

Women's wit on stage, 1660-1720

By

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I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

Thesis Abstract: Women's wit on stage, 1660-1720

My thesis entitled 'Women's wit on stage, 1660-1720' argues that women's wit emerged as a distinct category from masculine wit, due to the advent of the actress on the public stage and the professional woman dramatist. I explore the shifting representations of women's wit as a popular concept in the work of both male and female dramatists. Although women dramatists such as Catharine Trotter, Delarivier Manley, and Mary Pix were referred to as 'the female wits' during their life-time, women's wit has not been the focus of academic study in their work or the work of male dramatists from the Restoration onwards. I expand the view of wit as intellectual or humorous discourse to develop women's 'pregnant wit' which relies on practical knowledge, disguise, and acting on impulse, to acknowledge actions as well as language as witty. My research is informed by a variety of approaches such as feminist theory, performance, new materialism, including thing theory and affect theory. Alongside literary analysis of women's wit in drama by male and female playwrights, I consider the various nuances of the term 'wit' across the period using the tool *cqpweb* developed by Andrew Hardie from Lancaster University. I use this tool to chart whether reference to women's wit increased throughout the period and to track the way in which perceptions of wit changed throughout the period.

After outlining the shifting and conflicting characteristics of women's wit as creative, vengeful, supportive, subversive, conservative, and competitive, I explore the way in which the heroine's linguistic wit differed from the male rake's onstage. I acknowledge the previously neglected connection between wit, stage action, and performance, through 'wit in action' or 'embodied wit', which refers to the manipulation of space,

objects, and people through the witty exploits of female and male tricksters. I argue that wit is present in tragedy in the form of vengeful plotting and stage spectacle which deconstructs the abject through performance. I identify theatrical paratexts in comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy as miniature forms of wit which manipulate spectators' responses to the play. My thesis creates the term 'Sapphic wit' to refer to the supportive network of wit between women both in and outside of the theatre, from characters onstage, to dramatists, actresses, patronesses, and theatre spectators. Evidence of these networks, along with acknowledgement of female spectators exists in prologues, epilogues, prefaces to the plays, and in the plays themselves. Through cross-comparison of female and male-authored plays, I expose the distinctive features of women's wit in this period.

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, the late Patricia Turner, avid reader, theatre-goer and staunch defender of women's rights, a woman of vision and wit.

Abbreviations

Anthologies

All references to Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673), Etherege's *The Man of the Mode* (1676), Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and Catharine Trotter's *Love at a Loss* (1701) will be from *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Maja-Lisa von Sneidern (Ormskirk: Broadview Press, 2001).

All references to Shakespeare's works are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

Journals

ELH English Literary History

SEL Studies in English Literature

ZAA Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Databases

Cqpweb Corpus Query Processor

EEBO Early English Books Online

OED Oxford English Dictionary Online

Introduction

One of the prologues to Catharine Trotter's debut play *Agnes de Castro* (1695) poses the following question: 'Why should vain Man the Gift of Sense engross? / Since Woman's Wit was never at a loss?'¹ To date, women's wit in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama has not been fully explored. This is surprising because my research using Andrew Hardie's corpus query processor indicated a rise in the use of the phrase 'her wit' from a frequency of 0.96 per million words between 1660 and 1680 to 1.63 between 1700 and 1720, and a decrease in the frequency of 'his wit' between 1700 and 1720, the period in which women dramatists were firmly established on the public stage with the second generation of women dramatists and performers in vogue.² This statistical analysis prompted me to consider what makes women's wit distinctive and whether it differs from male wit in a literary context.

This thesis contends that women's wit emerges as a distinctive category when women dramatists were writing for the public stage and actresses first performed on the English stage. Using the techniques newly available to analyse a large database of early modern printed texts enabled me to capture an overview of how 'wit' operates in the

¹ Catharine Trotter, Prologue to *Agnes de Castro* (London: H. Rhodes, 1696), A3v

² For my search on 'his wit' and 'her wit', I used the database of texts in Version 3 of EEBO on Cqpweb, which contains 1,202,214,511 words in 44,422 texts. The above results were based on two separate searches within this corpus restricted by date for the phrase 'his wit' and 'her wit' from 1660-1680 and then another search for the same two phrases for 1700-1720. The first search on 'her wit' returned 214 matches in 122 different texts (in 223,554,598 words [7,425 texts]; frequency: 0.96 instances per million words) for the years 1660-1680, while 'his wit' returned 900 matches in 478 different texts (in 223,554,598 words [7,425 texts]; frequency: 4.03 instances per million words) in the years 1660-80. The search on 'her wit' restricted to 1700-1720 returned 26 matches in 10 different texts (in 15,939,170 words [575 texts]; frequency: 1.63 instances per million words). The search on 'his wit' restricted to 1700-1720 returned 59 matches in 38 different texts (in 15,939,170 words [575 texts]; frequency: 3.7 instances per million words).

changing landscape of seventeenth and eighteenth-century British culture. My thesis undertakes a comparison of the representation of women's wit in the work of male and female playwrights in the period 1660-1720 through literary analysis. I have chosen this period not only because of the increased frequency of the phrase 'her wit', but because it was the period in which Aphra Behn, the 'Female Wits' and Susanna Centlivre produced plays for the stage.

Critical Review

(i) Women Writers and Restoration drama

My thesis aims to further develop the recovery work of previous studies on seventeenth and eighteenth-century women dramatists, such as *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (1996), *Women and Dramatic Production* (2000), *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy* (2002) and *Teaching British Women Playwrights* (2010).³ This study of women's wit, a subject that gained popularity with the advent of the woman dramatist and actress, makes an important contribution which furthers existing research on performance, gender and the relationship between the actress and spectators.

Scholarship on women writers would not be possible without the ground-breaking research conducted by literary critics in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, which recovered texts that had largely been neglected, such as Elizabeth Polwhele's *The*

³ Katherine M. Quinsey (ed.), *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).
 Alison Findlay, Gweno Williams and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700* (Harlow: Pearson, (2000).
 Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
 Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (eds.), *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* (New York: MLA, 2010).

Frolicks edited by Milhous and Hume.⁴ Nancy Cotton's *Women Playwrights in England* (1980) first drew attention to the broad range of British women dramatists and, by grouping these writers together, suggested a genealogy of women's drama which began in the late medieval period.⁵ Elaine Hobby's *Virtue of Necessity* (1988) provided insight into the range of genres women used to express themselves, and how they negotiated constraints on their liberty through writing. Hobby's work shone a spotlight on Aphra Behn as an exemplar of a successful professional writer who relied on her wits and spoke her mind.⁶ Jacqueline Pearson's *The Prostituted Muse* (1988) established an important overview of the work of Behn's female contemporaries.⁷ The research conducted by the scholars listed above provided a crucial foundation for subsequent work on women dramatists, including my own.

Critics writing during the second wave of feminism sought to explore the work of the above writers within a tradition of women's writing. Constance Clark's *Three Augustan Women Playwrights* (1986) positioned 'the female wits', Mary Pix, Delarivier Manly, and Catharine Trotter, as part of the theatrical tradition.⁸ Angeline Goreau argued that Aphra Behn and the women dramatists who came after her, 'formed a tradition that established the woman writer as literary fact.'⁹ Angeline Goreau's work generated interest in the way in which female dramatists represented themselves. This

⁴ Elizabeth Polwhele, *The Frolicks* (1671) ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, (London: Cornell University Press, 1977). See also Alison Findlay's excellent article on Polwhele's play: Alison Findlay, 'Playing for All in the City: Women's drama', *Feminist Review*, 96 (2010), 41-57.

⁵ Nancy Cotton, *Women Playwrights in England c. 1363-1750* (Lewisburg PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980).

⁶ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-1688* (London: Virago, 1988).

⁷ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Female Dramatists, 1642-1737* (London: Harvester, 1988).

⁸ Constance Clark, *Three Augustan Women Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986).

⁹ Angeline Goreau, 'Aphra Behn: A Scandal to Modesty', in *Feminist Theorists* edited by Dale Spender (London: The Women's Press, 1983), pp. 8-27 (p. 9).

led to Catherine Gallagher's essay which drew connections between the public exposure of the female dramatist and the prostitute.¹⁰ Schofield's and Macheski's edited collection *Curtain Calls* (1991) agreed with Goreau that women dramatists saw themselves as professionals who sought fame and fortune. Their collection, which explored the variety of roles women occupied in the theatre, extended interest in the woman dramatist, by including studies of actresses, patronesses, and critics.¹¹ This research is integral to my consideration of the character's, dramatist's and performer's wit and its impact on theatre-goers.

The actress has attracted a wealth of critical attention, which has informed our understanding of the production and reception of drama, along with the creation of celebrity. The way in which the actress was viewed by spectators has been a subject of debate between scholars and is integral to understanding the impact of women's wit onstage. Highfill's *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers and Other Stage Personnel* and Avery's *The London Stage* are invaluable resources detailing information about performers' roles.¹² Peter Holland's *The Ornament of Action* (1979) provided insight into how restoration plays were staged and explored the playful relationship between performers and spectators.¹³ Holland's research is useful for considering the effect of wit in performance, and spectators' responses to witty

¹⁰ Catherine Gallagher, "Who Was that Masked Woman?: The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn," in *Aphra Behn: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by Janet Todd (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

¹¹ *Curtain Calls: British and American Woman and the Theater 1660-1820* ed. by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991).

¹² Philip Highfill, J.R. Kalman, A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans (ed), *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers and Other Stage Personnel in London 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). Emmett L. Avery, Ben Ross Schneider, Arthur H. Scouten and others, *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-79).

¹³ Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

exchanges. Howe's *The First English Actresses* (1992) drew attention to the phenomenon of the actress' entry to the public stage.¹⁴ Howe's book showcased the different roles played by women onstage in comedy and tragedy. Holland's and Howe's research is an invaluable resource for my thesis's exploration of whether certain roles onstage were considered witty, the influence of the performer on the creation of these roles and spectators' dual awareness of the character represented onstage and the performer's public persona. Felicity Nussbaum's *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-century British Theatre* (2010) developed Howe's work on the actress to consider the actress as celebrity, along with accounts of rivalry between powerful women in the theatre.¹⁵ My thesis will extend Nussbaum's work by exploring the role of rivalrous wit between women on and off-stage in seventeenth-century tragedy.

Alongside critical studies of rivalry between women, scholars have also investigated instances of collaboration within the theatre. Gilli Bush-Bailey's *Treading the Bawds* (2006) suggests that there was a strong collaboration between actresses Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle, and female dramatists Mary Pix and Aphra Behn.¹⁶ My thesis's consideration of a supportive network of Sapphic wit between actress, female dramatist and female spectators will extend Bush-Bailey's exploration of collaboration between women.¹⁷

¹⁴ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance and the Eighteenth Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Elin Diamond, 'Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*,' *ELH*, 56 (1989), 519-541 (pp. 535-536).

Deborah Payne's essay on the actress as 'reified object or emergent professional', engages with a subject that continues to divide scholars.¹⁸ Prior to Payne's essay, Elin Diamond argued that the actress placed in operation a 'female gaze' which positioned her as a powerful subject onstage.¹⁹ Jean Marsden focused on the heroine in she-tragedy as an object of desire.²⁰ Kristen Pullen's *Actresses and Whores* (2005) observed that the actress as whore is both female radical and victim.²¹ This debate is significant to analysis of women's wit in she-tragedy, a genre in which female characters have been labelled as 'passive', regardless of the stage presence of the actresses cast in these plays.²² Jean Marsden's focus on the effect of stage spectacle in tragedies by male and female dramatists is useful for my research on the character's, dramatist's and actress's wit.²³ Chapters 3 and 4 of my thesis extend Marsden's research on the visual spectacle of the actress, to consider the impact of the verbal and visual representation of the actress on spectators, and whether such emotionally affective spectacles are witty. Cynthia Lowenthal takes a different view to Marsden, arguing that the actress's body can be a site of resistance to violence.²⁴ My analysis of wit in tragedy, as a self-conscious performative strategy which outwits patriarchal authority, will contribute to scholarship on the presence of the actress as professional,

¹⁸ Deborah C. Payne, 'Reified Object or Emergent Professional? Retheorizing the Restoration Actress' in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth Century English Theater*, eds. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne Fisk (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 13-37.

¹⁹ Elin Diamond, 'Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*,' *ELH*, 56 (1989), 519-541 (pp. 535-536).

²⁰ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality and the English Stage 1660-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 105-9.

²¹ Kristen Pullen, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²² Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality and the English Stage 1660-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 34.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2003), p. 112, pp. 171-2.

and address the tension between the powerful figure of the actress and the passive female heroine in she-tragedy. Pilar Cuder-Dominguez refers to this as the dichotomy of ‘she-tragedy’, which is enacted by actresses and penned by women dramatists, but ‘denies women’s role in its making.’²⁵

There has been a similar tension in scholarship on early women dramatists between reclaiming women writers and situating the literary value of their work in relation to the work of their male contemporaries. Marilyn Williamson raised concerns about viewing all women’s writing as ‘a reaction against phallogentrism’, regardless of the work’s historical context and ideological approach.²⁶ Jacqueline Pearson’s *The Prostituted Muse* (1988) usefully provided a broad overview of how women were represented more generally in the work of both male and female dramatists.²⁷ Elaine Hobby’s article on Killigrew’s *Thomaso* as a source for Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), importantly situated Behn’s work in a wider context of seventeenth century drama.²⁸ Editions and essay collections focusing on a single author, such as Janet Todd’s and Derek Hughes’s work on Aphra Behn, responded to calls to consider the value of the work of female writers.²⁹ Derek Hughes’s *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (2001) provided detailed studies of Behn’s plays, and drew attention to her particular skill as a dramatist who was able to respond

²⁵ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights 1613-1713* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2011), p. 6.

²⁶ Marilyn L. Williamson, ‘Toward a Feminist Literary History’, *Signs*, 11 (1984), pp. 136-147 (p. 139).

²⁷ Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Female Dramatists, 1642-1737* (London: Harvester, 1988).

²⁸ Elaine Hobby, ‘No Stolen Object, but Her Own: Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew’s *Thomaso*’, *Women’s Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127.

²⁹ Janet Todd, ed., *Behn The Plays* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996).

-----, *Aphra Behn Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

-----, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

----- and Derek Hughes, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

to the changing theatrical landscape.³⁰ Single author studies such as Hughes's highlight the importance of considering the role of the dramatist's wit in predicting trends in comedy. *Women and Dramatic Production* importantly stressed the value of women's contribution to the theatre.³¹ Jane Spencer's *Aphra Behn's Afterlife* (2000) argued that Behn's importance as a dramatist was due to her influence on 'the female wits' Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix and Catharine Trotter.³² Despite the rich analysis of Behn's plays and of her fellow 'female wits', it is perplexing to note that wit is rarely acknowledged in their work. This may be because an anonymous comedy entitled *The Female Wits* (1697), which satirised Mary Pix, Delarivier Manley, and Catharine Trotter, refers to the dramatists' wit in a derogatory manner.

More recent studies on women dramatists, such as Pilar Cuder Dominguez's work on *Stuart Women Playwrights* (2011), have neglected to consider Aphra Behn and 'the female wits' alongside their male contemporaries. I extend Pilar Cuder Dominguez's work by including Susanna Centlivre alongside Behn and the Female Wits, and comparing plays by women dramatists with those of their canonical and non-canonical male contemporaries.³³ In her essay on the female wits, Jane Milling usefully pointed out that grouping these women dramatists together 'may not serve our understanding of the significance of this dramatic writing.'³⁴ I agree with Milling that in order to reach a fuller understanding of the literary value of these plays, it is necessary to position these dramatists within the context of their male contemporaries. Through detailed analysis of

³⁰ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

³¹ Alison Findlay, Gweno Williams and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000).

³² Jane Spencer, *Aphra Behn's Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³³ Pilar Cuder Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights 1613-1713* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

³⁴ Jane Milling, 'The Female Wits: Women Writers at Work', in *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England, 1650-1737: Leviathan to Licensing Act*, edited by Catie Gill (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 119 -129 (p. 121).

the way in which male and female dramatists responded to the popularisation of women's wit I endeavour to reclaim this concept in the work of the aforementioned writers and that of their male contemporaries.

(ii)

Works on wit

While there are a plethora of titles exploring women's wit in the twentieth century and beyond, such as: *The Wit of Women* (2015), *Wit's End: Women's Humor as Rhetorical Strategy* (2010), *Women's Wicked Wit* (2004), *Look Who's Laughing Now: Gender and Comedy* (1999), *The Wicked Wit of Women: From Elizabeth I to Ruby Wax* (1997), *Women's Strategic Use of Humor* (1992), and *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (1988), women's wit in drama has yet to be explicitly traced back to the seventeenth century.³⁵

Previous scholarship on seventeenth-century wit, such as Thomas Fujimura's *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1968), Robert Markley's *Two Edg'd Weapons* (1988), John Sitter's *Arguments on Augustan Wit* (1991), Raymond's Stephanson's *Yard of Wit* (2003), and Bonnie Soper's article on 'Restoration Raillery' (2017) emphasise wit as a masculine concept based on rationality and intellectual rivalry.³⁶ Thomas Fujimura

³⁵Kate Sanborn, *The Wit of Women* (Createspace independent publishing, 2015).
 Sean Zwagerman, *Wit's End: Women's Humor as Rhetorical and Performative Strategy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).
 Michelle Lovric, *Women's Wicked Wit* (London: Carlton, 2004).
 Gail Finney, *Look Who's Laughing Now: Gender and Comedy* (Reading: Gordon and Breach, 1999).
 Fidelis Morgan, *The Wicked Wit of Women* (London: Virago, 1997).
 Regina Barreca, *They Used to Call Me Snow White---but I Drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor* (New York: Penguin, 1992).
 -----, *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988).

³⁶Thomas H. Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968).

argues that wit is purely intellectual and titillates the mind, rather than provoking laughter.³⁷ In contrast to Fujimura, John Harold Wilson argued that wit primarily produced comic pleasure which was at odds with conventional morality.³⁸ Robert Markley moved beyond Fujimura's view of wit as purely intellectual, and Wilson's view of wit as mainly comic. In his observation that wit is double-edged and metatheatrical, Markley argues that wit is used by the male rake to comment on their society in Etherege's, Wycherley's, and Congreve's comedies.³⁹ Markley's research, which considers the effect of wit onstage and the way in which the rake uses wit to mask his financial insecurity, is useful for my own research on wit in chapter one as a form of cultural capital employed by women from a variety of social backgrounds. My thesis' focus on women's wit will expand current notions of wit, such as Bonnie Soper's recent article which presented wit as a verbal display of male competition.

This view of wit as a measure of masculine status has been adopted by scholars of seventeenth-century poetry. Both Sitter and Stephanson focus on wit's connection to the imagination and the process of writing. Sitter argues that John Locke's ideas about wit and the imagination provide an important framework for analysing Romantic ideas of the imagination, while Stephanson's analysis of 'poet as yard' tropes argues that wit

Robert Markley, *Two-edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

John Sitter, *Arguments of Augustan Wit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

Bonnie Soper, 'Restoration Raillery: The Use of Witty Repartee to Gain Power within Gendered Spaces of Restoration London', *Madison Historical Review*, 14 (2017), 60-80.

³⁷ Thomas H. Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (1968), p. 51.

³⁸ John Harold Wilson, *A Preface to Restoration Drama* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 124.

³⁹ Robert Markley, *Two-edg'd Weapons* (1988).

is a measure of male virility and creativity.⁴⁰ My thesis considers whether metaphors of ‘pregnant wit’ associated with creativity and authorship are used by male and female dramatists about female characters.

Recent scholarship from Adam Zucker on early modern and Caroline drama and Bonnie Soper on Restoration comedy briefly acknowledges women’s wit in comedy but does not distinguish women’s wit from masculine forms of wit. Similarly, critics such as Andrew Kennedy and Asad Al-Ghalith praise the wit of heroines in Restoration drama.⁴¹ However, Kennedy cites the heroine’s wit as an extension of the rake’s wit, and Ghalith refers to Millamant’s wit in *The Way of the World* (1700) as exceptional, rather than part of an ongoing tradition of witty heroines.⁴² Chapter One of my thesis explores the impact of the actress and woman dramatist on the portrayal of witty heroines onstage as distinct from the rake’s wit.

Scholars have begun to move away from the notion of wit as a libertine, upper-class and intellectual characteristic. Both Zucker and Soper observe that ‘different groups and social classes had their own definition of wit’ and acknowledge that characters of lower social standing also engage in wit.⁴³ Adam Zucker acknowledges that wit is not just language, but action. Zucker takes up the argument of wit as knowledge within a spatial context practised by the ‘untitled’ and ‘unmoneyed’ in the

⁴⁰ John Sitter, *Arguments of Augustan Wit*, (1991), p. 2.

Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit*, (2003), pp. 13-1, p. 94.

⁴¹ Andrew F. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue: The Duologues of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Asad Al-Ghalith, ‘Congreve’s Comedy Heroine: Progress Towards Self-Awareness’, *The Midwest Quarterly*, 52 (2011), 283-292.

⁴² Andrew F. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue*, (1984), p. 170.

Asad Al-Ghalith, ‘Congreve’s Comedy Heroine’, (2011), p. 283.

⁴³ Bonnie Soper, ‘Restoration Raillery: The Use of Witty Repartee to Gain Power within Gendered Spaces of Restoration London’, *Madison Historical Review*, 14 (2017), 60-80 (p. 67).

comedy of the 1630s.⁴⁴ In chapters three and four I develop Zucker's model of spatial wit to include active forms of wit such as intrigue and revenge plots enacted by women and low-status figures in comedy and tragedy, alongside witty discourse.

Katja de Winter has argued that the nature of wit changes according to historical period and literary taste.⁴⁵ My thesis will build on de Winter's research by exploring the different types of wit employed by women between the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In so doing, I endeavour to move beyond the narrow definition of wit as either intellectual or comic discourse, and to expose its complex and shifting nature.

Alongside literary analysis of the plays, I also utilise cqpweb3 to help me track the nuances of the term wit throughout my chosen period in comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy. Searching for the word 'wit' in tragedy proved fruitful; wit appears 14 times in *Agnes de Castro*, 12 times in *Anna Bullen* (1682), 10 times in *Love and Revenge* (1675), and 5 times apiece in *The Rival Queens* (1677) and *The Mourning Bride* (1698). Despite this, wit in tragedy has been neglected by critics, an omission my thesis will address in its consideration of revenge plots as a characteristic of subversive wit. Cqpweb's collocation tool, which generates a list of words which often appear in close proximity to the search term, provided me with a set of results for the words that most frequently characterise wit, along with those often placed in opposition to wit. I applied the collocation setting 3 words to the left and right of 'wit.' Among the top 50 collocates of 'wit' from my search on wit in texts of all genres from 1660-1720 were: 'eloquence', 'judgement', and rational 'sense' within the context of use of witty language within speech and writing, along with 'skill', 'dexterity', 'fancy', and 'subtlety' in relation to

⁴⁴ Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁵ Katja de Winter, *Wit and Morality in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy: The Changes between 1660-1770* (kindle edition, [n.p.]: [n.pub]. 2012).

deception in the form of plots and intrigues.⁴⁶ From these results it is clear that, to seventeenth and eighteenth-century readers, writers, speakers, and playgoers, there were distinctive categories of wit, notably the rhetorical wit associated with words and oratory, along with active wit related to managing plots. ‘Dullness’ and ‘wealth’ were high on the list of words placed in opposition to wit, affirming that distinctions of intellect and class play a role in the criteria of a ‘Wit.’ In this introduction I map the historical meanings of the word ‘wit’ and the main characteristics of wit, considering how they develop over time and which types of wit are employed most by female and male playwrights.

Defining Wit

Congreve, himself being witty in quoting Shakespeare, highlighted the multi-faceted nature of ‘wit’ when he stated that it is ‘difficult... to define wit’ as it is ‘of infinite variety.’⁴⁷ The historical entries for ‘wit’ and ‘witty’ in the *OED* demonstrate thirteen different variations of meaning for ‘wit’ and eight variations for ‘witty’. Among these variations for ‘wit’ the following are current in the Restoration and eighteenth century: the faculty of reasoning; intellectual ability and the name given to one in possession of it; skill in speech and written discourse; humorous or critical discourse; to be discerning and of sound mind; a person who is skilful and possesses practical talent; and finally,

⁴⁶ This was based on a collocation window of 3 words from the left and 3 from the right and returned 172,149 matches in 16,943 different texts.

⁴⁷ William Congreve, ‘Concerning Humour in Comedy’ (1695) in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy*, ed. by Brian Corman (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 2013), pp. 545-549 (p. 545). Enobarbus refers to Cleopatra’s ‘infinite variety’ in William Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra* II.ii.245 (p. 1357).

one who employs craft or cunning.⁴⁸ I will show that wit in the Restoration not only referred to humour and clever remarks, but also to the formation of cunning plots and possession of practical skill. I demonstrate that wit could be a positive quality of intellect and sociability used to confirm or elevate status and that wit could also be used negatively to refer to craft, an evil intention to cheat another person, or as a mode of resistance used to ‘out-wit’ authority. I begin by charting the historical development of the meaning and origins of ‘wit’ from the early modern period into the Restoration to explain the reasoning behind the types of wit discussed in this thesis and to justify exploration of wit in tragedy as well as in comedy.

During the Restoration wit as intellectual reasoning became an alternate measure of gentlemanly status that was divorced from considerations of birth and manifested as a form of critical expression rooted in sense. The *OED*’s first definition of the noun wit refers to the mind, intellect, and powers of reasoning with ‘wit’ defined as ‘the seat of consciousness’—an association that dates back to c.1000CE.⁴⁹ This association of wit with the mind continued in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in which wit signified a person’s faculties of ‘thinking and reasoning.’⁵⁰ To have wit meant that one was ‘endowed with reason’ as to be ‘out of one’s wits’ was a sign of irrationality.⁵¹ The close relation between wit and rational thought is present in the work of seventeenth-century writers and thinkers for whom the presence of wit in discourse determined a man’s intellectual status. David Abercromby in *A Discourse of Wit* (1685) describes wit

⁴⁸ *OED* Online, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], wit, n.1(1).
OED Online, [Accessed 23rd March 2018], witty, adj.

⁴⁹ *OED* Online, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], wit, n.1 (1).

⁵⁰ *OED* Online, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], wit, n.2 (a).
OED Online, <www.oed.com>, [Accessed 23rd March 2018], witty, adj. 3(a).

⁵¹ *OED* Online, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], wit, n.2 (a).
OED Online, <www.oed.com>, [Accessed 23rd March 2018], witty, adj. 3(a).

‘as senceful discourse, or sentence.’⁵² Abercromby’s use of the word ‘senceful’ refers to powers of reasoning: ‘many half-witted Men... speak well, though they write not wittily, because of the shallowness of their Judgement.’⁵³ Wit was characterised by the rational expression of insightful ideas, evidenced by Abercromby’s statement that wit must showcase ‘Vivacity of the mind’ (p. 6). Wit was used to display one’s intellect, the sharpness and creativity of one’s mind, and the ability to reason in discourse. This view of wit was held by other seventeenth-century writers and thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and William Temple who believed that wit should be rooted in reason and the intellect.⁵⁴ Thomas Hobbes argued that wit must include Fancy and Judgement in equal measure. Fancy was the creative, lively element of wit, while judgement was the element that provided rational insight.⁵⁵ During the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century the distinction between true wits and false wits was based on the balance of creative imagination and reason exhibited in their use of language. As William Temple explains, the highest level of wit must provide rational insights: ‘along with the heat of Invention and liveliness of Wit, there must be the coldness of good Sense and soundness of Judgment, to distinguish between Things and Conceptions [...] at first sight.’⁵⁶ In the eighteenth century Joseph Addison maintains the view that true wit is about the ‘Resemblance of Ideas’ rather than the ‘Resemblances of Words.’⁵⁷ Judgement and insight are essential characteristics of wit which are manifested on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century stage and serve to distinguish between true and false

⁵² David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit* (London: John Weld, 1685), p. 7.

⁵³ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit*, p. 186

⁵⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Printed for Andrew Cooke, 1651), p. 34.⁵⁴ William Temple, ‘Of Poetry’ in *Miscellanea* (London: Printed for J.R, 1690), p. 294.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Printed for Andrew Cooke, 1651), p. 34.

⁵⁶ William Temple, ‘Of Poetry’ in *Miscellanea* (London: Printed for J.R, 1690), p. 294.

⁵⁷ Joseph Addison, ‘True and False Wit’, *The Spectator*, 11 May 1711, <<<http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?textsid=38005>> [Accessed 28 October 2017], para 3 and 4 of 8.

wits. False wits, such as Witwoud in William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), make connections between the sound or resemblances of words rather than their meaning and often deliver puns rather than insights.⁵⁸ Witwoud's choice witty phrases are often irrelevant to the topic of conversation in the scene. Therefore, in my study of witty language in Chapter One, I analyse the way in which different characters' style of wit is used to signify their status as true or false wits and how witty language may be used to elevate one's status. The seventeenth-century definitions of wit cited above suggest that wit should provoke critical thought rather than simply being light-hearted, and this is something I explore in relation to women's use of wit to challenge authority. This model of rational wit was part of the tradition of courtly rhetoric associated with masculinity in the early modern period and, as such, developed the meaning of wit to signify clever, insightful, or humorous rhetoric in Restoration comedy.

Rhetorical Wit

The development of wit from rational expression to clever or humorous discourse in the sixteenth century is recorded in the *OED*'s definition of wit as ingenuity or 'quickness of fancy' and the ability to write or say 'sparkling things' often with humour.⁵⁹ In *A Discourse of Wit*, which was published in the seventeenth century, Abercromby dedicates a section to 'writing wittily' and one on 'why some do speak ill, and write well, and some do write ill, and speak well' to demonstrate that wit may be written or spoken and that each requires different qualities (p. 184). For Abercromby the character of a great wit in written discourse is someone whose remarks possess 'vivacity, sharpness, penetrancy' and in conversation a person who has 'always an

⁵⁸ William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700), Act III lines 408-414, p. 785.

⁵⁹ 'Wit', *OED Online*, wit, n.1,7.

answer at hand to any question.’⁶⁰ In other words, wit consists of penetrating ideas, speed of thought, and eloquent expression aptly applied to the situation. Wit as fast-paced eloquence aptly applied within a given context is showcased in Restoration comedy which features a linguistic device of wit called the ‘turn.’ The turn involves swiftly responding to another’s wit by adopting the phrase just spoken and altering its meaning. This depiction of wit as skilful speech is present in historical examples cited in the *OED* throughout the seventeenth century and eighteenth century. In 1667 the philosopher and scientist Robert Boyle refers to wit as ‘That nimble and accessible Faculty of the Mind, whereby some men have a readiness, and a subtilty, in conceiving things, and a quickness and neatness, in expressing them.’⁶¹ In 1704 the Reverend Thomas Yalden wrote a poem in praise of Sir Wilhoughby Aston’s ‘flowing wit’ and ‘engaging art, / That charm[s] the ear and captivate[s] the heart.’⁶² Drawing on these associations of speed and eloquence, it is possible to see how the fast-paced, entertaining, and articulate dialogue which is termed ‘wit’ became the trademark of Restoration comedy. To fully understand its dramatic effect, it is essential to consider whether the use of witty language shifts in the hands of female characters and female playwrights.

Witty use of language was part of a male-authored tradition of rhetoric which affirmed one’s gentlemanly status. Elizabethan writers such as John Lyly and Thomas Nashe developed a distinctive style of prose, earning the title of ‘university wits.’ The origins of witty discourse found in Restoration comedy can be traced back to John Lyly’s *Euphues The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) which created a pithy style of writing,

⁶⁰ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit*, p. 17, p. 36

⁶¹ Robert Boyle cited in *OED Online*, wit, n.1, 7.

⁶² T. Yalden cited in *OED Online*, wit, n.1, 7.

referred to as Euphuism. This style of expression became fashionable not only in written discourse, but also in conversation. Euphuistic wit exhibits ‘Fancy’ (imagination) and ‘Judgement’ (reason) to provide imaginative insights. Along with containing a balance of Fancy and Judgement, which Thomas Hobbes cites as the basis of wit, Euphuistic wit is tightly structured, utilises alliteration, and lists multiple examples of opposing objects. For example, ‘he that loppeth the vine causeth it to spread fairer; that he that stoppeth the stream forceth it to swell higher; that he that casteth water on the fire in the smith’s forge maketh it to flame fiercer.’⁶³ Lyly demonstrates the way in which wit generates pleasure through setting up stark contrasts like ‘cunning painters who for the whitest work cast the blackest ground to make the picture more amiable’ (p. 92). Such language exhibits Hobbes’s balance of Fancy (imagination) and Judgement (reason).

Lyly’s euphuistic wit becomes a competitive show of masculine bravado in Restoration drama. It is carried through into Restoration drama in the forms of the similitude, finding commonalities between opposites in the dissimilitude, and surprising one’s opponent with the ‘turn’ which appropriates another’s words and ‘turns’ or changes their meaning. Unlike Lyly’s witticisms, the similitude, dissimilitude, and turn were used by the rake to express his libertine views in Restoration comedy.⁶⁴ Anna Bryson demonstrates that the Restoration rake drew on and mocked existing codes of rhetoric and honour to generate a code of anti-civility that served as a marker of fashionable libertine status.⁶⁵ This is exemplified by the seventeenth-century writer

⁶³ John Lyly, *Euphuus: The Anatomy of Wit*, in *An Anthology of Elizabethan Fiction*, ed. by Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 113.

⁶⁴ Lisa Berglund, ‘The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of the Mode*’, *SEL 1500-1900*, 30 (1990), 369-386, p. 371.

⁶⁵ Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 269.

John Locke's concern that wit's blurring of the distinction between judgement and pleasure, along with its mockery of institutions such as the church and marriage, had the potential to confuse notions of truth, illusion, and morality.⁶⁶ In Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), for example, the rake Willmore's offer to divert the 'wicked...design' of Hellena's vow to 'die a maid' shows how witty language reinterprets sex outside marriage as an act of 'Christian' charity by conflating the language of religious devotion with sexual activity.⁶⁷ The pleasing language of wit therefore was used to question and challenge authority. Derek Hughes places the rake's questioning of institutions within the context of the scientific discoveries made in the seventeenth century, which marked a departure from stable categories of 'Truth.'⁶⁸ The aforementioned John Locke was suspicious of rhetoric which he believed was for 'nothing else but to insinuate wrong Ideas, move the Passions, and [...] mislead the Judgement' because it is a 'powerful instrument of Error and Deceit.'⁶⁹ Lisa Berglund has argued that the rake's use of metaphorical language thinly masks his immoral sexual practices.⁷⁰ The language of rhetorical wit showcased by Lyly in prose and defined by Hobbes, evolves into a display of desire, seduction and competition in the form of a battle of the wits and of the sexes between the comic rake and heroine onstage.

⁶⁶ John Locke, *An Abridgement of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London: A and J Churchill, 1696), Book III, Chapter 10, p. 170.

⁶⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, I.ii.180-185 (p. 598).

⁶⁸ Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 7, p. 27.

⁶⁹ John Locke, *An Abridgement of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1696), Book III, Chapter 10, p. 170.

⁷⁰ Lisa Berglund, 'The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in The Man of the Mode', *SEL 1500-1900*, 30 (1990), 369-386 (p. 371).

Competitive Wit

The language of wit is naturally competitive as it involves pressure to engage in skilful repartee which is apt to the most recent topic of conversation. According to the *OED*, the expressions ‘wit-combat’ and ‘wit-battle’ enter the English Language after the Restoration.⁷¹ However, the relationship between wit as a linguistic weapon as keen as ‘the razor’s edge’ was already established earlier in texts like Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1597) and in the ‘skirmish[es] of wit’ in which ‘every word stabs’ in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-9).⁷² The representation of the battle of the wits and the battle of the sexes continues in seventeenth-century drama, exemplified by Willmore’s comment that he was never ‘clawed away with broadsides from any female before’ in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677).⁷³ The battle between the sexes onstage showcased in Shakespearean comedy was revived on the Restoration stage due to the success of having feisty actresses such as Nell Gwyn sparring with a male actor. In Restoration drama this type of rhetorical duelling developed into the model of competitive wit between the ‘gay couple’ on stage, a male and female libertine evenly-matched in terms of intellect and rank, who captivate audiences by their skill in quick-fire discourse. Wit involves competition as one determines their wit in relation to that of another. Competitive wit celebrates the skill of the rivals, as Richard Flecknoe states, ‘the delight comes from watching the two opponents.’⁷⁴ My thesis will move beyond Bonnie

⁷¹ *OED Online* [Accessed 23rd March 2018], wit (compounds), C1 and C1a.

⁷² William Shakespeare *Love’s Labours Lost*, V.ii.256-7
Much Ado About Nothing, I.i.63, II.i.227-251.

⁷³ Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (1677), V.i.459-460 (p. 642)

⁷⁴ Richard Flecknoe, ‘The Preface to the Reader’ in *A Treatise of the Sports of Wit* (London: Printed for the Author, 1675), p. 5.

Soper's and Raymond Stephanson's view of competitive wit as solely a male activity, to consider competition between women and men, and between women.⁷⁵

Chapter One of the thesis considers how competitive wit in Restoration drama evolves between the 'gay couple', those who begin as antagonists, but whose attraction for one another develops through the game of courtship or wit duels.⁷⁶ Although there are earlier examples of the gay couple, such as James Shirley's *The Witty Fair One* (1628), I argue that the Restoration gay couple is fully fledged in John Dryden's *Secret Love* (1667) due to the presence of a female actor sparring with a male actor.⁷⁷ My thesis will investigate the extent to which the competitive wit of the battle of the sexes is modified in the work of women dramatists. I will focus on the development of the female libertine in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677) and Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) to consider the extent to which these heroines mimic the rake's language or adapt it for their own purposes. Hellena in Behn's *The Rover* (1677) provides an example of a heroine who develops her own type of witty language.⁷⁸ I will explore the development of female roles and wit onstage, from the wit of the female libertine in *Secret Love*, to that of the coquettish wit in *The Rover* and the 'coquette-prude' in *The Innocent Mistress*.⁷⁹

The association between wit, anti-civility, combat, and the sharp sting of raillery to wound one's opponent justifies an exploration of competitive wit exhibited in

⁷⁵ Bonnie Soper, 'Restoration Raillery: The Use of Witty Repartee to Gain Power within Gendered Spaces of Restoration London', *Madison Historical Review*, 14 (2017), 60-80 (p. 70).

Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit: Male Creativity and Sexuality 1650-1750* (Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania, 2011).

⁷⁶ John Harrington Smith, *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 13, pp. 47-48.

⁷⁸ Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (1677), I.ii.119-120.

⁷⁹ Ben R. Schneider, 'The Coquette-Prude as an Actress's line in Restoration Comedy During the Time of Mrs. Oldfield', *Theatre Notebook*, 22 (1968), 143-56.

dialogue between rivals in tragedy, exemplified by Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) in which the 'Wits' are 'fencer-like.'⁸⁰ Competitive wit is exhibited in the fast-paced repartee between women rivals in seventeenth-century tragedy, in particular the genre she-tragedy which features rivalry between the virtuous heroine and the passionate heroine. My research on competitive wit in tragedy will extend Felicity Nussbaum's research on rivalry within the theatre and tragedies by male dramatists to explore the competitive wit of quick-fire insults exchanged between rivalrous women in tragedy.⁸¹ My thesis will explore how rivalry between women in tragedy is structured as a wit duel designed to generate pleasure from spectators and the opponents themselves due to their skill in out-witting one another. I will investigate whether depictions of competitive wit between women are consistent with the historical and patriarchal perception of the period that women were unable to control their passions. I will consider the way in which decisions to cast actresses who were complete opposites, and sometimes even rivals in their private life, in the opposing roles of 'she-angel' and 'she-devil' also enhanced this performance of competitive wit.

'Skilful Action': Embodied Wit

This thesis makes an important contribution to wit studies by considering the relationship between wit and action. Despite the *OED*'s reference to the 'five wits' or senses of the body dating from c.1200 and continuing to 1830, and Abercromby's assertion that wit is not purely the product of reason, but of instinct and can take the form of a 'skilful Action', wit's relationship to the body and emotion has not been

⁸⁰ Nathaniel Lee, *The Rival Queens* (London: Printed for James Magnes and Richard Bentley, 1677), A1v.

⁸¹ Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance and the Eighteenth Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

considered in criticism.⁸² This is surprising because the melding of body and mind continued into the Restoration. The publication of Descartes's ideas in 1651 began the division between the mind and the body, but this separation was by no means complete.⁸³ An anonymous text entitled *The Polite Gentleman, or, Reflections upon the Several Kinds of Wits* (1700) observes that the mind and the body are united and argues that there is a clear relationship between wit and the body. The author states that 'a Man of Wit is only so far so, as the Constitution of his Body inclines him to it', observing that the 'Genius' of wit is influenced by the 'Mixture of different Humours amongst themselves, and [...] very often [...] the great Alterations which are occasion'd in our Bodies, and consequently in our Minds, by the Air we breath, the Nourishment we receive, [...] and in one word, all our different Ways and Methods of Life and Action.'⁸⁴ Restoration writers and thinkers consistently acknowledge the overlap of mind/body. As Charis Charalampous acknowledges, the philosopher John Locke believed that matter could think and stressed that 'our minds are material and therefore incapable of independent existence.'⁸⁵ The seventeenth-century philosopher Leibniz believed that the the body's five external senses passed information on to the interior sense of the imagination which worked with the mind to form judgements.⁸⁶ Fancy and judgement which constitute wit consist of this connection between the impressions made on the external senses filtered through the mind to form judgements. In the seventeenth century

⁸² *OED online* [Accessed 27/04/2018], wit, n.1, 3b.

David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit* (1685), p. 7

⁸³ Peter Dear, 'Cartesians and Newtonians' in *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and its Ambitions, 1500-1700*, 2nd edn. (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 repr. 2009), pp. 145-163 (p. 152).

⁸⁴ Anon, *The Polite Gentleman, or, Reflections upon the Several Kinds of Wits* (London: John Nutt, 1700), pp. 30-31, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁵ Charis Charalampous, *Rethinking the Mind-Body Relationship in Early Modern Literature, Philosophy, and Medicine: The Renaissance of the Body* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 154.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

scientist and writer Robert Boyle argued that the application of wit in conversation was an instinctual, sensory response and observes the emotional affect of wit on the bodily senses of listeners: '[Wit involves the] suddenness of a good Occasional Reflection [...] suggested by the Occasion, than barely applied to it that persuades the hearers that the speaker's wit is of its own growth.'⁸⁷ Seventeenth and eighteenth-century thinkers John Locke and Joseph Addison acknowledge emotional affect as a key characteristic of wit. Addison's article on 'True and False Wit' (1711) in *The Spectator* states that true wit must provide 'delight and surprise to the reader.'⁸⁸ For Addison, false wit identifies underwhelming resemblances between words and therefore lacks the pleasurable affect of true wit which makes insightful connections between ideas. As an embodied discourse, drama explores the overlap of mind/body and therefore exposes the philosophical division of mind/body as artificial. Therefore, it is appropriate that a study of wit in Restoration drama consider wit's relationship to the body, stage action, and the audience's pleasure.

Wit was used to describe and often to celebrate dextrous physical action. In the fourteenth century wit became associated with practical skill and craftsmanship: 'God...[has] wit in alle craftes' and reference is made to the 'workman's witt.'⁸⁹ Abercromby in his definition of wit as a 'skilful Action' draws attention to physical or embodied wit. Abercromby explains that 'skilful Action[s]' are those that involve

⁸⁷Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects, Whereeto is Premis'd a Discourse about Such Kind of Thoughts* (London: W. Wilson, 1665), section II chapter 1, p. 38.

⁸⁸ Joseph Addison, 'True and False Wit', *The Spectator*, 11 May 1711, <<http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/TextRecord.php?textid=38005>> [Accessed 28 October 2017], para. 2 of 10.

⁸⁹*OED Online*, witty, adj., 2(a).

Anonymous, *Guy of Warwick*, ([n.p.]: [n.pub], 1390), cited in OED, p. 212

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: John Wolfe for William Ponsonbie, 1590), I.iv C8v

practical craft, rather than reason: 'A Spiders Web in my conceit, is no less, if not more ingeniously contrived, than the Weaver's' (p. 12). In the section on women's wit, Abercomby refers to women's 'subtile management of intrigues, whether of Love or Revenge; for they can dissemble better than Hypocrisie it self.'⁹⁰ The word 'intrigue' meant to trick or deceive, rather than our present-day use, to rouse one's curiosity which came into existence in the nineteenth century. Therefore, women's wit for Abercromby is aligned with craft and the management of romantic liaisons and revenge plots. In 1661 'intrigue' as a noun is explicitly referred to the plot of a play, generating a relation between the action of crafting stage plots and witty scheming. This is exemplified by the 1699 translators of Terence's comedies, who highlight the popularity of embodied wit in comedy: 'our plots go chiefly upon variety of love intrigues' and 'ladies cuckolding their Husbands most dextrously.'⁹¹ As the examples cited above demonstrate, seventeenth-century usage of the term 'wit' was closely connected to stage action and stage plots. The strong resonance between wit and stage action in the seventeenth century makes a case for consideration of skilful actions in terms of stage plots as an important element of women's wit in seventeenth-century drama.

These representations of embodied wit in the form of successful management of love intrigues and secret plots occur in the work of seventeenth and eighteenth century male and female dramatists. Women's plots are examples of embodied wit because they revolve around the expression and fulfilment of desire through practical craft.

Seventeenth and eighteenth-century comedies, such as *The Frolicks* (1671), *The Country Wife* (1675), *The Rover* (1677), and *The Lady's Triumph* (1718), feature

⁹⁰ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit* (1685), p. 204

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Knight of Malta* in *Comedies and Tragedies* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1647), v.i (p. 93).

⁹¹ *Terence's Comedies by Several hands made English*, 2nd edn. (London: Abel Wale, 1699), p. 8.

heroines whose manipulation of stage action is driven by desire and is considered skilful, dextrous, and witty. However, as chapter two will argue, love intrigues shift from taking place outside of the household, to being set within the household in the work of later women dramatists such as *Centlivre*. This raises the question as to whether early eighteenth century drama, which marked the beginning of sensibility, departs from the roving, plotting heroine of the Restoration. Lisa A. Freeman has argued that dissembling intrigues declined in eighteenth century comedy.⁹² My thesis will investigate whether witty plotting still took place on the eighteenth-century stage and how it differed from portrayals of embodied wit in the Restoration. I will consider the impact of theatrical reform and restrictions on women's freedom of movement on the portrayal of women's wit, to explore how women's embodied or active wit functions when confined inside the household.

Pregnant Wit

Part of the wider category of embodied wit is women's 'Pregnant Wit' which is creatively produced 'out of necessity' or under pressure. The *OED* traces the origins of the word 'pregnant' as an adjective used to describe the imaginative faculty of a man's mind and sharpness of his wit back to the fifteenth century.⁹³ The origin of the phrase 'pregnant wit' lies in gendered perceptions about wit and the body. In the Elizabethan period, and during the early part of the Restoration, the phrase 'pregnant wit' was used to signify a man's skill in writing, or the issue from the 'teeming Womb of its Author's

⁹² Lisa A. Freeman, *A Character's Theater, Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 196.

⁹³ *OED Online*, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], pregnant, adj and noun, 2(a).

brain' as the Renaissance sonneteers struggled 'great with child to speak.'⁹⁴ This continues in the Restoration with male writers referred to as those with 'pregnant wit and [...] Pen.'⁹⁵ Although the phrase 'pregnant wit' has been linked to male autogenesis by Raymond Stephanson and Linda Phyllis Austern, male wit is often depicted in terms of intellectual labour, while women's wit is portrayed as natural.⁹⁶ Henry Care's translation of Cornelius Agrippa's *The Female Pre-eminence* which was published in 1670 framed women's wit as a natural ability linked to biological conception. Agrippa argued that female wit was 'more quick and ready [...] and most fertile' and therefore superior to the 'tedious labour' of male wit because their wit was 'ready at a push in the greatest straights.'⁹⁷ Care's translation, along with the aforementioned increase in frequency of the phrase 'her wit', marks a turning point in the perception and currency of women's wit. This is exemplified by the seventeenth-century satirist Richard Ames's poem *The Pleasures of Love and Marriage* (1691) produced in response to 'other Later Satyrs on Women.'⁹⁸ Ames's positive attitude towards women in the *The Pleasures of Love and Marriage* contrasts with another of his 'satyrs' produced in the same year,

⁹⁴ Philip Sidney, 'Sonnet I' in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter & Jon Stallwothy, 5th edn (New York: Norton 2005), p. 213.

⁹⁵ Rege Sincera, *Observations, Both Historical and Moral, Upon the Burning of London, September 1666 With an Account of the Losses, and A Most Remarkable Parallel between London and Mosco, Both as to the Plague and Fire : Also an Essay Touching the Easterly-Winde* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1667), A2r.

⁹⁶ Raymond Stephanson, *The Yard of Wit* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

Linda Phyllis Austern, 'Music and Manly Wit in Seventeenth-Century England: The Case of The Catch', in *Concepts of Creativity in Seventeenth-Century England*, edited by Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 281-308.

⁹⁷ Cornelius Agrippa, *The Female Pre-eminence*, trans. by Henry Care (London: T.R and M.D, 1670), p. 8, p. 64.

Richard Head, *The Canting Academy* (London: F. Leach, 1673), p. 127

⁹⁸ Richard Ames, *The Pleasures of Love and Marriage a Poem in Praise of the Fair Sex, in Requital for The Folly of Love, and Some Other Late Satyrs on Women* (London: H. N., 1691).

entitled *The Folly of Marriage* (1691).⁹⁹ In *The Pleasures of Love and Marriage* Ames describes women's wit as 'Invention quick and free, / Unforc'd, and Natural Ingenuity.'¹⁰⁰ The introduction of female dramatists who wrote wittily and of actresses who spoke and acted wittily, gave substance to this change of perception which regards women's wit as natural and recognises their skill in invention.

In Chapters Two and Three, I consider whether embodied wit in the work of women dramatists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century influences the meaning of the phrase 'pregnant wit' using the actresses' physical enactment of intrigue plots. Women writers regularly portray pregnant wit as wit functioning in the 'greatest straights', an active response to situation.¹⁰¹ The ingenuity of women's wit in such situations is celebrated in texts throughout the period, which state that women's wit functions 'best in sudden exigents' in line with Abercromby's view of wit as relying on instinct.¹⁰² This is due to the restrictions placed on women in the comic plot, especially in the comedies of the early eighteenth century which feature arranged marriages. Susanna Centlivre's comedies *The Basset Table* (1705) and *The Busy Body* (1709), produced during the period of increased frequency of the aforementioned phrase 'her wit', feature female characters who are described as having 'pregnant wit' which they use against oppressive guardians. Miranda from *The Busy Body* acknowledges that

⁹⁹ Richard Ames, *The Folly of Love, or, An Essay Upon Satyr Against Woman* (London: Printed for E. Hawkins, 1691).

¹⁰⁰ Richard Ames, 'The Pleasures of Love and Marriage' in *The Pleasures of Love and Marriage a Poem in Praise of the Fair Sex, in Requital for The Folly of Love, and Some Other Late Satyrs on Women* (London: H. N., 1691), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Richard Head, *The Canting Academy* (London: D. Leach, 1673), p. 127

¹⁰² Cornelius Agrippa, *The Female Pre-eminence*, trans. by Henry Care (London: T.R. and M.D., 1670), p. 64.

‘confinement sharpens the invention.’¹⁰³ Similarly, Mrs. Sago in *The Basset Table* ‘has a fertile brain’ for cunning, plots, and contrivances.¹⁰⁴ ‘Pregnant wit’ in these instances is depicted as the ease with which women contrive plots and as a natural ability which women possess, no matter how restrictive the situation. Women rely not only on their wits as in their common sense, but also their imaginative Fancy to contrive plots.

Vengeful Wit

There was a close relation between wit, craft, and revenge in the seventeenth century. The *OED* cites ‘witty’ as an adjective that carried a perjorative sense denoting ‘crafty, cunning, wily, artful; skilful in contriving evil.’¹⁰⁵ Elkanah Settle’s tragedy *The Female Prelate* (1680) refers to Saxony’s revenge as ‘witty.’¹⁰⁶ ‘Cunning’ registered as a high collocate of ‘wit’ and possessed a frequency of 14.9 expected occurrence with ‘wit’ in the *Early English Books Online* database from 1660 to 1720.¹⁰⁷ In his section on women’s wit Abercromby refers to women’s vengeful wit as a skilful action. He argues that the supposed ‘weaker Sex’ ought not to be viewed as possessing ‘no kind of real Wit; since their very Malice and Tricks do demonstrate the contrary.’¹⁰⁸ The

¹⁰³ Susanna Centlivre, *The Busy Body* (1709) in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies* ed.by, Fidelis Morgan and Paddy Lyons (London: J.M. Dent, 1991), pp. 293-363 (p. 317).

¹⁰⁴ Susanna Centlivre, *The Basset Table* (1705) in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies*, pp. 235-292 (p. 245).

¹⁰⁵ *OED Online*, <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], witty, adj., 2b.

¹⁰⁶ Elkanah Settle, *The Female Prelate Being the History of the Life and Death of Pope Joan: A Tragedy* (London: W. Cademan, 1680), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ This was based on the query “wit”, restricted to texts in the “*Decade: 1660-1669 or 1670-1679 or 1680-1689 or 1690-1699 or 1700-1709 or 1710-1719*”, and returned 62,892 matches in 7,438 different texts. I then searched for ‘cunning’ as a specific collocate of ‘wit’ in these results with a window of 5 words from the left to 5 words from the right.

¹⁰⁸ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit* (London: John Weld, 1685), pp. 214-5.

example from Abercromby's *Discourse of Wit* cited above demonstrates that there is a hierarchy of wit in relation to gender, with men more traditionally associated with intellectual wit and women with cunning. Many texts from the seventeenth century associate women's wit with cunning and revenge: Rosamund in *The Revengeful Queen* (1698) refers to 'women's malicious wit' as causing 'Destruction.'¹⁰⁹ Embodied wit in the form of revenge plots enacted by women was popular in tragedy and showcased the assumption that women were ruled by their emotions, a belief which dominated from the medieval period until well into the Restoration.¹¹⁰ Such views related women's perceived biological characteristics to their skill in revenge plots. An anonymous text entitled *The Great Advocate and Oratour for Women* (1682) states that men were made 'hotter and drier' while women were made 'colder and moyster' and associates cold and moist conditions with skill in plotting and malice.¹¹¹ This demonstrates that Galen's theory of the four humours which dominated early modern thought was still applied in relation to women in the late seventeenth century.¹¹² Edward Ward's chapter on revenge in *Female Policy Detected* (1695) defines revenge as a feminine act, arguing that 'women are more subject to this passion than men' due to 'their own Whimsies and Conceits' which 'sowre[s] their Affections into a sharp Revenge, without a just

¹⁰⁹ William Philips, *The Revengeful Queen* (London: P. Buck, 1698), p. 22.

¹¹⁰ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit*, p. 215 refers to women's changeable nature. Katherine Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea: Medea in English Literature, 1588-1688* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 9.

¹¹¹ Anon, *The Great Advocate and Oratour for Women or, The Arraignment, Tryall and Conviction of All Such Husbands (or Monsters) Who Held it Lawfull to Beate Their Wives or to Demeane Themselves Severely and Tyrannically Towards Them* ([n.p.]: [n.pub.] 1682), p. 60.

¹¹² Ibid, pp. 61-62.

Occasion.’¹¹³ The numerous connections between wit, women, cunning, and revenge cited above, illustrate that revenge was inherently associated with women’s wit.

My thesis demonstrates how the notion of the of the witty vengeful woman as monstrous changes with the advent of the actress and professional woman dramatist. My thesis will build on the work of Anne Hermanson, and Nicholas Brooke on the fascination of the revenger, by investigating seventeenth and eighteenth-century dramatists’ celebration of the skilled female revenger as having the potential to undercut the view of women as irrational, passionate and abhorrent in tragedy.¹¹⁴ My thesis will apply Brooke’s ideas about the unsettling charisma of the revenger to Restoration drama in order to extend scholarship on the female revenger by considering her vengeful wit as skilful in line with Abercromby’s view of women’s tricks as dextrous, rather than purely monstrous. My focus on admiration from other female characters at the skill of the solo female revenger extends Felicity Nussbaum exploration of vengeful rivalry between women in she-tragedy.¹¹⁵

Out-wit: Wit as a mode of resistance

I have established that women’s wit often referred to cunning or practical skill employed to enable women to achieve their desires. Wit was also used by women as a mode of resistance. In the seventeenth century the word ‘out-wit’ emerges, defined by the *OED* as ‘to get the better of (a person) by superior skill, craft, or ingenuity; to prove

¹¹³ Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected. Or, the Arts of a Designing Woman* (London, 1695), pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ Anne Hermanson, *The Horror Plays of the English Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: Open Books, 1979).

¹¹⁵ Felicity Nussbaum, “‘Real, Beautiful Women’: Actresses and *The Rival Queens*”, *Eighteenth Century Life*, 32 (2008), 138-158.

too clever for.’¹¹⁶ The verb ‘out-wit’ is regularly used in the context of the subversive power of wit to undercut patriarchal authority, evidenced from examples cited in the *OED* which refer to ‘subtle Rebekah’ out-witting her husband and the ability to use cunning to out-wit one’s enemies.¹¹⁷ In Genesis Rebekah instructs Jacob to dress in goat-skins to enable his father to mistake him for his brother Esau.¹¹⁸ Early examples of out-witting refer to domestic hierarchies of authority between husband and wife rather than national or political power struggles. Women, such as ‘subtle Rebekah,’ are placed at the centre of these schemes, not only challenging authority themselves, but also subtly influencing others to subvert authority. Unlike competitive wit which consists of public rivalry between equally-matched opponents, ‘out-witting’ is subtler and serves women who challenge patriarchal power. The difference between competitive rivalry and the subtlety of out-witting is exemplified by the following description from David Abercromby of women’s skill in subtly and successfully out-witting strong and powerful men:

Sampson could neither be overcome, nor out-witted by the Philistins, but subtler Dalila put a cheat upon him, that cost him at last his life. Solomon was the wisest Man of the Age he lived in, yet he was prevailed upon by the forcible persuasions of his Concubines to adore false Gods. Abigail with a short Harrangue triumph’d over David’s warlike resolutions. And Adam himself could not resist the Rethorick of his Wife Eve, but submitted to her as to his Master. So true it is that Women have out-witted the greatest men in all ages, and for ought I know, the World turns yet round at their discreation (p. 204).

While Rebekah outwits through skilful action Eve outwits using rhetoric. Like the use of rhetorical wit to display courtly status, the use of rhetorical and embodied wit in drama is a competitive spectacle which may be used to confirm a person’s status or

¹¹⁶ *OED Online* <www.oed.com> [Accessed 23rd March 2018], outwit, v.1.

¹¹⁷ J. Trapp cited in *OED online* [Accessed 28th April 2018], outwit, v.1.

F. Kirkman cited in *OED online* [Accessed 28th April 2018], outwit, v.1.

E. Hiceringill cited in *OED online* [Accessed 28th April 2018], outwit, v.1.

¹¹⁸ See Genesis 27. 5-18 in *King James Bible*, <www.biblegateway.com> [Accessed 29th April 2018].

challenge authority through displaying superior skill or craft. This thesis considers the way in which women out-wit the patriarchal structures which seek to confine them, through skill and craft. In the quotation above, Abercromby refers to women's ability to trick their male opponents through persuasive language and skilful plotting. My own concept of performative wit refers to skilful spectacle in tragedy which combines witty rhetoric and dextrous action to out-wit patriarchal structures. The connection between dextrous action and persuasive rhetoric as a type of women's wit on the Restoration stage is evident in John Banks's tragedy *Anna Bullen* (1682) in which the character Piercy encourages spectators to view the spectacle of 'Matrons, Wives, [and] Virgins' kneeling and engaging in persuasive rhetoric as 'Woman's art.'¹¹⁹ Performative wit is specific to tragedy and manipulates spectators' focus by skilfully creating a contradiction between verbal representation and physical representation. An example of this is the self-conscious contradiction between the verbal depiction of the rape-victim as tainted and the visual spectacle of her wearing white in Mary Pix's *Ibrahim* (1696), a spectacle created by character and performer from Pix's detailed internal stage directions.¹²⁰ Performative wit deliberately sets up conflicting representations of the female character to reveal the constructed nature of patriarchal authority. Elements of performative wit are present in scenes in which characters self-consciously adopt a submissive pose and acknowledge that they are doing so. In Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697), Almeria's acknowledgement that 'blessings [always] crown that posture [of kneeling]' demonstrates her awareness of the power of this affecting spectacle.¹²¹ The actress's self-conscious performance and her repeated reference to this constructed spectacle, directs the gaze of the characters on stage and of spectators in the audience, to

¹¹⁹ John Banks, *Anna Bullen; or Vertue Betrayed* (London: R. Bentley, 1682), p. 65.

¹²⁰ Mary Pix, *Ibrahim* (London: John Harding, 1696), p. 37.

¹²¹ William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697), IV.i, p. 48.

place the heroine in the role of director of the scene and plot. This raises the question of whether characters who direct the gaze are victims or witty heroines.

Critics such as Holly A. Crocker have acknowledged performing passivity as a form of resistance in Shakespearean drama.¹²² Crocker's arguments can usefully be applied to displays of passivity in she-tragedy. My thesis furthers Crocker's notion of performing passivity, through its consideration of the repeated spectacle of the actress performing the abject in seventeenth-century she-tragedy as a form of performative wit. This offers a new approach to considering female agency in she-tragedy, a genre often criticised as conservative due to its passive heroines.

In chapter 3 of the thesis, I consider how women dramatists use the spectacle of the actress onstage to deconstruct negative associations surrounding women's bodies in tragedy. Elin Diamond has argued that the arrival of the actress prompted 'looking at being looked at ness', or the actress's awareness of herself as spectacle.¹²³ Chapter 4 of the thesis will take Diamond's ideas further to investigate the effects of the actress's self-conscious spectacle on spectators. I will consider the way in which women dramatists develop the spectacle of the kneeling or swooning woman using performative wit, which relies on the dramatist's words and the actress's physical presence in performance.

Subversive wit

Subversive wit is a form of out-witting linked primarily to rank: it is used by socially marginalised or subservient individuals and groups of male and female

¹²² Holly A. Crocker, 'Affective Resistance: Performing Passivity and Playing A-Part in *The Taming of the Shrew*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54 (2003), 142-159, (p. 144).

¹²³ Elin Diamond, 'Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*', *ELH*, 56: 3 (1989), 519-541.

characters against their social superiors. The use of subversive wit by marginalised individuals and groups poses a powerful threat to established hierarchies and social order. Wit's connection to disrupting order is noted in Abercromby's reference to wit as the 'Headwel of Rebellion, Sedition, and Heresie' and warns of tradesmen employing their wit to cheat others (p. 149, pp. 135-6). The mention of tradesmen presents a connection between practical or street-wise knowledge and wit that may be used in a cunning manner for self-gain. This thesis will use the term 'subversive wit' to describe words or actions whose primary effect is to overthrow or invert assumptions of rank for personal gain. Although critics such as Thomas Fujimura have acknowledged that wit is rivalrous and hierarchical, less attention has been paid to the way in which wit, which relies on 'out-witting' another, can be employed to challenge hierarchies of gender and class in Restoration drama.¹²⁴ My thesis argues that wit is employed by characters of all social ranks and can be used as a mode of resistance. In Restoration drama, subversive wit is exercised by the trickster figure, usually a servant or chambermaid, who 'out-wits' their master or mistress through manipulation of language and stage action. The trickster figure's origins lie in the trope of the crafty servant from Roman comedy, further developed in *commedia dell'arte*. Popular pamphlets on cony-catching and 'canting' printed in the 1590s focus on the escapades of thieves, such as Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). As William Dynes has argued, although the trickster figure from early modern drama plots for personal gain, their plots are subversive in that they have wider 'social ramifications' for the social structure of the play and beyond the theatre.¹²⁵ Adam Zucker's *The Places of Wit* reconsiders those

¹²⁴ Thomas Fujimura, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 27, p. 64.

¹²⁵ William R. Dynes, 'The Trickster Figure in Jacobean Comedy', *SEL*, 1500-1900, 33:2 (1993), 365-84.

‘normally distant from centers of economic or political control’ such as ‘servants, women, the untitled and unmoneyed’ as witty, as they are ‘in the know’ possessing street-wise wit, or knowledge of location in early modern comedy which they use to their advantage in plots.¹²⁶ While the lower classes are those with the ability to cozen in the drama of the 1630s that Zucker refers to, in Restoration drama cozeners are generally from a more socially elevated class, such as the rake or beau-monde who outwits elder members of the aristocracy. However, the stock figure of the resourceful servant or chambermaid carries through in plays such as *The Beau Defeated* (1700). In contrast to the heroines on the early modern stage who tended to cross-dress and roam the city to assume the role of female trickster, in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy female tricksters plot from within the household. The skilful plots in which chambermaids and their mistresses outwit the master of the house in *The Busy Body* (1709) and *The Basset Table* (1705) provide examples of the way in which pregnant wit in the form of household knowledge can be subversively turned against the patriarch. My thesis will explore the way in which the trickster’s skill in manipulating disguise and language to deceive their superiors is disruptive. An example of this is Valentine’s servant Jeremy in William Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1695), who uses figurative language to baffle his social superior Sir Sampson, by responding to Sir Sampson’s assertion that he ‘will find’ Valentine with ‘would you could, sir, for he has lost himself’ (IV.v p. 417).

Private revengers are part of my category of ‘subversive wit’ as they employ wit to take the law into their own hands. Francis Bacon’s essay ‘Of Revenge’ (1605)

See also Douglas Canfield, ‘Naughty Heroine: Tricksters Get Away with It’ in *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1997), pp. 145-158.

¹²⁶ Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 10.

lists marginalised members of seventeenth century society, such as bastards, women, and deformed people as the social types most likely to commit revenge.¹²⁷ By the Restoration, the social groups that were marginalised had changed. ‘Moor’ had a stronger frequency as a collocate of revenge than ‘women’ between 1600 and 1699.¹²⁸ Elkanah Settle’s *Love and Revenge* (1675) offers a prime example of subversive wit in the form of revenge plots, as a recourse for the disempowered, as the revenger is a young woman disguised as a black, male servant, who enacts revenge. I will consider which groups enact revenge in tragedies penned by male dramatists and whether they are viewed as subversive or whether their wit is applauded. My thesis will investigate whether the representation of revenge and of those who commit it differs in the work of women dramatists. I will consider whether private revenge in seventeenth-century tragedy is always figured monstrous, cowardly, and feminine, symbolising the breakdown of order as Rebecca Merrens has argued.¹²⁹ I will question whether late seventeenth century revenge tragedies always represent revenge as an action committed on the behalf of an individual or whether the revenger acts on behalf of a group.

¹²⁷ Frances Bacon, ‘Of Revenge’ *Essays*, eds. by Samuel Harvey Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), pp. 34-35.

¹²⁸ ‘Moor’ was collocate number 101 and ‘Black’ number 138, compared with ‘Women’ which was numbered 420. This was based on an initial search on ‘revenge’ restricted to the century 1600-1699.

¹²⁹ Rebecca Merrens, ‘Unmanned with Thy Words: Regendering Tragedy in Manley and Trotter’ in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 31-53, (p. 41).

Sapphic wit

My thesis coins the term ‘Sapphic wit’ to refer to a mode of out-witting authority which contrasts with the competitive models of out-witting outlined above and cited in the *OED*. I have coined this term to refer to a mode of sisterly-wit between women which was prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth century but was not explicitly named due to its subversive nature. This subtle network of wit has not been recognised because previous studies of wit in drama have emphasised the competitive nature of wit, rather than focusing specifically on women’s wit and the way in which skilful plotting can be a collaborative and supportive enterprise. Sapphic wit is a supportive network of wit in which women from different social classes altruistically plot together in comedy, tragicomedy and tragedy to escape oppressive patriarchal structures. In Mary Pix’s *The Spanish Wives* and Susanna Centlivre’s *The Busy Body*, a chambermaid is ‘the ladies’ best utensil’ (p. 355). Women help one another organise intrigues, such as Orada’s assistance to help free her mistress from a tyrant husband in the *The Spanish Wives* (1696) and Lady Gaylove’s facilitation of Lady Loveman’s intrigue with Lord Courtall in Mary Pix’s *The Different Widows* (1703). A contrast to the portrayal of women as romantic rivals in Dryden’s *Secret Love*, Etherege’s *The Man of the Mode* and Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, this supportive characteristic of wit is most commonly portrayed in the work of women dramatists.

Sapphic wit can be traced back to an earlier tradition of women’s writing, from Sappho’s erotic poetry addressed to other women, to the representation of female friendship in early modern Country House poetry. Coteries of women and literary salons, members of which produced Household drama and benefited from the support of

patronesses are also part of this tradition.¹³⁰ However, Sapphic wit between dramatist, actress, character, and female spectator does not fully emerge in the theatre until the actress and female dramatist enter the public stage.

This is because the advent of professional female playwrights gave the male spectator a privileged point of access to female knowledge and experiences—previously only represented by male playwrights. Paula Backscheider has justly argued that the theatre was a ‘hegemonic apparatus used by women writers like Behn to represent female concerns, and to provide a guide to the world for women.’¹³¹ The second generation of women dramatists build on Aphra Behn’s and Frances Boothby’s earlier representations of forced marriages and women working together to achieve their desires. This can be seen in intrigue comedies such as Mary Pix’s *The Beau Defeated* (1700) and Catharine Trotter’s *Love at a Loss* (1701), in which Lesbia, Lucilia and Miranda instruct one another in the management of plots, with Lesbia commending Lysetta’s part in their intrigue which was ‘managed with wonderful dexterity.’¹³² Women share knowledge by instructing one another how to dissemble, whether to be ‘laughing or in a passion’ in *Love at a Loss* and *The Beau Defeated*.¹³³ Jacqueline

¹³⁰Sue Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 46-47.

¹³¹ Paula R. Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) p. 65, p. 69.

¹³² Aphra Behn, *The Amorous Prince* (1671) in *The Works of Aphra Behn Vol. 5*, ed. by Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), pp. 83 -156 (p. 107). Catharine Trotter, *Love at a Loss* (1701) in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, ed. by Douglas Canfield and Maja-Lisa von Sneidern (Ormskirk: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 857-902, V.iv.30-2 (p. 897).

¹³³ Mary Pix, *The Beau Defeated* (1700) in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies*, ed. by Fidelis Morgan and Paddy Lyons (London: J.M. Dent, 1991), pp. 161-234 (p. 211).

Catharine Trotter, *Love at a Loss*, V.ii.25-52 (p. 894).

Pearson has acknowledged a contract between women dramatists, performers and spectators but not in relation to a supportive network of wit.¹³⁴

Margarete Rubik argues that ‘Behn counterpoints the male community with a female one, in which friendships, mutual help as well as rivalries, are as common as in the male world.’¹³⁵ Contrary to Rubik’s view, I argue that the work of the first and second generation of women dramatists, such as Behn’s *The Amorous Prince* and Trotter’s *Love at Loss*, depicts a supportive world of women, unlike the competitive realm of male bonds. In stark contrast to Berinthia’s plot to seduce her cousin’s husband in Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1698), Miranda and Lesbia in Trotter’s *Love at a Loss* prioritise friendship over love.¹³⁶ Published shortly after Mary Astell’s essay on marriage, *Love at a Loss*’ prioritisation of friendship over love poses a direct challenge to marital relationships through its depiction of the reliability of Sapphic wit.

Examples of Sapphic wit in the form of a female community also occur in tragedies by female dramatists. In contrast to the representation of female rivalry in Nathaniel Lee’s tragedy *The Rival Queens* (1677), Sapphic wit in Catharine Trotter’s *Agnes de Castro* (1695) deconstructs the idea of women as rivals in tragedy. Agnes views Constantia as ‘sole perfection’ of the female sex and states that she is her ‘Light, [her] Guard, [her] all.’¹³⁷ Similarly, Mary Pix’s *Queen Catharine* (1698) places women’s struggles at the centre of history, retelling England’s history through the eyes

¹³⁴ Jacqueline Pearson, ‘Women Spectators, Playwrights and Performers and the Restoration Stage’, in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: MLA, 2010), pp. 44-57 (p. 48).

¹³⁵ Margarete Rubik, *Early Women Dramatists 1550-1800* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 48.

¹³⁶ Lesbia is aptly named after the isle of Lesbos, Sappho’s birthplace, and carries connotations of erotic female relationships.

¹³⁷ Catharine Trotter, *Agnes de Castro* (London: H. Rhodes, R. Parker and S. Briscoe, 1696), III.2 Er

of Queen Catharine and her ward Isabella, inviting spectators to invest in ‘Isabella’s Love and Catharine’s Grief’ (III.2, E1r). Both Trotter’s *Agnes de Castro* and Mary Pix’s *Queen Catharine* encourage spectators to focus on women’s struggles, writing their tragedies from a female perspective.

Sapphic wit moves beyond the realm of friendships between women in the drama and extends to female spectators. Marilyn Williamson, Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, Gweno Williams, and Jacqueline Pearson have already established a network of women writers in this period, termed the ‘daughters of Behn.’¹³⁸ Drawing on their research I contend that in addition to this supportive network of women writers, there was also a distinctive and supportive network of female wit, not only between the dramatists, but also between the women within their plays and female spectators. Peter Holland points out that during the 1680s and 1690s, the period in which the ‘daughters of Behn’ were writing, there was an increase in the number of women in the audience.¹³⁹ My research on Sapphic wit extends Elin Diamond’s concept of the ‘female gaze’ established with the actress’s entrance onto the public stage, to argue that actresses employ Sapphic wit in soliloquy, asides and epilogues to connect with female patrons in the audience.¹⁴⁰ An example of Sapphic wit which involves female spectators occurs in Aphra Behn’s tragicomedy *The Amorous Prince* (1671) when the actress in character addresses female spectators in the epilogue, asking them to approve her

¹³⁸ Marilyn L. Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), pp. 184-196.

Findlay, Alison and Stephanie Hodgson-Wright with Gweno Williams, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), p. 193.

Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Female Dramatists 1642-1737* (London: Harvester, 1988), p. 205.

¹³⁹ Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 140.

¹⁴⁰ Elin Diamond, ‘Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*,’ *ELH*, 56 (1989), 519-541 (pp. 535-536).

marriage to the Prince. This form of wit moves beyond mere sympathy to empathetic understanding, by establishing a feminine perspective.

Wit is such a pervasive trope in Restoration drama that a study of the different types of wit outlined above cannot be comprehensive in its survey. The thesis therefore makes a selection of texts for each chapter, combining canonical and lesser known plays, to provide a variety of material which is representative of women's wit in the variety of dramatic genres in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Using the cqpweb tool to search for wit I identified plays not typically associated with wit, but which display striking and, in some cases, exceptional examples of wit. These lesser-studied plays enabled me to develop and nuance my arguments, ideas, and analysis in ways that enrich understandings of wit. Inclusion of these striking examples of wit demonstrates that the canonical or typical play genre associated with wit is not the only text worthy of study. I selected my chosen plays using the cqpweb tool and EEBO database to conduct a search on wit with the collocates 'woman', 'women', or 'female' in plays dating from 1660-1720 in order to create a sub-corpus of texts which make frequent reference to women's wit. I then narrowed my choice of material by reading plot summaries of the plays, the plays themselves, scenes of dialogue, and arguments from critics about the plays. The process of selection from then on varied for each chapter and I shall discuss my play choices further in the detailed chapter summaries which follow.

The first chapter of this thesis considers the development of the heroine's linguistic wit from fast-paced turns to subtle and subversive elongated echoes in comedies by male and female dramatists 1660-1701. I argue that the heroine's linguistic wit differs from that of the rake in the work of women dramatists and that the heroine's wit, which was previously a mirror of that of the rake in the work of male dramatists

and part of the ‘gay couple’ trope, becomes completely distinct from that of the rake by 1701. I analyse the way in which female dramatists appropriate and adapt the male tradition of rhetorical linguistic wit and use new witty linguistic techniques which appear deferential but are used subversively to redirect the conversation and to enable women to have the last word. I argue that the style of witty repartee changes with the moral turn at the end of the seventeenth century as the heroine becomes less carefree and more critical of relationships, using her wit to question her fate after marriage. Each section of the chapter explores a specific linguistic technique employed in witty dialogue between the characters of all ranks in Restoration comedy. While wit in Restoration comedy has previously been made the focus of scholarship, the linguistic techniques involved in repartee have not been scrutinised. I draw on sociolinguistic theory to explore the way in which linguistic wit is used to form social relations. Sociolinguistics presents a helpful lens for consideration of witty language as wit itself is dialogic and relies on dynamic linguistic exchange between characters. I consider how the pattern of aggressive, defensive, and flirtatious language adopted by the ‘gay couple’ is used to promote or defer intimacy. I argue that wit functions as social capital which may raise a character’s status within the scene. I argue that gender and class affect the style and pace of the characters’ wit. I discuss the following plays: Dryden’s *Secret Love* (1667), Etherege’s *The Man of the Mode* (1675), Edward Ravenscroft’s *The Careless Lovers* (1673), Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* (1677), Mary Pix’s *The Innocent Mistress* (1695), William Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1698), *The Way of the World* (1700), and Catharine Trotter’s *Love at a Loss* (1701). These plays were selected because they are representative of the period as a whole, from the popularity of the care-free gay couple to the coquettes and beaux of sentimental comedy and the negotiation of the marriage contract in the eighteenth century. The plays were chosen based upon the

range of linguistic techniques employed in dialogue by male and female characters from a variety of social backgrounds.

Chapter Two of the thesis, 'Wit in Action', focuses on embodied wit in the form of characters' imaginative and skilful manipulation of plots and intrigues in comedies by female and male dramatists. The chapter employs thing theory and new materialist approaches which emphasise the mutuality between people and objects and therefore correspond with the seventeenth century's fluid boundary between the self and the world and the fluid conception of identity on stage. The plays I have chosen feature striking examples of witty manipulation of material objects often used to enable trickery in Restoration comedy, such as clothing as disguise, the bed-trick, exchange of money for information and for servants' household knowledge. I explore how tricksters' witty manipulation of disguise, objects, people, and space blurs subject positions and provides characters with agency. The comedies in this chapter from the 1670s and 1680s were selected for their response to the notion of 'risk' that characterised the seventeenth century after the word entered the English language in 1660. I establish a connection between wit and risk in these comedies from the 1670s and 1680s which are characterised by the trickster who takes risks and uses their wit to alter their social status. The chapter compares these comedies which feature risk-taking and roving tricksters with spatially and morally confined tricksters in eighteenth-century comedy to explore how the trickster's wit and their relationship with objects and people changes to become more collaborative. Susanna Centlivre's *The Busybody* (1709), Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703), and Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718) were chosen because they feature collaborative intrigues set in the household. The plays included in this chapter are representative of the seventeenth century's climate of gambling and risk, and the changing relationship between wit, trickery, and objects due to the

eighteenth century's focus on morality within the household. In section one I demonstrate that female characters' existing position as object enables them to achieve greater fluidity of subject positions than their male counterparts. I analyse the extent to which the subversive wit of the cross-dressing female trickster leads to a greater manipulation of subject positions in Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and the anonymous play *The Woman Turned Bully* (1675). The second section of the chapter considers the way in which commodities define male identity. I explore the male tricksters' exchange of knowledge and money as a type of subversive wit which blurs subject positions in John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672), the anonymous play *The Mistaken Husband* (1675), and Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686). In the anonymous comedy *The Mistaken Husband* (1675) and Susanna Centlivre's *The Busybody* (1709), I investigate the role of servants as instruments in intrigues, extensions of their master's and mistress's identity, in relation to subject positions. I consider whether servants are altruistic or selfish tricksters, whether they employ Sapphic or subversive wit. I explore the way in which servants' position as both outside of, and within the household, makes them skilled in manipulating space through pregnant wit out of necessity. I analyse the way in which the frequent situation of intrigues within the domestic sphere in early eighteenth-century comedy results in wit becoming more conservative. I consider wit as a means of protecting the household which results in a new focus on the domestic wit of married couples and relatives in Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703), the anonymous comedy *The Dumb Lady* (1672), and Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718).

The third chapter of my thesis entitled 'From Medea to Sappho: Women's Wit in Tragedy' refers to 'Medea' as the archetypal scheming heroine and 'Sappho' as the virtuous heroine. It explores the performative wit as a mode of resistance used by the

suffering heroine, along with competitive, vengeful, and Sapphic wit in seventeenth-century revenge tragedy to investigate whether wit in tragedy is always competitive, or whether it may be counterbalanced by Sapphic wit in the form of female friendship, and, if so, with what effects. The first section of the chapter considers performative wit as a means of deconstructing the abject through self-conscious repeated spectacle which inspires varying degrees of sympathy in Mary Pix's *Ibrahim* (1696), John Banks's *Anna Bullen* (1682), Catharine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1695), William Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697), and Delarivier Manley's *Almyna* (1707). These plays were selected because of their popularity on stage and their focus on the suffering heroine who performs the abject. *Anna Bullen* (1682) represents the popularisation of the suffering heroine, while *Almyna* (1707) demonstrates how the representation of the heroine as abject changes. I argue that performative wit in the work of women dramatists is a self-conscious witty strategy which deconstructs the abject through repeated spectacle, to destabilise the binary of virtuous/passionate in the male genre she-tragedy. The second half of the chapter focuses on vengeful and competitive wit and compares the representation of female rivals in *Agnes de Castro* (1696), *The Rival Queens* (1677), *Love and Revenge* (1675), *Queen Catherine* (1698), and *The Fatal Friendship* (1698) to investigate whether revenge is always competitive, women are always rivals, or if women can work together to form Sapphic networks of wit. There is also brief discussion of the representation of female rivals and vengeful wit in *Ibrahim* (1696), with some discussion of *Anna Bullen* (1682), and *The Mourning Bride* (1697). I chose *The Rival Queens* and *Love and Revenge* as popular and lesser-known examples of female rivalry that popularised the binary of Sappho and Medea which emerged in 1690s she-tragedies such as Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697). Catharine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1695), *The Fatal Friendship* (1698), and Mary Pix's *Queen*

Catharine (1698) were chosen for their striking examples of Sapphic wit and collaboration between women.

The final chapter of my thesis ‘Wit in Miniature’ considers the effect of competitive, vengeful, and Sapphic wit on spectators in prologues, epilogues, asides, and soliloquies. I selected a small number of plays in order to provide close-readings of specific types of witty audience address across comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy, choosing plays which use striking examples of wit to directly engage their spectators in current political and theatrical debates to provide insight into how wit functioned as part of the public sphere of debate, what this reveals about attitudes toward dramatic genre, gender, and politics, and how witty address developed across the period. I adapt Genette’s work on the influence of literary paratexts on our reception of a text to argue that dramatic paratexts in comedy and tragedy are miniature forms of wit, integral to the audience’s reception of the play.¹⁴¹ I argue that asides and soliloquies function as dramatic paratexts when they are addressed primarily to spectators and are separate from the main dialogue of the play. Like prologues and epilogues, soliloquies, which are addressed explicitly to playgoers, are probably delivered in the downstage area of the stage rather than the upstage area which contains the play’s action. By considering the intimate connection the actress establishes with spectators in dramatic paratexts which manipulate theatre-goers’ response to the play, I expand Diana Solomon’s work, which considers prologues and epilogues as distanced from the plays to which they are appended.¹⁴² The relationship between actor/actress and audience is one of exchange as Paul McCallum notes, arguing that the relationship between actress, playwright and

¹⁴¹ Gerard Genette, *Thresholds: Paratexts of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹⁴² Diana Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender and Comedy, Performance and Print* (Lanham: University of Delaware, 2013).

spectator as that of the cozener and the cozened.¹⁴³ I extend McCallum's view to include the audience as confidants and confidantes, especially in relation to the actress's employment of Sapphic wit in her addresses to female spectators in epilogues and asides. I consider whether the Sapphic networks of wit represented within the play extend to women in the audience, to form a Sapphic network between character, actress, playwright, and female spectators. I investigate how actresses used asides to connect with female patrons in the audience and to involve them in public debates about politics and theatre. *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679) and *Love's Contrivance* (1703) were chosen for their use of witty address to respond to anxieties about the popularity of comedy in a highly-charged political and moral environment. *The Feigned Courtesans* and *Love's Contrivance* disenfranchise spectators' ability to judge the play through their positioning of spectators as fools to stave off criticism of comedy. My discussion of paratexts in tragicomedy charts the changing relationship between audience, performer, and monarchy in the period. Frances Boothby's *Marcelia* (1667) and Behn's *The Amorous Prince* (1671) were selected for their critical reflection on the Restoration of the monarchy, from Marcelia's discomfort between 'seeming' and 'feeling' in Court which is transferred to spectators, to open criticism of the King's libertine principles through the creation of a Sapphic network between performer and spectators in *The Amorous Prince*. Following on from my previous chapter's discussion of revenge, I refer to affect theory to discuss the appeal of the villain, who frequently engages with spectators through asides and soliloquy in tragedy. *Love and Revenge* (1675) was selected for the way in which it channels and questions vengeful wit in the wake of the

¹⁴³ Paul McCallum, 'Cozening the Pit: Prologue, Epilogues, and Poetic Authority in Restoration England', in *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain Raisers and Afterpieces, the Rest of the Eighteenth Century London Stage*, ed. by Daniel J. Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 2-38.

prejudice of the 1673 Test Acts to explore the appeal of the villain. *The Mourning Bride* and *The Fatal Friendship* were selected as each play use witty address in paratexts to respond differently to Thomas Rymer's criticism of wickedness in tragedy. I argue that wit becomes more conservative in Congreve's later tragedy *The Mourning Bride* (1697), which exploits Aristotle's model of tragedy as cathartic, to expel the dangerous passions roused in tragedy. I propose that, by contrast, Trotter's sentimental tragedy *The Fatal Friendship* (1698) rejects Aristotle's concept of 'the tragic flaw' and departs from the notion of heroes and villains in tragedy to create a new style of tragedy which consists of sympathetic engagement with all characters.¹⁴⁴ Mary Pix's *Ibrahim* (1696), *Queen Catharine* (1698), and Delarivier Manley's *Almyra* (1707) were selected for the way in which their tragedies bring women's histories and experiences to the fore. I consider the way in which female dramatists use the persona of the actress to foreground and reflect on the role of women in history in *Ibrahim* (1696), *Queen Catharine* (1698), and *Almyra* (1707) in response to the reign of Queen Mary and Queen Anne.

The main focus of this thesis is the comparison of women's wit in the scripts written by male and female dramatists rather than a study of female performers as purveyors of wit on stage. However, the influence of particular actresses on the portrayal of women's wit in the plays has been considered in certain sections of the thesis in cases where a role was written for a particular performer who popularised a certain style of wit. Examples of this are discussed in Chapter One and include the influence of Nell Gwyn's charismatic performance as Florimell in *Secret Love* (1667)

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, quoted in Reneé Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie Containing the Necessary, Rational, and Universal Rules for Epick, Dramatick, and the other Sorts of Poetry: with Reflections on the Works of the Ancient and Modern Poets, and Their Faults Noted* (London: T.N., 1674), XVIII p. 105.

on the popularisation of care-free heroine onstage and Anne Bracegirdle's popular performance of the witty coquette in *Love for Love* (1695) and *The Way of the World* (1700). In Chapter Three I consider how the typecasting of actresses such as Rebecca Marshall, Elizabeth Boutell, Elizabeth Barry, and Anne Bracegirdle in the opposing roles of she-devil and she-angel contributes to the portrayal of competitive and vengeful wit onstage. In Chapter Four I analyse the effect of deliberately casting a performer associated with a certain type of role in a completely different role to undercut audience expectations to produce a witty effect in Susanna Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703). I have consulted Philip Highfill's *Biographical Dictionary of Actors and Actresses*, Howe's *The First English Actresses*, and Avery's *The London Stage* to inform my understanding of actresses' and actors' careers on stage.¹⁴⁵

Each chapter of this thesis is split into sub-sections of varying length. Some sections of the thesis, such as the discussion of performative wit which stages the abject in Chapter Three, and my analysis of the presence of risk in the male tricksters' plots in Chapter Two, are unprecedented in criticism on seventeenth-century drama, and therefore necessitate greater explanation and contextualisation. In Chapter One the discussion of the proviso scene is lengthy as the proviso scene utilizes many of the techniques already discussed to form a climax to the play's wit, and, as a more complex form, merits more sustained analysis. Unlike other linguistic techniques discussed in Chapter One, which are used by male and female characters, my thesis's short sections

¹⁴⁵ Philip Highfill, J.R. Kalman, A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans (ed), *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers and Other Stage Personnel in London 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). Emmett L. Avery, Ben Ross Schneider, Arthur H. Scouten and others, *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-79).

on echoing and interruptions identify these types of wit as feminine techniques used in the wit duel and therefore does not engage in comparative discussion of how female characters build on male characters' use of these techniques. In the case of Chapter Two's short section on married tricksters, this is because the wit of married tricksters marks a change from the self-seeking wit of female, male tricksters, and servants to a form of wit which seeks to protect and enhance existing subject positions and offers a conclusion to the chapter, demonstrating how the representation of wit became more conservative in the eighteenth century. The shorter discussion of disfigurement in Chapter Three develops previous discussion of how the abject spectacle of bloody wounds unsettle the male subject's sense of self. In Chapter Four the section on metamorphic wit is shorter as it builds on the previous section of satiric wit to explore how wit undercut spectators' security. Similarly, the section on performative wit in dramatic paratexts in Chapter Four extends arguments from Chapter Three and therefore needs less contextualisation.

My thesis cannot offer an exhaustive overview of wit, due to its omnipresence in the drama of the period, but I hope to expand current notions of wit and to showcase wit's versatility and shifting nature throughout this period. Consideration of the development of women's wit through the relationship between dramatist, actress and female spectators to form a Sapphic network of wit, brings to attention the importance of women's drama in providing a female perspective on the Restoration stage. This thesis thus aims to reassess the work of women dramatists in line with their male contemporaries, and vice versa, through the lively displays of wit in drama from 1660 to 1720.

Chapter One

‘Retailer[s] of Phrases’: Linguistic Wit in Restoration Comedy

‘There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turned...for motion, not method is their occupation.’¹⁴⁶

A thesis on wit would not be complete without a chapter dedicated to the use of witty language in comedy. Congreve’s reference to Petulant as a ‘retailer of phrases’ indicates that wit had become a form of credit in comedy.¹⁴⁷ The epigraph to this chapter from *The Way of the World* (1700), which refers to women’s wit, demonstrates that women became able users of wit by the end of the seventeenth century. While linguistic wit duels are an integral stylistic feature of Restoration comedy, in-depth analysis of the linguistic devices employed by its characters has not been the subject of scholarship. This chapter considers the sociable wit of the similitude, the empathetic wit of the dissimilitude, the subversive wit of turns and echoes, disempowering questions and interruptions in popular comedies from 1660 to 1700. It explores the way in which these techniques are used differently by men and women characters of high and low status and how these types of wit develop across the period. The aim of this chapter is to compare the way in which male and female characters and dramatists present witty language and which techniques of linguistic wit are most effective.

The plays included in this chapter were selected because they represent the development of the stock pairing of the witty ‘gay couple’ and their use of language from 1667-1701 in the work of canonical male playwrights and recently rediscovered women dramatists. I argue that women dramatists such as Behn played an instrumental

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. IV. ii. 507-510 (p. 778). All subsequent references will be given in act, scene, line and page number in parenthesis.

¹⁴⁷ William Congreve, *The Way of the World*, IV.i.349.

role in developing a distinct form of linguistic wit for the heroine on the Restoration stage and that the personality of particular actresses such as Nell Gwyn and Anne Bracegirdle contributed to the creation of an independent witty heroine on stage. Dryden's *Secret Love* (1667) provides an early and unusual example of a comic heroine inspired by and first performed by a real life female wit: Nell Gwyn.¹⁴⁸ The witty rake Dorimant from the highly successful comedy *The Man of the Mode* (1676) is integral to a study of the rake's linguistic wit as the play was penned by fashionable 'Court Wit' George Etherege. Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673) was popular due to the play's mad couple and its fast-paced dialogue. The wit of the spirited heroine Hellena in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* provides a useful comparison with the wit of earlier female leads such as Florimell in *Secret Love* and Harriet in *The Man of the Mode* as Behn's heroine outwits the rake by extending and developing existing linguistic techniques. William Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) and Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) are representative of the development of the heroine from mirror-image of the rake to witty reformer of the rake and this is evident from the stark difference between the hero's and heroine's use of language which communicates opposing values. William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and Catherine Trotter's *Love at a Loss* (1701) represent the eighteenth century's focus on negotiation of marriage contracts and individual freedom through wit. Millamant, the celebrated heroine of Congreve's *The Way of the World*, is a heroine whose independence is portrayed through her confident use of language, but whose independence and ability to speak wittily dwindles in the proviso scene. Trotter's comedy *Love at a Loss* completely reacts against the 'gay

¹⁴⁸ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 175.

couple' trope and moves toward the plain-speaking language of contract to present a bleak portrait of marriage despite the wit of her heroines.

In this chapter I discuss the wit of the gay couple, the main exponents of witty discourse, as a starting point for comparison of other characters' use of wit.¹⁴⁹ I argue that a character's gender and social status affects the style of their wit. I argue that women's wit develops from use of the short, sharp turn to a more confident, subtle and complex use of wit. I portray demonstrate the way in which linguistic wit openly overturns social hierarchies of class and gender in the seventeenth century and how wit presents a subtler questioning of patriarchy in the eighteenth century. I compare the use of specific language techniques at the beginning of the period with the end of the period in the work of male and female playwrights and compare the rake's use of the technique with the heroine's use of it and servants' use of it. Discussion of each linguistic technique in comedies from 1670s-1700 provides insight into the influence of a character's status on their style of wit, and whether wit resists, exposes or reinstates existing sexual and social hierarchies. I consider the subtlety of technique within aggressive and defensive examples and how these techniques affect the relationship between characters. I explore the way in which the gay couple's use of turns and similitudes in Dryden's *Secret Love* (1667) and Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673) depict the movement of desire and deferral within courtship. I analyse the contrast between the similitude as companionable discourse in William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) and Dorimant's usage of the dissimilitude as affectation which reveals his sociability as a performance in Etherege's *The Man of the Mode* (1675). In *Love for Love* (1695) the servants' quick-witted turns, which briefly mock their

¹⁴⁹ John Harrington Smith, *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971).

superiors, are contrasted with the leisurely-paced similitudes and dissimilitudes of the financially secure heroine Angelica. Extended turns, echoing, and rhetorical questions used by Hellena and Angellica Bianca in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677) differentiate their wit from that of the rake Willmore. My investigation of Hellena's and Angellica's wit develops scholarship on the plot and language of *The Rover*, such as Elaine Hobby's research on the connections between Behn's play and Killigrew's *Thomaso* (1664).¹⁵⁰ Interruptions employed by Mrs Beauclair in Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) demonstrate a bolder form of wit which strategically silences other characters onstage. I investigate whether the nature of the wit duel changes with the increased frequency of the technique of plain-dealing or plain speaking toward the end of the seventeenth century. I consider whether the witty railing mode dominates characters' discourse or whether the serious mode of plain-dealing is strategically employed to catch their opponent off-guard in Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) and Catharine Trotter's *Love at a Loss* (1701). I explore the way in which plain-dealing breaks the witty contract and depicts the heroine weighing up whether the rake is a secure investment. The final section of the chapter focuses on the proviso scene in which the gay couple negotiate their conditions for marriage.¹⁵¹ This chapter considers whether the abundance of witty linguistic techniques employed in the proviso scene provide closure, or whether they imply a continuation of the wit duel. The influence of performers such as Nell Gwyn and Anne Bracedirdle have been considered in cases where the role of witty heroine was inspired by the personality of a particular performer, but the main focus of this chapter is the characters' use of language.

¹⁵⁰ Elaine Hobby, 'No Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127 (p. 115, p. 118).

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (1992), p. 71.

Sociolinguistics presents a helpful lens for consideration of witty language as wit itself is dialogic and relies on dynamic linguistic exchange between characters. Applying a modern analytical tool to read Restoration drama may seem anachronistic but because language always plays an integral role in how we represent ourselves and how we establish relationships with others, many of the broad structural rules identified by sociolinguists can be usefully applied transhistorically. In Restoration comedy wit functions as social capital which affects social relationships. Language and humour play an important role in forming social relations; their use can generate intimacy or distance. Therefore, consideration of a character's rank and the appropriateness of their language in the context of the situation and the rank of the person to whom their witty remarks are addressed is crucial to understanding the effect of their wit in the scene. The notion of wit as movement within discourse, which promotes or discourages relations between individuals, is one that I will pursue in relation to characters of different rank and gender within Restoration comedy.

Although devices of linguistic wit feature in the work of both male and female dramatists, and are delivered by male and female characters, they come from the masculine and learned tradition of classical oratory and rhetoric, via Lyly's euphuistic wit in *Euphues, or, the Anatomy of Wit* (1578). Francis Bacon offers advice to the young courtier, defining the similitude as feigning to be what one is not, and the dissimilitude as secrecy practised by those who cannot 'discern what things are to be laid open, and what to be secreted, and what to be showed at half lights, and to whom and when.'¹⁵² Formal rhetoric, as a way of stylishly exhibiting one's intellect, continued

¹⁵² Francis Bacon, 'Of Simulation and Dissimulation' in *Essays Civil and Moral*, volume 3 part 1, ed. Charles w. Eliot (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14), 2001 online edition by Bartleby.com, <www.bartleby.com/3/1/> [accessed 20/05/17]

to be popular in the Restoration, exemplified by John Newton's *The English Academy* (1671) which includes a chapter on similitudes. The art of rhetoric was intrinsically linked to courtly masculinity and provided a means of showcasing a young gentleman's personal credit and honour. This was especially true at Court as many of Charles II's noblemen such as the Earl of Rochester were referred to as 'Court Wits', and like their monarch held libertine values.¹⁵³ The difference in the Restoration was that although wit was associated with noblemen, it became accessible to the women in Charles II's Court. Historian Grahame Hopkins observes the connection between the Court and the plots portrayed onstage, to argue that everything in Restoration England 'required layers of plotting, intrigue, fashioning and complication' and that this was especially true in the case of Charles II's mistresses, in particular Nell Gwyn who dazzled the King with her wit, both on and offstage.¹⁵⁴ Hopkins cites accounts from Lady Russell and Madame de Sevigné on the verbal rivalry between Charles II's mistress Louise Keroualle and Nell Gwyn as examples of women exercising their wit in Court to manipulate the King and public opinion.¹⁵⁵ The ability to speak wittily in public was a skill valued in women in courtly society, one which could raise a woman's credit in the absence of beauty. As Mr. P, a gentleman whose poem is included alongside those by the Court Wits stated, 'wit, like Beauty, triumphs o'er the Heart.'¹⁵⁶ However, women were advised to maintain a balance between charm and modesty, otherwise their proficiency in speaking similitudes and dissimilitudes would be likened to dissembling and immodesty.

¹⁵³ John Harold Wilson, *The Courts Wits of the Restoration* (New York: Octagon, 1967), pp. 7-10.

¹⁵⁴ Graham Hopkins, *Nell Gwynne: A Passionate Life* (London: Robson Books, 2003), p. 82.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 120-1, pp. 160-163.

¹⁵⁶ Poem by 'Mr. P' cited in George Villiers, *Poems on Affairs of State: From the Time of Oliver Cromwell, to the Abdication of K. James the Second* (London: S.N., 1697), p. 196.

Witty repartee provided a means by which men and women could engage in innocent flirtation in Court and on stage. The language of similitude and dissimilitude as a self-conscious performance continues from the fashionable world of the Court to the Restoration stage in the language of the rake and the heroine in comedy. The rake and heroine in Restoration comedy both display a keen awareness of wit as a form of social and financial credit. Anna Bryson's observation that in the 'Court and [the] town, a less regulated struggle for prestige established shifting hierarchies of fashion and breeding only loosely associated with priorities of birth' supports the view that wit became an alternative marker of a person's status, one valued as highly as the possession of a title.¹⁵⁷ The male rake onstage must appear to be carefree and well-dressed; he therefore uses his wit to conceal his financial anxiety and to position himself above titled characters. For the heroine, wit is integral to showcasing her breeding and charm. Linguistic wit on the Restoration stage relates to male and female credit and becomes the currency by which the rake sustains his reputation and the heroine presents herself as an attractive partner.

The interaction between the 'gay couple', or male rake and female libertine, popularised women's wit on the Restoration stage. The advent of the actress provided theatre-goers with the opportunity to witness a woman onstage sparring with a man, her presence heightened the effect of the dramatization of the battle between the sexes. I draw on Andrew F. Kennedy's interpretation of the wit of the gay couple 'as a comic rhythm [...] a kind of verbal sex...where word licence mimes the act that is not acted

¹⁵⁷ Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 262.

out', to consider the role of rhythm in witty discourse.¹⁵⁸ Rather than 'acting out' or even miming sex, the dialogue of the gay couple is characterised by a movement of desire and deferral with the rake expressing his sexual desire and the female libertine coyly deferring fulfilment of the rake's desire. Social psychologists Wojciech Kulesza and Dariusz Dolinski state that 'language is...a tool used by speakers to achieve the desired social distance between themselves and others. To achieve it, communicators may adopt any one of four strategies in speech: convergence, divergence, maintenance, and complementarity.'¹⁵⁹ The above techniques are significant when considering the rhythm of the couple's repartee. In 'Humor and Laughter in Social Interactions', Anthony J. Chapman rightly observes that humour helps to promote intimacy, but also supplies relief from intimacy being achieved too rapidly.¹⁶⁰ The pace and style of characters' wit reveals their varied aims, whether to promote intimacy, defend themselves or offend others.

The use of wit was part of a wider critical debate about styles of comedy in Restoration England. As Brian Corman notes, playwrights and critics were divided as to whether to continue the Jonsonian style of comedy favoured by Shadwell, which focused on humours and mocked vice in order to instruct, or Fletcherian comedy, preferred by Dryden, which positively showcased the witty conversation of gentlemen

¹⁵⁸ Andrew F. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue: The Duologues of Personal Encounter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 170.

¹⁵⁹ Wojciech Kulesza and Dariusz Dolinski, 'The Echo Effect: The Power of Verbal Mimicry to Influence Prosocial Behavior', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33:2 (2014), 183-201 (p. 186).

¹⁶⁰ Anthony J. Chapman, 'Humor and Laughter in Social Interactions' (1984), quoted in 'A Theory of Humour in Interaction', Neal R. Norrick, *Journal of Literary Theory*, 3:2 (2009), 261-284 (p. 263).

as an example of sociability.¹⁶¹ Whether wit should be instructive, exposing folly, or whether it should present comic raillery in line with decorum was a continual debate which related to discussions about the balance of Fancy and Judgement and whether the libertine held up as a wit should be represented onstage. Maximilian Novak argues that libertine values were based on the following beliefs: that society was an artificial construct; that marriage and other societal conventions should be avoided; and that the senses should be indulged.¹⁶² Wit was therefore controversial as it rebelled against Civil War morals. Tim Wauters importantly points out that libertinism was a constantly shifting semantic category and makes a distinction between the philosophical free-thinking libertarians and sexually-charged libertines.¹⁶³ While seventeenth century writers such as Thomas Hobbes referred to wit as ‘an intellectual virtue’, others such as Blackmore depict wit as obscenity.¹⁶⁴ Blackmore’s *Essay Upon Wit* (1716) states that the ‘ingenious Libertine’[s] ‘sprightliness of Imagination [...] gives [him] an exquisite taste for Sensual pleasures’ and ‘having too little strength of Reason to subdue his Appetites, and too much Wit to think’ means that he ‘renounces his God to preserve his Vices.’¹⁶⁵ The balance of Fancy and Judgement which make up wit, according to Hobbes and Sir William Temple, posed problems for writers and thinkers such as Alexander Pope and John Locke, who sought to defend the role of the imagination in

¹⁶¹ Brian Corman, ‘Comedy’ in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* ed. by Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 52-69 (p. 52).

¹⁶² Maximilian E. Novak, ‘Libertinism and Sexuality’ in *A Companion to Restoration Drama* ed. by Susan Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 53-68 (p. 55).

¹⁶³ Wauters, ‘Libertinage Erudite and Isaac Vossius (1618-1689): A Case Study’, *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 12 (2012), 37-53 (p. 41).

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1651) Chapter VIII, p. 32.

¹⁶⁵ Sir Richard Blackmore, ‘Upon Wit’ in *Essays upon Several Subjects* (London: 1716), pp. 3-32 (pp. 8-9).

wit, arguing that judgement and imagination are like ‘man and wife.’¹⁶⁶ Audra and Williams suggest that Pope viewed wit and judgement as ‘differing aspects of the same faculty.’¹⁶⁷ However, as literary critic Robert Lund points out, this tension between judgement and fancy within wit remained due to the way in which the similitude, which depends ‘upon the apprehension of likeness, or imagination, would always be susceptible to deceptions of one kind or another.’¹⁶⁸ This is exemplified by Thomas Allen’s comment in the seventeenth century, that the ‘Imagination [...] deceive[s] sense [and...] obscure[s] our Reason.’¹⁶⁹

Such a tension meant that many considered wit a guise for immorality or as a style of language which confused categories of truth. As Locke states:

Wit lying most in the assemblage of *Ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety [...] thereby to make up pleasant Pictures, and agreeable Visions in the Fancy [...], Beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought, to examine what Truth or Reason there is in it. The Mind, without looking any farther, rests satisfied with the pleasantness of the Picture, and the gayety of the Fancy.¹⁷⁰

Locke argues that the pleasure of Fancy prevents the recipients of wit from examining the truth of the ideas and observes that witty language may be used to deceive others. In Restoration comedy the language used by the male and female libertine is part of a self-conscious performance of identity which masks the characters’ insecurities.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) Chapter VIII, p. 33.

Sir William Temple, *Miscellanea, The Second Part in Four Essays* (London: Printed by J.R, 1690), p. 294.

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1754), p. 13.

¹⁶⁷ E. Audra and Aubrey Williams, *Poems of Alexander Pope Vol. I Pastoral Poetry and an Essay on Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 218.

¹⁶⁸ Roger Lund, ‘Wit, Judgement and the Misprisons of Similitude’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65:1 (2004), 53-74 (p. 55).

¹⁶⁹ Thomas Allen, *Cheirexokâe [sic] the Excellency or Handy-work of the Royal Hand* (London: William Godbid, 1665), p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ John Locke, ‘Of Discerning and Other Operations of the Mind’, in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690), Chapter XI, p. 69.

While Lund explores the language of the male libertine, critics have thus far neglected the language of the female libertine. Pope's reference to judgement and wit as 'often at strife' like 'man and wife' may have been influenced by the witty gay couple on stage.¹⁷¹ This chapter will investigate whether women's linguistic wit differs from men's wit in comedy. I also analyse the way in which dramatists manage the balance of celebration of the male and female libertine's wit with reformation of their characters' libertine principles in seventeenth and eighteenth-century comedies.

Similitude

The similitude is one of the best-known features of wit. John Newton's *The English Academy* (1671) defines the similitude as 'the comparing of two or more things together, which are in themselves divers, but do agree in some particular.'¹⁷² Newton provides the example of 'Glory is the shadow of vertue' to demonstrate similitude, and explains that although 'a *shadow* and *glory* are in themselves very different things: [...] the *shadow* doth accompany the *body*, and *glory*, *virtue*.'¹⁷³ Similitudes are employed more frequently by male characters in the work of male dramatists in Restoration comedy as they tend to display the libertine approach to life that was in fashion. An example of this is Willmore's rakish similitude in *The Rover* (1677), which argues 'there's no sinner like a young saint' (I.i.198-9, p. 598). The celebration of youth, wit and beauty expressed in Dorimant's rakish similitude in *The Man of the Mode*, which argues that constancy is 'not a virtue in season; you might as well expect the fruit [that] the autumn ripens i' the spring', was associated with the libertines of the Restoration

¹⁷¹ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1754), p. 13.

¹⁷² John Newton, *The English Academy, or, A Briefe Introduction to the Seven Liberal Arts Grammar, Arithmetick, Geometrie, Musick, Astronomie, Rhetorick and Logic* (London: William Godbid for Thomas Passenger, 1677), p. 148.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

who deplored marriage.¹⁷⁴ The metaphorical language of similitude becomes a means by which the libertine can justify his behaviour, interpreted by Lisa Berglund as ‘a polite fiction which conceals the actual result of the libertine ethic.’¹⁷⁵ In this way, similitudes are an artificial type of language which maintains decorum, but shies away from intimacy. Mary Crawford has argued that men joke to establish themselves as ‘credible performer[s]’, in contrast to women who joke to achieve intimacy.¹⁷⁶ The rake’s use of the similitude to express his libertine values is part of verbally presenting himself as the alpha male. In this section, I consider the use of the similitude as a form of sociability by the witty hero and heroine, along with upper-class fops and lower-class characters aspiring to the status of a ‘wit.’

The general quality of the allusions made in similitudes makes them accessible to the characters onstage and the spectators in the audience. This makes the similitude an inclusive type of wit which other characters and spectators can use themselves. In Etherege’s *The Man of the Mode*, Dorimant’s fashionably rakish friend Medley refers to lawyers and mistresses in his similitude on Dorimant, whom he states is ‘a man of great employment—[who] has more mistresses now depending than the most eminent lawyer in England has causes’ (II.i.127-9). Dorimant’s similitude includes spectators by mocking lawyers, often the subject of jokes. Similarly, Flavia’s description of Celadon as being ‘as unconstant as the Moon’ in *Secret Love* wittily applies the well-known comparison of women’s nature with the moon to the male rake to generate surprise (p.

¹⁷⁴ George Etherege, *The Man of the Mode* II.ii.199-201.

¹⁷⁵ Lisa Berglund, ‘The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of the Mode*’ *SEL 1500-1900*, 30:3 (1990), 369-386 (p. 372).

¹⁷⁶ Mary Crawford, ‘Just Kidding: Gender and Conversational Humour’ in *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina Barecca (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), pp. 23-38 (p. 31).

3). However, different status characters employ the similitude with varying degrees of success.

Wits use similitude in the correct context, whereas foolish wits, such as Witwoud in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), recite multiple similitudes in the wrong context so they appear forced. Witwoud's similitudes fail to establish intimacy between himself and the heroine Millamant, such as his comparison of her admirers with 'moths about a candle' and his response 'a physician of a good air' to her comment that she is 'sick' of his similitudes (II.ii.340-7, p. 775). As Robert Boyle states, the 'Speaker's Wit [...should be] of its own growth, and is rather suggested *by* the Occasion, than barely applied *to* it.'¹⁷⁷ Although similitudes are neat and pithy forms of wit, they are usually stock phrases developed in advance, rather than in the moment. Nevertheless, to work effectively they should retain this quality of spontaneity. The following similitude from Willmore in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677) can be used on more than one social occasion: 'Marriage is as certain a Bane to Love, as lending Money is to Friendship' (V.i p. 198). There is a time and place for wit, for example, Scandal in Congreve's *Love for Love* is scolded by Angelica for using similitudes to deliver serious news of Valentine's madness: 'I don't like raillery from a serious face [...] If you speak the truth, your endeavouring at wit is very unseasonable.'¹⁷⁸

While upper-class characters such as Witwoud have the leisure to memorise, create, and prepare their own similitudes to suit every social occasion, lower-status characters have less time to prepare their retorts but can be skilled in rhetoric, such as

¹⁷⁷ Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects, whereto is Premis'd a Discourse about Such Kind of Thoughts* (London: W. Wilson, 1665), section II chapter 1, p. 38.

¹⁷⁸ William Congreve, *Love for Love* (1695) in *Five Restoration Comedies* ed. by Brian Gibbons (London: AC & Black, 1984), pp. 333-462, 4.ii (p. 414). All subsequent references will be given by act, scene and page number in parenthesis.

Valentine's servant Jeremy in Congreve's *Love for Love*, who has 'been at Cambridge' and therefore possesses the same training in rhetoric as Witwoud (V.iii.161-2). In the following quotation from *The Man of the Mode*, one of the Wits, Medley, expresses annoyance at the shoemaker's proficiency in wit, accusing him of moving beyond his social station:

MEDLEY Whoring and swearing are vices too genteel for a shoemaker.
 SHOEMAKER 'Sbud, I think you men of quality will grow as unreasonable as the women, you would engross the sins o'the nation. Poor folks can no sooner be wicked but th'are railed at by their betters.

(I.i.279-284)

Medley attempts to set himself above the poor by identifying himself not only as a libertine, but also a gentleman. Robert Markley rightly notes that 'wit's divisiveness renders it capable of being [...] appropriated and turned back on its aristocratic practitioners.'¹⁷⁹ The shoemaker wittily points out that libertinism hides ungentlemanly behaviour, as he himself 'lives [...] like a gentleman' keeping a whore and a wife whom he 'hate[s] [...] heartily' (I.i.312-16).

Wit may also be used by female characters to undercut the rake's monopoly on witty discourse. When the heroine of the gay couple employs the similitude, she often mimics the rake's alpha male performance. In Dryden's *Secret Love* (1667) for example, Florimell mimics the rake's libertine language:

FLORIMELL You are i'th right: an old Mistriss or Servant is an old Tune, the pleasure on't is past, when we have once learnt it.¹⁸⁰

Florimell's similitude echoes the rake's sentiments that age as well as familiarity is incompatible with libertine desire for enjoyment in youth, wit, novelty, and beauty. She

¹⁷⁹ Robert Markley, *Two-edg'd Weapons: Style and Ideology in the comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 124.

¹⁸⁰ John Dryden, *Secret Love; or, The Maiden Queen* (London: Henry Herringman, 1669) p. 5.

deliberately mimics his values, or adopts the linguistic technique of ‘convergence’, to attract him and to promote intimacy.¹⁸¹

However, as the play progresses, Florimell’s skill in discourse increases as she moves beyond mimicry, to cross-dressing and boldly challenging his status as the alpha male:

CELADON A young raw Creature, thou hast ne’er been under the Barbers hands yet.
 FLORIMELL No, nor under the Surgeons [*sic*] neither as you have been.
 CELADON ’Slife what wouldst thou be at, I am madder than thou art?
 FLORIMELL The Devil you are; I’l Tope with you, I’l Sing with you, I’l Dance with you,–I’l Swagger with you.
 (p. 52)

During this exchange Florimell becomes the rake both physically and linguistically, through her disguise which influences the gendering of her wit. Her use of similitude which crudely implies that Celadon has been treated for venereal disease, positions her as a young, fashionable male rival. Being out-witted by a youthful male was a greater insult to a man than being out-witted by a woman, as men rated their wit in relation to the other men around them. Florimell appears to be more in touch with the fashionable mode than Celadon when she states that fighting is not *à la mode* (p. 52). In response to Lisa Berglund’s view that ‘those who speak the libertine language are the most powerful in the play’, Florimell’s influence over Celadon lies not in her ability to speak the libertine language, but her ability to become the male libertine through a combination of language and action in performance, a performance which undercuts his

¹⁸¹ Wojciech Kulesza and Dariusz Dolinski, ‘The Echo Effect: The Power of Verbal Mimicry to Influence Prosocial Behavior’, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33:2 (2014), pp. 183-201 (p. 186).

own.¹⁸² Florimell highlights the versatility of women's wit and demonstrates that skill in witty discourse was not a masculine domain. Nell Gwyn, who inspired the part of Florimell, described as 'pretty, witty Nell', was celebrated for her comic wit and playful sense of fun.¹⁸³ Roles were often written with particular actresses in mind, modelled on their own personality and wit, and this influenced the development of the heroine on the Restoration stage from female libertine to coquette. The success of Nell Gwyn's performance in *Secret Love* paved the way for dramatists to experiment with the style of women's linguistic wit, to distinguish the heroine's wit from the rake's.

While early comedies such as *Secret Love* and *The Rover* model the heroine's speech as a mirror-image of the rake's, the firm establishment of a tradition of actresses on the English stage gave rise to a female lead who differed from the male rake in terms of her characteristics and use of language. Theresa Braunscheider points out that the term 'coquette' did not circulate in English before 1660:

Introduced in conjunction with the return to England of a Frenchified Stuart Court upon the Restoration, the term quickly gained ascendancy as a disapproving appellation for a woman who eschews feminine modesty and exhibits vain, domineering, and/or flirtatious tendencies.¹⁸⁴

In later plays such as *The Way of the World*, the heroine performs the part of a witty coquette, employing the similitude to taunt her lovers and to publicly assert her independence.

¹⁸² Lisa Berglund, 'The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of Mode*', p. 373.

¹⁸³ Samuel Pepys, *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 3rd April 1665
<<https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1665/04/03/>>, [Accessed 18 October 2017].

¹⁸⁴ Theresa Braunscheider, *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 26. While the term 'coquette' appears in R. Cotgrave's *Dictionary of French & English Tongues* in 1611 along with the French expression 'simper de coquet' in English texts from 1546, the term 'coquette' does not appear onstage in England until after 1660. The above was based on searches for the term using the *OED* online and *Early English Books Online*.

Rather than mimicking the rake, Millamant offers a solo performance of wit, as coquette:

MILLAMANT Why, one makes lovers as soon as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and then they die as one pleases, and then if one pleases, one makes more.

(II.i.412-15, p. 776)

Millamant is experienced in conversation and uses her independent wit to attract a whole audience of admirers. Her use of the similitude is also companionable and displays her feminised vanity along with her knowledge of fashion, decorum and how to behave among suitors. Millamant's enigmatic wit provides an example of a change in the type of comic heroine. In public, coquettes such as Millamant adopt a position of cool superiority and disinterest. Angelica in *Love for Love* and Mrs. Beauclair in Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* also adopt the coquette's stylized performance of wit.¹⁸⁵

The affected nature of similitudes means that they can never be an authentic indication of the rake's or heroine's true self or feelings; rather, they are the public image they wish to portray. As Roger Lund notes, similitudes are always susceptible to deception.¹⁸⁶ Catharine Trotter's *Love at a Loss* (1701) demonstrates the deceptive quality of witty language, the way in which Beaumine's witticisms, such as 'a lover and speak sense! To answer in cross purposes, in broken murmurs, and disjointed words expresses passion' frustrate Lesbia who wishes he will 'condescend [...] to answer directly.'¹⁸⁷ When Lesbia responds that she believes Beaumine only cares a trifle for her, Beaumine continues with a similitude on the power of seemingly small events,

¹⁸⁵ William Congreve, *Love for Love* in *Five Restoration Comedies* ed. Brian Gibbons, (London: A & C Black, 1984), pp. 333-462, IV.i.659-661, p. 438.

Mary Pix, *The Innocent Mistress* in *Eighteenth-Century Woman Dramatists*, ed. by Melinda C. Fineberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.1-74, 2.iii.28-9 (p. 26).

¹⁸⁶ Roger Lund, 'The Misprisons of Similitude' p. 55.

¹⁸⁷ Catharine Trotter, *Love at a Loss; or Most Votes Carry It* (1701), III.i.87-91.

stating that ‘the cackling of geese once saved the Capitol.’¹⁸⁸ The above similitude is used tactically by Beaumine to defer an intimate confession of desire because his status as a witty libertine relies on self-conscious, affected behaviour and social performance. As Peter Holland notes, spectators were aware of the artificial nature of the performances of characters onstage.¹⁸⁹ The affectation of identity is explored further in Dorimant’s use of dissimilitude in *The Man of the Mode* (1675) which reveals a glimpse of the real Dorimant to the audience beneath the performance of rakish identity.

Dissimilitude: Rounding out the Rake

In contrast to the rake’s verbal performance of the alpha male, the dissimilitude provides the rake with a space for hopeful introspection and reveals the rake’s affectation which conceals his calculated motivations. The wit of dissimilitude involves taking two objects and exposing the difference between them. Thomas Newton defines the dissimilitude as ‘the disagreeing of two or more things in some particular; from this Topick we argue thus: that which agreeth with one thing that is unlike, doth not necessarily agree with another; and that which doth not agree with some one thing, may yet agree.’¹⁹⁰ Newton provides the following example: ‘Idle Citizens care not what mischief doth befall the Commonwealth; therefore the more generous and publick spirited men, must endeavour to keep the Republick from danger.’¹⁹¹ This form of linguistic wit tends to be longer and more complex, as it usually contains a sub-clause to depict difference: ‘Love gilds us over and makes us show fine things to one another for

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 58-9.

¹⁹⁰ John Newton, *An Introduction to the Art of Rhetorick* (London: E.T. and R. H. for Thomas Passenger, 1671), p. 18.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

a time, but soon the gold wears off, and then again the native brass appears.¹⁹² The carefree wit of the dissimilitude ‘gilds over’ the rake’s ambitions, but beneath this the dissimilitude reveals the ‘brass’ or rake’s real motivations behind his actions. Within this pithy piece of wit, there is a change in tone and direction. The dissimilitude’s turn toward the negative surprises the spectator. Unlike the similitude, dissimilitudes provide flickers of insight into the rake’s motivations which expose the rake’s financial preoccupations beneath the artificial language of libertine wit.

In *The Man of the Mode*, Bellair uses dissimilitudes to expose the truth behind the affected performance of his rakish friends. His comment to Medley that ‘You wish me in heaven, but believe me on my journey to hell’, exposes Medley’s distaste of Bellair’s plan to marry lurking beneath his affectation of joy (I.i.340-1, pp. 534-5). Bellair’s character fits the stock type of a young, virtuous male lover, who serves to balance the libertine ethics of Restoration comedy. However, Etherege uses the dissimilitude to temper the rake, to generate audience understanding of the rake’s difficult financial position.

The dissimilitude may be the key to the rake’s popularity and endurance on the Restoration stage as it provides a more rounded depiction of the libertine and his motivations, but retains a sense of hopeful confidence. The self-reflective tone of such dissimilitudes in *The Man of the Mode* which reveal the rake’s calculated motivations are at odds with the impulsive, *carpe diem* attitude associated with the libertine:

DORIMANT I may fall into the snare [of matrimony], too. But,
The wise will find a difference in our fate:
You wed a woman, I a good estate (IV.ii.194-6).

¹⁹² George Etherege, *The Man of the Mode* II.ii.216-8.

This statement is in accordance with the rake's competitive nature and his libertine values as it positions Medley as a fool and Dorimant as a wit. However, Dorimant reveals that his main priority is securing his finances even if that means entering into marriage, a concept he detests. Therefore, the libertines' *carpe diem* attitude, which focuses on the present, hides their ultimate aim of attaining financial security. Robert Markley rightly argues that Dorimant's rakish, carefree performance masks his financial difficulties.¹⁹³ Dorimant is hopeful here even though he has not yet secured Harriet as a wife. Dorimant's wit which provides him with confidence that he may elevate his status through charm, makes the rake an appealing character due to his publicly hopeful outlook on raising his own status.

The male and the female libertine must live by their wits if they have lost their fortunes and are in a precarious financial situation.¹⁹⁴ Wit therefore takes on its own value, exemplified by Blackmore's comments that playwrights such as Dryden make 'an Angel of a rake.'¹⁹⁵ 'Angel' was a type of coin and therefore, Blackmore not only refers to the appeal of the rake as a hero who gains wealth, but also to the value of the rake's wit in making money for the theatre. The dissimilitude by the male and female libertine then, provides insight into the rake's appeal as well as his social performance.

The very structure of the dissimilitude slows the pace of the play and promotes reflection, as the surprising change in the relationship of objects compared as seemingly in agreement, and then suddenly distinguished from one another, causes the spectator to review what has just been said. Robert Markley rightly observes the 'double-edged nature' of Dorimant's wit, which celebrates libertinism and acknowledges the

¹⁹³ Robert Markley, "'Still on the Criminals Side, Against the Innocent': Etherege, Wycherley and the Ironies of Wit,' in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan Owen, pp. 326-340 (p. 327).

¹⁹⁴ See Mrs. Frail's comments in *Love for Love* II.ix.434-440, p. 381.

¹⁹⁵ Blackmore, *A Satyr Against Wit* (Dublin: John Whalley, 1700) p. 14.

consequences of such values.¹⁹⁶ The dissimilitude breaks the artificial performance of sexuality and causes spectators to reconsider their identification with the libertine characters onstage:

DORIMANT They are very assiduous to show themselves at Court, well-dressed, to the women of quality, but their business is with the stale mistresses of the Town, who are prepared to receive their lazy addresses by industrious old lovers who have cast 'em off and made 'em easy.

(IV.i.28-33, p. 562)

Dorimant, playing the sensible Mr. Courtage, uses this guise to reflect on the gritty reality of fallen women abandoned by the libertines and the beaux, who only care about their public persona. However, Dorimant exposes his own affectation while playing Courtage, as he himself strives to impress 'the women of quality' but is about to leave them to meet with a town mistress. Spectators would recognise both the rake Dorimant and the fictional persona of Mr. Courtage in this speech, which generates a layering effect to complicate spectators' notions of the real Dorimant. The above quotation depicts Dorimant's skill in playing the opposing roles of roguish libertine and virtuous gentleman. Dorimant adapts the nature of his speech to suit his audience in order to set himself up as a wit in their eyes. His dissimilitude, addressed to Harriet's mother, anticipates his designs on Harriet as by playing Courtage he seeks to charm her censorious mother. This may be a glimpse of the future Dorimant after the present one is forced to reform his ways.

In contrast to the rake, whose use of dissimilitude exposes affectation and provides self-reflection, women deliver dissimilitudes in public, usually to a patriarchal figure whom spectators are encouraged to dislike due to their lack of wit:

¹⁹⁶ Robert Markley, *Two-edg'd Weapons* (1988), p. 108.

HELLENA Marry Don Vincentio! Hang me, such a wedlock would be worse than adultery with another man.¹⁹⁷

The female libertine in Behn's *The Rover* (1677) outspokenly employs the dissimilitude, not as a negative form of self-reflection, but as a humorous and poignant critique of societal expectations imposed upon women. The light-hearted and brief nature of Hellena's dissimilitude excuses her criticism of Pedro's wishes. The pace of delivery of dissimilitudes employed by the female libertine reveals the impact that risk has on her use of language. Hellena, who boldly critiques patriarchal authority, has a more concise wit than Congreve's Angelica, because she takes greater risks.

Unlike Hellena's fast-paced wit, in Congreve's *Love for Love*, Angelica indulges in more leisurely-paced reflective wit:

ANGELICA She that marries a fool, Sir Sampson, commits the reputation of her honesty or understanding to the censure of the world; and she that marries a very witty man submits both to the severity and insolent conduct of her husband. I should like a man of wit for a lover, because I would have such an one in my power; but I would no more be his wife than his enemy; for his malice is not a more terrible consequence of his aversion, than his jealousy is of his love.

(V.ii.62-69, pp. 441-2)

The leisurely nature of Angelica's wit demonstrates her assurance and freedom. Her lengthy dissimilitude makes her the focus onstage and gives her status. Angelica was played by Anne Bracegirdle, who would have brought her own status as celebrity and her confidence to the role.¹⁹⁸ Angelica's address to Sir Sampson, who is her social equal, can be read as a rehearsal of the kind of repartee she would engage in to rouse Valentine's interest. Her comment that she 'would have such a one in my power' in

¹⁹⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, I.i.150-1.

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (1992), p. 88, pp. 98-99.

relation to a witty man, demonstrates that she values wit as cultural capital, believing it would further elevate her status if she secures the affections of a witty rake.

The Turn

Unlike the dissimilitude which is reflective, the turn is a form of linguistic wit employed within the moment. The turn involves speedily taking your opponent's words and changing their meaning or turning the meaning against them. The gay couple use the turn as a defensive strategy within the wit duel. The following turns delivered by Celadon and Florimell in *Secret Love* depict the way in which the turn is used differently by the male and the female libertine:

FLORIMELL I must see a Lady.
 CELADON So must I too, if I can pull off your Masque;
 FLORIMEL You will not be so rude, I hope:
 CELADON By this light but I will:
 FLORIMELL By this leg you shan't not:

Exeunt Florimell and Flavia running

(I.ii, p. 5)

The above scene depicts the flirtatious movement between desire and deferral associated with the gay couple. The rake Celadon uses the turn as an aggressive strategy to express his sexual desire. Florimell uses it as a defensive strategy to communicate coyness ('By this leg, you shall not'). This example encapsulates the verbal and physical movement of the romantic chase, with Celadon pursuing Florimell and Florimell fleeing. Florimell's reference to her leg is not purely defensive or humorous; she uses the turn to coquettishly titillate spectators and to encourage the rake to continue the chase.

Hellena in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* inspires and defers desire through the language of cumulative wit:

WILLMORE **There** are ladies in the world that will not be cruel—**there** are, madam, **there** are—

HELLENA And **there** be men too, as fine, wild, inconstant fellows as yourself, **there** be, Captain, **there** be, if you go to that now. **Therefore**, I'm resolved—

WILLMORE Oh!—

HELLENA To see your face no more—

WILLMORE Oh!

HELLENA Till tomorrow.

WILLMORE Egad, you frightened me.

HELLENA Nor then neither, unless you'll swear never to see that lady more.

(III.i.292-304, emphasis mine)

Hellena builds on Willmore's use of the rule of three and betters his wit by adding an extra turn through use of a fourth 'there' in 'therefore.' As the punctuation indicates, Hellena pauses beforehand, placing emphasis on the fourth 'there.' Hellena not only turns Willmore's insult onto him, but also sets up expectations and by holding the rake and the audience in suspense, subverts those expectations. Susan Owen rightly notes that Hellena is 'mistress of the unexpected.'¹⁹⁹ This exchange not only produces comedy, but is an example of the way in which the rhythm of Hellena's speech is cumulative and builds to a climax, mirroring what Susan Owen refers to as 'extended foreplay' between the couple.²⁰⁰ Hellena acknowledges that this is a strategic device to surprise Willmore when she says 'what a wicked creature am I, to damn a proper fellow' (lines 311-2, p. 614).

The nature of the turn changes in Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* (1697), in which this device is used publicly rather than privately and becomes an example of wit

¹⁹⁹ Susan Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 70.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 71.

used to reform the rake. The turn in Pix's work becomes a wiry form of defence which avoids intimacy and socially humiliates the rake:

WILDLOVE Madam, I had hopes you would have done me the honour to let me wait on you this afternoon. But it has happened so unluckily that an old uncle of mine, to whom I am much obliged—

MRS. BEAUCLAIR Oh, I'm your uncle's servant. Sir, there needs no excuse, your company being all this time a favour I neither expect nor desire.

(III.ii.214-220)

Mrs. Beauclair's turn interrupts Wildlove's speech and takes control of the direction of the conversation. Instead of allowing Wildlove to complete his well-rehearsed excuse, she defies his expectation by feigning disinterestedness in him. This demonstrates the way in which the turn can be used to undercut a speaker's authority.

The brevity and speed of the turn make it an appropriate type of subversive wit used by the serving classes. This is because the turn functions as a powerful marker of status in conversation, determining for a fleeting period, who is the wit and who is outwitted. Jeremy in Congreve's *Love for Love* outwits his master Valentine in the opening scene of the play: 'Sir; I have dispatch'd some half a Dozen Duns with as much Dexterity, as a hungry Judge does Causes at Dinner-time' (I.ii.150-2). Jeremy also uses his wit to depict himself as raising his status: '*I came up Stairs into the World; for I was born in a Cellar*' (II.viii.336-7, emphasis mine). Jeremy taunts and confounds Sir Sampson's literal understanding of words with his figurative use of language. In response to Sir Sampson's statement that 'he will find him' when Jeremy has informed him that Valentine is 'gone', that he is out of his wits, Jeremy replies 'would you could sir, for he has lost himself' (IV.iv.113-4). Jeremy's use of language positions him above Sir Sampson in terms of wit.

Female servants' use of the turn is frequently defensive in nature, used to safeguard their mistresses against the rake's advances. In the following example from Etherege's *The Man of the Mode* (1675), Pert, a female servant, speaks wittily out of turn, offering her opinion in defence of her mistress:

MRS. LOVEIT Blockheads are as malicious to witty men as ugly women are to the handsome; 'tis their interest, and they make it their business to defame 'em.
PERT I wish Mr. Dorimant would not make it his business to defame you.

(II.ii.46-50, p. 541)

Such comments position the servants as speaking clearly and seeing through artifice, as possessing household wit or knowledge. Tattle in *Love for Love* comments on the role of the serving class as powerful witnesses and possessors of secrets when he states that he can 'summon the maids at the chocolate houses, all the porters of Pall Mall, [...] the doorkeepers at the playhouse, the drawers at Lockett's' (III.iii.132-5).

The representation of members of the serving class as witty, perceiving more than one view of a situation at once, is reflected in their use of language which tends to be direct and to employ multiple senses simultaneously. An example of this is Pert's pun on the word 'business':

PERT The business, sir, is the business, that has taken you up these two days.
How have I seen you laugh at men of business, and now to become a man of business yourself!

(*The Man of the Mode*, II.ii.154-6)

Pert cuts right to the matter in hand, Dorimant's absence from her mistress, and reveals her scepticism that a man usually concerned with pleasure has apparently become involved in legitimate business. Pert's repetitive and sarcastic use of 'business' is an example of the way in which repetition or appropriation of another's words may be used

as a subversive tactic. Pert reveals her awareness of Dorimant's liaison with another mistress and uses her access to knowledge of town intrigues to undercut his excuse. The act of repeating another's words appears to be deferential, but in fact, it undermines their authority through critique.

Echoing

Women dramatists such as Behn develop a distinct strategy of an elongated turn, which subversively copies the rake's words as a prelude to subtly changing their meaning. This technique of 'echoing' is a much subtler form of wit in discourse as it slowly changes the meaning, and its stealth makes it even more subversive because, for the characters onstage, it appears that the heroine is obeying them until she turns their words. This sets up anticipation and generates surprise. In contrast to Elaine Hobby's view that Behn's *The Rover* relies on Killigrew's *The Wanderer* for its plot and language, I view Behn's heroines' usage of novel linguistic techniques, such as echoing, as a departure from Killigrew and other dramatists' representations of the female libertine on the Restoration stage.²⁰¹ Using another's words against them, a technique which goes back to the myth of Echo from Book Three of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* translated into English by Arthur Golding in 1565, is highly inventive, and in the case of female characters, demonstrates the way in which women can appropriate male discourse and use it as a weapon.²⁰² This myth would have been well-known to

²⁰¹ Elaine Hobby, 'No Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127, (p. 115, p. 118).

²⁰² Arthur Golding, *The Fyrst Fouer Bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos Worke, Intitled Metamorphosis, Translated oute of Latin into Englishe Meter* (London: Willyam Seres, 1565).

The First Five Bookes of Ovid's Metamorphosis ([n.p.]: W.B., 1621), pp. 72-79

Restoration readers and playgoers as George Sandys's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* from 1656 was reprinted in 1664 and 1678.²⁰³ Echo is often read as a story about a woman punished for her loquaciousness, relegated to repeating another's words and never her own. However, the ability to have the last word is a powerful rhetorical device, because the last word is usually that which tips the balance of meaning to signify something else. The power of having the last word has been identified by linguists and social psychologists who have discovered a connection between verbal mimicry and trust. In their study 'Linguistic Mimicry and Trust', Lauren E. Scissors, Alastair J. Gill and Darren Gergle found that lexical mimicry was higher in higher-trusting pairs.²⁰⁴ The use of verbal mimicry as a rhetorical strategy to improve social relations has been highlighted by Wojciech Kulesza and Dariusz Dolinski, who found that verbal mimicry enables the mimicker to benefit 'socially... by establishing "social glue" with the mimicked party of the interaction', along with positively influencing the 'mimickee's' opinion.²⁰⁵

In Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Hellena subversively echoes her brother Pedro, using terms which inspire his trust, but ultimately outwit him:

PEDRO **False girl**, how came you hither and what's your **business**? Speak [...]
 HELLENA **Faith, brother**, my **business** is the same with all living creatures of
 my age, to love and be beloved, and here's the man.
 PEDRO Perfidious maid, hast thou deceived me too? deceived thyself and
Heaven?
 HELLENA 'Tis time enough to make my peace with that. Be you but kind; let
 me alone with **Heaven**.

²⁰³ Ovid's *Metamorphosis Englished*, trans. by George Sandys (London: J.F. for A. Roper, 1656, repr. 1664, 1678).

²⁰⁴ Lauren E. Scissors, Alastair J. Gill and Darren Gergle, 'Linguistic Mimicry and Trust in Text-Based CMC', Proceedings of the 2008 ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work, CSWC 08 November 2008, pp. 277-280.

²⁰⁵ Wojciech Kulesza and Dariusz Dolinski, 'The Echo Effect: The Power of Verbal Mimicry to Influence Prosocial Behavior', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33:2 (2014), pp. 183-201 (p. 186, pp. 196-7).

(V.i.542-552, emphasis mine)

Similar in some ways to Florimel's mimicry of the rake's sentiments in her similitudes, this is a strategic device which sets up the expectation that Hellena will obey Pedro, and then reveals her defiance when she 'turns' his words. Misty G. Anderson has argued that the reason Hellena is able to challenge her brother's plan to send her to a nunnery is because 'she knows that she has a separate inheritance of 300,000 crowns coming from an uncle.'²⁰⁶ The self-assurance of Hellena's language where she publicly addresses Pedro as her equal rather than her superior because she has taken control of her own destiny, contrasts with her rebellious wit earlier in the play which only questions her brother's authority in private:

PEDRO Go—up to your devotion; you are not designed for the conversation of lovers.

HELLENA (*Aside*) Nor saints yet a while, I hope. Is't not enough you make a nun of me, but you must cast my sister away too, exposing her to a worse confinement than a religious life?

(I.i.106-111)

The difference between Hellena's earlier fast-paced turns addressed to Pedro, and her more leisurely and complex echo, demonstrates the development of her wit, along with her increased feeling of security. Hellena's wit becomes even subtler as she no longer needs to attract Willmore's attention.

Similarly, Miranda's use of echoing in Trotter's *Love at a Loss* slowly catches Beaumine in a bind, causing him to admit his previous involvement with Lesbia:

²⁰⁶ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 68.

BEAUMINE Faith madam, the concern I have for her at present need disturb nobody but myself, for I do hate her heartily.

MIRANDA Which would not disturb you, if you had not rather love her heartily.

[...]

BEAUMINE A man can't bear to be imposed upon.

MIRANDA And now can a woman impose upon a man when they have no interest in one another [...]?

BEAUMINE Damn her, [...] I confess, Lesbia once had such an interest in me as would have cost the best part of my possessions to satisfy. But thanks to the virtue of her sex, she has forfeited [her interest].

(IV.i.192-217, p. 886)

The slow build of Miranda's wit which repeats Beaumine's words, changing a word here and there, lulls him into a false sense of trust, before turning his own words against him. Echoing can be used not only to attract or to cement bonds of intimacy, but also as an aggressive or disruptive strategy to catch others off-guard, as here.

The following turn and echo from Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673) functions differently to Trotter's and Behn's subtle manipulation of trust-relations through wit. Ravenscroft's light-hearted use of echoing builds on the earlier model of the libertine heroine from *Secret Love*, who uses physical humour to flirtatiously display her self-confidence. Ravenscroft's heroine's use of the turn and echo employ both verbal and physical mimicry. Hillaria, who as her name suggests is a natural source of comedy, uses her wit to challenge the rakish Careless who, like Hillaria, is averse to marriage. Hillaria's repetition of Careless's words and her exit prompts Careless to mimic her, by pursuing her just as he promises in the quotation below. Hillaria's response is to repeat Careless's comments to her earlier in the play on chaste women:

CARELESS They presently grow impertinent; they will ever be sending such notes as these to a man, or running after him. [...] I wonder women han't wit enough to know when a man cares for their love, or their company. To be sure, when he has a mind to either, he'll be coming or sending to them.

[...]

CARELESS Hark you, stay.

HILLARIA No, women are so impertinent, men will come after them, when they love them. Adieu. (*Exit*).²⁰⁷

Hillaria's appropriation of Careless's words encourages him to continue with the courtship chase and is strategically employed to promote intimacy through deferring desire. That Hillaria has the last word here foreshadows that she will succeed in reforming Careless by convincing him to marry her.

Questioning

Like echoing, questioning is a witty posture which shifts the subject of the conversation. Rather than subtly changing the meaning, questions are a sharp and swift type of linguistic wit. Women dramatists employ questions as a rebellious strategy used by their heroines. Deborah Cameron in *The Feminist Critique of Language*, states that questions provide a means for 'the socially powerless to exercise control.'²⁰⁸ Rather than being deferential, questions redirect the focus of the conversation and place the questioner in a position of power, who uses loaded questions to disarm their opponent. Lisa Merrill rightly argues that 'questioning [...] is a rebellious posture.'²⁰⁹

In Aphra Behn's *The Rover* Hellena employs rhetorical questions which repeat the rake's words back to him in a cumulative fashion, enacting a sharp turn which controls the conversation. In Act Three Scene One of the play, Hellena overhears Willmore's account of his liaison with Angellica. Willmore states that 'Cupid's quiver

²⁰⁷ Edward Ravenscroft, *The Careless Lovers*, in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Drama*, pp. 987-1037 (pp. 1022-1023). Subsequent references will be given in act, scene, line and page number in parenthesis.

²⁰⁸ Deborah Cameron, *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 25.

²⁰⁹ Lisa Merrill, 'Feminist Humour: Rebellious and Self-Affirming' in *Last Laughs: Perspectives in Women and Comedy*, ed. by Regina Barreca (London: Gordon and Breach, 1988), pp. 271-280 (p. 279).

has not half so many darts as her eyes' and to 'sleep in her arms is lying alfresco, all perfum'd Air about me' (III.i.113-6). Hellena uses the mode of questioning to repeat Willmore's words and turn them against him:

WILLMORE A man, upon Honour! a man. A she friend? No, no, madam, you have done my business, I thank you.
 HELLENA And was't your man friend, that had more darts in's eyes than Cupid carries in's whole budget of arrows?
 WILLMORE So—
 HELLENA Ah, such a bona roba! to be in her arms is lying alfresco, all perfum'd air about me—was this your man friend too?
 WILLMORE So—
 HELLENA That gave you the he and the she gold that begets young pleasures?
 (III.i.281-291)

Questions appear to come from a deferential position but are empowering in the way in which they reveal the heroine's knowledge of the rake's secrets, through echoing his own words. Hellena already knows the answer to the questions she asks, and therefore she seeks to disarm Willmore by forcing him to explain himself.

Sean Zwagerman has identified rhetorical questions as a performative strategy of women's humour, which put the female inquisitor in a position of power as her addressee is unable to give any answer that would be empowering.²¹⁰ In the following example from *The Rover* Hellena's and Angellica's powerful use of questions silences the rake Willmore:

HELLENA (*dressed as a man*) Why would you, sir, abuse my lady's faith?
 ANGELLICA And use me so inhumanely [?]
 HELLENA A maid so young, so innocent—[?] [...]
 ANGELLICA Dost thou know thy life is in my power?
 HELLENA Or think my lady cannot be revenged?
 (IV.ii.307-312)

²¹⁰ Sean Zwagerman, *Wit's End: Women's Humor as Rhetorical and Performative Strategy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), pp. 36-48.

Elaine Hobby argues that ‘cooperation between women is one of Behn’s key inventions.’²¹¹ The above is an example of Sapphic wit which challenges the rake’s behaviour. Although Hellena is dressed as a young man, the way in which the actresses playing Angellica and Hellena verbally dominate the scene would have provided a powerful spectacle of solidarity between women.

A similar scene in which two female rivals direct the conversation occurs in the male-authored *The Man of the Mode*. In contrast to the above scene featuring Angellica Bianca and Hellena, which depicts women’s raillery as strong when conducted by a group, Etherege’s use of this technique in *The Man of the Mode* plays to stereotypes of women engaging in rivalry and gossip. The following scene, in which the women dominate the stage, enables Etherege to showcase the star actresses such as Elizabeth Barry who played Mrs. Loveit. Rather than employing questions, Mrs. Loveit, her chambermaid, and Bellinda participate in a deliberately exclusive conversation about Dorimant in front of him:

MRS. LOVEIT ’Tis your fortune, Bellinda, ever to be here when I am abused by this prodigy of ill-nature.

BELLINDA [...] One who makes a public profession of breach of faith and ingratitude! I loathe the sight of him. [...]

DORIMANT You have reproached me handsomely, and I deserve it for coming hither, but—

PERT You must expect it, sir. All women will hate you for my lady’s sake!

DORIMANT (*Aside*) Nay, if she begins too, ’tis time to fly. I shall be scolded to death, else.

(V.ii.279-307, p. 579)

Their use of rhetorical language, which functions as a series of criticisms about Dorimant rather than a conversation, disempowers Dorimant by excluding his

²¹¹ Elaine Hobby, ‘No Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew’s *Thomaso*’, *Women’s Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127 (p. 118).

participation in the conversation he is the subject of. However, Dorimant's aside shared with the audience positions this as women's scolding, which belittles their criticisms of Dorimant, and his rapid exit halts their discussion, because the subject and recipient of their raillery has gone.

Mrs. Beauclair in *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) employs questioning to reform the rake through public exposure and mockery. This is consistent with the move away from the celebration of the carefree libertine as hero, towards comedies which criticise the rake's behaviour and reform him. Pix purposefully cast Anne Bracegirdle, who often played virtuous roles, as Mrs. Beauclair.²¹² Elizabeth Kubek argues that Pix's comedy delivers 'a series of lessons on manners and morals.'²¹³ Although Yebra acknowledges the play as 'morally attractive', critics have failed to acknowledge Mrs. Beauclair's subtle wit, claiming that wit becomes secondary in the play.²¹⁴ Pix's heroine Mrs. Beauclair is different from the young and reckless Hellena and Florimell. She is wary of the rake Wildlove and is self-conscious about maintaining virtuous decorum in line with the heroines of the new mode of sentimental comedy:

MRS. BEAUCLAIR Would you have him brisker, uncle? 'Tis but my clapping on a mask, and 'tis done. Sir Francis, do I wrong you? Have I not seen you at a play slighting all the bare-faced beauties, hunting a trollop in a mask with pains and pleasure? Nay, more: for her gaping nonsensical banTERS neglecting immortal Dryden's eloquence, or Congreve's unequalled wit...?

(III.ii.52-57, p. 32)

²¹² Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 182-3.

²¹³ Elizabeth Kubek, 'Mary Pix, the London Middle Class, and Progressive Whig Ideology' in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century* eds. by Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: MLA, 2010) pp. 81-92 (p. 83).

²¹⁴ Jose M. Yebra, 'The Flourishing of Female Playwriting on the Augustan Stage: Mary Pix's *The Innocent Mistress*', *Journal of English Studies*, 12 (2014), 149-167 (p. 155).

Mrs. Beauclair's wit is cumulative in the way that she lists Wildlove's inconstant and rude behaviour in the playhouse. She repeats what she knows about his character and in this way, repeats the perception of the rake back to him. The heroine undercuts Wildlove's libertine performance, situating it as out of the current fashion. Mrs. Beauclair's lines differentiate Wildlove's behaviour from the moral messages of plays staged around this time, such as Dryden's *Marriage a-la Mode* (1673) in which two couples who desire the other's intended decide to be faithful to the partner they are engaged to. Mrs. Beauclair self-consciously alludes to Dryden's highly popular comedy *Secret Love*, in which Florimell attracts Celadon by wearing a mask, and Congreve's *The Old Batchelour* (1693) which featured libertine behaviour. The above quotation can be read as the voice of Pix commenting on the current state of comedy, encouraging a change in the morals represented both on and off stage. James Evans reads Congreve and Pix as 'professional colleague[s]', due to the support Congreve actively displayed for Pix when George Powell plagiarised her comedy *The Deceiver Deceived*.²¹⁵ That Pix contributed to the poetry collection *The Nine Muses* (1700) dedicated to John Dryden after his death, suggests that Pix's allusions to both writers (through Mrs. Beauclair) is not an attack on male dramatists. As Anne Cotterill notes, the women behind the nine muses identified with and applied Dryden's 'embattled career of laureateship, disenfranchisement and... translation' to their own difficulties as women writers.²¹⁶ Rather, as Evans notes, Pix's and Congreve's comedies mark a turning point in drama, in which the dramatists point out the difficulties the model of Restoration comedy posed at the end of the seventeenth century due to the change in society's

²¹⁵ James E. Evans, 'The Beau Defeated and The Way of the World: Strains of Comedy in 1700', *South Atlantic Review*, 68 (2010), 15-33 (p. 18), [Accessed 9 June 2017].

²¹⁶ Anne Cotterill, "'Manly Strength with Modern Softness": Dryden and the Mentoring of Women Writers', in *Mentoring in Eighteenth Century British Literature and Culture*, ed. Anthony W. Lee (Abingdon: Routledge. 2011), pp. 25-50 (p. 28).

morals, which meant that the libertine character was ‘out-moded.’²¹⁷ Jacqueline Pearson accuses Pix of being more concerned with the reform of the rake and argues that Mrs. Beauclair is a weak heroine, compared with those in Behn’s comedies.²¹⁸ However, in drawing attention to the way in which the libertine was no longer the focus of comedy, Pix places Mrs. Beauclair’s wit as a strong-willed and confident heroine centre-stage.

Interruptions

Interruptions are used strategically in the conversation of the gay couple as a form of attack and also defence as they fracture the rhythm of the conversation and defy expectation. Keith George in 1696 comments on the way in which interruptions can be a cunning strategy which turn ‘the Discourse another way [...] by bringing in a new Subject to irritate’ the speaker.²¹⁹ For the female libertine, interruption is a means by which she can undercut male performance by seizing control of language. This can be interpreted as a form of castration as the interruption silences the male speaker. Mrs. Beauclair frequently interrupts Wildlove in public in Pix’s *The Innocent Mistress*. She cuts off his speech, stating ‘there needs no excuse, your company being at this time a favour I neither expect nor desire’ (III.ii.214-220). Interruption as a form of emasculation is made physically evident when Mrs. Beauclair, disguised as a male youth, interrupts Wildlove’s liaison with Mrs. Flywife and steals his mistress from him. Pix’s heroine wittily interrupts Wildlove to tell him that she will ‘never interrupt you

²¹⁷ James E. Evans, ‘Strains of Comedy in 1700’ (2010), p. 17.

²¹⁸ Jacqueline Pearson. *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Female Dramatists, 1642-1737* (London: Harvester, 1988), p. 174.

²¹⁹ Gerardus Croese, *The General History of the Quakers*, trans. Keith George (London: John Dunton, 1696), p. 25.

more' (IV.iii.33-34). However, within this interruption Mrs. Beauclair proceeds to critique Wildlove's choice in women:

MRS. BEAUCLAIR Hug in your bosom the plastered mischiefs, their blotted souls and spotted reputations no varnish can cover o'er. Pursue, o'ertake, possess the unenvied 'mongst the painted tribe. Most worthily bestow your heart.

(IV.iii.34-37)

Despite her promise not to interrupt Wildlove's amours, Mrs. Beauclair's lines are loaded with judgement and disdain, demonstrating the way in which interruptions are naturally unsettling. Mrs. Beauclair remains in control and maintains Wildlove's interest by feigning disinterest.

Harriet in Etherege's *The Man of the Mode* uses interruptions differently from Pix's heroine. This is primarily due to the way in which the heroine of the 1670s was characterised by her rebellious spirit and apparent aversion to marriage. While Mrs. Beauclair's interruptions seek to encourage Wildlove to enter the serious or plain dealing mode of discourse, Harriet interrupts Dorimant to maintain the play mode of the female libertine:

DORIMANT Is this all? Will you not promise me—

HARRIET I hate to promise. What we do then is expected from us and wants much of the welcome it finds when it surprises.

(V.ii.170-3, p. 583)

Harriet's lines, which occur during the play's final Act, express the libertine desire to continue to enjoy life without obligations, signalling to the audience that she remains unconvinced about marrying Dorimant.

There is a difference between the controlled and strategic interruptions employed by Mrs. Beauclair and Harriet, and the desperate use of interruption as an

attempt to regain control by the scorned female characters in both Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Etherege's *The Man of the Mode*. When Angellica Bianca and Bellinda interrupt the rake in *The Rover* and *The Man of the Mode*, it is to prevent him from speaking as they are in danger of being seduced, and thus disempowered, by his seductive language. In *The Man of the Mode*, Bellinda, who is unable to resist Dorimant, unlike Harriet, uses interruption as an aggressive strategy:

MEDLEY Dorimant, you are luckily come to justify yourself. Here's a lady—
BELLINDA Has a word or two to say to you from a disconsolate person.

(III.ii.55-7)

Bellinda takes charge of the conversation and avoids Medley's attempts to address the situation. However, Dorimant regains control of the scene through interrupting Bellinda and finishing her sentences for her. Dorimant redirects the conversation into an intimate one between himself and Bellinda, stating that he 'could kill himself to please you' (lines 73-4). A similar scene occurs in the final Act of *The Rover*, in which Angellica, who has had her heart broken by Willmore as she believed in his flattering language, threatens him with a pistol. Willmore uses his wit to try to dissuade Angellica, who interrupts him stating: 'Another word will damn thee! I've heard thee talk too long' (V.i.343, p. 640). Angellica misconstrues witty repartee for honesty and takes Willmore's language at face-value, believing him to be constant. Susan Owen rightly contrasts Angellica's lack of emotional control with Hellena's self-possession.²²⁰ Behn significantly positions Angellica outside of the witty mode by having her speak in verse throughout the play, to depict a heroic mode that does not fit with Restoration comedy.

²²⁰ Susan Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 70.

Plain-dealing

Plain-dealing or honest speech is a linguistic register frequently employed by the witty coquette in comedies staged between 1690 and 1700, used to reform the rake. Susan Owen notes that Hellena in *The Rover* wittily employs plain-speaking in place of figurative language.²²¹ However, plain-speaking may still be dishonest, whereas plain-dealing is arguably honest because it entails a character revealing their hand during the play of wit. Peter Holland problematizes the concept of plain-dealing, arguing that this technique signalled a very different meaning to spectators after Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1676). Holland notes that Wycherley's play complicates the meaning of plain-dealing as honest plain-speaking by amalgamating 'two incompatible ideas, plain-dealing and pretence.'²²² Holland's arguments encourage a reconsideration of plain-dealing as a strategic type of wit. Although it can be argued that plain-dealing is the antithesis of wit, plain dealing, much like the other types of linguistic wit, strategically manipulates the conversation through breaking the contract of wit established between the hero and heroine. As Florian Coulmas states 'the users of a currency and the participants in a language are a community of mutually dependent creditors. Only the belief that the others will uphold it lets me do so, and thus makes the convention hold good.'²²³ Each member of the gay couple trusts that the other will continue to uphold the libertine language. Plain-dealing is a slower form of strategic wit and an intimate one as it provides insight into the characters' emotions. Plain-dealing, like the turn, generates intimacy between the gay couple as they acknowledge one other's faults and speak the truth. Therefore, the plain-dealer disrupts the rhythm of raillery by refusing to

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 170-1.

²²³ Florian Coulmas, *Language and Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 19.

uphold libertine discourse, and lowers the value of the other's wit, who may not engage in raillery without an opponent.

Plain-dealing can be used as a strategic device of switching the pace and mode of the conversation in which the heroine mocks the rake, as seen in Etherege's *The Man of the Mode*. During Harriet's and Dorimant's first meeting, Harriet proceeds with caution, due to her reservations about Dorimant's rakish reputation:

HARRIET Could you keep a Lent for a mistress?

DORIMANT In expectation of a happy Easter, and though time be very precious, think forty days well lost to gain your favor.

HARRIET Mr. Bellair! Let us walk, 'tis time to leave him. Men grow dull when they begin to be particular.

DORIMANT Y'are mistaken: flattery will not ensue, though I know y'are greedy of the praises of the whole Mall [...] I observed how you [...] to make yourself more agreeable, [...] wantonly [...] played with your head, flung back your locks, and looked smilingly over your shoulder [...]

HARRIET I do not go begging the men's, as you do the ladies'. good liking, with a sly softness in your looks and a gentle slowness in your bows as you pass by 'em — as thus, sir— (*Acts him.*) Is this not like you?

(III.iii.86-106)

Harriet tricks Dorimant into plain-dealing, but Dorimant's response in the verbal fencing mode of raillery forces Harriet to continue to engage in repartee. In contrast to Berglund's view, plain-dealing is as powerful as the libertine language because it involves the risk of being made to look foolish or dull, or being exposed by expressing one's emotions if they are not reciprocated.²²⁴

Plain-dealing carries risk in Restoration comedy in which social relations are a performance. The witty railing mode in which the hero or heroine adopts a persona provides protection, and plain dealing removes such protection. In Aphra Behn's *The Rover* Angellica Bianca's plain-dealing speeches and expression of her feelings end up hurting her. Misty Anderson rightly argues that 'Hellena's paradoxical vow and bargain

²²⁴ Lisa Berglund, 'The Language of the Libertines: Subversive Morality in *The Man of Mode*', p. 373.

with Willmore to be “Hellena the Inconstant”’ based on libertine performance’, turns out to be ‘more viable’ than ‘Angellica’s offer of “thy love for mine”, a vow not upheld by Willmore in the sense she wishes it to be.’²²⁵ Hellena gains Willmore as a partner through maintaining the libertine mode and because her fortune is attractive, while Angellica loses him due to her honesty. Robert Markley’s view that wit carries ‘an inverse relationship to sexual experience’ can be seen in *The Rover*, in which the witty and chaste Hellena secures the hero.²²⁶ For the rake, plain-dealing also carries risk, exemplified by Beaumine’s concern in Trotter’s *Love at a Loss* that Lesbia would have ‘laugh’d at [him] for a fool’ if he had made his devotion known sooner (III.i.99-100).

The female libertine often employs plain-dealing in the form of questions in order to force a response from the rake. Lesbia in Trotter’s *Love at a Loss* makes use of this technique:

LESBIA Good romantic sir, will you condescend for once to answer directly a little intelligible sense?

BEAUMINE A lover and speak sense! [...]

LESBIA Do you think I’ll always be put off with this trifling, Beaumine?

BEAUMINE Oh! Mighty things have been produced from trifles. The cackling of geese once saved the capitol. Men’s promises have gained many a fair one, and women’s favors lost ’em many lovers. Trifles, trifles all, but great effects.

LESBIA Is not that to tell me I have lost you by what you think a trifle?

BEAUMINE No, to show you I don’t think our favors a trifle and have no mind you should lose me, I would have ’em still favors, the more to engage me and not turn all to duty.²²⁷

The use of plain-dealing to shift register and catch one’s opponent off-guard positions this linguistic technique as an aggressive strategy as well as a defensive one. Often the heroine must insist on breaking the witty mode of raillery to have the libertine confirm

²²⁵ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage*, p. 69.

²²⁶ Robert Markley, *Two-edg’d Weapons: Style and Ideology in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 134.

²²⁷ Catherine Trotter, *Love at a Loss, or; Most Votes Carry it* (1701), III.i.80-97.

his affection for her, embarking on a necessary risk. For example, Florimell in *Secret Love* breaks the comic rhythm and asks: ‘without raillery, are you in Love?’ (II.iii, p. 15). The intimate exchanges of wit are depicted by the dramatist as an investment for both the rake and the heroine, which leads the heroine to break the mode of verbal fencing to discover whether she has made a wise investment.

Proviso Scenes

The proviso scene usually occurs in the final Act of the comedy and consists of the hero and heroine wittily negotiating their conditions of marriage.²²⁸ While scholars have provided detailed accounts of the use of economic and legal language within proviso scenes, little attention has been paid to the role of linguistic wit within the proviso. Criticism on the proviso scene has been dominated by consideration of the way in which the heroine negotiates her autonomy within marriage, or ‘self-assurance’ as Asad Al-Ghalith has argued.²²⁹ Rather than viewing the proviso scene as offering closure, I contend that the proviso scene is a celebration of the gay couple’s wit, and demonstrates that the courtship chase continues even after marriage.

The anticipation of the way in which the gay couple negotiate their terms clearly generated pleasure for spectators as the proviso scene became a stock feature of the comic plot. Vivian L. Davis usefully interprets the dramatization of the sexual contract as a celebration of a joint theatrical performance between the hero and heroine in Centlivre’s *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*.²³⁰ Building on Davis’ arguments, I consider the extent to which proviso scenes celebrate the duet of the hero and heroine’s wit and whether this differs in the work of male and female dramatists.

²²⁸ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (1992), p. 71.

²²⁹ Asad Al-Ghalith, ‘Congreve’s Comedy Heroine: Progress Towards Self-Awareness’, *The Midwest Quarterly*, 52 (2011), 283-292.

²³⁰ Vivian Davis, ‘Dramatizing the Sexual Contract in Congreve and Centlivre’ *SEL 1500-1900*, 51:3 (2011), 519-543 (p. 535).

According to Kathleen Lynch, the proviso scene in Dryden's *Secret Love* is based on the twelve conditions laid out in Honoré d'Urfé's seventeenth century prose fiction *L'Astrée*.²³¹ The proviso scene in *Secret Love* is no different from earlier scenes in the play in which Florimell strives to have the last word. The turn features strongly here, as in other proviso scenes, as a continuation of the playful mode of intimacy, distance, and challenging one another as a form of defence. In the following scene, the turn serves to modify the conditions laid down by Celadon:

CELADON *Item*, I will have the liberty to sleep all night, without your interrupting my repose for any evil design whatsoever.
 FLORIMELL *Item*, Then you shall bid me good night before you sleep.
 CELADON Provided always, that whatever liberties we take with other people, we continue very honest to one another.
 FLORIMELL As far as will consist with a pleasant life.

(p. 65)

The above exchange displays Florimell playfully challenging Celadon's terms through her use of the turn. This signals to spectators that the two will continue to outwit one another and carry on the humour of 'Mistress and Gallant' (p. 65). Florimell's echoing of Celadon when she states, 'None of my privileges to be infring'd by thee Celadon, under the penalty of Cuckoldom', is an example of the female libertine having the last word. When Florimell asks, 'is not such a marriage as good as wenching?', she mimicks the rake's alpha male performance, demonstrating that the couple will continue to exercise their sexual freedom. In response to the criticism that Celadon and Florimell treat 'too lightly of their marriage in the presence of the Queen', Dryden admits that the inclusion of this scene at the end of the play was a strategic decision to make the play 'go off more smartly' as the above scene was 'in the opinion of the best judges, the

²³¹ Kathleen Lynch, *The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1926), pp. 302-8.

most diverting of the whole comedy.’²³² Dryden’s decision to place the exchange, which features an abundance of witty techniques, at the end of the play, leaves theatre-goers with a sense of celebration of the couple’s wit and their libertine values. Like the provisional conditions laid out for marriage, the proviso scene does not offer closure. This is exemplified by the proviso scene in James Howard’s *The Mad Couple* (1672) in which the couple cannot promise ‘how long’ they will love one another and resolve to ‘be as mad as we please.’²³³

The legal and economic language of proviso scenes has been interpreted as offering certainty against the instability of discourse.²³⁴ Despite the use of economic terms by the gay couple, George Etherege’s *The Man of the Mode* is playful as it does not culminate in a proviso, though the dialogue appears to build to one. Act Five Scene Two of *The Man of the Mode* opens with Harriet finishing Dorimant’s line of verse:

DORIMANT “Music so softens and disarms the mind—”
HARRIET “That not one arrow does resistance find.”

(V.ii.98-9, p. 582)

The verse, which comes after a song, sets up a reflective mode and slowing of the earlier, fast paced scenes of wit. This technique is also used in *The Way of the World* to signal the move toward closure for spectators. However, Etherege’s comedy resists closure. Even though Dorimant’s lines gesture toward the closure of proviso, stating the couple ‘must lose no time’, as here is a ‘picture of a celebrated beauty giving audience

²³² John Dryden, ‘Preface’ to *Secret Love* (London: Henry Herringman, 1669) A2.

²³³ James Howard, *All Mistaken, Or, The Mad Couple* (London; H. Brugis, 1672), pp. 22-23.

²³⁴ Richard Kroll, ‘Discourse and Power in *The Way of the World*’ *ELH*, 53 (1986) pp. 727-758 (p. 738).

to a declared lover', the following quotation from *The Man of the Mode* demonstrates Harriet's distrust of Dorimant and uses the language of economics to articulate her concern that he is a risky investment:

HARRIET Do not speak it if you would have me believe it.
 Your tongue is so famed for falsehood 'twill do the truth an injury.
(Turns away her head.)
 DORIMANT Turn not away, then. but look on me and guess it.
 HARRIET Did you not tell me there was no credit to be given to faces? That women nowadays have their passions as much at will as they have their complexions and put on joy and sadness, scorn and kindness with the same ease they do their paint and patches—
 Are they the only counterfeits?

(V.ii.131-141, p. 582)

The references to 'obligation' 'credit' and the promise to 'sacrifice [...] all interests', demonstrate the language of economic trust, or rather the rake's concern about settling his debts and 'making ends meet' as Robert Markley states.²³⁵ Dorimant can only offer Harriet the promise of fidelity based on trust. Harriet rejects Dorimant's terms of obligation, interest, and promises: 'I hate to promise! what we do then is expected from us' (p. 583). Within this exchange, the battle of the wits rather than the language of negotiation dominates. Harriet delays Dorimant's declaration of love, employing a similitude ('your tongue is so famed for falsehood') to maintain distance between herself and Dorimant. Harriet also paraphrases Dorimant's earlier words ('now they [women] would look as if they could kill, and anon they would look as if they are dying') and turns them against him (IV.i.126-130, p. 564). While Dorimant adopts plain-dealing throughout, Harriet retains the play-mode of wit by mocking Dorimant's devotion as 'more dismal than the Country!' (V.ii.448, p. 588). Harriet's refusal to

²³⁵ Robert Markley, "'Still on the Criminals Side Against the Innocent': Etherege, Wycherley and the Ironies of Wit' in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan Owen, pp. 326-340 (p. 327).

promise Dorimant marriage in the future resists a contract of marriage. As historian Gellert Alleman has demonstrated, marriage contracts were not legally binding unless a mutual vow to marry is made (*spousal de praesenti*) or a vow to marry in the future (*spousal de futuro*) in the presence of witnesses.²³⁶ Spectators would therefore have known that Dorimant's and Harriet's proviso is not a firm contract, unlike the witnessed ceremony between Bellair and Emilia. Dorimant confides to Mrs. Loveit that he is in need of 'a wife—to repair the ruins of my estate' and is clearly keen to continue to see Bellinda (V.ii.306-7, p. 585). This leaves the closure of the play uncertain as Harriet cannot trust Dorimant even at this stage and neither has full confidence that the other's feelings towards them are genuine or will last. Viewing proviso scenes and the language of the gay couple in relation to trust and risk promotes a different way of approaching and interpreting the function of the proviso scene as a continuation of the gay couple's carefree humour and expression of their anxieties in relation to marriage.

While comedies produced in the 1670s celebrate the 'gay humour' of the rake and female libertine within the proviso scene, as Braverman argues, 'marriage rather than passion becomes the woman's prerogative.'²³⁷ This resulted in a turn towards contractual language, based upon 'mutual consent' in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century comedy.²³⁸ Mirabell's and Millamant's proviso scene in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) features traces of the wit duel, but strongly depicts marriage as an end to the courtship chase:

MIRABELL Have you any more conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.

²³⁶ Gellert Spencer Alleman, *Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), pp.6-7, p. 11.

²³⁷ Richard Braverman, 'Capital Relations in *The Way of the World*', *ELH*, 52 (1985), 133-158 (p. 147).

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 138.

MILLAMANT Trifles: [...] to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance or to be intimate with fools because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please. Dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humor without giving a reason. [...] These articles subscrib'd, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

MIRABELL [...] Well, have I liberty to offer conditions, that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarg'd into a husband?

(IV.iv.211-233, p. 793)

Millamant adopts a defensive position and the two playfully turn one another's words. The beginning of this proviso exchange celebrates the quick wit and good humour of the two protagonists. In contrast to Asad Al-Ghalith's view that Millamant's self-assurance makes her the most complex and independent heroine on the eighteenth-century stage, I argue that the economic language of the proviso scene portrays the way in which Millamant becomes Mirabell's property.²³⁹ Throughout the exchange, references to commodities such as tea and coffee depict Mirabell's desire to control the entertainments and goods that Millamant has access to along with her person, as his property (p. 793). Contrary to MacKenzie's view that Millamant 'bargains up her own worth', in my view, Millamant's language depicts the way in which she 'dwindle[s] into a wife' in this scene; her language becomes a series of disjointed and childish exclamations: 'Horrid provisos! [...] I hate your odious provisos.'²⁴⁰ Mirabell directs the conversation and Millamant has fewer and fewer lines in the exchange. This movement demonstrates the decline of the witty gay couple into the union of marriage in which Millamant has very little control.

²³⁹ Asad Al-Ghalith, 'Congreve's Comedy Heroine; Progress Toward Self-Awareness' *The Midwest Quarterly*, 52 (2011), 283-292 (p. 283).

²⁴⁰ Scott R. Mackenzie, 'Sexual Arithmetic: Appetite and Consumption in *The Way of the World*', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 47 (2014), 261-276 (p. 262). William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700), p. 794.

Catharine Trotter's *Love at Loss* (1701) departs from the proviso scene and from the use of economic and legal language. Instead, the characters vote for the man Lesbia should marry. In contrast to the celebration of witty language showcased in proviso scenes, the play's final scene is devoid of linguistic sparring and the characters appear to be at a loss for words. Critics such as Laura Linker have interpreted the play's ending as signifying a match of obligation rather than of love, in which women are expected to marry their seducers.²⁴¹ While it is true that Lesbia and Beaumine's promise of engagement carries a legal and social obligation due to the mutual ceremony of *spousal de futuro* and signed contract mentioned in the play, the 'loss' referred to in the title can be interpreted differently (I.i.143-157). The play's title, 'Love at a Loss', may imply a marriage without economic advantage. However, Lesbia marries Beaumine who has a large fortune. The 'loss' mentioned in the play's title may therefore refer to Lesbia's relinquishment of her first love Grandfoy. Trotter's comedy was published shortly after Mary Astell's *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, a text which depicts the way in which a woman becomes secondary to her husband after marriage, relinquishing the 'Authority and right to Govern' herself.²⁴² Lesbia's reference to Beaumine's 'indisputable right' to marry her, along with the omission of her own opinions in the final scene, freely expressed throughout the play, confirms Astell's depiction of marriage as a loss of freedom. Is this a scene which confronts head-on the loss of the freedom that the libertine and coquette value? The answer lies in Trotter's substitution of a vote for the proviso.

²⁴¹ Laura Linker, 'Catharine Trotter and the Humane Libertine', *SEL 1500-1900*, 50 (2010), 583-599 (p. 592).

²⁴² Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (London: John Nutt, 1700), p. 42. Accessed via <<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/astell/marriage/marriage.html>> [7th February 2017].

While *The Man of the Mode* and *The Rover* also end with a petition to the characters on stage and spectators in the audience to vote or approve the match, *Love at a Loss* disenfranchises both members of the gay couple from voting, along with the audience. *The Man of the Mode* appeals to those in the pit that ‘if these honest gentlemen rejoice, / [...] the boy has made a happy choice’ (p. 588). Appealing to the youthful wits and libertines that frequented the pit sustains the playful humour of the gay couple. Similarly, Hellena’s petition for the characters to vote is a means of disobeying her brother through consensus. Trotter takes Hellena’s petition for the characters to vote for ‘Heaven or the Captain?’ at the end of *The Rover* further, to dramatize the risk associated with marriage by comparing it to a cast of a die or a vote (p. 643). The novelty and surprise of such a device, acknowledged by Cleon as ‘extremely new’ in *Love at a Loss*, is witty and pleasurable and forward-thinking, as Miranda is given a vote. However, Trotter’s depiction of marriage determined by chance is troubling and moves beyond the closure of comedy (V.iv.261).

Although Beaumine and Grandfoy refer to the vote as Lesbia’s will because she is the one who proposes it, it offers a bleak criticism of the risk involved in marriage. This proviso is notable for the lack of economic terms within the scene. Beaumine’s and Grandfoy’s claim to Lesbia and their value are determined by criteria created by each of the individual characters onstage who all have different interests. Bonsot values one that will ‘not quarrel with her’, Constant is in favour of the one who ‘loves her best’, while Miranda favours him whom she loves least (V.iv.270-7). The above criteria, which favour the characters’ own preferences and are contradictory, demonstrate the conflict between societal and emotional interest. The vote enfranchises all the characters on stage except for Beaumine and Lesbia, and depicts the way in which choices in relation to marriage are already made. Economic status and avoidance of scandal are the

characters' main concerns and Beaumine is the best option in relation to these considerations. As Roxane Kent-Drury notes, Trotter's work dramatizes the 'conflict between pursuit of honour and pursuit of happiness.'²⁴³

Lauren Caldwell argues that the proviso scene involves the characters investing 'an economic trust in friends, a legal trust in strangers, and an affective trust that works to close the gap between them' to argue that the marriage contract itself relies upon a network of people as witnesses were needed for a marriage to be valid.²⁴⁴ In the case of *Love at a Loss*, Lesbia trusts in the other characters on stage to decide for her, and this is depicted as a loss of self. She states, 'the odds are on Beaumine's side, whether I love him least or best, there's a vote for him [...] there's but two against him' (line 279-280). The 'two against him' refers to Constant's vote for Grandfoy and Phillabell's vote for 'him that she loves best', therefore the 'two against him' also includes Lesbia herself. Lesbia must part with her first love Grandfoy to honour Beaumine's promise of engagement. This marks a move toward the cult of sensibility and the values of stoicism which advocate that each person is connected to and has an obligation to another. In terms of trust, spectators bear a responsibility for the play's outcome due to the pressure on dramatists to please spectators by imposing marriage at the end of a comedy.

However, the vote in Trotter's *Love at a Loss* is primarily concerned with embracing risk. Earlier in the play Beaumine asks Lesbia:

²⁴³ Roxanne Kent-Drury, 'Performance and Philosophy in the Work of Catharine Trotter Cockburn', *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs, (New York: MLA, 2010), pp. 110-119 (pp. 117-9).

²⁴⁴ Lauren Caldwell, "'Drink up all the waters in the sea'": Contracting Relationships in Congreve's *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World*' *ELH*, 82:1 (2015), pp. 183-210 (p. 204).

Would anyone in their senses that were in possession of a good estate,
without any prospect of bettering it, put it to the chance of a die whether
they should keep it or lose it?

(II.i.161-5)

In this light, Lesbia takes the risk that Beaumine will not. Beaumine is financially the better option for Lesbia as well as the choice that will damage her reputation the least. *Love at a Loss* looks beyond the formal conclusions of closure, generating an uncomfortable atmosphere for spectators who, like the hero and heroine, are excluded from the vote which is sprung upon them. 'Loss' refers to the state of bewilderment that spectators are left with. Lesbia uses the term 'loss' within the same context of bewilderment: that she is 'at a loss.'

As Trotter is known for writing tragedy, and therefore stands outside of the comic tradition, she is able to adopt a fresh approach to the proviso scene. The vote at the end of the play can be interpreted as pleasurable due to its novelty, but also as sad, as it acknowledges that the end of the play and of the characters' freedom is nigh. While the final scene of Congreve's *The Way of the World* gradually shifts in tone to depict Millamant slowly 'dwindl[ing] into a wife', in Trotter's play there is no room for negotiation. *Love at a Loss* defies expectations of the gay couple trope. From the cast list which mentions 'Beaumine, a gay roving spark' and Miranda 'a gay coquette', one would think that the gay couple who must overcome their libertine humour to marry one another at the end of the play would be Beaumine and Miranda. Instead it is Beaumine and Lesbia.

The representation of women's linguistic wit in Restoration comedy moves from the use of short turns as a mode of playful defence in the courtship battle in Dryden's *Secret Love* (1667), to the subtler and more complex cumulative and climactic wit of the

elongated turn employed by Hellena in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677). While Congreve's Millamant sticks to the usage of similitude from Euphuistic wit popularised in male-authored prose fiction, women dramatists explore the way in which linguistic techniques that appear deferential, such as echoing and questioning, may be used subversively to have the last word and to redirect or turn the conversation. The transition of the heroine from a female libertine, whose language mirrors the rake's, to the witty coquette in *The Innocent Mistress* (1697) and *Love at a Loss* (1701), marks the way in which women's use of language became distinct from that of their male counterparts. Questions and interruptions employed by Pix's and Trotter's heroines develop Behn's subversive yet subtle use of echoing into a bolder expression of wit which seizes control of the conversation and castrates male speech. The heroine's plain-dealing in Pix's *The Innocent Mistress* and Trotter's *Love at a Loss* not only symbolises the movement away from celebrating libertine values onstage, but also demonstrates that women dramatists actively question what happens to the heroine's liberty once she is married. While male dramatists employ the proviso scene to celebrate the couple's wit, women dramatists such as Trotter use the proviso scene to suspend closure. By positioning characters onstage and spectators as responsible for the couple's choice of partner Trotter offers a trenchant critique of marriage as closure in comedy.

There is a striking difference in the style of witty language used by characters of different gender and status. Women dramatists experiment with the heroine's wit and have her develop deferential forms of language into rebellious responses. Comparison of oratorical techniques has shown that the social status of the character affects the speed and style of their wit. Exploration of the various types of wit has illuminated this difference. Financially impoverished characters such as the rake must make a favourable impression through their wit and use this as social currency. Therefore, their

wit is short, sharp, and light-hearted and serves to disguise their financial worries through ingenious similitudes and turns. Servants' wit plays upon swift turns and double meanings which raise their status with spectators as their understanding of word-play places them above their foppish masters. Servants' wit must be short and play upon multiple meanings as they are taking a risk by mocking their social superiors.

The actress also contributed to the representation of women's linguistic wit. Millamant's and Angelica's leisurely wit in *The Way of the World* and *Love for Love* not only relates to the characters' secure financial position, but also to the popularity of the witty heroine as an established feature of Restoration comedy whose identity and wit had become distinct from her male counterpart. This development signals the way in which the actress's secure position onstage contributed to the development of women's wit in comedy. This chapter has illustrated the lively dialogues of male and female wit onstage and has expanded the types of linguistic techniques discussed in Restoration drama beyond the similitude, dissimilitude and turn. It has showcased the variety of linguistic techniques employed by characters from a range of social positions, moving from the affected similitude to the more subtle technique of echoing and elongated turns. The language of the female libertine or coquette is often accompanied by skilful action, which is the subject of my next chapter.

Chapter 2 Wit in Action

David Abercromby's inclusion of wit 'as a skilful action' in his *Discourse Of Wit* (1685) inspired this chapter, which reads wit through the lens of materiality.²⁴⁵ Wit in terms of weaving plots is a material process, one which relies on manipulation of disguise (such as false beards, cross-dressing), material objects (such as letters, keys, purses, cudgels), and the representation of servant characters as 'instruments', that is instrumental to the success of an intrigue.²⁴⁶ Skilful actions involve both interaction between conspirators and intra-action, in scenes in which characters are caught at the threshold of the action and overhear information. Although William Dynes and Douglas Canfield have acknowledged the political implications and social status of tricksters in seventeenth century drama, neither considers their manipulation of objects and space.²⁴⁷

To compare the way in which objects are used as part of wit in action in plays by women and by men I have chosen a range of texts which focus on witty intrigues that rely on material objects and trickery in order to succeed. The plays, both canonical and lesser known, range from across the period but all are representative of the seventeenth century's climate of gambling and risk, and the changing relationship between wit, trickery, and objects in the eighteenth century in which intrigues are confined to the household space. Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and the anonymous play *The Woman Turn'd Bully* (1675) were chosen for their heroines who employ clothing to manipulate the subject/object relation by cross-dressing to enter the public sphere. The anonymous play *The Mistaken*

²⁴⁵ David Abercromby, *A Discourse of Wit* (London: John Weld, 1685), p. 7.

²⁴⁶ Anonymous, *The Mistaken Husband* (London: F. Magnes and R. Bentley, 1675), p. 10.

²⁴⁷ William R. Dynes, 'The Trickster Figure in Jacobean Comedy', *SEL 1500-1900*, 33:2 (1993), 365-84.

J. Douglas Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

Husband (1675), John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672), and Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) portray the role played by manipulation of people as objects, and of acquisition of knowledge, money and disguise in the male trickster's elaborate schemes to enter the private household to gain a wife and an estate. Susanna Centlivre's *The Busy Body* (1709) and Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718) are representative of the popularity of intrigues set within the household on the eighteenth-century stage. The household setting is important to an investigation of whether the female trickster's wit is confined within the household and the role of servants as conspirators in their mistress's intrigues.

In section one I have chosen to look at the wit of female tricksters and the agency cross-dressing provides. Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671) presents a striking example of a cross-dressed heroine, who traverses the city unchaperoned and plays the trickster through her command of disguise, props, entrances and exits, purely for her own pleasure.²⁴⁸ *The Woman Turn'd Bully* (1675), an anonymous comedy, represents cross-dressing as theatrical performance and exposes masculinity as a construction through its reference to the material space of the theatre. *The Woman Turn'd Bully* was in the past attributed to Aphra Behn, but according to recent editors of the play this is not the case.²⁴⁹ The editors suggest that the play's author would have to be a gentleman with knowledge of the Inns of Court due to the specificity of legal references within the text.²⁵⁰ Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) depicts the way in which female tricksters such as Margery must rely on a combination of objects such as

²⁴⁸ Elizabeth Polwhele, *The Frolicks; or The Lawyer Cheated* (1671) ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (London: Cornell University Press, 1977).

²⁴⁹ *The Woman Turn'd Bully*, ed. by Maria Jose Mora, Manuel J. Gomez Lara, Rafael Portillo and Juan A. Prieto-Pablos (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2007).

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 21.

letters and clothing to carry out their intrigues. In section two, I compare John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672), the anonymous play *The Mistaken Husband* (1675), and Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) which present manipulation of disguise, along with objects, and people from within the household space, as integral to male tricksters' plots to enter the household. Allardyce Nicoll believes *The Mistaken Husband* (1675) to be an adaptation of a comedy by Richard Brome.²⁵¹ However, no consensus has been reached as to the play's authorship. In his preface to the anonymous play Dryden refers to the play as one by another author which he wrote a scene for. In section three, I read servants as 'instruments', extensions of their masters and mistresses in *The Mistaken Husband* (1675) and *The Busybody* (1709) who traverse the city on the behalf of confined heroines and transport important personal objects essential to their master's and mistress's intrigues, such as billets-doux and love-tokens. In section four, I consider the protective wit of married tricksters in John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672) and Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718). The above plays feature striking examples of wit which protects the household and the union of man and wife, through a husband and wife team who plot both together and against one another. This form of conservative or household wit also features in Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703) which I discuss briefly.

Thing theory or New Materialism provides a useful framework for my view of active or embodied wit, which relies on the characters' manipulation of objects, disguise, the architecture of the household, and the involvement of servants in their intrigues. The blurring of the subject-object relation, integral to New Materialist thought, which generates a fluid identity is not an alien notion in the seventeenth

²⁵¹ Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), p. 232.

century in which identity and the relation between mind, body, and self were still in flux. The pre-Cartesian notion of the self, that body and mind were inextricably linked, dominated early modern thought and continued beyond the Restoration as Descartes's model of separation between mind and body, published in 1651, did not take hold straight away.²⁵² Therefore, Restoration drama was produced during a period in which ideas about the self were by no means fixed. In addition, new discoveries such as the invention of the first reflecting telescope in 1663 and the acquisition of tea, tobacco, and sugar through trade in the eighteenth century meant that objects were changing the way people related to their own self, objects, and others.

Restoration actresses playing the roles of witty heroines in comic plots embody the mutuality of the subject/object relation: they simultaneously occupied the position of subject in the workplace and sexualised object on stage. The advent of the actress and the public woman dramatist marked the beginnings of women's entrance into the public sphere. Ambiguity between the notion of women as objects or subjects is present in the figure of the female trickster who desires to participate in the public sphere but must first negotiate her position as an object of male ownership. Through skilful manipulation of clothing and objects the female trickster achieves the status of subject. Reading wit through the lens of material objects builds on and develops Adam Zucker's thesis that wit is linked to knowledge of, and interaction with, place.²⁵³ Bill Brown argues that when considering objects we should focus less on 'the story of how the thing really names...an object' and instead on the 'subject-object' relation between humans

²⁵² Peter Dear, 'Cartesians and Newtonians' in *Revolutionizing the Sciences: European Knowledge and its Ambitions, 1500-1700*, 2nd edn. (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 repr. 2009), pp. 145-163 (p. 152).

²⁵³ Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

and objects.²⁵⁴ New Materialism's approach of thinking 'through things' and considering the mutuality between subject and objects, will enable me to discuss the ways in which witty manipulation of objects and spaces allows both male and female characters to reconfigure their subjectivities.²⁵⁵ As Colin Nicholson points out, the beginnings of a capitalist and consumerist culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries meant that 'across society, subjects and objects were relating to each other in complicated patterns of valorisation and transference' as such a climate offered the 'possibility of exchanging one object for another.'²⁵⁶ This mindset is literalised in Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) in which Sir Cautious exchanges his wife for money, resulting in a reconfiguration of the characters' identities.

Tim Ingold argues that, 'in the phenomenal world, every material is a becoming', 'an ongoing historicity' and 'to understand materials is to be able to tell their histories.'²⁵⁷ In Wycherley's *The Country Wife* china is an example of an object 'becoming.' Wycherley draws on china as a metaphor for sex from Jonson's *Epicoene* (1609), transplanting this into a period in which china became popular in women's homes, an item associated with women as economic consumers. G. Harman notes that for Heidegger objects taken out of context become something else, explaining that a knife in a kitchen differs from that same knife in the hands of a criminal.²⁵⁸ This is of particular relevance to the theatre in which objects take on powerful significance and act

²⁵⁴ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory' *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), pp. 1-22 (p. 4). Brown draws on Heidegger's theorisation of 'thingness.'

²⁵⁵ Paul Graves Brown ed. *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture* (London: Routledge. 2004), p. 4.

²⁵⁶ Colin Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 7.

²⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, 'Towards an Ecology of Materials', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), pp. 427-442 (pp. 434-5).

²⁵⁸ G. Harman, 'Technology, Objects and Things in Heidegger', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 34 (2010), 17-25 (p. 19).

as agents, such as Mrs. Manly whetting ‘the point of her Steel bodkin, as if she had a plot upon us’ in *The Mistaken Husband* (1675).²⁵⁹ The fact that Mrs. Manly has ‘ask’t twice or thrice for a knife’ signifies the transformation of the bodkin into a weapon.

This chapter will discuss how wit in action’s skilful movement of characters through private spaces and public spaces shapes status, representations of gender, and social relations. I investigate whether those who plot from the confines of the household rely on objects more than those positioned outside. I consider whether the wit of female tricksters, male tricksters, and servant tricksters functions best within the household or outside of it and whether this changes on the early eighteenth century stage.

Consideration of material spaces in the seventeenth and eighteenth century theatre must take account of the transformation of London’s cityscape, including its theatres, due to the destruction caused by the Great Fire in 1666.²⁶⁰ The city rose from the ashes to become a porous body which provided opportunities for social mobility as discussed in detail by Cynthia Wall and Liza Picard.²⁶¹ Julia Fawcett notes that during the years following the Great Fire, ‘personal space was crucial to Londoners’ understanding and—more importantly— their experience of their city...as they struggled to make sense of the rapid changes sweeping the city’s spaces and the implications of those changes for the publicness or privateness of urban bodies.’²⁶² The introduction of actresses onto the stage marked the entry of women’s bodies into the

²⁵⁹ Anonymous, *The Mistaken Husband* (1675), p. 48.

²⁶⁰ After the Great Fire, the architecture of the theatre changed; tennis courts and open spaces were converted into theatres, Gibbons’ Tennis Court became the initial venue of Killigrew’s King’s Company.

²⁶¹ Cynthia Wall, *The Literary and Cultural Spaces of Restoration London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Liza Picard, *Restoration London* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

²⁶² Julia H. Fawcett, ‘Unmapping London: Urbanization and the Performance of Personal Space in Aphra Behn’s *The Lucky Chance*,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 50:2 (2017), 155-71 (p. 157).

public sphere and the financial marketplace, complicating their conventional confinement to the private, domestic sphere. This phenomenon is depicted in comic plots in which female tricksters devise intrigues to roam the city.

Female Tricksters

Pieces of clothing play an integral role in the female trickster's plots, enabling her to move beyond the household and embark on adventure. Cornelia in Aphra Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679) makes clear the relation between devising or weaving plots and the role of clothing as disguise within those plots when she states 'I ha't! A project worthy of us both, which, **whilst we dress**, I'll tell thee...' (IV.ii.266-69, emphasis mine). Clothing and cross-dressing as disguise take on their own agency, exemplified by the cross-dressed heroine of *The Woman Turn'd Bully* who states 'tis the humour of the garment' that has caused the change in her behaviour.²⁶³ Clothing therefore promotes greater fluidity of subject positions. According to the *OED* the word 'shift' during the seventeenth century referred not only to undergarments, but also to witty jests and the ability to make a living by one's own devices.²⁶⁴ The phrase to 'shift for oneself' or to provide for oneself through employment of deception, originated in sixteenth century discourse and bears a close relation to the expression to 'live by one's wits.' The expression 'to shift' also referred to changing one's clothes, exemplified by Pepy's diary which refers to the actress's costume changes as 'shifts.'²⁶⁵ Fashion

²⁶³ Anonymous, *The Woman Turn'd Bully* (London: J.C., 1675), IV.ii, p. 56.

²⁶⁴ *OED Online* <www.oed.com> [Accessed 12 April 2017], shift, n.3e, n.10, v.7.

²⁶⁵ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Mathews, 11 volumes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970-83), volume 8, pp. 71-72.

theorist John Harvey argues that different clothes ‘conjure for us different bodies.’²⁶⁶

This establishes a connection between material clothing and transformation of identity through performance. Cross-dressing has often been used as a plot device in early modern and Restoration drama which enables female characters to ‘shift’ for themselves, to enact revenge and investigate the fidelity of their lovers.

The popularity of the cross-dressed actress who played the coquettish trickster, placed women at the centre of intrigues in comedy. Elizabeth Howe’s table of roles played by actresses between 1671 and 1706 lists 45 breeches roles in individual plays.²⁶⁷ Styan points out the way in which gesture, dress and use of props such as the fan were integral parts of flirtatious wit comedy, in other words examples of embodied wit in action and through action.²⁶⁸ Cross-dressing as a form of disguise has been explored by Elizabeth Howe and Juan Prieto Pablos, and has been acknowledged as a playful form of ‘punning language’ which deconstructs gender binaries along with the boundaries of a stable identity.²⁶⁹

Clothing and disguise are just one type of material object which offers the potential to change subjectivity and relationships between characters. As wives and daughters, women in drama are often depicted as objects of ownership rather than autonomous subjects, exemplified by Pinchwife’s description of women in *The Country*

²⁶⁶ John Harvey, ‘Showing and Hiding: Equivocations in the Relations of Body and Dress’, *Fashion Theory*, 11 (2007), 65-94 (p. 66, p. 80).

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 178-189.

²⁶⁸ J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 120.

²⁶⁹ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (1992).

Juan A. Prieto Pablos, ‘Women in Breeches and Modes of Masculinity in Restoration Comedy’, *Sederi*, 22 (2012), pp. 69-91.

Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 143, p. 58.

Wife as ‘dough-baked, senseless, indocile animals, ..., too hard for us, their politic lords and rulers’ (IV.iv.44-6). However, Pinchwife’s statement that women are ‘too hard for us’ makes clear that women challenge their position as object. A change of wardrobe is merely the springboard for female tricksters to enter male-dominated spaces and manipulate objects. I shall discuss the ways in which the female trickster’s manipulation of objects breaks down the division between subject and object relations to generate new forms of agency.

This section will consider whether the historical positioning of women as objects within patriarchal culture makes female tricksters more dexterous in their understanding and manipulation of objects as a means by which they may extend their powers of agency and create new identities. I will also investigate whether women dramatists writing female tricksters blur the distinction between subject and object more radically than their male contemporaries. Douglas Canfield’s *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* observes the way in which comedy reinforces the Stuart ideology of the value of the man’s estate by presenting the male trickster’s desire to win back his estate.²⁷⁰ However, Canfield is unclear about the role of female tricksters in society, arguing instead that they function on the margins of society. As this section will demonstrate, rather than plotting from the margins, female tricksters move through public and private spaces and foil the plots of law-makers in Elizabeth Polwhele’s *The Frolicks* (1671) and *The Woman Turn’d Bully* (1675). Unlike the male trickster who is usually heavily in debt, the female trickster occupies a more financially secure position but has a similar aim to the male trickster, identified by Canfield, which is to gain future security through a desirable marriage partner. This usually involves

²⁷⁰ Douglas Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1997).

ensuring the reform of the spendthrift rake. Elizabeth Howe agrees that the heroine's aim is to secure the libertine and states that her performance of scorn towards marriage, in other words, flaunting her freedom as belonging to no one, is essential in the female trickster's achievement of her desires.²⁷¹ Positioning herself as a fluid object, passing through a variety of spaces, is a means of displaying herself as well as her freedom.

For Clarabell, the cross-dressing heroine of Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671), breeches not only provide greater freedom of physical movement, but also enable her to enter male-dominated public spaces, such as city streets and taverns. Moreover, the role of rake gives the character and actress a different gait, use of gesture and access to a range of objects she would not normally use herself, such as the tankard. Clarabell's action of toasting the tavern mistress's health with the tankard in *The Frolicks* and encouraging others to do so, sets in motion a unifying social action which connects her body to the bodies of others in the tavern (Act III, p. 101). Clarabell appropriates Mark's words about the temptation of 'wine and wenches' to introduce herself as the alpha male in the tavern ('no wine or ladies?') (p. 91, p. 99). Sir Gregory raises his glass, wishing 'health to the gentlewoman' (Act III, p. 101). Sir Gregory is referring to the tavern mistress rather than Clarabell and this demonstrates that he has accepted Clarabell as a fellow gentleman, along with her instigation of a toast. The tankard, therefore, transforms Clarabell's identity and enables her to participate in the male-orientated social practice of drinking. Scholars such as Alexandra Shepard have related the act of drinking to the social practice of male bonding.²⁷² Angela McShane

²⁷¹ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 59.

²⁷² Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

-----, ' "Swil-bolls and Tos-pots": Drink Culture and Male Bonding in

has argued ‘healthing’ as a bonding ritual had taken over the ritual of communion by 1716.²⁷³ Passing the drinking cup around mimicked communion and was a social act. The simple act of raising her tankard prepares the way for the carnivalesque scenes of cross-dressing that follow. As Roth Marty has observed, ‘carnival is unthinkable without mood alteration, and no other component of the carnival mixture explains the quality of transformation better than drink.’²⁷⁴ Clarabell’s tavern humour generated by her use of the tankard results in the fluidity of subject positions which ensues.

The act of toasting with the tankard leads to Clarabell’s suggestion of dancing, and men dressing as women to make up for the lack of female partners. Pieces of clothing play an important role in the transformation of identity. Sir Gregory and Zany dress as women, while Clarabell continues to play the young gallant, viewing herself as a ‘he.’ She consistently refers to herself as one of the men, whilst wearing breeches, and does not include herself among the women present in the tavern. Instead she expresses annoyance that ‘there is but one woman, and you [Rightwit] must snap her’ (Act IV, p. 102). Polwhele draws attention to the fluidity of the actress’s performance of different subject positions when the constable refers to the cross-dressed men as ‘lewd beasts in petticoats’, hinting at the move away from earlier tradition of boy actors playing women on stage, with the success of women onstage (Act VI, p. 107).

Clarabell can more easily continue the performance of rakish humour than Rightwit due to her comfortable financial situation. This is evident from the way in

England, c. 1560–1640’, in *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800*, ed. by Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 110-130.

²⁷³ Angela McShane, ‘Material Culture and ‘Political Drinking’ in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 222 (2014), 247-276 (pp. 249-50).

²⁷⁴ Roth Marty, ‘Carnival, Creativity and the Sublimation of Drunkenness’, *Mosaic*, 30:2 (1997), 1-18 (p. 3).

which Polwhele directly contrasts the scene with Rightwit in the tavern with Clarabell's tavern frolic (Act II p. 86, Act III pp. 100-103). Rightwit's suffering 'credit' is contrasted with Clarabell freely paying Drawer for the tavern entertainment (Act II p. 86, Act III pp. 100-103). For Rightwit, buying Sir Gregory and Zany a drink is a necessary means to secure a rich husband for his sister, to restore the family's financial security. Rightwit's attempt at improving social relations in the tavern is less successful than Clarabell's frolic which promotes social mixing and inverts gender positions by having the men cross-dress. By contrast, Rightwit is unable to create such festivity. Instead drink is passed around and a drum is played begrudgingly. Leonora's lack of freedom in her choice of marriage partner is contrasted with Clarabell's financial and personal independence.

For Clarabell in *The Frolicks*, the breeches are the springboard for her greater freedom of movement. Clarabell's physical freedom of movement is contrasted with Rightwit's imprisonment in debtor's prison. Her comment that she arrived at the prison by 'things call'd legs', associates the breeches with independence and new possibilities (p. 119). The above quotation simultaneously refers to the actress in breeches as object of the gaze and Clarabell as a powerful subject. Polwhele's *The Frolicks* challenges the plot of a heroine who cross-dresses to gain a spouse.²⁷⁵ Clarabell's references to her body in breeches, instead of titillating the male rake, serve to highlight her freedom. Clarabell's second song in Act IV references her desire to maintain her agency, that Rightwit's cure for 'greensickness' would cause her to 'swell in thickness' and lose her liberty (p. 119, lines 358-362). Instead of emphasising a heroine's lack of freedom, or

²⁷⁵ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 59.

‘limited liberation’ as Derek Hughes and others have argued, Polwhele’s depiction of cross-dressing showcases female agency.²⁷⁶

Clarabell is able to manipulate household space and stage space, while Swallow ‘goes out at one door’ she and Mark exit ‘at another’ (Act IV lines 317-8, p. 117). Clarabell’s sexual freedom is contrasted with the burden of Rightwit’s sexuality. The financial burden of the illegitimate children produced as a result of his promiscuity, is embodied by the babies strapped onto his back by a group of women in the street (Act IV, line 134, p. 110). As Misty G. Anderson notes, male libertines were often punished for their sexual behaviour through the obligation to provide financial support for their bastard children.²⁷⁷

Clarabell’s freedom and fluidity of subject positions endures even after she returns to her normal clothes. By Act V of *The Frolicks* Clarabell, now dressed in her normal clothes, becomes an object as Mark orders the chairmen to place ‘down...your load at this door’, the load being Clarabell who has been summoned thither by Rightwit. Clarabell states that the ‘sedan’ and not Mark brought her, confusing the relation between subject and object (p. 132). While Mark’s instructions to the chairmen position Clarabell as a commodity ordered by Rightwit, Clarabell turns this relation on its head. She argues that the chair brought her, thereby turning the sedan into an active agent, along with herself at the same time, highlighting her sense of new-found agency through her recent adoption of male disguise. Her confinement in the sedan has the potential to suggest commodification of her body. However, Clarabell’s acquired skill in blurring subject-object relations through cross-dressing earlier in the play, enable her

²⁷⁶ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (2001), p. 43.

²⁷⁷ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 62.

to flaunt both her monetary and spatial agency in ordering the sedan, even now that she has assumed her usual dress.

The carnivalesque humour which wittily subverts subject-object relations through the manipulation of objects in the city space is adopted by female tricksters from the country such as Margery in *The Country Wife* and Betty Goodfield in *The Woman Turn'd Bully*. Margery Pinchwife in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) can be classed as a coquettish wit, a female trickster from the countryside who quickly learns the ways of the town. Unlike Horner, who freely traverses the city space and later the houses of the townswomen, Margery's movements are restricted by her jealous husband. Prior to Pinchwife's insistence that Margery cross-dress to attend the theatre, Margery is unaware of her attractiveness, stating 'a homely country girl? [...] No body will like me.'²⁷⁸ However, her disguise draws attention to her shape and she becomes aware of her charms when she asks Horner 'but did you love her indeed and indeed?'²⁷⁹

Margery's encounters with Horner significantly involve an exchange of objects, such as the oranges and dried fruit in Act Three, the letter in Act Five and Margery as Alithea in Act Five. These exchanges with objects are what change Margery's relationship with others around her. Critics have tended to read the 'China orange' that Horner gives to Margery, along with Pinchwife's comment that Horner has 'squeezed my orange' as positioning Margery Pinchwife as the object of sexual appetite and consumption. Pinchwife and Horner have been interpreted as male rivals in an erotic triangle in line with Sedgwick's theory of homosocial bonds.²⁸⁰ However, as Beth

²⁷⁸ William Wycherley, *The Country Wife* II.i.116-7.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, III.ii.514.

²⁸⁰ Eve Sedgwick. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Kowalcze notes, women were consumers in this period.²⁸¹ Perhaps we can re-read Margery's subjectivity in positive terms as consumer of the orange, rather than situating her as the consumed. Oranges were associated with the orange-sellers in the theatre who had the reputation of participating in the economic marketplace as working women and prostitutes. They were also associated with the figure of the actress, as Nell Gwyn supposedly began her career in the theatre as an orange-seller. Margery first appears in public in the theatre and her receiving of Horner's gift of the orange marks the beginning of the way in which Margery herself blends subject/object relations through material objects which express female desire.²⁸² This becomes more evident when we consider the other women in the play, such as Lady Fidget and her friends who use 'china' as a metaphor for sex with Horner. The discussion between the women which ensues positions Horner as object to be consumed, each desiring his china. Rather than associating china with women's delicacy, Horner's masculinity is fragile as he does not have enough 'china' to satisfy the women's appetite. Deborah Payne's view that the word 'china' does not relate to sexuality, that it is the context rather than the words that imbue the word with a sexual meaning, disregards the way in which Lady Squeamish and Lady Fidget consistently use metaphors of material goods when discussing Horner.²⁸³ Lady Fidget remarks 'though we get no presents, no jewels of him, we are savers of our honor', and following the china scene Lady Fidget continues to associate Horner with material goods for women's pleasure (V. iv. 180-181, p. 1095). Reading the play from this perspective positions Horner as object and women as desiring

²⁸¹ Beth Kowalcze Wallace, 'Women, China and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth Century England', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29:2 (1995-6), 153-167.

²⁸² Oranges were recommended as a cure for green-sickness. See *Queen Elizabeth's Closet of Physical Secrets* (London: Will Sheares, 1656), p. 130.

²⁸³ Deborah C. Payne, 'Reading Signs in *The Country Wife*', *SEL*, 26 (1986), 403-419(p. 413).

subjects. This subject positioning is clearly set out during the first scene; Margery's male clothes define her as 'phallus' and Horner's persona of eunuch portrays him as 'lack.' However, Margery's sexual desire dominates her disguise, she refuses to conceal her interest in Horner and makes it clear that she is not a man (III.ii.521). Unlike Lady Fidget and Lady Squeamish's playful reference to material goods, Margery takes this further through her manipulation of objects.

When Margery switches the letters in her bodice, the letters become part of her clothing, and like her dress, they simultaneously conceal and reveal secrets close to her heart. J. L. Styan has pointed out the erotic nature of this trick of 'the bosom as letterbox' in which letters are placed within the bodice in full view of the audience.²⁸⁴ Clare Brant rightly notes that the action of pressing the letter to the breast 'make[s] paper simulate skin' and expresses 'an erotic desire' to possess the beloved.²⁸⁵ This demonstrates that Margery overtly positions herself as a desiring subject. As Derek Hughes argues, 'Margery matures by gaining control of the art of the hand, and becoming adept in visual display by disguising herself as Alithea.'²⁸⁶ This is more than sleight of hand however. As Styan has pointed out, Margery and the actress playing her has purposefully turned her body into 'a useful object', a closet for concealing items.²⁸⁷

For heroines confined to the household such as Margery, manipulation of objects, or sleight of hand, provides the means by which the female character may achieve agency outside of the household. Katherine M. Oliver has commented that the letter-writing scene in *The Country Wife* is an example of the violence of male sexuality

²⁸⁴ J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 92.

²⁸⁵ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), p. 110.

²⁸⁶ Derek Hughes, *English Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 141.

²⁸⁷ J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance*, p. 92.

asserting itself over female sexuality, with the penknife symbolising the phallus.²⁸⁸

However, Pinchwife's acceptance of Margery's assertion that the letter is Alithea's, draws attention to the way in which the woman's body, as letter, is fluid and interchangeable and in this way, is able to change subjectivity more easily. The Quack doctor exemplifies the way in which the letter stands in for the female body: 'Bringing his wife to you is the next thing to bringing a love letter from her' (V.ii.38-9).

Margery's letter trick foreshadows her further manipulation of costume, along with space when she switches her own clothes for those of her sister-in-law Alithea and continues to outwit Pinchwife through a simple trick of swiftly moving from one side of the door, to another (V.i.117-122). Harcourt's depiction of his male rival as a 'cloak' foreshadows Margery's appropriation of Alithea's cloak:

HARCOURT A rival is the best cloak to steal to a mistress under without suspicion, and when we have once got to her as we desire, we throw him off like other cloaks. (III.ii.198-201)

Margery enacts Harcourt's metaphor, using Alithea's cloak to 'steal to' her prospective lover Horner. While men's view of themselves as subjects and other male bodies as objects to be disposed of, can ruin male bonds, women manipulating the view of their own bodies as interchangeable carries potentially more serious risks in Wycherley's play. Margery's identity trick not only threatens the financial security of Alithea's impending marriage to Sparkish, but also Alithea's honour.

Betty Goodfield, Frank, and Madam Goodfield in *The Woman Turn'd Bully* (1675) use clothing and props to construct new identities. Derek Hughes has criticised

²⁸⁸ Katherine M. Oliver, "“I will write Whore with this Penknife in your Face”: Female Amatory Letters, the Body, and Violence in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*", *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture 1660-1700*, 38 (2014), 41-60.

the play, arguing that it does not cross any boundaries.²⁸⁹ I argue that *The Woman Turn'd Bully* not only crosses boundaries of gender and subject-object relations, but also addresses the dichotomy between country and city. The play celebrates the way in which Betty's and Madam Goodfield's merry and playful country humour functions in the city space of exchange. Cross-dressing and the handling of objects change the heroine's relationship to bodies onstage. When Betty challenges her brother to a duel, expressing disappointment that her brother is 'one of those that will not rend the buttons from your doublet for any man's pleasure' she draws attention to the bodies around her (p. 34). As John Harvey states, 'dress, like literature, can be self-referential, enjoying a self-irony as men and women signal, both to their own gender and to the other, that they can play with style, with the relish of comedy.'²⁹⁰ Having the actress playing Betty hint at her physical sex and her body shape added an extra dimension to plots in which the heroine cross-dresses, a further sense of irony or pleasure for audiences. Disguised as a man, Betty's behaviour changes, she becomes the rude rake depicted onstage, correcting her brother on his speech and instructing Truman on how to converse with women and men (p. 19). The play's editors have observed that 'nothing in Truman and Ned's behaviour identifies them as rakes or even brings them close to the model of brisk male lover impersonated by Betty.'²⁹¹ Betty's impersonation of the rake serves to demonstrate the greater freedom of personal space held by men and her disguise enhances her skill in playing a variety of roles, whether interacting with Docket's Clerk, challenging Truman or seducing Loveal. Initially described as a 'stripling', 'smock-face', 'little fellow', Betty is later described as a 'She-wit' and 'Petticoat Sathan'; her

²⁸⁹Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 134.

²⁹⁰ John Harvey, 'Showing and Hiding: Equivocation in the Relations of the Body in Dress', *Fashion Theory*, 11 (2007), 65-94 (p. 75).

²⁹¹*The Woman Turn'd Bully* (2007 edition), p. 39.

identity shifts according to whether she wears breeches or petticoats, demonstrating that she is in transition (p. 19, p. 39, p. 18, p. 57, p. 69).

The duel between Truman and Betty is figured as a verbal, rather than a physical combat, as Truman states, 'I know the Duel will prove but a Wit combat at most' (p. 38). This exemplifies the way in which the duel could mean different things to different men. Jennifer Low has argued that fencing provided gentlemen with an extended sense of personal space. She states that the recipient of a wound, or those who lost the duel, were viewed as feminine or prepubescent. Low argues that female characters fight for didactic, rather than violent purposes and not to prove self-worth.²⁹² For the libertine rake, the duel was an act of showmanship, obscuring cowardice. The witty heroine's ability to carry out an intrigue in breeches is another facet of her skill in plots admired by the rake. The duel offers a means by which Betty may discourse intimately with Truman and try his affection for her under the guise of a rival in his love. While Betty's cross-dressing and handling of a sword is in some sense a didactic trial to test the rake's constancy, her disguise, initially a means of intercepting her mother's marriage plans for her, gives Betty a taste for performance which she struggles to shake off: 'I am resolv'd to have one frolick more in the open field of this world, before I enter into the enclosures of Matrimony' (p. 60).

Betty, who occupies a secure financial position and is skilled in commanding speech, already possesses the features of an assured masculine subject. The sword and breeches which function as conventional signs of masculinity, provide Betty with an elevated confidence which enables her to become intimate with other bodies around her, and to understand their performed identities. She states 'no threatnings, [...] Sir. Your

²⁹² Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 44-5, p. 49, p. 139.

great Threatners are ever the least performers' (p. 40). Betty's frequent references to lines from plays draw attention to the performative, or constructed nature of masculinity. Having Betty's rakish performance of duelling set in Lamb's Conduit, and staged in the theatre at Lincoln's Inn fields, situates spectators simultaneously in the green duelling space on which the theatre was built, conflating the performance space of the theatre with the duelling space and the legal space of the courts nearby. This provides a fluid connection between the performance of masculine identity in the city, of lawyers in the courtroom and of performers onstage. Whilst cross-dressed, Betty quotes the rake Wildblood from Dryden's *An Evening's Love* (1671) to court Mrs. Loveal:

BETTY [...] (As my Couzen Wildbloud has it), *I am an exceeding Honourer of course linnen; 'tis as proper sometimes in an under Garment, as a course Towel to rub and scrub me.*

(p. 9)

By repeating Wildblood's lines, the actress and dramatist cleverly conjure up other performances of the rake in spectators' minds. Derek Hughes argues that Betty's cross-dressing plot does not challenge subjectivity because her disguise is temporary and she cites the work of male dramatists.²⁹³ However, I would argue that Betty's invocation of Wildblood's lines is a joke shared by the actress with spectators, which encourages them to review performances of masculinity, to compare her performance of the rake with that of her fellow actors. In addition to this, the actress's reference to 'course linen', playfully draws attention to her undergarments as well as Loveal's, blurring subjectivities.

Betty's servant Frank blends male and female subject positions even before she cross-dresses due to her unisex name, which hints at the slippage between

²⁹³ Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 134.

Frances/Francis. This is made evident when Betty's brother does not recognise Frank in breeches, as their family maid. Such slippage of identity and obscurity of the gender of the character's name goes back to Richard Brome's *The Damoiselles* (1637-8) and Ben Jonson's comedy *The New Inn* (1629) as discussed by Alison Findlay. Findlay has argued in relation to boy actors, that Frank in Brome's comedy 'undoes binary oppositions of male subject and female object' and represents 'a lost ideal wholeness' which enacts 'the undecidability of castration [which is] an illusion of originary wholeness.'²⁹⁴ *The Woman Turn'd Bully* directly references these precedents as Loveal is Madam Goodfield's maid, while Frank is Betty's maid who cross-dresses. The playwright switches the genders of these characters and playfully stages a faux courtship scene between Loveal and Betty and one between Frank and Lucia's maid, in which Frank and Betty are commented upon as the 'strangest' men, with Betty neither 'man nor boy' (p. 18). In terms of gender, Betty and Frank are in transition Betty refers to Frank as 'wench' suggesting that she is young and Betty plays the type of young bully who is in between a man and a boy, blurring subject positions (p. 82). Despite her youth, Frank reads the bodies of other women, questioning the chastity of another servant, calling her a '*callow-maid*', which suggests that Frank is more experienced than she seems (p. 18).²⁹⁵ The name Frank would seem to imply the honesty associated with one from the countryside, but Betty's maid has been in the city before.

In contrast to Betty Goodfield, Madam Goodfield does not assume male dress to pursue her interests. Instead she makes use of props which relate to her country

²⁹⁴ Alison Findlay, 'Gendering the Stage', in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2017), pp. 456-473 (pp. 466-8).

²⁹⁵ The name 'Frank' in Restoration comedy serves a dual nature. Frank Harcourt in *The Country Wife* whose frankness is associated with his ulterior motives, rather than innocent honesty, is an example of this.

identity, such as her potent ‘Darby’ Ale which she brings with her to London (p. 13). Madam Goodfield’s honest country identity is also created through her relationship to clothes. From her derogatory comment that the ‘fine Gentlewoman’ elaborately dressed is ‘nought’, it is clear that the widow favours unadorned clothing herself (p. 27). As Styan notes, the heroine’s attitude toward clothing and her toilette distinguished a vain woman from a free-spirited one.²⁹⁶ Madam Goodfield’s association of the ‘fine Gentlewoman’ with deception contrasts with her construction of herself as one who ‘can’t dissemble’ (p. 30). Madam Goodfield’s Derbyshire ‘ale’ and penchant for smoking tobacco are continuations of her desire for plain-speaking directness, she is for ‘fair drinking, and fair dealing’ (p. 30). Deborah Payne and Harold Weber’s view that alcohol promotes honest social interaction in Restoration comedy is particularly relevant to Madam Goodfield’s use of alcohol as a social equaliser which aids her interaction with the lawyer Docket.²⁹⁷ Madam Goodfield’s props which relate to her Derbyshire identity bring her confidence in negotiating the city. Although she ‘hates London’, she receives Docket in her London accommodation surrounded by her Derbyshire luxuries and servants, enabling her to command Docket to ‘pray take a seat by me.’ She proposes drinking healths, placing herself in command of the space and encouraging Docket to see her as an equal (p. 27, p. 30). Madam Goodfield is a wealthy widow and is therefore able to act independently without the necessity of disguise, unlike her daughter, who must quit ‘the open field’ for the ‘enclosures of Matrimony’ (p. 60). Madam Goodfield refers to her independence and ability to behave as she wishes in public, contrasting herself with the women in ‘Town that take Tobacco’ who

²⁹⁶ J. L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (1986), p. 105.

²⁹⁷ Deborah C. Payne, ‘Reading Signs in *The Country Wife*’ *SEL*, 26 (1986), 403-419. Harold Weber, ‘Horner and His “Women of Honour” The Dinner Party in *The Country Wife*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 43 (1982), 107-120.

run ‘into a corner to do it’ (p. 29). Madam Goodfield constructs herself as an open, honest and plain-speaking woman, in contrast to the scheming or double-tongued women from the enclosed space of the city. The open space of the countryside is conflated with Madam Goodfield’s subversive behaviour of openly smoking a pipe. The editors of the play identify that ale was associated with the countryside, personified as a countryman in the pamphlet *Wine, Beere, Ale and Tobacco* (1630), and argue that while ‘the older characters are rooted in the separate spheres of town and country, this dichotomy does not apply to the younger generation, Betty and Ned are similar, if not identical, to those of their town partners Truman and Lucia.’²⁹⁸ However, I would argue that Betty, who is criticised by her brother Ned for turning into a ‘capricious She-wit’ after beginning as a pleasant country rogue, is celebrated for her country humour of jest, which light-heartedly impersonates and embraces the performance of different identities in a fluid, carnivalesque fashion (p. 57). Betty conflates the humour of the innocent, inclusive, fun-loving country trickster with the confidence and skill of the cunning and exclusive city trickster.²⁹⁹

The above plays demonstrate the way in which the female trickster’s manipulation of objects not only changes her relation to her own body, but to those around her. *The Frolicks* and *The Woman Turn’d Bully* celebrate the witty exploits of the unmarried and widowed female trickster, while Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* provides a darker portrait of the married trickster negotiating her identity as a sexual subject. Despite Margery’s position as object, which aids her manipulation of articles

²⁹⁸ *The Woman Turn’d Bully* (1675), ed. by María José Mora and others (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2007), pp. 35-7.
 Gallobelgicus, *Wine, Beere, Ale, and Tobacco. Contending for Superiority A Dialogue* (London: Thomas Coates, 1630).

²⁹⁹ For an example of cunning associated with the city, see IV.ii.156-8 of William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675).

within the household, she remains her husband's property. *The Frolicks* and *The Woman Turn'd Bully* present a much more fluid version of the subject-object relation through embodied wit in action.

Male Tricksters

While disguise and object-relations enable female characters to enjoy freedom outside the household, male tricksters invariably seek to enter the household, engaging with objects and architectural structures in order to do so. Because the male trickster functions outside the household, he takes greater risks in having to rely on, and place confidence in, numerous people – often strangers – in the pursuit of his designs. Risk is therefore a useful critical framework to assess the witty plots of male tricksters that involve objects, money and the material environment. According to the *OED*, the verb 'risk' enters the English language in 1660.³⁰⁰ Anthony Giddens, a prominent theorist of risk, argues that risk is a feature of modern industrial society, and that capitalism is one of the four conditions of modernity, characterised by risk.³⁰¹ The representations of tricksters in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama suggests that the risk society existed much earlier. The long eighteenth century saw a financial revolution with the creation of the Bank of England and establishment of the State Lottery in 1694, along with the introduction of banknotes and the Stock Exchange (1698) and the concepts of national debt and credit. Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have argued that knowledge and money provide a means of controlling the relations between subject-object in the

³⁰⁰ *OED Online* <www.oed.com> [accessed 14th May 2017], risk v.2.

³⁰¹ Anthony Giddens on modernity, quoted in *The Sociology of Anthony Giddens*, by Steven Loyal (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 115.

risk society.³⁰² Beck states that in the risk society ‘a social dynamic is set in motion, which can no longer be composed of and understood in class categories.’³⁰³ Through manipulation of money and knowledge, male tricksters in John Lacy’s *The Dumb Lady* (1672), *The Mistaken Husband* (1675), and Aphra Behn’s *The Lucky Chance* (1686) uproot traditional class distinctions to raise their own status through financial gain. Douglas Canfield has rightly pointed out that the male trickster often seeks to establish his estate, or to sustain his existing estate in the wake of a period of carefree spending.

While female tricksters plot from a position of objects within a system, male tricksters are already subjects within the system for whom commodities form part of their identity. This is evident from the characters’ names such as Sir Cautious Fulbank, who is a miser. As Marjorie Garber states, while “woman” in patriarchal society is conceived of as an artefact [...] “man” is likewise not fact but artefact, himself constructed, made of detachable parts.³⁰⁴ Male identity is constructed and is always determined by the commodities that provide him with status in society. The witty plots of the male trickster which capitalize on the way in which money promotes a fluidity of subject and object relations, pose a threat to the control of commodities, property and status of learned professionals and the landed gentry in *The Dumb Lady*, *The Mistaken Husband* and *The Lucky Chance*.

For the trickster in John Lacy’s *The Dumb Lady; or The Farrier Turn’d Physician* (1672), knowledge, rather than money, provides the means by which the

³⁰² Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

³⁰³ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 39.

³⁰⁴ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Crossdressing and Cultural Anxiety* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 41.

trickster improves his social position. Lacy's comedy is characterised by the problem of placing trust in expert knowledge, a feature that Anthony Giddens refers to as a symptom of the risk society.³⁰⁵ The play focuses on the potential of knowledge to disembed social relations. Anthony Giddens explains that 'disembedding mechanisms consist of expert systems: Examples of experts are doctors, lawyers, architects and, most importantly, scientists. Like symbolic tokens, expert systems permit the removal of social relations from their immediate context and their transferral across space and time.'³⁰⁶ The scene in which Drench the farrier must convince a team of physicians that he is indeed a trustworthy and knowledgeable professional, comically enacts the way in which knowledge enables traditional class relations to be uprooted, or in Giddens's words, disembedded. Lacy's comedy is characterised by the problem of placing trust in expert knowledge.³⁰⁷ A different kind of knowledge is privileged in the play as 'Invention has no room in learned heads / [...] th'illiterate are for fancie bent.'³⁰⁸ Lacy privileges the creative wit of those in a practical, rather than an intellectual profession. In contrast to *The Mistaken Husband* which I shall discuss later in the chapter, *The Dumb Lady* (1672) provides a striking example of a trickster who is a farrier, and therefore occupies a similar social position to an apothecary. Farriers were below physicians in rank, but by the eighteenth century were highly thought of. As Louise Hill-Curth points out, their status ranged from 'professional' farriers, self-styled farriers,

³⁰⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) p. 83, pp. 124-5.

³⁰⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p. 21, p. 83.

³⁰⁷ See above, pp. 124-5.

³⁰⁸ 'Epilogue' to John Lacy, *The Dumb Lady; or, The Farrier Turn'd Physician* (London: Thomas Dring, 1672).

[to] horseleeches and horse-doctors.³⁰⁹ The farrier adapts his existing knowledge of his profession and applies it to the treatment of humours. Drench, the farrier, constructs himself as ‘a doer’ rather than one of the ‘talkers’, or physicians that use ‘canting words’ (pp. 71-2). As Giddens states, trust is based on ‘ignorance’, people trust experts who are skilled in an area that the lay person is not.³¹⁰ Lacy compares the knowledge of the farrier in practice with the discursive knowledge of anatomists, as a means to cozen out of their money those who do not understand Latin. The farrier plays upon this himself, speaking in pseudo-Arabic to confuse the physicians.

Disembedding reveals the instability of what Giddens refers to as ‘expert systems.’³¹¹ Giddens argues that tension is generated between lay scepticism and professional expertise during ‘access points’ or face to face encounters and argues that these encounters threaten the credibility of abstract systems. The farrier uses a combination of his knowledge of equine maladies, skewed physical proof (urine) and pidgin Latin from a parson pretending to be his assistant to convince the team of physicians of his expertise. Thus, his identity is transformed, the farrier is ‘turn’d physician’ as the title suggests. Michael O’ Donnell’s view that being a Doctor is similar to being an actor, as the ‘skill of the performer blinds them [the patients] to the artifice that has to be employed’, can be seen in Lacy’s play in which the farrier’s performance convinces the physicians that he too is a learned physician.³¹² Drench is transformed or ‘gallantified’ into a physician and this transformation is made evident in

³⁰⁹ Louise Hill-Curth , ‘The Care of the Brute Beast: Animals and the Seventeenth-century Medical Market-place’, *Social History of Medicine*, 15 (2002), 375-392, abstract.

³¹⁰ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p. 89

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 21 and p. 83.

³¹² Michael O’ Donnell, ‘Doctors as Performance Artists’ in *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and Jane McNaughton (Gordonville: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 35-48 (pp. 38-9).

the speech prefixes of the script, which no longer lists the character as ‘Drench’ but ‘Doctor.’ The farrier’s performance earns him the respect of the other physicians. Drench’s transformation alters other characters’ identities, signalling that all is not as it appears: Olina is not dumb, Leander is not married, the parson is not an assistant to the physician, and Isobel is not mad.

Lacy takes fluidity of identity further, comically merging the distinction between people and animals in a skilled performance which blurs subject positions through sympathy. Drench states that ‘horse and man’ are of ‘one constitution’, that feeding horse’s blood to a man cures him (p. 30). This is evident from the way in which human diseases are replaced with those suffered by animals and vice versa, such as ‘the Pox in a Horse, and...the mourning of the Chine in a man’ (p. 72). Stiruglio, Drench’s fake medical assistant, makes the point that doctors should train as farriers first because working with horses heightens the practitioner’s sympathy, as they must interpret and respond to the horse’s behaviour (p. 73). The psychology employed by doctors when they treat patients’ real or imagined illnesses involves a performance of sympathy and understanding. Subject positions are blurred as Gernette (Olinda’s father) has his pulse taken by Drench, who diagnoses Olinda’s malady based upon her father’s pulse. This generates the idea that father and daughter are of one flesh joined by sympathy, and that Drench can diagnose Olinda by her father’s anxiety (p. 20). Tom Tyler’s article ‘If Horses Had Hands’ cites a case study of a horse that was believed to have superior intelligence, before scientists realised that the horse was reading and responding to the body-language of those conducting the experiment.³¹³ Drench merely responds to the physical signals emitted by those around him, his suggestion that one of the physicians

³¹³ Tom Tyler, ‘If Horses Had Hands’, *Society & Animals*, 11 (2003), 268-281.

has the cow-itch convincing the other physicians that they have it too, through shared sympathy (p. 74). The learned physicians are exposed as asses when they are convinced that he is indeed a skilled doctor.

Lacy's play, which draws on Molière's *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* (1667), changes the position of Drench from a woodcutter to a farrier. This choice is significant as Drench's skill in understanding and controlling horses is proven to be applicable to people. This flaunts Drench's credit, as good horsemanship or the ability to work with horses was associated with the ability to run a stable household and State. In the case of Drench, "expert" knowledge provides him with credit:

DOCTOR I shall get credit as I am her Physician, and money as I your bringer
together, or your pimping friend.
Thus shall I be your Advocate and Protector, (rings)
And venerably call'd both baud and Doctor.

(p. 29)

The farrier earns credit or trust in the risk society through 'expert knowledge', which displays his manhood through his control of horses and of people, positioning him as self-sufficient.³¹⁴ The assistance Drench provides to Leander, the play's romantic hero, enables Drench to enter a credit network built on trust and to improve his social position.

While Drench employs his practical knowledge, positioning himself as an expert to form social ties based upon trust, Hazard in *The Mistaken Husband* (1675) disembeds social systems through the exchange of money and the risk-taking activity of identity theft. Hazard's manipulation of subject-object relations in the risk society contributes to a transformation of his identity. The stolen identity plot of *The Mistaken Husband*

³¹⁴ Alexandra Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England', p. 89.

shares similarities with the remarkable sixteenth century legend of Martin Guerre, a peasant who disappears, returning later to find another man in his place, who claims to be him.³¹⁵ Hazard, as his name suggests, embraces risk and relishes the challenge of impersonating Manly as there is 'profit at the end as/ Well as pleasure' (p. 3). This emphasises that the risk is accompanied by the benefit of reward. *The Mistaken Husband* depicts wit in action in Hazard's transformation of identity: Hazard refers to himself as 'younger brother of the House of Mercury' associated with alchemical transformation and cozening (p. 3). Hazard's desire to enter the household, to obtain property and to 'exchange this Transitory life for a better', is similar to the rake's aspirations of securing a home and financial stability (p. 8).

Hazard takes greater risks than other libertines who plot on home-turf, such as Horner in *The Country Wife*. Hazard's reliance on others for information and his decision to undertake an intrigue in unfamiliar territory involves high levels of risk. As Beck and Giddens point out, expert systems of knowledge are less trustworthy in the risk society. Although Hazard gives himself a scar to physically resemble Manly, he must persuade those closest to Manly that he is their friend returning from a nine-year absence at sea. Hazard's question 'have we many more Rooms to go through before / We come at hers [his wife's]?' reveals his lack of knowledge of the house (p. 15). However, Manly's long absence enables him to claim that 'tis so long ago, I've almost forgotten' (p. 15). A similar incident occurs when Hazard mistakes Isobel for another of Mrs. Manly's cousins (p. 24). Hazard builds relations with his accomplice Underwit, a servant named Thomas and the Watch to enable him to take charge of the household, the city and its inhabitants through bribing them. By Act Four Hazard has conquered the

³¹⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

city, causing Manly to ask, 'Is all the City Mad?' when he is falsely arrested at Hazard's request (p. 44). Hazard and Underwit are 'pioneers', colonisers of space, with Hazard described as a 'Master-Architect' (p. 4, p. 39). The term 'Master-Architect' depicts Hazard's desire to create a household for himself through stealing the identity and position of another (p. 39). Hazard refers to the intrigue as 'house-keeping' as his plot involves not only taking Manly's place, but also keeping it even when Manly returns to claim his status and property (p. 48).

Hazard views others as either objects to further his desire or obstacles in his path (p. 39). 'Trusty Thomas' the household servant becomes an 'instrument' of Hazard's design, fluidly passing between the street and the household, conveying messages to Mrs. Manly. By creating ties with other characters, invading the household through trust, Hazard convinces others that he is Manly. Therefore, these social relations cement his stolen identity. The language used to describe Hazard's trickery positions Manly's father-in-law Learcut as a piece of difficult architecture to smooth over: 'How smooth your Fancy paves a rugged way? and with / What ease you polish *Learcut's* harshness?' (I.i p. 3). Anthony Giddens' assertion that within the risk society people are only concerned with the future, can be seen in Hazard's copious planning and his focus on the way forward.³¹⁶ Mrs. Manly symbolises property and fortune for Hazard, evident from the way in which he refers to his desire to gain 'Access' to her (p. 4). Hazard articulates his plot to cozen Mr. and Mrs. Manly in spatial terms, stating 'ther's not / A secret passage in their Love', boasting that he will easily break the ties between the couple and gain Mrs. Manly's fortune (p. 4). As Giddens remarks, fluidity of knowledge disembeds spatial and temporal distance. Hazard's knowledge of the couple's secrets,

³¹⁶ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 84.

obtained from a drunken Manly, enables Hazard to traverse the emotional and physical distance between himself and Mrs. Manly and to overcome the potential emotional obstacle of Manly's many years of absence from his wife.³¹⁷

Objects, clothing, and wealth convince Learcut and Thomas of Hazard's wealth and therefore his worth and trustworthiness. As Alexandra Shepard argues, a man's status, trustworthiness, and credit was determined through his 'self-sufficiency, economic independence and responsibility towards others' which enabled him to participate in networks of trade with others.³¹⁸ The scene in which Thomas asks Mrs. Manly 'Can you believe this?' and 'gives her gold', demonstrates the way in which gold or money creates new bonds between characters (p. 10). Relations within the play function through exchange of material objects for information. Hazard gives Mr. Manly 'Clothes / And Money' in exchange for information about his past over the course of their drunken meetings, so that Hazard may pretend to be Manly (p. 4). The bonds created through alcohol inspire a false sense of trust through the loosening of social inhibitions. The play highlights a distinction between those characters, such as the Boatswain who is used to risk and does not trust in promises or material goods, and those such as the servant Thomas who is easily bribed by goods. While the 'promise of a Turkey Pye at *Easter*' is enough to make Thomas 'lean to my [Underwit's] party, and now he has committed him [Manly] to Newgate', the Boatswain refuses Learcut's offer of 'Cheese... a water'd Chamlet Petticoat,...a Gold wedding Ring for every / Finger' for his wife in exchange for Learcut's freedom (IV.v, p. 48, V.i, p. 53). The Boatswain asserts that he 'know[s] men in necessity are always prodigal of promises, but once

³¹⁷ *ibid*, pp. 21-22.

³¹⁸ Alexandra Shepard, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), 75-106, (p. 89, p. 86).

escap'd the storm, the Saint to whom they vow'd is laugh't at' (p. 58). The Boatswain, who is accustomed to venturing and to those who venture, recognises the lack of worth of a man's word and the tenuous nature of bonds generated through risk. In contrast, Thomas concerns himself with the 'reward' 'for all the wit I have expended in this business', believing in the fiction of Hazard's ships and white mares, thereby seeking to improve his own status (p. 12).

Hazard's attainment of the 'golden key...broke betwixt / Them [Mr. and Mrs. Manly] at their separation', serves as proof to convince Manly's trusty servant Thomas that Hazard is Manly (p. 4). The 'golden key' in *The Mistaken Husband* is not a real key, but two pieces of gold used as a bridal token by the couple.³¹⁹ The gold carries agency as it is the object that enables Hazard's physical union with Mrs. Manly, exemplified by the stage direction in which Hazard 'gives' Thomas the piece of gold, referring to it as the piece of his heart that 'never was whole since fate divided us' (p. 9).

The bed-trick which follows Hazard's return of the gold piece to Mrs. Manly literalises Anthony Giddens's concept of disembedding, which signals the lifting out of social relations from their local contexts of interaction and facilitates their restructuring across time-space, enabling the past to be appropriated to shape the future.³²⁰ Disembedding in the form of the bed-trick literally uproots traditional social ties, exchanging one body for another, for a more fluid sense of social interaction. Through bedding Mrs. Manly, Hazard 'disembeds' her relationship to Mr. Manly. Hazard's elaborate bed-trick means that the trust between Manly and Mrs. Manly is replaced by

³¹⁹ See Gellert Spencer Alleman, *Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), p. 12.

³²⁰ Steven Loyal, *The Sociology of Anthony Giddens* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2003), p. 116.

what Giddens refers to as a relationship of ‘pure intimacy’ generated between Mrs. Manly and Hazard through the process of individual selves opening out to another through risk.³²¹ Hazard, to his own surprise, transforms into a devoted husband and benefits from the improvement of his status through property, wealth, and a wife.

Wit in action in *The Mistaken Husband* questions and renegotiates the view of who is the true owner of property. In *The Mistaken Husband* the real Manly is revealed to be undeserving of Mrs. Manly because his interest in her is purely financial; Manly leaves his wife after Underwit gives him the equivalent of her dowry. As Alleman observes, ‘seven years absence was not, as Underwit maintains, cause for annulment, it was sufficient to protect the deserted person who married after ...seven years.’³²² The revelation that Manly did not love his wife and that their marriage was never consummated exorcises unsettling feelings about the intrigue, that may have been experienced by married spectators.

The sheer speed of the plot and swift shift that occurs at the end of the play, which elevates and rewards the witty characters, would have appealed to rakes and members of the serving class, due to the alternative measure of those deserving reward. The realisation that Underwit is Learcut’s son, and therefore entitled to the plate and jewels he steals earlier in the play, demonstrates that wit reveals true ownership in its depiction of the witty as deserving of reward. This initially seems to provide an obstacle to Hazard’s desire of an estate as Learcut now has a male heir. However, the partnership forged between Hazard and Underwit through the risks of plotting ensures Hazard a portion of money, courtesy of Underwit. Wit in action’s redistribution of goods and

³²¹ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, p. 124.

³²² Gellert Spencer Alleman, *Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1942), p. 131.

status enables the rake figure to achieve his desire of attaining an estate. The rewards of witty action are shared between the characters in the play and are mutually beneficial. This would have appealed to a range of spectators because all members of the household, the master, his daughter, the rake and the servants are shown to benefit from wit in action.

While Manly's long absence in *The Mistaken Husband* enables Mrs. Manly to remarry, the bed-trick in Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686) dissolves an existing marriage as Julia and her husband agree to separate.³²³ Behn represents gambling as offering the potential to renegotiate personal relationships, taking notions of credit, value and ownership further.³²⁴ Behn dramatizes the view of personal relationships as a process of exchange characterised by risk. *The Lucky Chance* is a deeply unsettling comedy in which two conspiring tricksters, Gayman and Sir Cautious Fulbank trick Lady Fulbank into sleeping with Gayman. Derek Hughes argues that the dice game for Lady Fulbank's body is a 'ruthless' example of 'woman exchange.'³²⁵ Part of the reason for divided opinions on the play is due to the way in which Behn playfully presents people as objects of exchange. This problematizes the view of Julia, described as a 'bauble', as active or passive in her own destiny.³²⁶ The metaphor of people as goods to be exchanged is literalised in the play, in which the object-subject relation is blurred

³²³ See Gellert Alleman, *Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy*, p. 107 and p. 117.

³²⁴ Aphra Behn, *The Lucky Chance*, in *Behn: Five Plays*, ed. by Maureen Duffy (London: Methuen, 1990), pp. 1 -100.

³²⁵ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 161.

³²⁶ Robert Erickson, in contrast to Hughes, argues that Julia is based on Behn and resembles a playwright/creator figure, struggling for independence (See Erickson's essay, 'Lady Fulbank and the Poet's Dream in Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance*', ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey, *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 89-112.

through action involving things onstage. Gayman is conveyed into Sir Cautious's house via a chest that Sir Cautious refers to as containing 'rich commodities' (p. 88).

The male trickster in *The Lucky Chance* portrays Colin Nicholson's view of relationships as a process of 'valorisation and transference' in which one object could be exchanged for another; Sir Cautious exchanges his wife for the sum of three hundred pounds.³²⁷ Earl A. Wilputte's view that the play criticises the 'urge in society to sacrifice anything for money' and 'the declining power of the individual to combat it or to make a difference', fails to observe the converse, the possibility provided by money for the male trickster, the liberating potential of risk in the Restoration.³²⁸ Elaine Hobby argues that the bed-trick represents 'the inescapable economic basis of men's sexual activities.'³²⁹ For Gayman the bedtrick between himself and Julia is ultimately an economic transaction as it results in him securing an estate in future.

Sylvia Mieskowski has noted the resurgence of the bed-trick as plot device on the Restoration stage.³³⁰ Its revival highlighted the currency of risk, opportunity and movement of people onstage. There are two bedtricks in the play: one organised by Julia and her servant Bredwel in Act 3 and one arranged by Gayman and Sir Cautious in Act 5. Gayman's successful bed-trick results in Sir Cautious Fulbank bequeathing his 'Lady [and...] whole estate' to Gayman (V.vii, p. 97). Social disembedding enables Gayman to appropriate Sir Cautious's land, wealth, and role as Julia's husband to form his own future.

³²⁷ Colin Nicholson, *Writing and the Rise of Finance: Capital Satires of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.7.

³²⁸ Earla A. Wilputte, 'Wife Pandering in Three Eighteenth-Century Plays', *SEL*, 38 (1998), 447-464 (p. 462).

³²⁹ Elaine Hobby, 'No Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127 (p. 124).

³³⁰ Sylvia Mieszkowski, 'Unauthorized Intercourse: Early Modern Bed Tricks and Their Under-Lying Ideologies', *ZAA*, 61 (2013), 319-340.

Julia is also positioned as a skilled manipulator of objects and space within the play as she is a character who sets objects in motion. Catherine Gallagher has commented that it is precisely Julia's 'nullity', her position as object, that enables her to secure her desires.³³¹ In Act 3 Scene 5 Julia directs a masque and bedtrick in her husband's house with help from her servant Bredwel. By stating that the fault 'was all my husband's' after Gayman's bedtrick in Act 5 she deliberately positions herself as an object, whose value must be protected by her husband to abscond blame (V.vii, p. 93). Julia's bedtrick is interrupted by the arrival of Sir Feeble. Despite Julia's skill in moving objects around such as the theft of her husband's money, the gift of her ring to Gayman, and manoeuvring Gayman around the house, Julia cannot escape her fate as object in the play. Julia's status as object is confirmed by Gayman's description of her body in disguise during her masque as akin to 'a canvas bag of wooden Ladles' (IV.i, p.66). The play leaves spectators with the uncomfortable notion that Julia remains a victim of object-exchange and her only option in the society she is part of is to manipulate other objects around her to maintain her own personal and financial security.

Giddens's concept of mutual disclosure which enables pure intimacy is marred in the play's bedtrick as Julia 'weeps' at the betrayal of trust that has transformed her identity from wife to 'foul Adultress' against her will (V.vii, p. 92). Although critics such as Julia Fawcett argue that the stage directions included shortly after the bed-trick in which Julia kneels to Gayman indicate a change in Julia's power and status within the scene, I would argue that despite Julia's skilled manipulation of

³³¹ Catherine Gallagher, 'Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Comedies of Aphra Behn' in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 1993), pp. 65-85 (pp. 82-4).

objects and space in the play, she is unable to move beyond the position of object as she is moved from one forced union into another (V.vii, pp. 92-3).³³²

As one of Behn's later plays the expectation is that her heroine will achieve some form of independence. By the end of the play Julia has 'no third identity' as Hobby has argued.³³³ The expectation of female liberation falls short in the play. As a married trickster Julia is already her husband's property. Unmarried tricksters such as Clarabell in Polwhele's *The Frolicks* (1671) and Betty Goodfield in *The Woman Turn'd Bully* (1675) are able to capitalise on blurring the subject-object relation with greater success.

Gambling provides another example of the transformation of social relations through financial exchange, which aids the trickster's improvement of their status. The inability of the aristocracy to handle the risk of gambling in *The Lucky Chance* separates the skilled trickster from those who lack wit. Money, as Giddens' concept of 'disembedding' makes clear, uproots the social distinctions between people, and the risk of gambling carries the potential for individuals to switch social positions. Sir Cautious is not at home with such risk, commenting after he has lost his wager with Gayman, that he is 'as restless as a Merchant in stormy Weather, that has ventur'd all his Wealth in one Bottom' (V.vii, p. 91). In contrast to Julia and Gayman who take risks through manipulation of money and in Julia's case the bestowal of a ring to confirm their desires, Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble are unable to risk full participation in this process of exchange which involves embracing the blurring of the subject-object relation. This

³³² Julia Fawcett, 'Unmapping London: Urbanization and the Performance of Personal Space in Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance*', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 50 (2017), 155-171 (p. 166).

³³³ Elaine Hobby, 'No Stolen Object, but her Own: Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*', *Women's Writing*, 6:1 (1999), 113-127 (p. 124).

is exemplified by Act Three Scene Five in which Sir Cautious and Sir Feeble are separated by a table and are unable to communicate, instead they 'sit gaping and staring' at one another (p. 55). The scene plays upon their verbal and physical impotence which is displayed through their inability to treat the table as anything but a barrier. As Kirk Combe points out 'England moved from an aristocratic, land-based political economy to a mercantile, capitalistic one.'³³⁴ Sir Cautious's title aligns him with aristocratic status based on hereditary entitlement while Gayman who is a gambler, is aligned with the new, shifting economy (p. 10). This reflects the way in which the beaux and rising merchant class began to replace the gentry in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Sir Cautious, as his name suggests, does not understand trade under the risk society as 'he exposed this treasure;' and 'like silly Indians bartered thee for trifles' (V.vii, p. 92). Thomas Kavanagh in *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance* has argued that gambling was a social performance through which members of the aristocracy confirmed their status, as only one of true status would risk it.³³⁵ However, *Advice Concerning Gaming* (1668) states, 'there are but a few casts at Dice, betwixt a Person of Fortune and a Beggar.'³³⁶ Justine Crump rightly argues that gambling threatens signification of status.³³⁷ As Behn demonstrates, gambling provides a means by which those of lower social standing, the libertine who has spent all of his money, may achieve an estate.

³³⁴ Kirk Combe, Rakes, 'Wives and Merchants: Shifts from the Satirical to Sentimental' in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 291-308 (p. 295).

³³⁵ Thomas Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 42.

³³⁶ Anon, *Leather-more, or, Advice Concerning Gaming* (London: [n.pub.] 1668), pp. 3-4.

³³⁷ Justine Crump, *The Perils of Play: Eighteenth-Century Ideas About Gambling*, <http://www.histecon.magd.cam.ac.uk/docs/crump_perils.pdf> [accessed 14 May 2017] (p. 27).

As these examples show, the competitive wit of the male trickster operates differently from the coquettish and subversive wit of the female trickster onstage who, from her position as object, dextrously manipulates material objects to create a new identity, or to occupy a range of identities. The male trickster, by contrast, extends his own status through trade, exchanging objects to prove his worth. Through trade in public spaces, the male trickster gains credit to enter private spaces and secure a wife and property. The male trickster is largely self-seeking, using his wit to compete with and usurp the existing position of his rivals. Wit in action enables the redistribution of goods and property through trade, and therefore provides an alternate measure of ownership, based on those deserving of property, rather than those born into privilege.

Mischievous Servants

Servants invariably occupy the position of ‘objects’ or ‘instruments’ and are integral to their masters’ and mistress’ intrigues as useful objects of service. The next section of this chapter will consider the role of servants, arguing that they occupy a fluid position between subject-object, upstairs-downstairs, inside-outside, selfless action and self-interest. The view of servants as extensions of their master/mistress is evident from their names which describe the role they perform, such as ‘Whisper’, ‘Scentwell’, ‘Handy’, ‘Drawer’ and ‘Patch.’³³⁸ Servants’ fluid relation to space and material objects reveals the way in which they employ wit in action to interact with those outside the

³³⁸ Susanna Centlivre, *The Busybody* (1709) ed. by Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan, *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies* (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 293-363.

Elizabeth Polwhele, *The Frolicks* (1671), ed. by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

George Etherege, *The Man of the Mode*, pp. 526-589.

household, to affect change within the household. In this way, servants are integral to the definition of space and the identities of those they serve.

A search for texts containing ‘servants’ in the title on *Early English Books* online returned a particularly interesting case of theft of household objects. The case of ‘Robert Bolron and Lawrence Maybury, servants, against their late master, Sir Thomas Gascoigne’ (1680) provides an example of the way in which servants frequently stole from their masters and refashioned themselves as gentlemen through clothing and commodities. Lawrence Maybury was suspected of the theft of ‘some twenty Pieces of Gold, [a] Wedding Ring, and several little Stone Rings, Medals, and other things, to the value of about sixty Pounds’ when the servant, who was not ‘worth a Groat’ and had a small salary, was seen clothed finely and in the company of gentlemen.³³⁹ Historian Danae Tankard points out that clothing ‘was sold for cash, exchanged for food or immediately put on’ by thieves.³⁴⁰ Throughout the seventeenth century, clothing was an important signifier of social status, those of high-status expressed concern about those of lower rank wearing the same clothing as them. As Tankard notes, ‘household servants and apprentices, both male and female, were noted to have a particular weakness for fashionable clothing.’³⁴¹ Cynthia Lowenthal observes that Restoration spectators recognised that aristocratic status could be performed, resulting in theatre managers warning actresses not to wear their costumes outside of the theatre.³⁴²

³³⁹ Anon, *An Abstract of the Accusation of Robert Bolron and Lawrence Maybury, Servants, Against Their Late Master, Sir Thomas Gascoigne, Kt. and Bart. of Barnbow in York-shire, for High-Treason with His Tryal and Acquittal, 11 February 1679/80* (Printed for C.R., 1680), p. 1.

³⁴⁰ Danae Tankard, “‘I Think Myself Honestly Decked’: Attitudes to the Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Rural History*, 26 (2015), 17-33 (p. 28).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁴² Cynthia Lowenthal, ‘Sticks and Rags, Bodies and Brocade: Essentializing Discourse and the Late Restoration Playhouse’, in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in*

Clothing as a means of transforming one's identity was not only present onstage, where actresses wore clothes belonging to those of a higher status, but also off-stage in the case of Nell Gwyn, who rose above her station by becoming the King's mistress.

Alithea in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* refers to women in the theatre audience wearing masks to conceal their identity.³⁴³ As Liza Piccard notes, during the Restoration servants were over-worked and underpaid and were often given clothes by their masters. Piccard references a case in which a female servant took advantage of being washed and clothed and then ran away before commencing work.³⁴⁴

In *The Mistaken Husband* clothing is highly valued by the servants, who trade confidential information about the household in exchange for pieces of clothing. Thomas and Isobel who serve in the miser Learcut's household have the status of 'instruments' or objects of use, but desire the status of subjects. These servant tricksters make the most of their ability to move upstairs and downstairs, along with their access to the wine cellar and their master's other commodities. Their sly acquisition of objects belonging to their master and mistress depicts the way in which their cunning and subversive wit elevates them to the position of subject. It is significant that the servants in *The Mistaken Husband* have their own names, rather than being referred to in terms of their function in the household. In contrast to the servants in *The Busybody*, Thomas and Isobel in *The Mistaken Husband* are interested in advancing their own position; Thomas dreams of having 'three or four knights to wait on me', while Isobel wishes she were 'a dozen year [o]lder' so that she may have her mistress's suitor Hazard as a lover

Restoration Drama, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 219-233 (p. 228).

³⁴³ William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, III.i.101 (p. 1060).

³⁴⁴ Liza Piccard, *Restoration London* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 175.

(pp. 13-14). Relationships between the trickster servants in the play are based upon material exchange of goods in order to construct their identity:

ISOBEL [...] I know he'll be constant to his poor *Bell*, that gave him two-yards of Ferset Ribbond t'other day for a pair of Shoe-strings [...] Have I not starch't thy Bands to bid defiance to thy Masters?

(p. 12, p. 15)

Clothing becomes an extended metaphor for self-fashioning to raise one's status.

Thomas and Isobel list their trade of goods within the household, goods which reflect their social aspirations. Both subversively construct a higher social status for themselves through their subtle thefts. Thomas believes clothing will transform his identity; his response to Hazard's query into his health is to state that he 'want[s] Clothes, and money' (p. 5). Both Thomas and Isobel read other characters' status through their clothing. For example, Thomas explains that the supposed Manly is not the 'Quondum man in the thread-bare-breeches' 'But [the man in] dazelling Scarlet, lac'd and lin'd with Gold' (p. 5). Thomas implies that Manly's sartorial and economic transformation constitutes an ontological shift, as he has come respectfully to claim his wife; his rich clothing therefore raises his credit.³⁴⁵ Thomas is manipulated by Hazard and misled by the objects that Hazard uses to cement his stolen identity, such as the 'six Flanders Mares', along with the forged 'Bills of Lading' for his fictional trading ships (p. 8, p. 17).

Such exchanges of goods affecting a person's identity are based upon self-interest and the witty grasping of opportunity. The servant tricksters in *The Mistaken Husband* relate to each other in terms of exchanging goods and raising one another's status, thus mirroring the relationship that the men have with Mrs. Manly. Mrs. Manly

³⁴⁵ The play's epilogue comments on dress and status, that 'these hir'd Signiors when we meet together, / May then wear Sattin, though they now wear Leather.' The epilogue implies that that support for the play will improve the actors' economic standing and as a result, their garments.

is openly referred to as a 'Freehold' property by Manly (p. 36). Similarly, Thomas, as an 'instrument' owned by a Master, is also property. However, Thomas's position as an object that can interact with and serve multiple masters provides him with agency, as he is able to calculate whose interests best serve his own. The following quotation depicts the realisation that Thomas is serving two masters:

MANLY (*takes Thomas violently by an Arm*) Sirrah, dare you deny that I am her husband?

HAZARD. (*Takes him as eagerly by the other*) Dar'st thou deny she is my Wife?

(p. 42)

Thomas becomes a physical object as he is pulled by his masters. His role as instrument puts him at risks on all sides, including from Mrs. Manly. This crisis of ownership, not only who owns Mrs. Manly but to whom does Thomas belong, appears to reduce Thomas from a subject to a worthless object passed between the two men. However, the ambiguity of where Thomas' loyalty truly lies demonstrates his value as an individual subject, as he is asked to confirm each man's status as rightful owner of Mrs. Manly. Paradoxically, 'Transitory' Thomas's absence of allegiance positions him as a free and fluid subject. In contrast, Hazard's and Manly's identities are truly threatened. Property determined a man's status, therefore the absence of recognised ownership of a prosperous wife produces anxiety and threatens to damage his credit.

Similarly, once Learcut is divested of his gold and plate, his status as subject is threatened. The servants take over the house and raid the cellar for wine and beer. After he is imprisoned onboard a ship, taken into the liminal space of the sea, and believed to be dead, subject positions are reversed as Learcut becomes a servant figure when he returns home and answers the door:

LEARCUT Methinks some body knocks at door, (*one knocks.*)
And now, methinks I open it. (*he opens the door.*)

(p. 63)

Learcut ingeniously makes use of the opportunity to play ghost or ‘Inhabitant of the lower Region’, to ‘ramble through every Room, and play some fair Tricks’ (p. 64). Once Learcut loses his fixed status, his wit comes into play. The above quotation not only refers to the ‘lower Region’ of death, but also the downstairs areas of the house, occupied and run by the servants. *The Mistaken Husband* references Shakespeare’s *King Lear* not only in the name Learcut, but also in the servants’ abuse of their master’s house. Learcut, being divested of his worldly goods and life, is restored to another form of property, his long-lost son Underwit, who encourages him to acknowledge Hazard’s value (p. 69). While objects constitute status and identity in *The Mistaken Husband*, their fluid exchange signals the way in which subject positions can be affected and exchanged through the witty trickster’s aspirations. ‘Transitory Thomas’ is a useful object of service who wittily conveys Hazard in and out of the house and is integral to Hazard’s plots. As Paddy Lyons observes, hierarchies are resumed in comedy which means that servants rarely undermine the play’s closure, despite their subversive wit.³⁴⁶ Rewarded with a wife at the end of the play and the continuation of service, Thomas’s delusions of grandeur of becoming a merchant remain unfulfilled.

Susanna Centlivre’s *The Busybody* (1709) develops the notion of servants as instruments, by making use of servants as extensions of the heroine’s creative self and transforming place into space (p. 48). In *The Busybody*, wit in action exercised by servant tricksters transforms the house into a protective space in which servants and female characters, who are familiar with the entrances, exits, nooks and crannies of the house, safely convey male love interests in and out of the household. Spatial theorist Gaston Bachelard adopts a psychoanalytic approach to the house, viewing this space as

³⁴⁶ Paddy Lyons, ‘What do the Servants Know?’ in *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England: From Leviathan to the Licensing Act*, ed. by Catie Gill (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 11-32 (p. 18).

a protective shelter for the dreamer.³⁴⁷ Rather than associating the household space with dreams, I view the house in Restoration drama as a female body, a feminine space in which men who are out of place in the domestic sphere are offered refuge from discovery.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, comic action is increasingly set within the confines of the household. The house as architectural object and people's relations within it become important in the plots of Restoration plays, facilitating the movement of bodies and things. In contrast to Paddy Lyons's view that servants in Restoration drama possess household secrets but do not participate in the plot, the servants in *The Busybody* provide routes to liberty for Centlivre's heroines.³⁴⁸ The stakes of risk are higher for women imprisoned within the home, such as Isabinda. However, servants Patch, Scentwell and Whisper play an important role in the intrigue plot, creatively transforming the household from a place of confinement into a space of liberation.³⁴⁹ In relation to early modern women's relationship with space, Alison Findlay has acknowledged the way in which women proved adept at moving fluid currents of desire in enclosed spaces.³⁵⁰ Patch, Isabinda's chambermaid, can pass easily in and out of the household, conveying messages to Isabinda's lover Sir Charles. Patch acts as agent for Isabinda, and in this way, is an extension of her identity. As Anderson acknowledges, Patch provides 'the literal patch in the ruptured strategies of her mistress' (p. 120). Whisper acts as Isabinda's legs, carrying confidential messages

³⁴⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 6.

³⁴⁸ Paddy Lyons, 'What do the Servants Know?' in *Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England* (2010), pp. 11-32 (p. 13, p. 17).

³⁴⁹ Susanna Centlivre, *The Busybody* (1709), in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies*, ed. by Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 293-363. Further references will be given parenthetically.

³⁵⁰ Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 214.

between Isabinda and Sir Charles (p. 335). Knowledge of events within and outside of Isabinda's household is exchanged with Miranda's household by Patch. Patch, who used to work for Miranda and was recommended by her to Isabinda, connects the two households, establishing a Sapphic network of wit. Bernard Capp refers to the way in which neighbours and friends provided a protective community in early modern society, in contrast to the sense of the city as a large place full of faces and without intimacy.³⁵¹ Rather than depicting London as 'a wide town' as the playwright of *The Woman Turn'd Bully* does, Centlivre's play displays a small, yet witty network that protects female interest in the household.³⁵² The aid provided by Patch within the household, and Scentwell and Whisper outside of the household, enables the oppressive household place to be turned into creative space through pregnant and Sapphic wit, as information and other persons pass freely in and out of the home unbeknownst to Isabinda's oppressive guardian Sir Jealous.³⁵³

Isabinda is described as having a 'pregnant wit' and, unlike the female tricksters previously discussed, plots from within the household, stating that 'confinement sharpens the invention' (p. 318). Kristeva's semiotic chora which is associated with the generative body is relevant to Isabinda's wit, which Centlivre relates to the materiality of the female body.³⁵⁴ The chora has recently been interpreted by feminist critics such

³⁵¹ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 157.

³⁵² *The Woman Turn'd Bully*, ed. by María José Mora and others (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2007), p. 173.

³⁵³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

³⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

as Elizabeth Grosz and Emmanuel Bianchini as an active and creative site.³⁵⁵ As Patch states, ‘though she can’t come abroad, we have a way to bring him home, in spite of old Argus’ (p. 302). Through inspiration or wit out of necessity, the women turn a place of confinement into a play space as Isabinda is ‘locked up’ to ‘enjoy more freedom than he [Sir Jealous Traffick] is aware of’ (p. 318).

Isabinda refers to the way in which she, Sir Charles and Patch become creators of their own narrative:

Oh, you have your ladder of ropes I suppose, and the closet window stands just where it did, and if you hadn’t forgot to write in some characters, Patch will find a way for our assignations.

(p. 323)

This metatheatrical comment mocks the plots of Spanish romances and depicts Isabinda’s practical attitude which anticipates the risk of failure and the need for Patch’s assistance. Patch, who refers to her position as chamber-maid as that of a woman’s ‘best utensil’, puts this into practice when she converts the status of the love-letter she accidentally drops in front of Sir Jealous Traffick into ‘a charm for the toothache’ (p. 338). Misty G. Anderson has commented on the displacements of material objects into immaterial fictions that occur in the play:

Whisper’s trickster-servant facility with language also substitutes the invented thing, the dog for the real message, the sign for the meeting [...] The transformation of the letter that isn’t into the dog that isn’t is the first of several comic displacements to protect the words of Charles and Isabinda from the intervention of Sir Jealous.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Emanuela Bianchi, ‘Receptacle / Chora: Figuring the Errant Feminine in Plato’s *Timaeus*’, *Hypatia*, 24:4 (2006), 124-46.

³⁵⁶ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 119.

The conflict of signification that Anderson highlights in the play, positions the household space as an area distanced from masculine signification, consisting of bodily signs and creative Fancy, which cannot be regulated by Judgement. Like Kristeva's semiotic Chora, the household is 'indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine [...] irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation.'³⁵⁷ Centlivre relates creativity to the female body, which when in action, is generative. Isabinda follows Patch's cue to distract Sir Jealous from the discovery of Sir Charles and turns her body into an obstacle when she 'throws herself upon the closet door' and swoons, resulting in Patch's warning 'you'll tread upon my lady' (p. 340).

Isabinda is described by Sir Charles as the 'lovely prize' contained in Sir Jealous's house and Miranda is courted by Sir George with the offer of money (p. 322). However, Miranda's and Isabinda's negotiation of space through intrigue, blurs subject and object positions. Sir George becomes the object that is moved around, hiding first in the garden and later behind the chimney breast and is referred to as 'a monkey' by Marplot (p. 347). Misty G. Anderson argues that Marplot's echoing of Rochester's reference to monkeys as 'little miniatures of man' feminises Sir George and blurs human/animal subject positions in order to make a case for women's independence as subjects. Anderson states that 'the animal nature of Sir George, or of any man, calls into question the sexual double standard of contract; if males can overcome their status as mere animals when they make contracts, why can't women?'³⁵⁸ Building on Anderson's

³⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (London: Blackwell, 1993) pp. 89-136 (p. 94).

³⁵⁸ Misty G. Anderson, *Negotiating Marriage on the English Stage*, p. 121. See also Ellen Mackay 'Performance Theory: Attending to the Monkey Wrench in Centlivre's *The Busie Body*', in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: Modern Language Association, 2010), 325-335.

reading of the confined space of the chimney as a vagina in *The Basset Table* (1705), I propose that Valeria's command that Ensign Lovely hide in a fish barrel to avoid discovery, carries similar associations with the female body.³⁵⁹ Like the chimney, the fish barrel is another feminised space due to its confinement and cold and watery conditions, and provides a further example of male characters emerging from a feminine space. Centlivre's fish barrel scene is a feminist reversal of the tortoise-shell scene in Act Five Scene Four of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1607) which is figured as a comic act of cowardice, compared with Centlivre's representation of the feminine household as a protective space.

Centlivre's model of Sapphic and pregnant wit which manipulates the subject-object relation provides an unusual representation of collaborative trickery between mistress and servant which rewrites conventional exchanges based upon material gain. Historian Bernard Capp has commented on the way in which mistresses befriended their maid-servants and that this often disrupted the order of the whole household, particularly if a daughter disobeyed her father's wishes due to encouragement from the maid-servant.³⁶⁰ Patch occupies a dual role between serving, or appearing to serve, the wishes of Sir Jealous Traffic and those of her mistress Isabinda. She states: 'I have found a way to make Sir Jealous believe I am wholly in his interest, when my real design is to serve her' (p. 301). Unlike Thomas and Isobel in *The Mistaken Husband*, Patch desires no self-advancement, only to remain in service to her mistress (p. 363).

³⁵⁹ Susanna Centlivre, *The Basset Table* (1705) in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies*, ed. by Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 235-292 (p. 261).

³⁶⁰ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 156, p. 161.

Centlivre's blurring of subject and object positions has Isabinda and Miranda make use of their bodies and those of their servants in a process of exchange which is not exploitative. Sir Charles embraces the climate of creativity and at Patch's suggestion, impersonates the Spaniard Don Babinetto in order to marry Isabinda. While the subversive wit of servant tricksters, such as Thomas and Isobel, relies on exchange of goods, the Sapphic wit of the tricksters in *The Busybody* alters the subject/object relation without exchange of money or goods and therefore, without the risk of the loss of control of oneself. Instead, exchange of aid, ingenuity, and bodies in confined spaces changes the household space and relations between those within and without it.

Married Tricksters

The move from outside the household to the inside continues in later plays in this period in which the trickster's focus moves from seeking to enter or leave the household, to reforming and protecting it from external threats through wit employed by married couples. The type of wit shown in action and, as a result, the character of the trickster, changes in the eighteenth century. The enjoyable exploits of the trickster are preserved in comedy. However, after Collier's criticism of the profanity of witty comedy, there is a shift in the drama from the pairing of rakish heroes and young, witty heroines to married tricksters. This was an unlikely scenario at the beginning of the Restoration in which marriage is mocked and reviled onstage. In the 1690s, however, the young rake who derives sport from cuckolding other men, and women who enjoy the pleasures of the town, are reformed through the altruistic plots of the married couple or family relatives. Wit becomes a means of protecting the household and retaining moral standards. This final section demonstrates the way in which tricksters move from seeking to further their own position and subverting hierarchies, to reinstating hierarchies and maintaining a secure household in John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672)

Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703), and Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718).

John Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* (1672) features a dynamic duet of low-status married tricksters who use wit to protect their privacy as a couple:

ISABEL Murther, murther, help, murther. (*enter a neighbour*)
 NEIGHBOUR What's here, fie, fie, neighbour Drench, hold for shame: what, beating your wife?
 ISABEL Ay marry is he Sir, what's that to you? Suppose I long for a beating, I have been getting him in a good humour this two months to do it, and now you must disturb us [...] you wicked fellow [...]
 DRENCH (*Beats him*)
 NEIGHBOUR Hold, hold, hold; if ere I part man and Wife, if ere I put my hand betwixt the bark and the tree again, may my fingers bear fruit, and the boys rob my Orchard.

(p. 7)

As Bernard Capp points out, within the period, 'wife beating in public, or even at home, in the presence of company, was generally unacceptable' and 'neighbours felt entitled to step in, to defend both the victim and public order.'³⁶¹ Instead, in Lacy's play, the neighbour is accused of disturbing husband and wife and impeding upon their privacy during a sexualised beating. In Lacy's comedy the stage directions do not state where this scene occurs, whether in public or in private. Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703), which also adapts Molière's comedy *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666), features a similar scene. However, the commotion takes place on the street, adding to the topsy-turvy sense of wit as protecting the privacy of the household, despite the incident occurring in public. This scene from Molière must have been popular with audiences, as is it replicated in both Lacy's comedy, and Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* in which the husband and wife mock Bellmie, the hero of the play, for his interference.

³⁶¹ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 107.

Lacy's blurring of human/horse relations in *The Dumb Lady* discussed earlier, highlights the dynamic between husband and wife in which man is positioned as the tamer of woman, who like a horse, has 'bloud [which] gallops in her veins' (p. 57). However, Lacy's depiction of wit within marriage is that of co-operation between wife and husband. Like the image of horseman and horse in conduct books and William Cavendish's writings, rider and horse must work together.³⁶² The role of trickster is imposed upon Drench by his wife Isobel, who has him 'cudgell'd into a Physician' as revenge for beating her. Martin Ingram states that 'it was conventionally assumed that a man who had allowed himself to be beaten by his wife was inevitably also a cuckold.'³⁶³ Drench and his wife Isobel plot against one another, and the representation of their combative relationship is a novel modification of the archetype of an unmarried couple outwitting one another. Lacy develops marital wit as a type of wit in action which maintains the spark in the couple's relationship. Drench's household benefits through his wife's revenge as he is rewarded a 'Pension of fifty pounds a year' by Leander for his services as a faux doctor, which secured Leander's match to Olinda (p. 81). Isobel acknowledges the role her wit played in advancing her husband's position when she asks Drench 'who made you a doctor but my invention' and seeks to capitalize on the identity that Drench has embraced (p. 36).

Despite Drench's embracement of his wife's plot which he appears to control, the following exchange between Nibby and the Nurse which refers to husbands in terms of subject-object relations poses the question of who controls whom:

³⁶² Elspeth Graham, 'The Duke of Newcastle's Love for Good Horses: An Exploration of Meanings', in *Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Peter Edwards, K.A.E. Enenkel, Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 37-69 (p. 58, p. 40).

³⁶³ Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music, and the "Reform of Popular Culture" in Early Modern England,' *Past & Present*, 105 (1984), 79-113 (pp. 86-7).

NIBBY A Husband is such a thing [...] a thing that's good for many things [...] a husband is a thing that is a good Cloak for a woman's knavery.
 NURSE Ay, if a husband could be brought to do the civil office of an orange-woman, to fetch and carry, he were worth his weight in gold.

(p. 57)

This exchange, like Isobel's physician plot, reveals the wit of the woman behind her husband. Rather than the wife as the wild horse to be controlled, the husband is depicted as a work horse designed to carry things. Nibby reveals the way in which married life provides female tricksters with a protective screen to mask their mischievous plots, arguing that a woman may plot behind the scenes and retain respectability, as she is defined by and tied to her husband's good name and credit, which to a certain extent protects her.

Mary Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703) features reform imposed by familial relations through wit in action. Lady Gaylove who leads 'a wanton life' is 'punished to be twice a wife' and has her children taken from her by a relative who 'hope[s] to better them.'³⁶⁴ The play's epilogue advises other libertines like Sir James Belmont to 'leave your wicked courses.' Although Pix's comedy does not make use of material objects within the household, Lady Bellmont and Valentine enact reform, and thus constitute a further example of wit used to protect the interests of household and family. Adam Zucker argues that wit in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* protects the community.³⁶⁵ The way in which wit becomes more conservative in the eighteenth century is a marked change from the type of wit displayed in the Restoration.

In Elkanah Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718), wit in action protects the sanctity of marriage because the intrigues devised by the couple add variety to their stable, monogamous existence. Settle's comedy subverts the traditional comic plot of a

³⁶⁴ Mary Pix, *The Different Widows* (London: Henry Playford and Bernard Lintot, 1703). See epilogue and p. 13.

³⁶⁵ Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit*, p. 30.

young man (Sir Charles Traplove) seeking to cuckold fifty-six-year-old Sir Cunningham Plotwell by arranging a rendez-vous with eighteen-year-old Lady Plotwell. Instead, Lady Plotwell and Sir Cunningham Plotwell outwit the young rake and their own household servants by conspiring to reform Sir Charles. The house is turned into a weapon as the male rake is beaten with objects traditionally used to conceal lovers in Restoration drama:

LADY PLOTWELL Slip under this Carpet, and I'll cover you for a folding table.

Sir Charles lays his coat upon the table and 'beats his coat' with a stick.

(p. 7)

Each beating is followed by an emasculating speech from Lady Plotwell advising the bruised libertine to go home and rest. The images used to describe Sir Charles, especially Lady Plotwell's recommendation that he go home to a 'warm Nurs'ry', have the effect of exposing the vulnerability of his masculine performance (p. 27). Jason Farr argues that 'for libertines, the possibility that their virility may be compromised always looms.'³⁶⁶

The male rake beaten in the china closet in *The Lady's Triumph* parodies *The Country Wife*, mocking the bawdiness and immorality of early Restoration comedy:

LADY PLOTWELL Where's my China?

SIR CHARLES (*Coming out of the Crate*) Here, my charming Fair,
Substantial China, no frail brittle Ware.

LADY PLOTWELL But hark, what noise is that?

SIR CHARLES Noise! (*Slips into the Crate again*)

[...]

SIR CUNNINGHAM PLOTWELL [T]his wicked Varlet, this sly Seducer, to bring his prophane China to lead thy chaste Eyes astray [...] (*He falls to cudgelling the crate amongst the China, and at ev'ry stroke he makes dismal Clatter...*)

SIR CHARLES (*Comes out of the Crate with Scars and Streaks of Blood all over his Hands and Face...*).

³⁶⁶ Jason S. Farr, 'Libertine Sexuality and Queer-Crip Embodiment in Eighteenth Century Britain', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 16 (2016), 96-118 (p. 102).

(pp. 44-7)

The naked cupid Lady Plotwell sends her husband, prefigures the way in which Sir Charles is reduced to a fragile object; subject and object merge as the young man's cries blend with the clattering of the broken china. Sir Charles's attempt to display himself as sexually desirable ('no frail brittle ware') are foiled. The ruse that served Horner well in *The Country Wife* is parodied and results in Sir Charles's cracked moral credit. This scene depicts a shift in audience identification; the rake hero is mocked and beaten with the very devices that previously enabled fluidity of subject positions. Kevin Casper has commented on the way in which slapstick comedy blurs the artificial with the real, arguing that we laugh at another's pain as we know that this pain is purely artificial.³⁶⁷ Casper rightly observes that slapstick relies upon the superiority theory of laughter. In this case, spectators are encouraged to take pleasure in the violent reform of the rake. Sir Cunningham's wealth, related to his credit and masculinity, is contrasted with Sir Charles's frequent emasculation through the three scenes in which he is beaten both physically and intellectually within the intrigue. Settle employs wit in action or physical comedy to position the rake as beneath the Alderman, and himself the dramatist, as a master engineer. This is exemplified by the epilogue, which presents Settle's decision to show a 'City Wife and make her chaste' as a witty innovation. As Settle's, Lacy's and Pix's tricksters demonstrate, plots which involve protecting the household and are devised between a small number of individuals are more co-operative and productive.

The above texts feature a turn in the representation of the trickster figure who relies on the witty manipulation of objects to extend his/her identity. This chapter has shown that wit in action enables female tricksters to adopt a more fluid subject position.

³⁶⁷ Kevin Casper, "'I'm So Glad You're Fake!': Simulacra Slapstick and the Limits of the Real', *Ephemera Theory and Politics in Organization*, 15:3 (2015), 581-600 (p. 581, p. 585).

In *The Frolicks* the coquettish wit of cross-dressing, along with Clarabell's manipulation of objects such as swords, tankards, and sedan chairs, goes beyond mere attempts to secure the rake. Through wit in action the female trickster affects others' subjectivity and achieves independence, expressing disdain for marriage in *The Frolicks* and *The Country Wife*. In earlier plays the use of wit by the young hero and heroine leads to a condescension to marry, but in *The Lucky Chance* and *The Mistaken Husband*, wit in action emphasises the way in which subject positions of status and marital ties can be exchanged through the male trickster's manipulation of money and trade. Servants' freedom to move upstairs, downstairs and outside the household makes them integral to intrigues, as they possess access to the household and its objects. Servants extend their subjectivity through trade or theft of goods in *The Mistaken Husband* and this demonstrates their self-serving wit in trading information for material goods. In *The Busybody*, servants employ pregnant and Sapphic wit to act on behalf of their mistress.

In *The Dumb Lady* and *The Lady's Triumph* married couples employ wit in action through manipulation of household objects as a tool to protect the household. In *The Dumb Lady*, the wife's cudgel transforms the farrier into a physician and brings money into the household. The rake is displaced from his position as instigator of the action to a position of intra-action in which he is manipulated. In Lacy's *The Dumb Lady* and Settle's *The Lady's Triumph*, wit provides a means to sustain excitement within marriage, implying that the wit of well-matched couples continues throughout marriage. Settle, Pix, and Lacy playfully challenge the moral standards of characters onstage and audience members. Across the period there is a movement from wit as subversive to wit as conservative, reinstating traditional values. This change in the portrayal of wit will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of the thesis in relation to

performers' engagement with spectators in prologues, asides and epilogues. Rather than witty repartee, active wit through manipulating others as objects of exchange to aid transformation of circumstances dominates the plays discussed in this chapter. Building on my analysis of wit in action, the next chapter will explore vengeful, competitive, and performative wit in tragedy which relies on plotting and reading the actions of the actress's body onstage.

Chapter 3 From Medea to Sappho: Women's Wit in She-tragedy

Through consideration of wit as a mode of resistance this chapter seeks to provide new insights into tragedies written by dramatists during the period in which the passive heroines of she-tragedy were popular with audiences and in so doing, refute previous claims that these heroines are completely passive. The spectacle of wit in tragedy that I focus on is 'out-witting', defined by the *OED* as 'to get the better of a person by superior craft or skill.'³⁶⁸ I consider persuasive and competitive verbal address which challenges another's authority as an example of out-witting, along with the way in which physical spectacle can undercut verbal address and upstage male authority. I argue that performative wit which stages the abject is a form of witty resistance which outwits patriarchal authority.

Performative wit in tragedy contrasts skilful action with persuasive rhetoric to undercut patriarchal authority and to establish a critical audience. Like the verbal technique of dissimilitude which exposes difference and affectation, performative wit in tragedy manipulates spectators' focus by creating a contradiction between verbal representation and physical representation on stage. The effect of this wit is that it reveals the constructed nature of patriarchal authority by setting up conflicting representations of the female character. In this chapter I discuss the way in which the spectacle of performative wit, vengeful wit, competitive wit, and Sapphic wit out-wits other characters onstage to subvert patriarchal authority. I consider the subversive wit of revenge plots, competitive wit between female rivals, Sapphic wit as an alternative to female rivalry, and performative wit which deconstructs the abject.

³⁶⁸ *OED Online*, <<http://www.oed.com>> [Accessed 4th April 2018], outwit, v.1.

All of the tragedies chosen in this chapter depict the way in which wit in performance through skilful plots, Sapphic networks, and visual dissimilitude challenges patriarchal structures. The tragedies included in this chapter were selected based on the high frequency of the terms ‘wit’ and ‘witty’ in the plays which signal to spectators that the heroine’s speech and actions are witty. The genre she-tragedy which emerged during the 1680s, placed female characters and actresses centre-stage, both verbally and physically.³⁶⁹ This makes she-tragedy an important genre in which to consider women’s wit. Indeed, the term ‘wit’ appears fourteen times in Catharine Trotter’s tragedy *Agnes de Castro* (1695). Despite the presence of wit in she-tragedy, critics have read these heroines as passive in their suffering, a position this chapter seeks to challenge by considering how actresses play contrasting roles of passionate and virtuous heroine and the ways in which the performance of rivals out-witting one another in revenge plots deconstructs patriarchal competition through pleasure of one another’s wit. I consider the pleasurable spectacle of witty rivalry between women in Elkanah Settle’s *Love and Revenge* (1675) and Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* (1677) which predate the genre she-tragedy, but arguably paved the way for the contrasting roles of virtuous/passionate heroine in the genre. William Congreve’s *The Mourning Bride* (1697), Mary Pix’s *Ibrahim* (1696), and Delarivier Manley’s *Almyna* (1707) feature women who rebel against seventeenth and eighteenth-century ideals of womanhood through a combination of witty address to spectators and skilful action which deconstructs the feminine as abject to upstage male authority. Catharine Trotter’s *Agnes de Castro* (1695) and Mary Pix’s *Queen Catharine* (1698) were chosen for

³⁶⁹ The term ‘she-tragedy’ was coined by Nicholas Rowe in 1714 and refers to late seventeenth-century tragedies with a strong focus on their female characters.

inclusion in this chapter due to their focus on Sapphic wit in the form of female friendship which challenges patriarchal structures.

In the first section of this chapter, I draw on Kristeva's theorisation of the abject along with recent studies of the abject in performance, to develop a reading of 'performative abjection' that deconstructs the model of the erotic passive female victim or 'Sappho' in 'she-tragedy' through the actress's self-conscious and witty performance of the bleeding, kneeling, and swooning body. I argue that this witty spectacle breaks down boundaries of self/other. Kristeva's modern theory of abjection offers a useful lens for reading seventeenth-century she-tragedy as the genre itself is characterised by representations of the monstrous female body (Medea) which are expelled in the tragedy, in favour of the virtuous heroine (Sappho). Although psychonalysis did not exist in the seventeenth century the dichotomy between the complete subject and the abject self which Kristeva identifies is present in seventeenth-century concepts of gender which positioned the woman's body as an abject leaky vessel and the male subject as complete.³⁷⁰ Kristeva's theory of abjection is particularly applicable to seventeenth-century notions of the clean classical body versus the passionate and grotesque body, as the Fury or passionate woman was deemed abject.³⁷¹ While critics of film and performance art have discussed the way in which the performer's gaze deconstructs the abject through performance, this has not been discussed in relation to the deconstructive potential of the actress's gaze in she-tragedy. I develop Elin Diamond's discussion of the actress's critical gaze, her awareness of herself as both subject and object, to argue that the combination of the character's words, actress's gaze

³⁷⁰ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern Texts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 24.

³⁷¹ Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected, or; The Arts of a Designing Woman Laid Open* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1695) pp. 21-22.

and the dramatist's stage directions referring to costume and spectacle conflict with one another, and in doing so create a visual dissimilitude of wit in performance which deconstructs the abject spectacle by revealing it as a patriarchal construct. The Restoration marked the establishment of the actress on stage and the prevalence of the abject, which is wittily deconstructed in performance. This demonstrates this historical moment in which women were acting and writing for the public stage instigated a change in the depiction of women's bodies in tragedy.

The second section of this chapter considers the way in which rivalry between women is sometimes balanced with admiration, even conspiracy between them, a sisterly bond paralleling homosocial bonding in plays such as *Agnes de Castro* and *The Fatal Friendship*. I argue that women's Sapphic and performative wit in these plays attacks tragedy as a male-centred form, and challenges patriarchy, along with conventional representations of women in tragedy. Rather than being a complete departure from comic wit tragic wit uses types of wit found in comedy, such as verbal competition, wit in action using clothing as disguise, subversive wit to overturn hierarchies through a combination of language and action, and Sapphic networks of co-operative wit. I argue that wit in tragedy disturbs and deconstructs the status quo. I demonstrate that instances of women relying on their wits to turn a tragic situation around and plotting to achieve their desires produce a range of emotions in the spectator; not only pity, fear and admiration as Aristotle has argued, but also surprise, shock and pleasure.³⁷² By making passionate heroines witty and funny, male and female dramatists problematise the representation of passionate women as monstrous.

³⁷² Aristotle, quoted in René Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie Containing the Necessary, Rational, and Universal Rules for Epick, Dramatick, and the*

The title of this chapter comes from John Hill's *Treatise on the Art of Playing* (1750) which asserts that the skilled artist can become a Medea and a Sappho in the same moment.³⁷³ I argue that this talent for shifting mode is present in tragedies penned by women dramatists, whose heroines are not 'pale and non-descript' or raging Furies, but somewhere between the two. Sappho connotes sweetness, virtue and erotic female friendship; in addition to this, Margaret Drabble records a popular and romanticised myth that Sappho threw herself into the sea due to the despair of her unrequited love for Phaeon the boatman—a myth which corresponds with the representation of the virtuous heroine as passive and self-destructive.³⁷⁴ This myth is the subject of Alexander Pope's translation of Ovid's 'Sappho to Phaon' (1707). A figure from classical mythology, Medea was a sorceress who bewitched King Creon's daughters and murdered her own children. Although Medea has been held up as a Fury, her act of infanticide has been viewed sympathetically by early modern dramatists as Katherine Heavey has shown.³⁷⁵ Contrasting pairs of women were a staple of she-tragedy. Elizabeth Howe lists actresses Anne Boutell and Rebecca Marshall in the 1670s and Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Barry from 1680 onward, as examples of such pairings.³⁷⁶ Boutell and Bracegirdle often played the 'angel' or virtuous woman (Sappho), while Marshall and Barry were cast as the 'she-devil' or passionate woman (Medea).

Other Sorts of Poetry: With Reflections on the Works of the Ancient and Modern Poets, and Their Faults Noted (London: T.N., 1674), XVIII, p. 105.

³⁷³ John Hill, *The Actor, or, A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (London: R. Griffiths, 1750), p. 15.

³⁷⁴ Margaret Drabble, 'Sappho' in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 896.

³⁷⁵ Katherine Heavey, *The Early Modern Medea: Medea in English Literature 1588-1688* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 115.

³⁷⁶ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 147.

The aim of late seventeenth-century tragedy was to affect its audience, as Robert Hume has pointed out.³⁷⁷ The process of inspiring pity and sorrow in an audience involves humanizing tyrants and villainesses and as Alison Hopgood argues, carries the risk of contagion because powerful emotions are passed from performer to spectator.³⁷⁸ Psychologists have identified that mirror neurons in the brain cause spectators in the theatre to experience the same emotions simulated by the performer onstage.³⁷⁹ Critics of the stage such as John Evelyn and Jeremy Collier expressed concern about spectators' identification with characters onstage and worried that theatre-goers would not be able to distinguish between art and life.³⁸⁰ Having actresses rather than boy actors playing women, meant that the boundary between art and life became even more permeable. As Restoration theatre critic Bonamy Dobrée stated, 'tragedy, from the spectator's point of view, is the most personal of the literary forms. We identify ourselves with the persons of tragedy as we watch it; we are Orestes, or Macbeth.'³⁸¹ However, not all spectators are affected in the same way and this will be discussed further in chapter 4. This chapter will investigate the way in which dramatists, particularly female playwrights, grappled with the representation of women in tragedy

³⁷⁷ Robert Hume, *The Development of Seventeenth Century Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 228.

³⁷⁸ Allison P. Hopgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.

³⁷⁹ Mconahie and Hart cited in John McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 44, p. 136.

³⁸⁰ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. De Beer (London: OUP, 1959), 18 October 1666, p. 501.

Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (London: S. Keble, R. Sare and H. Hindmarsh, 1698).

³⁸¹ Bonamy Dobrée, *Restoration Tragedy 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 9.

as either ‘demonic or inferior’ to quote Kathleen M. Sands.³⁸² I will assess the impact of the actress’s embodiment of tragic wit onstage to consider whether wit alters the representation of women in tragedy.

Pilar Cuder-Dominguez has pointed out that ‘the paradox remains that Restoration tragedy appears to be essentially feminocentric, while its critique often denies women’s role in its making.’³⁸³ Critics have tended to assess work by Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix and Catharine Trotter as part of the genre ‘she-tragedy’ which emerged in the 1680s and was particularly popular in the 1690s. She-tragedy often features scenes of male and female suffering and rivalry between a virtuous heroine and a passionate one. Jean I. Marsden has argued that the work of Trotter, Manley, and Pix does not fit comfortably into this genre.³⁸⁴ Female characters in Catharine Trotter’s *Agnes de Castro*, for example, do not conform to the virtuous/passionate binary; Trotter’s Agnes is neither wholly virtuous nor passionate. Friendships between women in *Agnes de Castro* deconstruct the view of women as monstrous and in so doing, outwit patriarchal structures. This demonstrates the affective power of wit in tragedy which has the potential to disturb moral absolutes of virtuous/vicious.

The paradox that Cuder-Dominguez refers to also applies to actresses playing female roles in tragedies by male and female playwrights. I have decided to include discussions of revenge tragedies by male dramatists that precede the genre she-tragedy such as Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* (1677) which popularised the

³⁸² Kathleen M. Sands, ‘Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time after Time’, in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. Rita Felski (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 82-103, (p. 95).

³⁸³ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights 1613-1713* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 6.

³⁸⁴ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, pp. 111-121.

virtuous/passionate binary, and female rivalry in Elkanah Settle's *Love and Revenge* (1675). These earlier plays initially adopt the model of rivalry between the virtuous and passionate heroine and in some instances problematise the binary. Both male and female dramatists capitalize on tragedy's emotive quality to inspire sympathy for female characters; through calculated choices of casting they not only destabilise the boundary between virtuous and passionate heroine, but also generate sympathy for her through depictions of Sapphic wit between characters in Catharine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1695), Mary Pix's *The Fatal Friendship* (1698) and *Queen Catharine* (1698). I will explore the way in which male and female playwrights rewrite women revengers as sympathetic and charismatically witty in Catharine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* and William Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697). Rather than emerging as a response to heroic tragedy, I contend that she-tragedies were a witty response to an earlier tradition of Jacobean revenge tragedies and Restoration tragicomedies. Both male and female dramatists manipulate spectators' expectations through casting, plot and their treatment of common themes, such as rape, to surprise and modify conventions of she-tragedy and revenge tragedy. I argue that the work of women dramatists does not simply follow the form she-tragedy, it questions and modifies the genre.

Plays by women dramatists feature female friendship, admiration of another's plots and collaboration and co-conspiracy in intrigues by both the Sappho figures and the Medea figures. Such collaboration portrays a network of Sapphic wit between characters, actresses, women dramatists and female spectators to whom such scenes of friendship are directed. I analyse the way in which bonds of Sapphic wit between female characters subvert patriarchal structures of female rivalry. By deconstructing the binary opposition of Sappho and Medea, my chapter will develop Marsden's view that

the work of women dramatists does not fit snugly into the genre ‘she-tragedy.’³⁸⁵ In contrast to Marsden’s view that the ‘Female Wits’ were not part of an *écriture féminine*, I argue that they expose and suggest alternatives to violence and suffering in the form of Sapphic wit.³⁸⁶

The heroine of Frances Boothby’s *Marcelia; or The Treacherous Friend* (1669), a tragicomedy and the first play penned by a woman to be performed on the London stage, deconstructs the binary of the dissembling villainess (Medea) and the suffering heroine (Sappho):

MARCELIA I will colours wear of Victory;
And my sad thoughts dress up in such disguise,
As shall deceive the most informing eyes.
Thus I an inward Martyr must become,
And seem to triumph, when I’m most undone.³⁸⁷

Even in its tragic plot *Marcelia* highlights women’s ability to act, disguise, dissemble and to switch states. While Marcelia’s comic ability to dissemble presents her as a trickster, referring to herself as a ‘Martyr’ and as ‘undone’ adds a more serious tone, implying silent suffering. Women’s wit often destabilises the boundary between comedy and tragedy, and along with the revival of the tragicomic genre during the Restoration period, there was also a revival of the Vice figure from Jacobean revenge tragedy. As Robert Hume and Pilar Cuder-Dominguez have pointed out in relation to tragedy and tragicomedy ‘one should look at both forms of the tragic mode together.’³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 111-2.

³⁸⁶ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality and the English Stage 1660-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 130.

³⁸⁷ Frances Boothby, *Marcelia; or The Treacherous Friend* (London: Will Cademan and Giles Widdows, 1670), II.vi, E1r.

³⁸⁸ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, *Stuart Women Playwrights 1613-1713* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 8.

Robert D. Hume, *The Development of Late Seventeenth Century Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

Unlike the strict model of French Classical tragedy, an important part of which was ‘vraisemblance’ or a plausible chain of events and a distinct lack of comic relief, English tragedies and tragicomedies incorporate comic relief and rely on surprise and variety, characteristics which are closer to witty tragedy than Classical models of tragedy. Viewed in this light, the genre she-tragedy is a continuation of tragicomic and revenge plots, drawing on an earlier tradition of Jacobean and Caroline drama. The incorporation of earlier models of Jacobean revenge tragedy and tragicomedy in she-tragedy, creates a mixed or hybrid genre which produces a range of complex and conflicting emotions within the spectator from admiration to pity. I argue that the monstrous or revenging woman (Medea) in she-tragedy draws on an early modern tradition of the charismatic revenger (male and female), based on the Vice of medieval drama. Plotting produces surprise and comic moments which disrupt the classical solemnity and seriousness of high tragedy. Wit in performance deconstructs boundaries between genre, tragic and comic, good and evil and Sappho and Medea.

Performing Female Abjection

In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva argued that the abject is that which splits the subject, simultaneously returning it to the site of birth and death, creation and destruction:

During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit [...]. The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall) ... is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile... corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border... If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be,

the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled.³⁸⁹

Kristeva argues that one of the reasons that the abject is so disturbing is because it reminds the subject of their own mortality, threatening a dissolution of their identity. The suffering heroine of she-tragedy achieves this effect through performative wit which stages the abject as I shall discuss.

Kristeva goes on to explain that abjection functions as a reminder of birth, of the separation from the maternal body which is necessary to the creation of a 'complete' subject. She states:

The abject confronts us with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before existing inside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of power as securing as it is stifling.

(p. 13).

The maternal becomes 'the desirable, terrifying, nourishing and murderous', the 'fascinating and abject inside' as it symbolises the moment before the subject was independent and complete.³⁹⁰ The abject symbolises 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' and marks the boundaries and limits of the subject. Kristeva goes on to state 'I abject myself within the same motion through which I claim to establish myself.'³⁹¹ The abject is a product of the need to create boundaries in order to constitute the subject; however, the abject is constantly in danger of breaking down those boundaries. Like the abject, wit transgresses gender norms and breaks down boundaries between the subjectivity of the character onstage and disrupts the self-assurance of spectators.

³⁸⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3-4.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 54, p. 13.

³⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

Judith Butler illustrates the subversive potential of the abject to expose the constructed boundaries of the subject:

The subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, “inside” the subject as its own founding repudiation. And yet, this disavowed abjection will threaten to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is in repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control.³⁹²

The abject is rooted in the body in substances such as blood, vomit and excrement and the areas of pregnancy and death. Tragedy, particularly Restoration horror tragedy and she-tragedy, abounds with abject images of the bleeding and swooning body as abject.

Kristeva identified literature as a space which ‘involve[s] not an ultimate resistance to, but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word.’³⁹³ For Kristeva literature provides a space in which these concerns can be played out. As an embodied form of literature, theatrical performance is an important art form in which the abject has not been fully explored.

This concern was recently raised by contributors to a special issue in *Performance Research* on abjection who argued that the abject was first represented in performance art of the 1960s.³⁹⁴ The special issue featured articles on the emotional affect of the abject on viewers of theatre and art exhibits, such as Rina Ayra’s article on abjection and body art, which locate the abject within performance as ‘cathartic.’³⁹⁵

³⁹² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 208.

³⁹⁴ Rina Ayra and Nicholas Chare, ‘Introduction’ to On Abjection in *Performance Research*, 19 (2014), 1-4, (p. 1).

³⁹⁵ Rina Ayra, ‘Taking Apart the Body: Abjection and Body Art’, *Performance Research*, 19 (2014), 5-14.

See footnote 392.

However, I argue that ‘performative abjection’ began 400 years earlier, with the advent of the actress on the Restoration stage.

Thea Harrington argues that the cathartic nature of the abject is not purely consigned to the action of purging. She focuses on the performative relationship between the analyst and patient in Kristeva’s work on the abject. Harrington demonstrates that through analysis the abject is incorporated in a ‘rebirth’, that ‘analysis affords this positive look at the abject because its participants enact, through mimetic play, “cohabitation” with the abject.’³⁹⁶ Performance which deconstructs and questions the abject through wit can be read as a positive rebirth in accordance with Harrington’s views. Through playfully performing the abject, the actress as analyst and the audience as patient participate in this process of ‘mimetic play’ which ‘re-enacts the moment when the abject came to exist.’³⁹⁷ The actress’s body which actively performs the abject deconstructs the passive suffering of the female object. The outward, vocal martyr who stages her own suffering, clearly contradicts the trope of women suffering passively and silently. Her skilful performance questions the abject and invites spectators to reassess the expulsion of the feminine as abject. In this way, performance promotes a positive look at and reconsideration of what we consider to be abject.

I would argue that this performance of abjection, which both disrupts and deconstructs, is a form of performative wit, especially when we consider the shifting, conflicting and contradictory representation of these ‘victims.’ As aforementioned, performative wit sets up a contrast between verbal and visual representation to challenge patriarchal representations of women. Manley’s *Almyra* is depicted as ‘a

³⁹⁶ Thea Harrington, ‘The Speaking Object in Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*’, *Hypatia*, 13:1 (2001), 138-157, p. 152.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 152.

willing victim', a contradiction in terms, while Boothby's *Marcelia* who wittily dissembles in order to appear 'to triumph', suffers as an 'inward Martyr', another contradictory phrase, considering the spectacle associated with martyrdom.³⁹⁸ Similarly, Elvira and Bianca in Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* makes 'Good, Ill, and Ill for Good appear', much like Marcelia's appearance of success when the situation is bleak. Inward Martyrs such as Marcelia suit the virtuous model of Sappho. However, like Elvira and Bianca, Marcelia uses dissembling—a trait associated with scheming women—to mask her ill fortune, and in this respect, has more in common with Elvira and Bianca who resemble the passionate model of Medea. This is yet another example of the way in which wit deconstructs the boundaries which define the feminine as abject, similar to the depiction of 'outward martyrs' such as Morena and Almyna who are portrayed as both virtuous and passionate through their confusion of boundaries via the abject.

Through performative wit which questions the violated woman as abject, Mary Pix, John Banks and Delarivier Manley offer an alternative viewpoint of rape and adultery, together with novel ways of reading bleeding, kneeling and swooning as active modes. These heroines embrace the abject and control their own self-representation through performance of the abject. These tragedies are not an exercise in purging the feminine abject and restoring masculine order but questioning it through wit and offering alternatives.

³⁹⁸ Delarivier Manley, *Almyna; or, The Arabian Vow* (London: William Turner, 1707), p. 43.
 Frances Boothby, *Marcelia; or, The Treacherous Friend* (London: Will Cademan and Giles Widdows, 1670), II.vi, E1r.

Blood

Mary Pix's Morena in *Ibrahim* (1696) outwits patriarchal control by skilfully staging the abject to 'turn' the abject gaze towards the Emperor. When Morena seizes the emperor's sword and 'draws [it] through her hands' so that she bleeds, she foregrounds the cruel rape that Ibrahim has planned for her, staging it as a spectacle, before instructing him to 'see Emperor, see are these hands / Fit to clasp thee?'³⁹⁹ By staging the intended rape before it occurs in the form of a bleeding wound and performing this abject sight, Morena defines the act of rape rather than her own violated body as abject. Instead of presenting herself as an example of masochistic violence out of desperation, as Marsden has argued, Morena deliberately exposes the horror of the Emperor's act and confronts him with his own cruelty through a combination of skilful emotive language and physical spectacle.⁴⁰⁰ Morena's blood-stained hands 'fit to clasp thee' leave a trace of violence on the emperor, a guilty stain. Gerry Harris comments on the abject in performance that 'the subject's "wholeness" is threatened by the sight of blood...which serve[s] as [a] reminder of...the ultimate loss of self—death.'⁴⁰¹ In addition the sight of blood confronts the Emperor with his mortality. This is not only an example of the actress reminding the powerful male character of his own mortality, but also the actor playing him, upstaging both Emperor and actor. By seizing his sword, Morena emasculates the powerful Moor and undercuts his authority as her resistance causes him to worry that 'his almighty Will / Which half the Universe obeys' will 'Without dispute be contradicted / By a Woman' (p. 22).

³⁹⁹ Mary Pix, *Ibrahim* (London: John Harding, 1696), p. 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality and the English Stage 1660-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 109.

⁴⁰¹ Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) p. 127.

Rather than a passive victim, Morena uses her wit to actively display resistance through skilful action. Morena's self-conscious performance of the abject spectacle of 'bleeding hands' is an example of subversive wit as it undercuts the masculine subject's security. Re-invoked throughout the play, the image of Morena's 'bleeding hands...for justice' serves as a reminder of her broken hymen (p. 29). The image of her bleeding body blurs boundaries and threatens subjectivity as it recalls the utterly abject: menstrual blood. A simultaneous reminder of origins and death, menstrual blood connotes the failure of foetal formation from matter; the dissolution of a potential subject. In the early modern period menstrual blood was viewed as the failure of the male seed to imprint itself on female mat(t)er and thus create life out of the chaos of undefined matter.⁴⁰² The repetition of Morena's bloody hands signifies the failure of the rapist (Ibrahim) to reproduce himself and to generate offspring via the act of rape. Morena draws attention to her rapists' failure to reproduce when she threatens to 'run thro' all thy Guards / And camp!' with 'dishevell'd hair, torn robes, and / Bloody hands' so that her 'just complaints [may] compel Rebellion!' (Act III, p. 25). Morena's threat disturbs the boundaries and the order of the sultan's camp, plunging his attempt to assert physical control into chaos, whilst exposing the fragility of masculine subjectivity and out-witting patriarchal control.

Morena's father's emotionally charged depiction of the rape cited below is also deconstructed by the actress's skilful performance of the abject establishes a contrast between verbal and visual representation to expose the construction of the female as abject:

MUFTI This lov'd Morena, torn from her
Helpless Father's aged Arms—dragged to

⁴⁰² Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p. 59, p. 22.

The presence of your honour'd Emperour,
 Whilst his Cheeks grow with Lust— [...] suppose
 Her Prayers, her tears, her cries [...] all in vain [...]
 The savage Ravisher twisting his [hands]
 In the lovely Tresses of her hair,
 Tearing it by the smarting Root,
 Fixing her by that upon the ground:
 Then—(horroure on horroure!)
 On her breathless body perpetrate the fact.

(Act IV p. 28)

Morena's corrupted body becomes an abject sight; her torn hair and 'breathless body' are images of 'horroure.' Pix demonstrates the way in which language controls the representation of the female body. In the Mufti's speech Morena is completely passive, she is the object acted upon. Her body is masculine property which moves from one form of patriarchal control— 'her Father's Arms'—to another which is the 'honour'd emperor' or 'savage Ravisher' (p. 28). Pix exposes rape as a form of ownership of the female body which signifies homosocial competition. Although the Mufti describes his daughter's body as 'breathless' and inactive, this is deconstructed by the actress's active and 'disorder'd' body performing breathlessness when the '*scene draws*' (p. 28). Marsden has argued that scenes which open up and 'reveal' are erotic spectacles of the suffering heroine.⁴⁰³ If these scenes which draw spectators' gaze to the actress and her performance of the character's emotional struggle are pleasurable, as Marsden suggests, then spectators are invited to gaze upon the abject, rather than to turn away from it. This example of performative wit marks a tension between the rape victim as horrific spectacle and the actress's skilled performance. The scene in *Ibrahim* which reveals the actress labouring to act as 'breathless' cleverly deconstructs the image of a passive

⁴⁰³ Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, p. 70.

victim and showcases the performance behind the character, drawing attention to the constructed nature of the 'passive victim' or 'she-angel.'

Like abjection, performance deconstructs boundaries. Geraldine Harris has applied Judith Butler's methodology directly to theatrical performances to point out:

Repetition or performance of different types of roles is perceived as a deconstructive strategy that operates to confuse, not dissolve, the boundaries between good girl/whore, masculine/feminine, commodity/agent... using parody and pastiche to denaturalise, or rather to unveil, the theatrical, constructed nature of these identities.⁴⁰⁴

Morena's rape is repeatedly represented: symbolically when she draws the phallic sword through her hands, verbally when her father relates 'the fact' and physically through scenes which 'discover' her on the ground, dishevelled, before a later scene in which she enters wearing white.

Pix employs performative wit to construct a visual dissimilitude to outwit patriarchal representations of the rape victim as abject; she deliberately represents Morena wearing white after she has been raped, to deconstruct the rape-victim as abject and re-assert the presence of the female body as matter. Punning on the Latin '*mater*', Judith Butler refers to the female body as 'matter' and points out its generative quality, arguing that the 'unsettling of 'matter' can be understood as indicating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter.'⁴⁰⁵ 'Matter' is earthly, sexual and material, a contrast to Julia Kristeva's '*stabat mater*' which refers to the Virgin Mary as a pure, deified and martyr-like figure.⁴⁰⁶ In the following scene, the actress as Morena deconstructs *Mater*/Matter opposition through performative wit:

Enter Morena drest in white.

⁴⁰⁴ Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 143.

⁴⁰⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 30.

⁴⁰⁶ Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' trans. by Leon S. Roudiez in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 160-187 (p. 165) (p. 181).

MORENA Drest in these Robes of Innocence,
Fain wou'd I believe my Virgin Purity remains.

(p. 37)

This spectacle creates a visual dissimilitude which contrasts with Morena's father's account of the rape, which depicts Morena as a suffering '*Mater*' figure. The physical presence of the actress deconstructs the image of Morena's lifeless body (p. 28). Jocelyn Catty in *Writing Rape: Writing Women in Early Modern England* argues that 'the way in which...writer[s] negotiate or engage with the subject of rape prove[s] an intrinsic part of their treatment of the subjects of women's sexual autonomy and women's agency, and their political or linguistic power.'⁴⁰⁷ Pix's costume choice for Morena emphasises the heroine's innocence and purity. Catty importantly points out the dislocation between the mind and the body of the rape victim in the early modern period; that though the mind was chaste, the body was not so and that it was deemed 'a disgrace...to have but one spot of uncleanness.'⁴⁰⁸

In contrast to Nicholas Brady's *The Rape* (1692) in which the raped woman is rejected by her lover, Pix's Amurat is unwavering in his affection for Morena:

AMURAT Shall I forsake the Christal Fountain,
Because a Rough-hewn Satyr there
Has quencht his Thirst? No! [...]
[T]hy Virgin Mind was pure!

(p. 40)

Amurat does not judge Morena's chastity purely on the state of her body, but on the state of her mind which resisted rape. As Doris Lechner has observed, Amurat's attitude

⁴⁰⁷ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape: Writing Women in Early Modern England Unbridled Speech* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), p. 129.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

toward Morena, marks a departure from earlier representations of the rape victim.⁴⁰⁹ For example, in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece commits suicide after she is raped, despite Shakespeare's depiction of her innocence.⁴¹⁰

The repeated staging of Morena's rape as an example of performative wit which outwits patriarchal security contrasts with the repeated spectacle of a stained handkerchief in John Banks's popular tragedy *Anna Bullen* (1682). Banks uses the image of the stained handkerchief—the same object used as evidence to question Desdemona's fidelity in *Othello*—to question Anna's virtue. The handkerchief first makes an appearance during a scene in which Anna has a nosebleed, a rather specific nosebleed consisting of three drops of blood.⁴¹¹ Nosebleeds were considered bad omens.⁴¹² The droplets of blood on the handkerchief in the play portend the accusation contesting Anna's virtue and also signify a broken hymen. Anna's nosebleed appears to be natural and uncontrollable and is an example of the body showcasing signs of guilt, while Pix's Morena causes herself to bleed and actively uses her blood as a symbol of cruel sacrifice. Spectacle in *Anna Bullen* offers aesthetically pleasing and emotional scenes of wronged women, compared with Pix's spectacle which turns the passive suffering female into an active one, who uses her wit to manipulate spectacle and to expose injustice. Morena's blood and her white costume in *Ibrahim* present her as

⁴⁰⁹ Doris Lechner, "“And Am I Thus Rewarded?”: The Rejected Hero and the Raped Heroine in Mary Pix's *Ibrahim*", *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 64:4 (2016), 367-383 (p. 372).

⁴¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), pp. 1720-1744, p. 1734, p. 1740.

⁴¹¹ John Banks, *Anna Bullen; Or, Vertue Betrayed* (R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1682), Act IV, p. 56.

⁴¹² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: John Lichfield and James Short, 1621), p. 214.

innocent, while Anna's nosebleed in *Anna Bullen* condemns her as an adulterous, passionate woman.

The handkerchief reappears after Anna's execution as proof of her guilt and to reassert patriarchal authority; at the play's close we are told that 'the King is just.'⁴¹³ However, it is clear that Banks wants to inspire sympathy for Anne Boleyn and that the audience would not view the King as 'just' judging from Act Five in which Diana Talbot has Princess Elizabeth plead for her mother's life. Banks has one of his characters describe Anna dressed in white, preparing for her execution, to deconstruct the notion that Anna is guilty (p. 70). As Susan Owen notes, the meaning of women's experience in seventeenth-century tragedy is not privileged, but 'sharply contested.'⁴¹⁴ Pix goes further than Banks in staging the abject. Using performative wit's visual dissimilitude to question patriarchal authority, Pix capitalizes on the actress's body which is used to actively stage the abject, while Banks' *Anna Bullen*'s bleeding body is interpreted as a sign of guilt and her innocence is reported rather than staged.

Pilar Cuder-Dominguez views Morena as a passive heroine, arguing that Sheker Para is the main 'agent of the action' in *Ibrahim*.⁴¹⁵ Doris Lechner, Cynthia Lowenthal, Jacqueline Pearson and Constance Clark acknowledge that Morena actively displays resistance.⁴¹⁶ I argue that this is because Morena controls her own visual representation.

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 76, p. 74.

⁴¹⁴ Susan Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 88.

⁴¹⁵ Pilar Cuder-Dominguez, 'Gender, Race and Party Politics in the Tragedies of Behn, Pix and Manley', in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (New York: MLA, 2010), pp. 263-274 (p. 268).

⁴¹⁶ Doris Lechner, "'And Am I Thus Rewarded?': The Rejected Hero and the Raped Heroine in Mary Pix's *Ibrahim*", *ZAA*, 64:4 (2016), 367-383 (p. 368).

If we apply Elin Diamond's idea of a self-conscious female gaze to these scenes, the actress's staging of the abject criticises 'being-looked-at' and positions the male gaze as the cause of female suffering to outwit patriarchal authority.⁴¹⁷ Moments such as these which make visible 'contradictory social attitudes in both text and society' through performative wit are examples of what Elin Diamond refers to as 'feminist gestic criticism' where the gestus 'denaturalize[s] and defamiliarize[s] what ideology—and performativity—makes seem normal, acceptable and inescapable.'⁴¹⁸ The gestus also goes further in threatening to dissolve the boundaries of subjectivity through the shared gaze of the audience. This can be seen in the following section on disfigurement in which Morena's invitation to have her body harmed, involves not only the characters within in the scene but also the theatre audience.

Disfigurement

Through performative wit as a mode of resistance Agnes in Catherine Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1695) skilfully controls her own self-representation. Staging self-harm is portrayed as a form of control of one's body in the following scene:

AGNES I'll blot out all that's lovely in this Face
Disfigure it to black deformity [...]
And bring him [the Prince] back to reason.

(II.ii.B4r)

Self-harm in this instance resembles taking control over one's representation through the character's and actress's performative wit which stages the abject. Throughout the

Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration stage* (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2003), p. 171.

Constance Clark, *Three Augustan Women Playwrights* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 277.

Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Female Dramatists 1642-1737* (London: Harvester, 1988).

⁴¹⁷ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 77.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, p. 52, p. 47.

play Agnes is perceived as abject because she is an outsider inside the court who disturbs relations between others. In this scene Agnes controls her own representation by defacing her beauty which the prince is attracted to. By making herself appear abject, she believes that the shocking sight will bring the Prince back to reason, that it will confront him with the horrific act of inconstancy to his wife Constantia. Once again Agnes's performative wit which controls her own representation challenges patriarchy by positioning the male gaze, in this case the Prince's destructive desire, as abject.

Morena goes further in staging the abject in the following scene as she invites others to harm her, demonstrating how performative wit confronts the boundaries between self/other:

MORENA Punish my disobedience with Wracks with Gibbets,
 With any thing but loss of honour!
 Tear out my eyes, stab, mangle my face;
 Till it grow horrible to Nature
 And the amazed world gazes with terror,
 Not delight: burn me! heap torture
 Upon torture! and if I murmur a complaint
 Fulfil the bitterest curse—Release,
 And bear me to your bed!

SHEKER Speak Visier, he stands confounded.

(Act III, p. 23)

Through inviting the Emperor to 'tear' and 'mangle' her face, Morena welcomes the breakdown of boundaries, much like modern artists have done as Rina Ayra explores in her discussion of abjection and body art.⁴¹⁹ Contrary to Marsden's view that Morena's status as heroine is compromised by 'the fact that her violence is directed against herself', I read Morena's self-harm as an active display of resistance.⁴²⁰ Morena willingly opens her body up to infliction of violence. This is a witty turn from passive victim to courageous heroine; instead of violence being perpetrated on her against her

⁴¹⁹ Rina Ayra, 'Taking Apart the Body: Abjection and Body Art', *Performance Research*, 19:1 (2014), 5-14.

⁴²⁰ Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire* (2006), p. 109.

will, as would typically occur in scenes depicting a victim, Morena gives her perpetrator a choice between disfigurement and rape. The boundary between perpetrator and victim is broken down by her performance when she enters into a discussion with the Emperor. Morena straddles the divide between virtuous sufferer who would not ‘murmur [a] complaint’ and a vocal heroine who challenges authority. She offers powerful and emotive images of violence to communicate the horror of rape to the Emperor and the audience. Morena cleverly communicates that rape is as monstrous, if not more so, than disfigurement. This shocks the Emperor and undercuts his authority as he ‘stands confounded’ (p. 23). This spectacle takes place not only in front of the Emperor, but also his Vizier, his loyal mistress Sheker Para and Chief Eunuch Achmet. Barbara Creed applies the phrase ‘abject gaze’ to films to describe the effect of horrific scenes on the audience, arguing that ‘spectators are left in a moral dilemma.’⁴²¹ We can see this effect in practice in the response of other characters to Morena’s spectacle, who witness this event and who may feel a responsibility to step in and prevent violence. Morena’s performance provokes a panicked response from Sheker Para and Ibrahim’s Vizier. Rina Ayra importantly argues that in performance spectators are exposed ‘to acts of violation and [made] culpable in the actions...we are made to watch a sequence of gruesome acts that increase in their level of violence. We are compelled to witness...the operation of abjection.’⁴²² In the above scene, performative wit breaks down the boundaries between audience and character; Morena’s spectacle not only involves the characters onstage, who witness her discussion with Ibrahim, but also the theatre audience. Morena’s action produces conflicting emotions within spectators who have

⁴²¹ Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005) p. 32.

⁴²² Rina Ayra, ‘Taking Apart the Body: Abjection and Body Art’, *Performance Research*, 19:1 (2014), 5-14, p. 8.

bought a right to gaze, but in doing so are made to feel disturbed as they are endorsing violence; this destabilises spectators' sovereignty as paying customers. According to Gerard Langbaine, 'the Distress of Morena never fail'd to bring Tears into the Eyes of the Audience.'⁴²³ Morena's spectacle of performative wit exemplifies the way in which women's wit disturbs hierarchies of power and puts patriarchal authority under scrutiny.

Kneeling

The bleeding body provides just one example of the abject in she-tragedy. As I shall discuss, scenes in which the heroine delivers an emotional speech whilst kneeling, create an equally abject and non-bloody spectacle. Kneeling appears to be submissive, but when combined with subversive speech it is a strategic form of action which inspires pity and is persuasive. Words of witty resistance reverse the posture of kneeling from an abject position and elevate it to a powerful and skilful action which undercuts authority. Through adopting the submissive mode of kneeling, both audience and figures of male authority are tricked into assuming that the heroine will plead for forgiveness. As Judith Butler has argued, using Jacques Derrida's concept of '*différance*' in relation to gender, 'all intelligibility depends on repetition but repetition constantly produces new meanings which defer the production of final meanings', producing the 'possibility of resignification.'⁴²⁴ Through performative repetition of the

⁴²³ Gerard Langbaine, *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets: With an Account of all the plays printed in the Year 1698* (London: Printed for Thomas Leigh and William Turner, 1699), p. 111.

⁴²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40: 4 (1988), 519-531, [accessed 18 November 2014] (pp. 519-20).

Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 70.

role of obedient patriarchal subject, female dramatists provide us with new meanings and ways of reading kneeling as a visual dissimilitude when combined with persuasive rhetoric, which contradicts the association of kneeling with feminine passivity.

During Act Four of Delarivier Manley's *Almyna* (1707), the heroine kneels before the Sultan and reminds him that 'tomorrow ends the pleasing boast' after he has praised her beauty, causing the Sultan to revoke his vow to kill her, as 'such beauty, was not made, so soon to fade.'⁴²⁵ Almyna wittily and self-consciously performs the abject position of kneeling to challenge the Sultan's vow through her radical re-reading of primary subject positions:

ALMYNA Cast but thy Eyes around the fair Creation,
 And say what Beings challenge such perfection.
 Are we not made for the most perfect Work,
 And therefore surely, the most perfect Creatures?
 Besides, be not the Means, the Joys, the Pains the same,
 In the production, of the Females, as the Males
 [...]
 Since then their Beings, and their Birth's the same,
 They dye the same, and the same Way shall rise,
 And to Immortal Life adjudged as you be,
 Dost thou not tremble; Sultan, but to think?
 How fatal to thee, the Mistake may prove?
 [...]
 I beg not for myself, I am content to Dye.
 So that my Death may be thy last of Crimes.

SULTAN Still do I dream, or waking, am confus'd,
 Beyond what 'ere was in the pow'r of Dreams?
 Is it her Eyes, or Tongue, this Change has caus'd?

(Act IV, pp. 44-45)

Almyna outwits patriarchal authority through her witty rhetoric whilst kneeling which deconstructs the binary opposition in which Eve is the rib, the secondary mirror of the primary creation Adam, by arguing that women are 'the most perfect Creatures' (p. 45).

⁴²⁵ Delarivier Manley, *Almyna; or The Arabian Vow* (London: William Turner, 1707), Act IV, p. 42.

This is a radical revision and reclamation of matter from its usual position of abjection, which deconstructs male subjectivity and primacy. Despite multiple requests asking whether the Sultan will ‘permit his willing victim’ to ‘speak’, Almyna uses speech to ‘argue with thy vow’ and to say what ‘none of all thy council [...] can, or dare relate’ (Act IV, p. 43, p. 46). Almyna surprises and problematizes the audience’s expectations by creating a visual dissimilitude through performative wit: she speaks with authority whilst adopting a submissive pose. Her powerful speech which contrasts with her servile action is a striking instance of performative wit.

In *Anna Bullen* (1682) Diana Talbot makes use of her ‘Woman’s Art [...] to pierce his [Henry VIII’s] stubborn Nature to the Quick’ when she leads in Princess Elizabeth with an entourage of women (p. 65). In the following scene, kneeling is employed as a witty strategy:

DIANA Pardon this bold Intrusion in your Presence.
 Your Daughter Sir, this little Princess here,
 [...]

 Scream’d for her Father. [...]

 KING What wouldst thou have, my little *Betty*, say?
 [...]

 Come, Let me take thee in my Arms---

 CHILD No: but I’le kneel: for I must be a Beggar,
 And I have learn’t, that all who beg of you,
 Must do it kneeling.
 [...]

 I’m told that streight my Mother is to die,
 Yet I have heard you say, you lov’d her dearly:
 And will you let her die, and me die too?
 KING She must die, Child;
 There is no harm in death;
 Besides the Law has said it, and She must.
 CHILD Must! Is the Law a greater King than you?

(Act V, pp. 66-67)

The kneeling child inspires sympathy in the audience and accuses Cardinal Wolsey of plotting against her mother, referring to him as ‘the Devil’ (p. 56). This scene threatens

the King's authority as his daughter's words and kneeling posture move him. The King urges his guards to 'take her away' and states that 'Women's Tears, and Children's idle Prattle' will not alter his 'fixt Resolves' (p. 56).

Congreve's Almeria in *The Mourning Bride* (1697) is aware of the persuasive power of kneeling coupled with rhetoric and challenges her father's authority under the guise of a submissive pose:

ALMERIA Did ever Father curse his kneeling Child!
Never: For always Blessings crown that Posture.

(V.i, p. 48).

Almeria deliberately performs the feminine action of kneeling, knowing that it will be difficult for her father to refuse her request from such a position. Almeria's self-conscious performance of kneeling in response to her father's anger about her secret marriage to the son of her father's enemy in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* embraces the maternal as abject and reconfigures the subject's return to their origins as a positive rebirth, overturning the patriarchal viewpoint of the maternal as abject:

ALMERIA O Earth, behold, I kneel upon the Bosom,
And bend my flowing Eyes, to stream upon
Thy Face, imploring thee that wilt yield;
Open thy Bowels of Compassion, take
Into thy womb the last and most forlorn
Of all thy Race. Hear me, thou common Parent;
— I have no parent else— be thou a Mother,
And step between me and the Curse of him,
That was—that was, but is no more a Father.

(IV.i, p. 47)

Images of the earth in Almeria's speech depict a return to the maternal body through an inverse birth. As Gerry Harris points out, death marks 'the ultimate loss of self'; here the maternal body is abject because it threatens the stability of the 'complete' subject,

which in this instance is her father.⁴²⁶ Almeria's kneeling to her father and allusions to mother earth threaten him so much that he flees. She challenges the abjection of the maternal body, by highlighting the injustice of his claims that she is a 'Murderer', 'Parricide' (p. 47). Instead, Almeria petitions him to occupy a resurrected maternal space and condemn his mistaken patriarchal exclamations of anxiety:

ALMERIA [B]e thou a Mother,
And step between me and the Curse of him,
That was—that was, but is no more a Father.
But brands my Innocence with horrid Crimes,
And for the tender Names of Child and Daughter,
Now calls me Murderer, and Parricide.
(IV.i, p. 47)

Almeria employs witty spectacle and speech to confront her father, suggesting that his willingness to harm his own daughter is unnatural and monstrous.

There are limits to Almeria's affective technique in *The Mourning Bride* as the male character's reaction to performance of the abject directs spectators' response to resist the maternal model proposed by Almeria. Death as the only solution for the suffering heroine was a common trope in she-tragedy. Despite Almeria's manipulation of kneeling combined with rhetoric, her father avoids succumbing to his emotions, stating that if he should linger to listen he should 'catch thy Madness' (IV.i, p. 50). This plunges Almeria into self-hatred, causing her to curse her 'Tongue, that cou'd not move his Pity' (IV.i, p. 50). Almeria is portrayed as weak and passive here; cursing in drama was viewed as the weakest form of action.⁴²⁷ Rather than blame her father, she views herself as abject. Congreve reinstates patriarchal authority by having Almeria's father resist the alternate model proposed to him by his daughter. However, this example of

⁴²⁶ Gerraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities* (1999), p. 127.

⁴²⁷ Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 19.

performative wit in action which arguably generates sympathy, complicates spectators' emotions about Almeria's father and, in turn, patriarchal authority.

A powerful and more successful instance of kneeling as a strategic form of performative wit occurs in Manley's *Almyna*:

ALMYNA Farewel!
 [...]

 Ile dye
 [...]

 Where are the Mutes? Prepare your Bow-strings,
 When I veil my Face, perform your Office.
 [...]

 Thus lowly then, I humbly do resign *kneels*
 All-seeing gracious Heav'n, dart mercy on me.
 [...]

 And let thy failing Creature taste forgiveness.
 Oh! holy Prophet! Take me to thy care.
 And be my loss of Life, the last of our
 Great Emperor's wilful Crimes. [...]
As the Mutes are going to Strangle her, the Sultan speaks from above.
 SULTAN Mutes, on your Lives forbear, till I descend.
 [...]

The Sultan enters, and runs to embrace her.

(V.ii p. 63)

The spectacle of Almyna kneeling, and her willing sacrifice of her life, combined with her affective speech, moves the Sultan to pity. This turns the situation as Almyna who is kneeling speaks powerfully, causing the Sultan to descend from his elevated position on the balcony. This is a deliberate performance by Almyna as she uses penetrative language to affect the Sultan's conscience, referring to his vow to kill virgins as a crime. Another powerful instance of this occurs when Almyna first meets the Sultan. Almyna kneels veiled before the Sultan and when he removes the veil he comments on her eyes: 'All commanding; how they pierce me! [...] my whole Breast is naked to 'em' (VI.i p. 42). Almyna returns the gaze forcefully, making the Sultan feel exposed in a witty turn of the gaze which deconstructs the sovereignty of the powerful Moor.

Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697) features female characters that use performative wit to control the gaze and subvert patriarchal power by staging the abject. However, their agency is limited. Jean Marsden views Zara's veil and reference to herself as 'seeing and unseen' as an example of the way in which Zara constructs herself a desiring subject who avoids objectification through her control of the gaze (p. 96). Zara orders Osmyn to 'look on me now [...] think on my suffering first, then, [...] view thy self: Reflect on Osmyn, and then look on Zara' (II.i p. 24). Through performative wit which stages the abject, Zara depicts Osmyn as a mirror image of herself due to their mutual suffering and deconstructs Osmyn's belief in himself as a complete and authoritative subject. This is a powerful use of rhetoric which invites Osmyn to consider his actions.

Jean Marsden has argued that 'in urging characters to look on them and stressing their status as sexually 'ruined' the heroines of these plays perpetrate their position as erotic object.'⁴²⁸ In my view, women in these scenes use their wit to expose male brutality through their performance of the suffering female body, and in this way, critique the abject. Zara invites Osmyn's gaze to inspire pity, much in the way that Morena in *Ibrahim* draws attention to her suffering body to evoke sympathy and showcase male cruelty. Morena, Almeria, and Zara control the gaze in these scenes through rhetoric combined with skilful action, forcing their male oppressors to see them as active speaking subjects. Zara orders Osmyn to look at her and to see himself and his cruelty reflected there as though he were gazing into a mirror; this marks a dissolution of Osmyn's subjectivity as a primary subject. This is a self-conscious performance of the abject that advertises its deconstructive power.

⁴²⁸ Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women Sexuality and the English Stage 1660-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Swooning

The swoon is another feature of Restoration drama that has been considered solely as a display of feminine weakness. Like kneeling, swooning has been interpreted as a pathetic and sentimental trope of she-tragedy and has attracted little attention in studies of Restoration drama in relation to wit. Both swooning and kneeling are examples of the non-bloody body which self-consciously creates a spectacle to outwit patriarchal power. I argue that swooning is a self-conscious performance which deconstructs the abject as the actress labours to faint. Like the abject which is feminised and features images of death and rebirth, 'swooning' or 'fainting' frequently collocates with the following; 'her', 'senseless', 'deadly', 'dead', 'trance', and 'recovered.'⁴²⁹ I view the swoon as a witty device used as an exit strategy to resist patriarchal violence by embracing the abject performance of death and renewal. An instance of this occurs in Delarivier Manley's *Almyna* where the 'poor Zoradia sinks' after her sister has cursed Zoradia's lover Abdulla for mistreating her and while Abdulla implores Zoradia to press him 'closer to thy fragrant bosom!'⁴³⁰ During this scene Zoradia is caught in the middle of the conflict between her sister Almyna and her lover Abdulla. Zoradia avoids conflict by swooning to prevent her from having to 'poniard' Abdulla or answer her sister. Rather than swooning due to a deluge of emotion as Osmyn does in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697) on being reunited with his wife, the swoon in Manley's tragedy

⁴²⁹ A Cqpweb search on 'swoon*' returned 2,459 matches in 1,313 different texts (in 1,202,214,511 words [44,422 texts]; frequency: 2.05 instances per million words), reduced to results where query node matches word-tag combination: *swoon_NNI* (1,947 hits). Deadly came up as collocate number 8, senseless 39, dead 15, her 10, trance 13, recovered 17.

⁴³⁰ Delarivier Manley, *Almyna* (1707), p. 36.

serves a similar function to that in comedies. In Susanna Centlivre's *The Artifice* (1722), for example, the swoon is employed as a self-conscious device of performative wit which prevents the heroine's lover being discovered by her husband.⁴³¹ Aristotle acknowledges the use of swoon as one of several in a list of crafty devices employed by women; 'Crocodile's Tears, Vows and swoonings.'⁴³² Boram Kim argues that the swoon is a practical and witty device:

Women seized upon what was available and found a way to use it to their advantage. This image eventually came to be interpreted as one of craftiness and deviousness. Then again, are those not merely different terms for clever, pragmatic, and resourceful?⁴³³

This firmly positions the swoon as a skilful action, a form of performative wit.

Another such example of the swoon as a practical device or means of escape from patriarchal authority occurs when Almeria conveniently swoons to protect herself from her father's rage after she has revealed that she is already married (IV.i, p. 49). Csengei argues in relation to eighteenth century fiction that such moments can be viewed as 'acts of resistance and escape.'⁴³⁴ Morena's swoon when Ibrahim is about to rape her can be read as such an act of resistance (Act III p. 25). The above critics have viewed the swoon as a way in which women could display resistance, whilst not departing from the generic mode of sentimentality and sensibility. The swoon was also

⁴³¹ Susanna Centlivre, *The Artifice* (1722), in *The Works of the Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre volume 3* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), pp. 287-372 (p. 310).

⁴³² Aristotle, 'Chapter IV A Discourse on the Happy State of Matrimony', in *Aristotle's Master-piece Completed in Two Parts* (London: B. Harris, 1697), p. 46.

⁴³³ Boram Kim, 'Faint or Feint? Literary Portrayals of Swooning in the Eighteenth Century', <http://sspace.snu.ac.kr/bitstream/10371/2391/3/englishstudies_v29_148.pdf> [Accessed 1 March 2014], p. 164.

⁴³⁴ Ildiko Csengei, "'She Fell Senseless on His Corpse": The Woman of Feeling and the Sentimental Swoon in Eighteenth-Century Fiction', *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (2008), <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/psychoanalysis/csengei/csengei.html>> [accessed 12 May 2015], para. 22 of 26.

used as a plot device to offer relief or a pause in the narrative before it develops, as

François-Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac explains:

The Act ends not when the Stage is without an Actor, but when it is without Action. And that which makes me say so, is, that I have observ'd, that among the Ancients the *Chorus* does both sing and dance, and the Musick play, though there be an Actor upon the Stage, which happens two ways; the one, when an Actor remains upon the Stage, but incapable of Action, as *Hecuba* in *Euripides*, who falls in a swoon between the First and Second Act.⁴³⁵

Zoradia's swoon and recovery in *Almyra* occurs between the third and fourth Act. I argue that this is not only a plot device to offer relief, but also a tactical move on her behalf in the scene. Zaidee E. Green argues that the swoon functions as a 'restorative' device for characters during battle scenes.⁴³⁶ Naomi Booth has pointed out that the origins of swooning lie with Medieval representations of death and religious conversion or renewal.⁴³⁷ When swooning, a person enters into a death-like state, a space which excludes language; swooning can be viewed as a space which creates and negates the subject, extinguishes and restores in simulation of the semiotic *chora*. This return to the feminine space of the *chora* undercuts patriarchal subjectivity as it marks a return to maternal origins. Julia Kristeva states that the '*chora* is a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic.' It is a space 'indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine [...] irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation.'⁴³⁸ Swooning offers an unreadable spectacle, a deconstructive performance that simultaneously evokes death and birth, and resists patriarchal language.

⁴³⁵ François-Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, *The Whole Art of the Stage* (London: 1684), Chapter 10, p. 71.

⁴³⁶ Zaidee E. Green, 'Swooning in *The Faerie Queene*', *Studies in Philology*, 34:2 (1937) [accessed 16 December 2013], 126-133 (p. 126).

⁴³⁷ Naomi Booth, 'Swooning' *BBC 3 The Verb*, 05/06/2015.

⁴³⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 89-136 (p. 94, p. 97).

Feminist critics such as Elizabeth Grosz and Emmanuel Bianchini have argued that the space of the semiotic *chora* has the potential to function as an active and creative site.⁴³⁹ Alison Findlay has argued in relation to women's household drama that the *chora* is 'an incubator, a safe space for women to remake the world.'⁴⁴⁰ Zoradia avoids having to answer by entering a state devoid of language. Abdulla wants Zoradia to kill him as he has betrayed her and is in love with her sister Almyrna, who is furious with him. The swoon as a restorative device enables women to remove themselves from the situation and to plot their next move. Zoradia awakens opportunely from her swoon as the scene escalates to prevent Almyrna and Abdulla, who are cursing each other, from delivering physical blows. This ends the discussion and conflict between Almyrna and Abdulla and prevents Almyrna, who invokes the 'furies', from turning into a vengeful woman. The above are instances in which performative wit acts as a mode of resistance offering a creative alternative to the constraints and weaknesses of patriarchal language.

Resurrection and Dismemberment in *The Mourning Bride*

Performative wit in *The Mourning Bride* expels the abject memory of the Civil War through collective catharsis. Rhetoric and spectacle in the play create a collective body, blurring hierarchical distinctions of King and subject, enemy and family, virtuous and passionate to raise moral consciousness. Congreve wittily draws on the abject to ignite the audience's memory of the fall and the restoration of the monarchy, an event which shares characteristics with the abject's focus on death and resurrection. As Kristeva

⁴³⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, Perversion* (London: Routledge, 1995).
 Emanuel Bianchini, 'Receptacle/ Chora: Figuring the Errant Feminine in Plato's *Timaeus*', *Hypatia*, 24:4 (2006), 124-46.

⁴⁴⁰ Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 21.

states, 'abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms the death drive into a start of life, of new significance' (p. 15). Congreve's tragedy is dominated by abject images of death and resurrection which problematize the boundaries of the subject, to generate a sense of collective identity and responsibility for the events of the Civil War. Anne Hermanson has argued that the genre horror tragedy emerged in response to the 'social dislocation' and deep-seated anxieties which lingered after the Civil War due to the government's suppression of addressing the causes of the event.⁴⁴¹ Congreve reinvokes feelings of horror and guilt on the subject of Charles I's execution, to render the audience as a collective, abject. Drawing on a shared memory of political change, Congreve's depiction of the abject encourages spectators to engage in a process of cathartic release in which they can confront their past. As Miriam Handley argues, Congreve's play sought to legitimise the accession of William and Mary.⁴⁴² I argue that Congreve rekindles memories of the Civil War using the abject to promote the monarchy as providing stability from crisis. In this way Congreve's representation of performing the abject contrasts with that of women dramatists as he reinstates patriarchal order. The boundary between life and death is frequently problematized because multiple resurrections occur within the play: Osmyn is presumed dead and appears to 'rise' from the dead when he is reunited with Almeria in a tomb, and Almeria, who has taken poison, is resurrected by Osmyn at the end of the play. Almeria's abject image of clothing Osmyn's 'rotten bones' with her 'own flesh' blurs the boundary between life and death with its bizarre depiction of resurrection and sex (p. 49).

⁴⁴¹ Anne Hermanson, *The English Horror Plays of the Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 2, p. 33.

⁴⁴² Miriam Handley, 'William Congreve and Thomas Southerne' in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, edited by Susan Owen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 412-428 (p. 425).

In the following scene set in a tomb, individual identity is deconstructed by the abject through performative wit which inspires a feeling of collective political identity within spectators:

HELI I saw you on the Ground, and rais'd you up.

I saw Almeria—

OSMYN I saw her too, and therefore saw not thee.

ALMERIA Nor I, nor could I, for my Eyes were yours.

(p. 21)

In the above passage Congreve wittily joins three bodies together through skilful spectacle; Heli raises Osmyn up and Almeria's eyes are Osmyn's. Heli loses his identity through raising or resurrecting Osmyn, he is no longer seen. Thus, the performers become a collective, forming one body. This spectacle can be likened to Hobbes's representation of the Body Politic in *Leviathan* which depicts the King's body formed of his people.⁴⁴³ This sense of collective identity becomes evident when the performers stage the scene. The lines imply that Heli would be positioned behind Osmyn and therefore obscured by him, with Almeria facing Osmyn. The above resurrection can be read as the Restoration of the monarchy and reformation of the body politic.

Performative wit which stages the abject in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697) confuses signs and signifiers, collapsing the distinction between King and subject, death and life, friend and enemy. Congreve's witty use of the abject to confuse identities achieves its full potential in performance, as the King misguidedly disguises himself as Osmyn under the cover of darkness to surprise Zara. Zara's plot to murder Osmyn results in the King's body becoming Osmyn's; melding Moor and enemy to the state with King and protector. Mistaken for Osmyn, the monarch's body becomes a 'bloody and undistinguishable Trunk' (p. 68). The King's identity and status is

⁴⁴³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Andrew Cooke, 1651), p. 121.

destroyed, as is his distinction from the people as their 'head.' This serves as a reminder of Charles I's fall from grace which signalled a turning point in history as the King was no longer untouchable by man, and like his subjects was mortal, capable of being 'reduc'd to common Clay' (p. 68). The chaotic scene which follows, in which Gonsalez urges his son to 'turn your avenging sword' on me who 'have spilt my Royal Master's Blood', invokes the haunting memory of the conflict and division between families during the English Civil War. The abject division of the body politic is confronted through performative wit which creates a critical atmosphere by positioning spectators as a moral collective (p. 67).

Congreve includes dismembered male bodies in the play to feminise the abject and to depict Zara's Ottoman Court as an effeminate and chaotic form of government which destabilizes political order in Granada. The abject image of the King's disembodied 'grizled... Head...all smear'd with Blood, / Gasping as it would speak' foreshadows the severance of the King's head from his body and the play's subsequent descent into chaos (p. 50). It is significant that the King's head is muffled in the mute's clothes, as the mute's communication via bodily gestures, rather than Patriarchal language, is associated with the crisis of sign and signified in the play. In the final Act, the mutes' signs are misunderstood by Almeria who believes they are urging her to drink the poison left by Zara. On the stage abject images are associated with the female body and women's plots. Zara's co-conspirator Selim the eunuch is an example of the male body made monstrous and effeminate. Selim, the mutes and Zara are depicted as dangerous within the play. The vault in which Osmyn is interred is referred to as a 'womb' and the images of the grave are likened to the female body, such as Almeria's petition to the earth to take her 'into thy womb' (p. 47). The metaphors of womb as tomb negatively associate the abject with the feminine.

Performative wit in Congreve's tragedy differs from Pix's, Manley's, and Trotter's plays. In *The Mourning Bride*, the actress's virtuoso performance is undercut by the male character's/performer's reaction to the scene which directs spectators' response to the abject. When Congreve's Almeria kneels her father walks away, but when Manley's Almyna kneels the Sultan pardons her. Zara powerfully manipulates the gaze when she visits Osmyn 'veil'd.' This positions the actress as seeing but not seen and merges the virtuous heroine with the passionate heroine, as Zara is mistaken for Osmyn's love Almeria (p. 31). However, Congreve does not treat Zara sympathetically: she is denied the opportunity to perform the figure of martyr. Her sadness on seeing the decapitated body (thinking it is Osmyn's) is that she did not have the chance to 'fall before his Eyes / A Martyr and a victim to my Vows', to demonstrate her willingness to die for him (pp. 70-1). Congreve reasserts the boundary between the virtuous and the wicked. This is exemplified by Almeria's statement that 'innocence survive[s]...for blessing ever wait on vertuous deeds' and her condemnation of Zara, whose 'Error...[was] plain' (p. 74). Zara is too dangerous a figure to be allowed to succeed as her confusion of signs causes chaos within the play. Congreve, who believed that tragedy should be instructive, purges his play of the monstrous female. As Rebecca Merrens has argued:

By representing all women—even the stock 'good' woman as disabling and dissolving male authority and order, Congreve disguises the prevalent conflicts and ruptures among men in the play and powerfully legitimates the violent male relations upon which his tragedy begins and depends.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁴ Rebecca Merrens, 'Unmanned with thy Words: Regendering Tragedy in Manley and Trotter' in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 31-53 (p. 41).

I agree with Merrens that the women in the play are portrayed as a threat to order. However, I would argue that Congreve employs performative wit which stages the abject to address concerns about political effeminacy and to help his audience come to terms with the horrific events of the Civil War and Interregnum. Unlike Congreve, plays by women dramatists depict women as co-conspirators in intrigues. In the next section of this chapter I will explore Catharine Trotter's and Mary Pix's Sapphic community of witty women who outwit patriarchal authority by deconstructing the notion that women rupture homosocial bonds. Thus, exposing witty networks between women as an alternative to patriarchal structures.

Deconstructing Medea

In this section I argue that the subversive wit of women revengers and the Sapphic wit generated between women rivals outwits patriarchal structures in tragedy. The witty plotter deconstructs tragedy's celebration of virtue and condemnation of vice because wit complicates the emotions roused in the spectator; combative scenes between witty rivals elicit feelings of pleasure and even admiration in the audience. As Kathleen Sands has argued, tragedy demonises passion and sexuality in women as monstrous.⁴⁴⁵ However, plotters such as Elvira and Bianca persuasively justify their schemes, reclaiming their revenge as a necessary means of regulating male desire.

There is a close relation between wit, plots, and revenge as all have the potential to change a character's fortune and therefore are often employed by those of lower

⁴⁴⁵ Kathleen M. Sands, 'Tragedy, Theology and Feminism in the Time after Time', in *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. by Rita Felski (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 82-103 (p. 95).

social standing. From my research using Corpus Query Processor, I observed that revenge was a popular theme during the 1670s with a frequency of 52.16 instances per million words and one which increases again in the 1690s with a frequency of 52.34 instances per million words; this is considerably higher than the frequency of 49.97 instances per million words in the 1680s.⁴⁴⁶ Revenge appears fifteen times in Pix's *Ibrahim*, twenty-two times in Trotter's *Agnes de Castro*, and thirty-two times in Settle's *Love and Revenge*. This invocation of revenge seems to me to be a response to Jacobean revenge tragedies. Linda Woodbridge relates revenge in the Jacobean period to balancing account books.⁴⁴⁷ Woodbridge's view of the popularity of revenge in relation to economics and social inequality is particularly pertinent to plays produced during the 1690s, after the Bank of England was set up in 1694 to manage and balance public debt. Following this, the London Stock Exchange was founded in 1698. The climate of stocks, shares, and gambling offered a means by which fortunes could be unexpectedly overturned, raising or lowering social status. Woodbridge argues that revenge is motivated by 'unfairness' or inequality, arguing that revenge is a 'redress for the disempowered.'⁴⁴⁸

In the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon views disadvantaged types or those marginalised in society as more likely to commit revenge; among which he lists bastards, women, and deformed people.⁴⁴⁹ Bacon argues that while public revenge is 'for the most part fortunate', private revenge is only tolerable when it serves to right

⁴⁴⁶ This was based on a Cqpweb decade by decade search for *veng* between 1670-1700 in the texts from the Early English Books online database (eebov3 corpus).

⁴⁴⁷ Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 61.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Frances Bacon, 'Of Revenge' *Essays*, ed. by Samuel Harvey Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), pp. 34-35.

‘those wrongs which there is no law to remedy’ and associates private revengers with ‘witches’, gendering ‘vindictive persons’ as female.⁴⁵⁰ Elkanah Settle’s *Love and Revenge* (1675) manipulates spectators’ expectations of the marginalised revenger by conflating two marginalised groups into one in Chlotilda, a female rape victim disguised as a black man.

Private revenge enables women to right personal wrongs when the perpetrator has not been punished by law. Late seventeenth century tragedy features marginalised groups such as moors (*Love and Revenge*), women, widows (*The Fatal Friendship*), eunuchs, and mutes (*Ibrahim, The Mourning Bride*), all of whom commit revenge. Settle’s *Love and Revenge* conflates the black subject with the female-sexed rape victim to raise questions about race and gender. This represents a witty turn in which audience members’ prejudices about blackness are challenged. Morwenna Carr observes that blackness is imagined as being incompatible with the actions and intelligence shown by the racially othered Nigrello.⁴⁵¹ Moors in drama such as *Othello*, are generally out-witted by white males rather than out-witting those around them. Queen Fredigond views Nigrello as a loyal slave and never suspects Nigrello of deceit. Chlotilda’s masculine disguise and her assertion that this was merely ‘a cruel part’ acted showcase the performative nature of gender (p. 82). Chlotilda is viewed as her ‘Sexes Champion’ and by revealing her identity as a woman, she unusually maintains her honour (p. 82). This contrasts with George Chapman’s *Bussy d’Ambois* (1607) and Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* (1610) which imply that female revenge is incompatible

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, pp 34-35.

⁴⁵¹ Morwenna Carr, ‘Material / Blackness: Race and Its Material Reconstructions on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage’, *Early Theatre*, 20 (2017), 77-96 (p. 91).

with honour. Chapman's Charlotte is unsuccessful in her revenge and Beaumont and Fletcher's Evadne aligns herself with a Fury ('I am a Tiger').⁴⁵²

Instead of being portrayed as furies Restoration revengers such as Settle's Chlotilda in *Love and Revenge* and revengers in tragedies by the 'female wits' reclaim revenge in feminine terms and are pragmatic and calm. Settle's Chlotilda is similar to Kyd's Bel-Imperia from *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587). Bel-Imperia, cited by many as the first female avenger, calmly commits revenge. Chlotilda as Nigrello in *Love and Revenge* and Zara in *The Mourning Bride* are both adept at disguise and dissembling. Zara's 'Words and Actions are obscure and double, / Sometimes concur, and sometime disagree' (V.i, p. 45). However, Zara is portrayed as mad and passionate, while Nigrello is calm, collected, and comments on her own art through asides. Congreve's Zara conforms to the stereotype of women changing into furies due to 'corrupt'd love', cited by seventeenth-century misogynist Edward Ward, as the third Act ends with the following; 'Heav'n has no Rage [...] Nor Hell a Fury, like a Woman scorn'd.'⁴⁵³

Restoration and eighteenth-century women dramatists respond to the work of Jacobean playwrights to portray revenge as essential to the regulation of male desire, aligning women's revenge with public revenge. This is exemplified by Trotter's *Agnes de Castro* (1695) in which Elvira and Bianca present revenge as 'just Anger':

'Tis vice to leace such Injuries unpunish'd
'Twould make all men be Faithless as the Prince,
If Women bore their Wrongs without return.

⁴⁵² Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy* (London: Nicholas Okes for Richard Higgenbotham, 1619), V.i K₂.

⁴⁵³ William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1697), III.i, p. 39.

(I.i B₁)

This echoes Evadne's revenge on behalf of 'abused ladies' in *The Maid's Tragedy* (1619) and rejects the representation of the female stoic in she-tragedy.⁴⁵⁴ The calm schemes of co-conspirators Elvira and Bianca are contrasted with Elvira's brother's 'boundless Rage and Jealousie' (I.i B₁). The stereotype of the woman fury is problematized in *Ibrahim* in which Pix's villainess Sheker Para resists the stereotype of scorned woman who descends into madness.⁴⁵⁵ Instead Sheker's wit is praised throughout the play and she is framed as an expert plotter whose 'thinking Mind that in her own dark Cell / Revolves, and then performs' (Act III p. 14). Similarly, in *Queen Catharine* Mary Pix departs from the representation of vengeful women as 'Furies.' Though Gloucester refers to Catharine as a Fury, she is never represented as one. Pix cleverly places this opinion in the mouth of a misogynist and dislikeable character to challenge the trope of powerful women as vengeful Furies. This contrasts with *The Rival Queens* (1677) in which Statira is 'by Love a Fury made' (Act III p. 31).

The female revenger as Fury is further deconstructed by the celebration of her wit in plotting. Sheker Para's wit is heralded 'Divine' by the Sultan and the vizier who 'take a Woman's Counsel!' when plotting revenge (p. 18, p. 15). The wittiest action in Settle's *Love and Revenge* is carried out by a woman disguised as a man who is celebrated as her 'Sexes Champion' (Act V p. 82). The reveal that the heroine Chlotilda uses two layers of disguise to retain her virtue, pretending to be a moor and adopting 'a masculine shape' for her scenes of cruelty, is surprising and delightful (Act V p. 82). However, Chlotilda must disassociate her sex from her deeds in order to remain a

⁴⁵⁴ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy* (London: Nicholas Okes for Richard Higgenbotham, 1619), IV.i.169.

⁴⁵⁵ Mary Pix, *Ibrahim* (London: John Harding and Richard Wilkin, 1696).

sympathetic character (p.72). Female dramatists go further than male dramatists, such as Settle, in their witty presentation of pragmatic female revengers who do not disassociate themselves from their Sex but defend revenge in their own terms to challenge the view of woman as Fury.

Women Revengers in Plays by Male Dramatists

Female revengers in Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) and John Banks's *Anna Bullen* (1682) are portrayed as Furies. Lee depicts 'rival Queens of different humours' presenting a clear binary between Statira (Sappho), played by Elizabeth Boutell, and Roxana (Medea), played by Rebecca Marshall.⁴⁵⁶ This binary is reinforced through language; Statira 'cry'd for milk' while Roxana was 'nurs'd in blood' (p. 28). Roxana shares characteristics with Medea; she is described as an 'Enchantress' who used magic and wine to seduce Alexander the Great (p. 23). Lee's representation of Roxana as a raving Fury can be seen below:

ROXANA: [G]ive a whirlwind room,
 [...]
 Fury, revenge, disdain, and indignation
 Tear my swoln breast, [...]
 My brain is burst, debate and reason quench'd,
 The storm is up, and my hot bleeding heart
 Splits with the rack, while passions like the winds
 Rise up to Heav'n and put out all the Stars.

(p. 26)

⁴⁵⁶ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 15.

Roxana is not in control of her passions; she threatens to set Alexander and Statira ‘on fire to blaze for ever’ (p. 33). Roxana taunts Statira with images of Alexander clasping her ‘throbbing breast[s]’ (p. 28). Roxana’s sexual forwardness contrasts with Statira’s ‘sickly Virtue’ (p. 30). The portrayal of Roxana as passionate meets the stereotype of the Fury as a sexually experienced woman who cannot control her passion.

Like Roxana who is an ‘instrument’ in Cassander’s plot, John Banks’s villainess Elizabeth Blunt in *Anna Bullen* is represented as a Fury manipulated by Cardinal Wolsey:

BLUNT Be curst the time of *Bullen's* fatal Birth,
 Wrinkles like Age anticipate her Youth;
 Mildews and Blasts devour her wanton Beauties,
 [...]
 Dig up her Charms and Features by the Roots,
 And bury 'em in Pits as deep as Graves.

WOLSEY Study some Act that may revenge this Fury,
 This hurts no more than Barks of Coward Curs;
 She lives, and is as beautiful as ever:
 Be rul'd by me, who like a dreadful Piece,
 Am sure to kill, where-e're I take my aim[.]⁴⁵⁷

Blunt appears to conform to Bacon’s depiction of women revengers as ‘vindictive.’ However, Blunt employs curses, deemed the weakest form of revenge. That Banks’s villainess does not plot herself but is manipulated by Wolsey shows that the view of woman as Fury is produced by men. I would argue that Banks’s depiction of Blunt as vulnerable to manipulation positions her as a powerless victim. Banks therefore provides spectators with an ironic depiction of Blunt as Fury.

The embodiment of women revengers as villainous breaks down in performance, inspiring sympathy in spectators. Elizabeth Howe notes that having popular actresses

⁴⁵⁷ John Banks, *Anna Bullen; Or, Vertue Betrayed* (R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1682), p. 5.

cast as the ‘darker woman’ made the character more sympathetic.⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth Barry’s performance as Zara in *The Mourning Bride* was more popular than Bracegirdle’s Almeria.⁴⁵⁹ This demonstrates the actress’s ability to affect spectators’ reception of character. The actress’s wit must also be acknowledged because the collaboration between women dramatists and actresses enabled greater variety within roles for women onstage, as I shall discuss.

Wit in tragedy does not always promote difference and conflict between women. Wit can unite characters either through admiration or plotting towards a common end in response to injustice. The rivalry set up in ‘she-tragedy’ breaks down in performance during moments of admiration of one another’s wit and sympathetic identification with the other’s situation. Elements of rivalry which break down in performance can be seen in Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* in the competitive exchanges between Roxana and Statira which cause Clytus to comment on the performance of the queens, that ‘never did passions combat thus before’ (p. 35). However, Lee capitalizes on the erotic nature of such rivalry through language which draws attention to the actress’s physical body; female playwrights take this idea of admiration further as I shall go on to discuss. There is some sense of admiration towards Statira from Roxana, who comments that Statira ‘shews a certain bravery of Soul, / Which I shou’d praise in any but my Rival’ (p. 29). Statira attempts to mimic Roxana when she states, ‘Rival take heed and tempt me not too far; / My bloud may boyle, and blushes shew a War’ and claims that she is ‘by Love a Fury made, like you (p. 31). Such moments of admiration and identification made during performance briefly disrupt the distinction between the women. The women

⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 181.

⁴⁵⁹ Gerard Langbaine, *The Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets* (London: William Turner, 1699), p. 23

strive to out-do each other in hostile rhetoric, with Statira claiming ‘I meet thy tides of Jealousie with more’ (p. 31). When asked ‘what wou’d you dare?’ by Roxana, Statira responds with ‘whatever you dare do’ (p. 31). The actresses are centre-stage during this verbal battle of the wits in which Statira has the last word:

STATIRA Yes, tow’ring proud Roxana, but I dare.

ROXANA I tow’r indeed o’re thee;

Like a Fair Wood, the shade of Kings I stand,
While thou, sick Weed, dost but infect the Land.

STATIRA No, like an Ivy I will curl thee round,
Thy sapless Trunk of all its pride confound,
Then dry, and wither’d, bend thee to the ground.

(p. 32)

In this quick-fire exchange, the women are clear rivals who strive to out-perform each other. One can imagine the actresses vying for spectators’ attention, showcasing their skills as performers. As Felicity Nussbaum argues, ‘the confrontation between the two paired women simply side-tracks the audience from the main plot’ of the downfall of Alexander’s political reign.⁴⁶⁰ However, Lee chooses to display women’s wit here in the form of cursing in line with Bacon’s view of women revengers as ‘witches.’⁴⁶¹ In contrast to women dramatists’ portrayal of female plotters plotting from behind the scenes through a combination of language and action, Statira’s and Roxana’s rivalry is open, upfront, and relies on verbal battles of competitive wit associated with the male sphere. In *The Rival Queens*, Roxana’s attempt to dissemble at the beginning of the scene in which she ‘weeps to see Statira grieve’ does not fool Statira, who recognises that Roxana’s feelings are ‘counterfeit’ (p. 30). Though such scenes of competitive and vengeful wit are entertaining, the language used by the women draws attention to the actress as an erotic spectacle, such as Roxana ordering Statira to ‘put forth these Royal

⁴⁶⁰ Felicity Nussbaum, “‘Real, Beautiful Women’: Actresses and *The Rival Queens*”, *Eighteenth Century Life*, 32 (2008), 138-158 (p. 144).

⁴⁶¹ Francis Bacon, ‘Of Revenge’, in *Essays*, ed. by Samuel Harvey Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), pp. 34-35, pp. 34-35.

Breasts / [...] That I may change their milkie Innocence / To bloud' (p. 55). This image also reinforces the virtuous/passionate binary of Statira crying for milk and Roxana being 'nurs'd in bloud' (p. 28). Lee's Roxana and Statira fit the stock binary of angel and she-devil, resulting in a dramatic but not necessarily sympathetic or celebratory view of female revengers (p. 55).

Elkanah Settle takes the representation of admiration of wit between rival women further than Lee in *Love and Revenge*. After Queen Fredigund's death, the spark of Chlotilda's wit fades and her cunning plots lose momentum. Queen Fredigund and Nigrello are well-matched rivals in wit. Nigrello comments that Fredigund's plot to have Chlotilda's brothers falsely accused, is 'most admirable' and Fredigund thinks Nigrello 'hast a Wit which does engender thoughts/ As Regal as our own' (p. 7 and p. 49). During Act three of *Love and Revenge* Nigrello and Fredigund attempt to outwit one another; Nigrello starts a fire in the castle in an attempt to catch Fredigund and her lover Clarmount together in front of the King. However, the Queen employs her quick wit and asks Clarmount to put on 'th'Habit that my Husband wore last Night / When he was Poyson'd' to 'Make up the form of the dead King' (p. 25). Nigrello threatens to countermining Fredigund's design when he comments 'That habit [...] was last night put off' and 'never stir'd from thence [the Queen's bedchamber] till now' (pp. 27-28). Nigrello adds that 'the Disguise his Ghostly Visage wore, / I'm confident was more Pleasant to the Queen / When't enter'd thither', to imply that the ghost is the Queen's lover (p. 28). Chlotilda/Nigrello enthusiastically praises her rival's wit in countermining her plots and takes equal pleasure in her own efforts to foil Fredigund's designs.

However, as the play progresses Chlotilda's vengeful wit loses momentum; her threat to create rebellion in the empire does not come to fruition as she 'turn[s] Woman'

when she is about to kill King Clotair—the man who raped her (p. 81). Without her rival, Chlotilda reveals her disguise before committing her revenge—which was typical. However, it appears that she abandons her designs when Fredigund is no longer available to marvel at her wit. It would be simplistic to argue that Chlotilda could not uphold her violent deeds or that the revenger must ultimately reveal themselves and then die as punishment, especially as Settle's Chlotilda is praised for her deeds. Instead, I link Chlotilda's loss of momentum to the loss of her rival. Chlotilda as Nigrello states that her skill is in countermining and rates this as a higher skill to basic plotting, perhaps then Chlotilda's wit can only survive as the cunning Nigrello when she is creatively responding to another's plot. When Chlotilda/Nigrello achieves the upper-hand, there is no longer anyone to try her wit.

In *Ibrahim* there are flickers of mutual admiration between Morena and Sheker Para. Morena enlists Sheker's help to petition the Sultan to spare her, knowing that Sheker is a strong influence on the Sultan and skilled in rhetoric. Morena, who employs performative wit through staging the abject, admires Sheker's rhetorical skill and Sheker recognises Morena's power when the Vizier is struck dumb by her spectacle. However, it is Pix's representation of an alternate female community in the form of Sheker Para's friendship with her eunuch Achmet that goes further in deconstructing the view of women as rivals. Felicity Nussbaum has argued that the harem is presented as a 'feminotopia' in the work of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.⁴⁶² In contrast to Congreve's representation of eunuchs and mutes as dangerous forces in *The Mourning Bride*, Pix portrays marginalised identities as part of an alternate female community.

⁴⁶² Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth Century English Narratives* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 156.

Sapphic Wit

Women dramatists capitalise on the skill of the actress to establish Sapphic networks of wit between character, performer and female spectators. Sapphic wit is not only generated between actress and spectators, but is also between female characters onstage as I shall discuss. The actress's performance in Mary Pix's *Queen Catharine* (1698) deconstructs the binary of Sappho/Medea. Through performance, the heroine Isabella metamorphoses from virtuous victim to raging Fury, showcasing the actress's skill in switching register. Isabella who is about to be raped by Thyrrold, initially adopts the mode of virtuous heroine by pleading with him:

ISABELLA Hold, Sir, as ever you have heard of Vertue or
Religion [...] remember
There will come a time when these mad passions,
That buoy your blood up to Rapes and Mischiefs, must
Sink with fainting nature
[...] reflect
Look back on a lewd dessolute life, and forward on
Eternity.⁴⁶³

When this fails she assumes the mode of Fury within the space of a few lines, a sharp contrast which demonstrates Pix's awareness of the powerful affect of the actress on spectators:

ISABELLA Stand off. [...] approach not , do not
Move a hairs breadth, for if thou dost, I'll be reveng'd
On those curst eyes
[...]
And dash 'em bleeding in thy face.

⁴⁶³ Mary Pix, *Queen Catharine* (London: Printed for William Turner and Richard Basset, 1698), V.ii, p. 43.

(V.ii, p. 43)

This is a rapid change from Isabella's previous speech which causes Thyrold to say he does not recognise her as virtuous anymore. Jocelyn Catty's work on rape victims in literature argues that Philomela's metamorphosis into a nightingale charts the 'emergence of the woman from...silence into a discourse of resistance.'⁴⁶⁴ Isabella's rapid and witty transformation in *Queen Catharine* from pleading to commanding showcases the way in which wit is a mode of agency through which women can seize control of their destiny and positions the female revenger as a model of resistance. Women revengers like Isabella enact transformation, drawing attention not only to the playwright's wit in constructing the character, but also the actress's self-conscious performance of transformation. The skilled dramatist is able to write from one mode to the next, while the actress showcases her skill through her ability to embody opposing modes in swift succession. Tragic actresses in particular were judged on their ability to shift 'from Passion to Passion, from Extream to Extream, [...] with easie grace.'⁴⁶⁵ The actress herself becomes a kind of author by transforming herself from angel to she-devil to expose binaries as constructed. Jocelyn Catty highlights active metamorphosis as one mode of resistance and weaving as another form of agency 'associated specifically with female language.'⁴⁶⁶ Women dramatists go further than male dramatists in their presentation of cunning women who weave plots and are co-conspirators in revenge. These women form an alternate Sapphic community in *Agnes de Castro*, *Ibrahim* and *The Fatal Friendship*.

⁴⁶⁴ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape: Writing Women in Early Modern England Unbridled Speech* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), p. 123.

⁴⁶⁵ John Dennis, 'Preface' *Liberty Asserted* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1704).

⁴⁶⁶ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape* (2011), p. 122.

Agnes de Castro and *The Fatal Friendship* take radical steps to deconstruct female rivalry. Scenes in which women inspire one another and praise each other's wit create a temporary Sapphic community in which women sympathise or identify with one another. In *The Fatal Friendship* and *Agnes de Castro* Trotter offers friendship between women as a solution to conflict, portraying women revengers as part of an alternate female community in response to male inconstancy; in Act Five Scene One Lamira proposes friendship to Felicia as they have both been deceived by the same man and this Lamira believes is enough to unite them:

LAMIRA You're Innocent to me, as I to you,
 Tho both each others chief unhappiness;
 But there's another guilty cause of that;
 Him only we should hate, let us be Friends; [...]
 I have resolv'd [.]
 To [...] leave to you, *Felicia*, the Possession
 Of all that Fortune I am Mistress of.
 FELICIA This is amazing, Madam! How have I
 Deserv'd from you such kindness? ⁴⁶⁷

Such witty turns would have been unexpected twist for spectators, as Lamira was played by Elizabeth Barry, known for her role as the villainess Zara in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*. In addition to this twist, Lamira survives and commits herself to a convent—an unusual fate for the passionate heroine. Tragedy in Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* is caused by Bellgard's attempts to satisfy his friend Gramont, his sister Felicia, and Felicia's rival Lamira (II.i, p. 25). Bellgard's disapproval of and interference with Felicia and Gramont's relationship splits the two lovers apart and ends miserably for all parties. Trotter condemns patriarchal intervention in affairs of the heart. Bellgard rather than Felicia and Lamira is at fault for being 'False, and Faithless

⁴⁶⁷ Catharine Trotter, *The Fatal Friendship* (London: Francis Saunders, 1698), V.i, p. 41.

to [his] trust' and depicts bonds between brother, sister and male companions as unstable (V.i, p.54).

Trotter's villainesses Elvira and Bianca draw on the Vice tradition of commenting on the play, to offer insight through Sapphic wit; Lamira states that there is 'no Reality, no Truth in man', while Elvira appeals female spectators when she airs her belief that that women should not bear 'their Wrongs without return' (IV.ii, p. 38 and I.i B1v). Trotter's Lamira also uses Sapphic wit to comment on the plight of women in the following aside which questions 'why must our Sex seem shy of what they wish?' (III.i, p. 22). Bianca, whose name translates as 'white' in Italian, a colour associated with innocence, is a sympathetic villainess. She pities Constantia who is made to leave her friend Agnes, whom she has known from infancy (I.i.B).

Produced during the same year as Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* (1698), Pix's *Queen Catharine* similarly explores the conflict between friendship and heterosexual love. Kathryn McQueen Kendall observes in relation to Pix's *Queen Catharine* that 'women [...] keep the world on its axis, without the calm, sensitive guiding hand of women, the kingdom would fall into chaos.'⁴⁶⁸ However, bonds between women break down when a heterosexual relationship is introduced, much in the way that male bonds are disrupted by marriage in Restoration drama. I investigate whether Eve Sedgwick's concept of 'homosocial desire' applies to the heroines of Mary Pix's *Queen Catharine*,

⁴⁶⁸ Kathryn McQueen Kendall, 'Theatre, Society and Women Playwrights in London from 1695 Through the Queen Anne Era' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 1986) p. 276.

whose loyalty to one another is threatened by their romantic relationships which have the potential to disrupt their bond of Sapphic wit.⁴⁶⁹

Dawn Goode has argued in relation to Mary Pix's *Queen Catharine* that Sapphic relationships between women are exposed and expelled within the play.⁴⁷⁰ Contrary to Goode's view, I argue that Pix presents bonds between women as reliable within the play. Isabella and Queen Catharine become rivals in the second half of the play when Isabella disobeys Catharine by eloping with Clarence. In an over-hearing scene, in which Catharine discovers that Isabella is spying on her and Owen Tudor when Isabella lets out a sigh, Queen Catharine states the following, knowing that Isabella is within earshot:

QUEEN CATHARINE [B]ehold your fair guide as the
Dearest object of my Friendship; nay she
Almost Rivals you. The kindest maid, the
Truest creature, Companion in all my solitudes,
Forsaking the allurements the tempting
Pleasures which her charming youth and
Vast fortunes might have commanded, still
Has she follow'd my retirement: and with
Her Innocence and Goodness cheated me.

(p. 22)

Dawn Goode has interpreted Catharine's line that Isabella 'almost Rivals' Owen, as evidence to suggest that though Catharine loves Isabella, Owen Tudor is chief in her affection.⁴⁷¹ However, there is something peculiar about the phrase 'cheated me' in this passage. In my view this line depicts Catharine's anger and betrayal by Isabella, and is intended for Isabella, whom Catharine knows is watching them. Catharine's line situates

⁴⁶⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁴⁷⁰ Dawn M. Goode, 'Duelling Discourses: The Erotics of Female Friendship in Mary Pix's *Queen Catharine*', *SEL 1660-1700*, 32 (2008), 37-60 (p. 37).

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 46.

Isabella as a dissembler. Read in this way, Catharine's comment that Isabella 'almost Rivals' Owen is motivated by Catharine's hurt at being betrayed by her friend.

Mihoko Suzuki has commented on the way in which Trotter presents 'friendship between women as a more constructive alternative to marriage.'⁴⁷² In *Agnes de Castro* Constantia and Felicia are close friends, rather than rivals. Agnes views Constantia as 'sole perfection' of the female sex and states that she is her 'Light, [her] Guard, [her] all' (III.II, E1r). Even when Constantia discovers that the prince is in love with Agnes, she refuses to view Agnes as her rival and when Agnes offers to leave the Court, Constantia is determined that Agnes should remain with her:

AGNES But, Madam, think, weigh well e'er you Command,
What dangerous mischiefs, may attend my stay.
PRINCESS None that can equal that of losing thee.

(II.i, C3v)

Constantia vows to be Agnes's 'protectress'(C4r). Constantia refers to Agnes more affectionately than her husband the Prince as demonstrated by Bianca's observation of Agnes and the Princess together:

BIANCA The Princess leaning on her Rival's Neck;
They mingled Kisses with the tend'rest Words,
As if their Rivalship had made 'em dear;
Nor did she meet her Lord with greater Kindness[.]

(III.i, B2v).

Agnes and Constantia do not conform to the representation of women as jealous rivals, despite the Prince's attempts to persuade them to wreak vengeance on him, to 'shew your resentment [...] Revenge your Wrongs' (I.ii C1). Moments such as these, during which female friendship is displayed as an alternative to conflict, portray a Sapphic

⁴⁷² Mihoko Suzuki, 'Recognizing Women's Dramas as Political Writing: The Plays of 1701 by Wiseman, Pix and Trotter', *Women's Writing*, 18 (2011), 547-564, p. 557.

community. This is similar to the ending of Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* which closes with an image of female support; the final scene consists of Felicia in a swoon over Gramont's corpse, surrounded by women. Seeing Felicia in a swoon, Lamira remarks; 'how tenderly she lov'd him, poor *Felicia!*' (V.i, p. 56).

The above instances of Sapphic wit are also present in plays in which villainous women plot in pairs with other like-minded conspirators, such as Elivira and Bianca in *Agnes de Castro* and Sheker Para and her eunuch Achmet played by Mrs. Verbruggen in *Ibrahim*. In contrast to Zara's eunuch Selim played by an actor in *The Mourning Bride*, Achmet in Pix's *Ibrahim* was played by Mrs. Verbruggen in 'man's clothes'.⁴⁷³ The intimate exchanges between Sheker and Achmet in which Sheker asks Achmet 'was my curst Rival fair?', along with Pix's decision to have the actress play Achmet, showcase the bond of Sapphic wit between conspirators (III.i, p. 13).

Congreve and Pix take the relationship between female conspirators further, to include feminised figures, such as the mutes and eunuchs in the Sultan's harem, as part of a Sapphic community. Eunuchs were often employed to guard the Sultan's harem and were protective towards the Sultan's mistresses. Lisa Lowe interprets the harem as 'an erotic universe' in which 'social and sexual practices...are not organized around the phallus or a central male authority'.⁴⁷⁴ Congreve and Pix present scenes in which co-conspirators offer one another support. Selim advises Zara when she asks; 'what's to be done? Or when, or how/ Shall I prevent [...] th'approaching Danger?' (p. 41). Similarly, the mutes display loyalty to Zara when, to prevent discovery of her plots, they consume her written orders and kill themselves (V.i, p. 53). Pix describes Achmet as Sheker's

⁴⁷³ Philip Highfill, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers and Other Stage Personnel in London 1660-1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), Vol 5, p. 138.

⁴⁷⁴ Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 48.

‘darling useful Eunuch’ and confidant (p. 10). This is a different kind of feminised space, unique to the East and one which is portrayed in a similar way to the bond between women and their ladies in waiting.

This chapter has drawn attention to the prevalence of wit in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century tragedy, which consists of performative wit, competitive wit, vengeful wit and Sapphic wit. I have demonstrated that performance of the abject originated much earlier than the 1960s, with the advent of the actress on the Restoration stage. Subject positions such as kneeling and swooning, previously viewed as displaying feminine weakness, have been reinterpreted as active and deconstructive displays of the abject through the lens of performative wit. The vocal performance of suffering by ‘outward martyrs’ such as Almyra and Morena, destabilises the passive virtuous heroine/ passionate Fury binary. Almyra’s performance of the abject wittily rewrites traditional subject positions, positing that women, rather than men, are primary subjects. This shifts the focus from the suffering heroine to the heroine who relies on her wit in tragic situations. Performances of the abject, such as Morena’s bleeding body, not only threaten the subjectivity of the powerful Moorish Emperor, but also spill over to the audience, challenging their subjectivity.

Male and female dramatists challenge the representation of the binaries set up in she-tragedy through their use of vengeful wit from Jacobean revenge tragedy. In *Agnes de Castro*, *Ibrahim*, and *Queen Catharine*, women dramatists and actresses rework the notion of revenge through celebrating women’s wit in plotting. Male dramatists present female plotters as manipulative and a threat to patriarchy, such as Settle’s Chlotilda who must disassociate her violent acts from her sex to maintain a respectable reputation as a woman. Rivalry between women onstage breaks down through praise of one another’s

performance in Lee's and Settle's drama. This is presented differently by women dramatists, who point out that such rivalry is a product of patriarchal society and suggest friendships, or Sapphic wit, between women as an alternative to competitive wit. Women dramatists go further in their collaboration with the actress to capitalize on the representation of performative wit as a self-conscious and sympathetic performance as a means of survival. Women's wit in tragedies by female playwrights is portrayed as the ability to 'dissemble', or 'switch mode', to perform as a means of self-preservation.

The emotional affect of wit in tragedy touched on in this chapter forms the focus of my next chapter which considers the affect of witty prologues, epilogues, asides, and soliloquies on spectators comedy, in tragicomedy, and tragedy.

Chapter 4 Wit in Miniature

‘Who’s greatest Fool or Wit today,
The audience or the Author of the play?’⁴⁷⁵

In this chapter, I explore the way in which wit in dramatic paratexts magnify and manipulate the responses of spectators in comedy, tragicomedy, and tragedy, along with the way in which dramatists use wit to challenge conventions of genre to develop an increasingly sophisticated relationship between dramatist, performer, and audience which changes, becoming more subtle, self-aware, and complex throughout the years 1669-1707. I focus on a small selection of comedies, tragicomedies, and tragedies spanning from 1669 to 1707 to analyse the way in which witty prologues, epilogues, asides, and soliloquies engage spectators and function as part of the public sphere of political and theatrical debate in the aftermath of the Restored monarchy, the Popish Plot, and during the relative stability of Queen Anne’s reign. Each of the plays included in this chapter are a direct response to important political and theatrical debates in the period and use witty address to involve spectators in these debates.

The first section of the chapter focuses on how satiric wit in comedy exposes religious and political hypocrisy to set up a critical audience. The second section of the chapter argues that political wit in tragicomedies licenses divided feelings about the Restoration of the monarchy by engaging spectators as confidants and confidantes to members of the Court in the plays. The third section argues that prologues, asides, soliloquies, and epilogues in tragedy serve as vehicles of contagion for the characters’ passions. I argue that vengeful wit in tragedy empowers spectators by aligning them with marginalised characters who are witty and successful. I explore how William

⁴⁷⁵ Susanna Centlivre, ‘Prologue’ to *Love’s Contrivance* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703).

Congreve and Catharine Trotter adapt these paratexts to expel dangerous emotions through the tone of moralising and empathetic wit, directing spectators' responses to the drama.

The plays included in this chapter all use bold forms of witty address ranging from Sapphic wit, vengeful wit, performative wit, and subversive wit to critically engage spectators in theatrical and political debates. Frances Boothby's *Marcelia* (1669) and Aphra Behn's *The Amorous Prince* (1671) boldly encourage criticism of the Court in the prologue, epilogue, and the play itself and provide insight into attitudes toward monarchical authority after the monarchy's restoration. Behn and Boothby are unusual in their inclusion of women in debates concerning the public sphere in their epilogues, soliloquies, and asides. Aphra Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679) and Susanna Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703) depict a more sophisticated form of audience address which plays upon using subversive and satiric wit to outwit spectators and to undercut their power to judge. Each of the above comedies was staged in the aftermath of significant political or theatrical events. *The Feigned Courtesans* which is 'set in Rome' engages spectators in a politicised public sphere in the aftermath of the Popish plot. *Love's Contrivance*, which was staged after Collier's critique of comedy, reacts against the clear-cut characterisation of wits and fools in Restoration comedy and diplomatically responds to criticism about the morality of comedy to place the responsibility of the play's moral in the hands of spectators. Paratexts in tragedy also address political themes. Settle's *Love and Revenge* (1675) employs vengeful wit in paratexts to empower disempowered groups of spectators in the wake of the 1673 Test Act which excluded Catholics from holding public office. Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697) reinvokes the memory of the chaos of the Civil War in his tragic plot to celebrate William and Mary's monarchical authority. Tragedies by women dramatists

such as *The Fatal Friendship* (1698), *Queen Catharine* (1698), and *Almyna* (1707) employ Sapphic wit and performative wit in paratexts to include women in the public sphere and to bring their histories centre-stage.

In addition to engaging spectators in political debates *Love's Contrivance* (1703), *The Mourning Bride* (1697), and *The Fatal Friendship* (1698) use their prologues, asides, soliloquies, and epilogues to self-consciously critique the genres tragicomedy, Restoration comedy, and She-tragedy which their play appears to adopt, before rejecting these models in favour of a sentimental mode of theatre. In response to Rymer's criticism of 'Murders' and 'Parricides' in tragedy *The Mourning Bride* and *The Fatal Friendship* exploit prologues, asides, soliloquies, and epilogues to self-consciously critique the portrayal and appeal of wickedness in tragedy.⁴⁷⁶ The epilogue to *The Amorous Prince* resists traditional comic closure of marriage and resolution in tragicomedy, while *Love's Contrivance* adopts a sentimental mode of comedy in which sympathy is generated for all characters onstage.

Building on the arguments about wit, status, and emotional affect made in Chapter Three, this chapter considers the ways in which witty address in prologues, epilogues, asides, and soliloquies becomes a vehicle for empowering spectators. By referring to topical political events in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prologues and epilogues seek to engage spectators in political debate and in so doing, turn the theatre into a sphere of public debate. In response to Habermas's view that the emergence of the public sphere occurred in the eighteenth century, Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus have recently argued that the public sphere can be traced back before the emergence of

⁴⁷⁶ Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), p. 36.

coffeehouses.⁴⁷⁷ The division between Court and public arguably occurred with the Civil War, and although Restoration theatres were patronised by the King, they promoted dialogue between Court and public and provided a public forum with the potential to critique the Court. Colley Cibber writing about the theatre acknowledges its empowering potential, arguing that the theatre made ‘every common spectator a judge.’⁴⁷⁸ I argue that women dramatists use Sapphic wit primarily in tragicomedy and tragedy (the genre in which women’s desires are invariably side-lined), to involve women in political debates about monarchical and authority and individual freedom. Peter Holland and David Roberts have already considered female spectators’ influence on drama; Holland and Roberts have drawn attention to the rise in the number of women in the audience after 1688, but neither has acknowledged the way in which drama itself directly involves women in the public sphere.⁴⁷⁹ My reading of Sapphic wit which involves women in the public sphere extends Solomon’s argument that prologues and epilogues are vehicles of female agency. This chapter provides new insights into how satiric wit, Sapphic wit, vengeful wit, and subversive wit adopted in dramatic paratexts provided immediate commentary on political and historical events.

It is not possible to know exactly how individual spectators would have responded to what they saw and heard on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century stage. Therefore, any discussion of the effect of wit on individual spectators and groups of

⁴⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England’ in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-30 (pp. 9-10).

⁴⁷⁸ Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, second edition (London: Printed for John Watts, 1740), Vol. 2 Chapter XII, p. 340.

⁴⁷⁹ Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 140-1.

David Roberts, *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 127.

spectators must be speculative. Since any attempt to analyse the reactions of individual playgoers must be exploratory, affect theory offers a valuable framework from which one can which build a sense of general impressions. Affect theory acknowledges the ‘transactional’ relationship between ‘artist, artwork and those encountering it’ and when applied to performance, views the performance as a relational process, a series of affective transactions.⁴⁸⁰ Affect theory is applicable to an analysis of the effect of wit as wit derives its effect from the exchange between characters, individual spectators, and communities of playgoers. Dramatic paratexts rely on interaction with spectators for their effect and are integral to the transactional relationship between performer and spectator. However, affect theory is susceptible to the risk of making generalisations about spectators’ experience which can wrongly emphasise a universal playgoing experience rather than the unique perspective of individual playgoers. John McGavin and Greg Walker avoided this in *Imagining Spectatorship* which skilfully draws attention to the unique perspective each playgoer has based on where they sat or stood in the theatre. *Imagining Spectatorship* importantly acknowledges the social and cultural diversity of theatre spectators to argue that spectators would have had a variety of responses to drama.⁴⁸¹

McGavin’s and Walker’s arguments can usefully be applied to Restoration and eighteenth-century drama. Although it is impossible to know exactly how spectators would have reacted to prologues and epilogues on the Restoration stage, from the existing evidence of the different social groups who frequented the theatre we can speculate as to which lines may have appealed to specific groups of spectators. With

⁴⁸⁰ James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 131.

⁴⁸¹ John McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

this in mind, I limit my discussion of the effect of wit in dramatic paratexts to consider the possible responses of and interactions with different groups of spectators that we know frequented the theatre. I hope to demonstrate what role was played by the witty address in dramatic paratexts in involving individual spectators and groups of spectators in public debates. My approach in this chapter, which makes use of Genette's structuralist approach to paratexts along with affect theory already discussed in Chapter Three, is an unusual combination. However, I argue that paratexts such as prologues and epilogues, despite appearing to be external to the play, have a powerfully affective dimension, making them integral to the play's effect through their manipulation of spectators as individuals and as collective groups.

Gerard Genette defines the paratext as 'a threshold [...] between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and of a strategy, of an influence on the public, [...] that is at the service of a better reception for the text.'⁴⁸² Prologues and epilogues in the theatre are part of the public sphere as they engage with social and political issues and invite criticism on these from spectators. Prologues and epilogues are self-consciously aware of the need to gain a favourable hearing for the play. Prologues set the tone of the play—comic or tragic, and epilogues position spectators as judges of the play and direct their lasting impression of the play. Although different from literary paratexts, prologues market the play to influence their audience in the same way that a preface in a novel influences its reader's perception of the text. Prologues and epilogues incorporate similar techniques to literary prefaces and dedications, such as flattery, playful self-consciousness and

⁴⁸² Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2. All subsequent references will be given parenthetically.

‘expressing what the author, from a sense of propriety, modesty, discretion [...] cannot say [...] acting as a second voice.’⁴⁸³ While dedications ‘address a specific addressee’, prologues, epilogues and asides are directed to a range of spectators and are more playful and less polite than the register usually adopted in a dedication. As Philippe Lejeune argues, paratexts represent the ‘fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s reading of the whole text.’⁴⁸⁴ The tone adopted by the performer in prologues and epilogues can be read as a miniature form of wit which shapes spectators’ experience of the play. The performed paratext is a collective, live experience and a compulsory one, unlike prefatory material in published prose which can be ignored by the reader. Performed paratexts seek to engage a wide range of spectators in an instant. Unlike literary paratexts performed paratexts can elicit an immediate verbal response from spectators in the theatre, and therefore create an opportunity for public discussion and debate.

While scholars such as Diana Solomon and Paul McCallum have acknowledged the lively relationship between performers and spectators showcased in prologues and epilogues of the Restoration, their importance in relation to the play’s overall reception has not been considered. The epigraph appended to this chapter taken from the prologue to *Love’s Contrivance* which asks ‘Who’s greatest Fool or Wit today?/ The audience or Author of the play?’ provides an example of the complex relationship between performer and audience that is established through witty prologues, epilogues, and asides. Centlivre appears to invite her audience to judge whether spectators or the dramatist are fools or wits, but by manipulating spectators she playfully sets herself up as wit.

⁴⁸³ Roland Barthes, ‘Preface to *La Parole Intermediare*’ cited in p. 275 of Genette’s *Paratexts*.

⁴⁸⁴ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte Autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 45.

Prologues and epilogues playfully recreate social hierarchies, making assumptions about audience members' social status to involve them in the performance. These performative paratexts invite spectators to play the roles of fool or wit, flattering spectators by positioning them as wits, or cozening them by refusing to meet the expectations set up in the prologue. Harold Love explains that these effects were designed to draw a positive reaction, 'laughter from the bulk of the house, and retaliatory hisses from the victims.'⁴⁸⁵ As Paul McCallum has observed, the actress cozens spectators in prologues and epilogues, and 'the cozener cannot cheat without the co-operating assistance of the target' who identifies 'with the agent of his...deceit.'⁴⁸⁶ Unlike Solomon's focus on the actress's delivery of paratexts and the personality of the performer, this chapter is primarily concerned with the dynamic generated between performer and spectator. However, where appropriate, details about specific performers have been included in cases where casting decisions deliberately and self-consciously undercut spectators' expectations of the play.

In addition to exploring the effect of witty prologues and epilogues, I include examples of soliloquies and asides in this chapter which, like prologues and epilogues, directly address spectators, probably from a downstage position, and serve to influence spectators' response to the play. As pieces addressed to playgoers as silent interlocuters, which are performed separately from the lines delivered to characters in the fictional world of the play, asides and soliloquies can be considered as dramatic paratexts. They are a site of transaction between performer and spectator, bridging the threshold between spectators and the action onstage. J. L. Styan notes that the aside 'encourages

⁴⁸⁵Harold Love, 'Who Were the Restoration Audience?' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 10:1 (1980), 21-44 (p. 27).

⁴⁸⁶ Paul McCallum, 'Cozening the Pit' in *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-Raisers and Afterpieces*, eds. Daniel Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle (Massachusetts: Rosemont Publishers, 2007), p. 14, p. 2.

the actor to step out of the play repeatedly and to reach out to the spectator.⁴⁸⁷ Asides and soliloquies promote intimacy between characters and spectators. Michael McGrath and Dawn Lewcock rightly argue that asides position spectators as the character's confidant.⁴⁸⁸ Michael McGrath and Jure Gantar argue that asides are 'a dramaturgical footnote' and therefore differ from soliloquies which are integral to the action of the play.⁴⁸⁹

However, as a form of direct address, like asides, soliloquies are often delivered in the downstage space close to spectators. The delivery of paratexts from a downstage position immediately aligns them with spectators and the character's awareness of the audience in asides and soliloquies justifies consideration of these devices as affective paratexts. McConachie's and Hart's research on "mirror neurons" in the brain which found that we mirror the emotions of others through empathy is useful for my consideration of emotive soliloquies and asides delivered in close proximity to spectators.⁴⁹⁰ Although Allison Hopgood gives only passing mention to cognitive neuroscience, she argues that emotions in the theatre were viewed as transmissible' in the seventeenth century, that passions were contagious.⁴⁹¹ Wit's use of playful manipulation in paratexts aligns spectators with specific characters and draws

⁴⁸⁷ J.L. Styan, *Restoration Comedy in Performance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 205.

⁴⁸⁸ Michael J. McGrath's article 'The (Ir)relevance of the Aside in Golden Age Drama' (*Romance Quarterly*, 61:4 (2014), 227-237 (p. 230).

Dawn Lewcock, 'Converse with the Audience in Restoration Theatre', *Participations Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 3:1 (2006), para. 11 of 22.

⁴⁸⁹ Michael J. McGrath's article 'The (Ir)relevance of the Aside in Golden Age Drama' (*Romance Quarterly*, 61:4 (2014), 227-237 (p. 229).

Jure Gantar, 'Invention to Convention: A Critical View of the Evolution of the Aside in French Neoclassical Drama', *Style*, 35:3 (2001), 515-30 (p. 518).

⁴⁹⁰ John McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 44, p. 136

⁴⁹¹ Allison P. Hopgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 2.

spectators' attention to their emotions, making them aware that they are being manipulated. Wit therefore, is the lens through which affect is magnified.

Satiric Wit in Comedy

Paratexts in comedy are characterised by satiric wit, which playfully pokes fun at audience members, and in Jonsonian comic style, encourages spectators to recognise the character's flaws, and in turn, their own as I shall discuss. Wit in comedy relies on the audience's superior knowledge of the relationship between different characters, or rather omniscient wit, for its comic effect. As Jane Spencer notes, the comedy 'depends not on the wit of the speeches but on the audience's consciousness of the intricate pattern of relationships among the speakers, a pattern of which they themselves [the characters] are ignorant.'⁴⁹² The comedy of asides comes from the audience laughing at the character's lack of knowledge, exemplified by Galliard's 'A ghost! This is an odd preparative to love' in Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679).⁴⁹³ This is a form of omniscient wit which flatters spectators. Spectators are placed in a position of omniscience through such asides which provide full knowledge of each character's secrets, foibles and plots, positioning spectators as confidants and confidantes. Examples of this are asides from the Englishmen Sir Signal Buffoon and Timothy Tickletext who are new to Rome and whose faults are exposed and shared with spectators in asides such as the following:

⁴⁹² Jane Spencer, 'Deceit, Dissembling and all that's Woman: Comic Plot and Female Action in *The Feigned Courtesans*' in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Heidi Hunter (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 1993), pp. 86-101 (pp. 94-95).

⁴⁹³ Aphra Behn, *The Feigned Courtesans* (1679) in *Female Playwrights of the Restoration: Five Comedies*, ed. by Paddy Lyons and Fidelis Morgan (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 1-102, V.2 (p. 87). All subsequent references will be given parenthetically.

TICKLETEXT 'Tis a wonderful pleasure to deceive the world: and as a learned man well observed, that the sin of wenching lay in the habit only: I having laid that aside, Timothy Tickletext, principle Holder-forth of the Covent Garden Conventicle, Chaplain of Buffoon Hall in the County of Kent, is free to recreate himself.

(III.i, p. 50)

In Behn's *The Feigned Courtesans* the audience are aligned with the 'Englishmen' Tickletext and Sir Signal Buffoon who are new to Rome, particularly Tickletext, who like the audience, fears 'Popery'; this is set up in the prologue in which the actress asserts that the 'play's damned' as the 'plot is laid in Rome.'⁴⁹⁴

Paratexts in *The Feigned Courtesans* employ biting satire to expose theatregoers' faults. Spectators are implicated in hypocrisy in the prologue and later on in the play when their omniscient position of judging others' flaws is undercut by the epilogue's exposure of their own. The play's written dedication references the hypocrisy of Nell Gwyn's elevated status and ambition in Behn's ironic depiction of a whore-turned-actress's words being repeated in front of the family (pp. 3-5). This is taken up within Behn's comedy, in which the hypocrisy of 'women of quality' pretending to be courtesans is explored; Marcella and Cornelia disguised as courtesans are viewed as 'glorious whore[s]', but when Cornelia reveals that she is a maid of 'noble birth', she is considered worse than a whore, as even a 'whore' would have 'scorned thy cunning' (Act IV, pp. 60, 71-2). The hypocrisy of an actress such as Gwyn becoming a 'woman of quality' in real life, is contrasted with actresses in the theatre 'honestly' playing virtuous women. Behn not only depicts playing the courtesan in homage to Nell, but also draws attention to 'Vizard Masks' in the audience and reports of 'women of quality' hypocritically wearing a mask to the theatre in order to speak more freely with men. This is similar to Cornelia's and Marcella's disguise as courtesans in order to

⁴⁹⁴ Aphra Behn, 'Prologue', *The Feign'd Curtizans* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1679).

speak more openly with their lovers. The play's blurred distinctions of virtuous woman and courtesan take this further to imply, as Alison Findlay notes, that women's manipulation of disguise 'offer[s] the disturbing vision that every woman in the audience could potentially be something other than she appeared.'⁴⁹⁵ The ambiguity between courtesan and woman of quality would have disturbed male spectators, who were encouraged to view actresses as women of quality for the duration of the play. It also mocks those women in the audience who wore a mask to the theatre to gain attention. Spectators are encouraged to consider their role as patrons of the theatre as they pay to see virtuous women represented on stage, knowing full well that the women playing these characters are not.

Comic prologues and epilogues seek to involve groups of spectators in the drama through identifying them as social types, such as the 'fool [who] turns Politician.'⁴⁹⁶ The foolish spectator is elevated here, while the politically-minded spectator is lowered as any fool can become a politician, especially as the Popish Plot (1678) fooled those in government. This demonstrates the way in which verbal address may supplement and playfully contradict a spectator's physical and social limitations in the theatre. While persons of the best quality sat in the side boxes, and the pit was a mixture of persons of quality and socially mobile classes, the galleries were occupied by ordinary people. Therefore, having the actress address those in the gallery as wits or elevate apprentices to the same class as their superiors, would have transgressed class structures. Another example of comic prologues and epilogues which include spectators in the social world of the drama is the epilogue to Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* which

⁴⁹⁵ Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright and Gweno Williams, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000), p. 1769.

⁴⁹⁶ Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1679), A4r.

singles out the Beaus who are ‘still damn’d, still in debt’ and the ‘City ‘Prentices’ or ‘upstart Beaus’ ‘run aground’ by ‘Lewdness and Gaming’, which elevates the apprentices to the position of ‘Beaus.’⁴⁹⁷ In his diary, Samuel Pepys expresses annoyance at the emerging class of city apprentices who sat in the pit along with persons of quality.⁴⁹⁸ In the prologue to *Love’s Contrivance* Centlivre acknowledges the diversity of spectators and personal taste in the audience, stating that ‘in diff’rent persons, diff’rent humours reign’ (A3v).

The effect of such wit in comedy can be subversive in that it blurs the boundary between the characters represented onstage and theatregoers.⁴⁹⁹ The way in which spectators are positioned in comic prologues and epilogues can make them feel uncomfortable, especially if they are aligned with fools when they consider themselves to be a wit. The fast-paced nature of satiric wit which enacts the exclusive and rivalrous nature of wit, means that spectators of comedy can never be secure due to the constant shift in power between characters. A good example of this is Act Five Scene One of *The Feigned Courtesans* which features multiple asides from each character, along with Act Five Scene Two in which the characters strive to outwit one another but no one character is in control of the scene, meaning that spectators’ alignment switches between characters. Wit shifts between the characters between the scene, demonstrating that maintaining the position of a wit is a difficult task. Spectators can be tricked into sympathy and then proved foolish by the mere pace of the play in which their empathy

⁴⁹⁷ Susanna Centlivre, *Love’s Contrivance* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703), pp. 67-8.

⁴⁹⁸ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970-83), III, 55-56 (entry for 11th -12th February 1667), and IX, 2 (1st January 1668) .

⁴⁹⁹ For further examples of paratexts which reference types onstage and within the audience, see William Wycherley’s prologue to *The Country Wife* (1675) and the epilogue to Elkanah Settle’s *The Lady’s Triumph* (1718).

or resonance with a particular character type is turned against them through biting satire from the dramatist who comments on theatregoers' own faults. For those spectators who identify with Tickletext's fear of being 'perverted' by popery, the discovery that he 'in a lewd Popish country' is caught visiting 'a Romish courtesan' would have positioned them as foolish hypocrites (Act I, p. 12, Act IV p. 62). Sir Signal's aside in which he admits that he 'was the fool! But who can help that [?]', which may have been accompanied by a witty gesture inviting comment, includes spectators and aligns them with foolish behaviour (p. 76). Theatregoers' expectations are challenged when Sir Signal positions Galliard as a fool through aside, he observes that he 'is not the only fool defeated! Ha! Galliard!' (p. 97). By these means, those 'Wits' or beaus who identified with Galliard are now made to feel foolish.

The epilogue employs satiric wit to point out spectators' faults and challenge their position as omniscient wits. The actress's reference to spectators as her 'supplies' in the prologue reverses the commercial relationship between performer and audience and is taken further in the epilogue to dethrone spectators from their position as omniscient judges. Instead spectators are implicated in the hypocrisy present within the play. The unmasking which occurs in Act Five in which Marcella and Cornelia reveal themselves to their family prepares for the unmasking of theatregoers in the epilogue, which threatens to expose spectators' immoral behaviour:

And when we fail what will the Poets do?
 They live by us as we are kept by you:
 When we disband, they no more Plays will write,
 But make Lampoons, and Libel ye in spite;
 Discover each false heart that lies within,
 Nor Man nor Woman shall in private sin;
 The precise whoring Husbands haunts betray,
 [...]
 I hope these weighty considerations will
 Move ye to keep us all together still;

[...]

If not, the aforesaid Ills will come, and we must part.⁵⁰⁰

Spectators are threatened with the consequences of the demise of the stage. This can be read as a strategy adopted by the performers to secure future attendance at plays.

However, the epilogue crucially draws attention to the importance of the theatre as a public, political forum. Behn contrasts the dialogic and immediate nature of the theatre in which spectators can vocally retaliate with the print culture of 'libels' and 'lampoons' which make it difficult for the public to respond swiftly. The epilogue blurs the distinction between theatre and reality through the threat of exposure.

After Collier's criticism of drama which favoured the reward of sober persons onstage, the dynamic between dramatist, performer, and spectator generated through paratexts becomes more complex. Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703) was produced in a period during which 'managers search[ed] frantically for anything... [to] attract paying customers.'⁵⁰¹ In comedies produced in the eighteenth century, libertine figures are no longer central to the play; instead the virtuous characters who reform the libertine are the heroes and heroines. Therefore, the notion of 'wit' changes: in eighteenth-century comedies, the witty are those who plot to reform Vice, demonstrating 'silent wit' in concealing clandestine affairs behind moral reform. Conservative wit is on show in Pix's *The Different Widows* (1703), Settle's *The Lady's Triumph* (1718), and Centlivre's *The Artifice* (1722), while devious wit functions subtly in the background. An example of this is Mrs. Watchit's affair which remains concealed in *The Artifice* as she returns to her husband; in this way the changing nature of wit redirects audience identification.

⁵⁰⁰ Aphra Behn, *The Feign'd Curtizans* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1679), p. 72.

⁵⁰¹ Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 459.

Centlivre's Metamorphic Wit

The style of wit in Centlivre's *Love's Contrivance* (1703) is not only satiric, it is metamorphic and relies on the skill of the performer, in the way in which relationships between spectators and characters shift throughout the play. Spectators discover that they cannot tell fools from wits, as Sir Toby's character shifts between the two and challenges the notion of stock characterisation from the Restoration.⁵⁰² Jane Milling rightly argues that the metatheatrical space of prologues and epilogues became increasingly important in managing theatregoers' expectations of the play. Milling notes that clowns and fools most fully capitalized on this.⁵⁰³ Sir Toby Doubtful, 'an old city Knight', initially depicted as a fool who impedes Bellmie's match with Lucinda, uncharacteristically outwits the romantic hero Bellmie (A4r, pp. 61-63). Ambiguity in relation to Sir Toby's status as a fool or a wit is present in his asides which showcase the performer's awareness of the conventions of comedy:

LUCINDA Once a week! I wou'd not for the world bed you oftner; why 'tis not the Fashion, Sir Toby; and I assure you when I marry I hope to be my own Mistress and follow my own Inclination, which will carry me to the utmost Pinnacle of the Fashion. [...]

SIR TOBY (*Aside*) That is as much as to say, the Fashion is for Ladies to cuckold their Husbands; and for the better effecting of it, they'd find Pretence for lying alone.

(p. 47)

Sir Toby, played by Mr. Johnson, known for his comic roles, addresses spectators as actor and character to critique the figure of the fop, revealing that he is not a fool

⁵⁰² Susanna Centlivre, *Love's Contrivance* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703).

⁵⁰³ Jane Milling, "'For Without Vanity I'm Better Known': Restoration Actors and Metatheatre on the London Stage', *Theatre Survey*, 52 (2011), 59-82 (p. 60, p. 75).

because he suspects Lucinda's motives. Centlivre's scepticism of the labels 'Fool' or 'Wit' is outlined in the prologue, which informs spectators that 'Fool' and 'Wit' are unstable categories. This critique appeals to connoisseurs of comedy, but would also have appealed to all spectators, by suggesting that anyone can be witty. Centlivre's wit is displayed in creating characters which conform to stock representations from Restoration comedy but evolve throughout the play to outwit their rivals. Sir Toby's fear of cuckoldry is given credence and therefore appeals to those spectators who share this anxiety. Centlivre's sympathetic representation of Sir Toby contrasts with husbands in other comedies, such as Pinchwife in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), whose fear of cuckoldry is mocked. The performer moves spectators, beyond their expectations of the character to sympathize with the fool.

Love's Contrivance exemplifies the silent wit of the dramatist as well as using the wit of the performer. Centlivre's silent wit leaves the interpretation of fool and wit to her audiences; she refuses to 'instruct them.' Centlivre makes spectators reconsider their own sense of wit by interrogating their right to judge. There is also an emotional risk to spectators' reputations because if they identify with a character who is exposed as fool, the play may make them look and feel foolish. Carole Heim reminds us that spectators play a social role in the theatre as participants in the performance.⁵⁰⁴ The following description of the groups within the audience from the *The Country Gentleman's Vade Mecum* (1699) emphasises the importance of positioning oneself in the theatre in accordance to one's social position and maintaining the social behaviour associated with that position:

⁵⁰⁴ Carole Heim, *Audience as Performer: The Changing Roles of Theatre Audiences in the Twenty-first Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 4.

In our Playhouses at *London*, besides an Upper-Gallery for Footmen, Coachmen, Mendicants, &c. we have three other different and distinct Classes; the first is called the *Boxes*, where there is one peculiar to the King and Royal Family, and the rest for the Persons of Quality, and for the Ladies and Gentlemen of the highest Rank, unless some Fools that have more Wit than Money, or perhaps more Impudence than both, crowd in among 'em. The second is call'd the *Pit*, where sit the *Judges*, *Wits* and *Censurers*, or rather the *Censurers without either Wit or Judgement*. These are the Bully-Judges that damn and sink the Play at a venture; [...] in common with these sit the Squires, Sharpers, Beaus, Bullies and Whores, and here and there an extravagant Male and Female Cit. The third is distinguish by the Title of the Middle Gallery, where the Citizens Wives and Daughters, together with the Abigails, Serving-men, Journey-men and Apprentices commonly [...] take their Places: and now and then some disponding Mistresses and superannuated Poets.⁵⁰⁵

The anonymous author draws attention to the porousness of boundaries between social ranks in the theatre, that one can be associated with a different rank based on their behaviour in the playhouse and their reactions to the play, such as the 'Fools that have more Wit than Money' who are deemed refined enough to sit with 'Person's of Quality.' There is a sense that in the playhouse one's behaviour and social reputation was under surveillance from other spectators. Centlivre's epilogue states that 'Humour's a Hazard', exemplifying the risk that spectators will appear foolish for laughing in the wrong place, or for identifying with immoral characters (p. 68). Sir Toby and Selfwill are laughed off the stage by the cast, causing spectators to feel foolish as they are aligned with Sir Toby in his aside in which he admits he has been made 'an Ass' (p. 66).

Thomas Hobbes's superiority theory views laughter as an act of exclusion, arguing that individuals observe 'the imperfections of other men' and laugh at the 'defects of others', rendering themselves superior.⁵⁰⁶ The cast's laughter excludes those

⁵⁰⁵ Anon, *The Country Gentleman's Vade Mecum* (London: John Harris, 1699), pp. 38-9

⁵⁰⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Printed for Andrew Crooke, 1651), Part I, Chapter 6, p. 27, pp. 65-6.

who had identified with Sir Toby and Selfwill, the older generation of the audience. Henri Bergson argues that ‘laughter is above all a corrective’ which implies that the audience have identified with characters deemed morally disreputable in the play.⁵⁰⁷ In Centlivre’s play the cast’s laughter corrects Selfwill’s tyrannical attitude towards his daughter and may have appealed to younger generations in the audience, such as the ‘Journey-Men’ and apprentice class who frequented the theatre.⁵⁰⁸ The performers onstage may have encouraged those in the pit to join in the cast’s laughter, thus appealing to the younger generation of spectators now frequenting the pit. Centlivre uses laughter to correct Selfwill’s behavior. However, Lucinda and Bellmie’s cruel laughter directed toward Selfwill and Sir Toby also problematizes spectators’ identification with the hero and heroine of the play, in particular those from the older generation. Centlivre splits the audience to appeal to a future audience, investing in the younger generation of spectators.

Love’s Contrivance resists the traditional closure of sentimental comedy as the ‘interests of parents and children’ are not reconciled ‘before the marriage union takes place’, but instead ‘happiness is achieved when the parent admits that they have been outwitted and that the marriage union cannot be undone.’⁵⁰⁹ Centlivre argues that ‘various Humours are pleas’d various ways’, that it is for spectators to judge the play’s ending ‘as [they] find it.’⁵¹⁰ *Love’s Contrivance* is a medley of comic elements which merge the conventions of Restoration comedy with sentimental comedy to challenge

⁵⁰⁷ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesely Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), p. 209.

⁵⁰⁸ Anon, *The Country Gentlemen’s Vade Mecum* (London: John Harris, 1699), pp. 38-9.

⁵⁰⁹ Lisa A. Freeman, *A Character’s Theater, Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth Century English Stage* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 196.

⁵¹⁰ Susanna Centlivre, *Love’s Contrivance* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1703), A4V, p. 68.

spectators. Paratexts confidently capitalize on the partnership of the dramatist and performer to shift responsibility for the affect generated onto the critics or Wits of the pit in the audience who judged plays. This is exemplified by Centlivre's challenge to spectators to discover 'who's greatest Fool or Wit today? / The Audience or the Author of the play?' (A4r). Although it is left for spectators to decide, they are still being manipulated by Centlivre's silent and devious wit which appears to give spectators sovereignty, but positions them as fools through the performer's metamorphic wit which destabilizes stock characterization and complicates identification.

Political Wit in Tragicomedy

Paratexts in tragicomedy throw a spotlight on the individual's conflict between serving the self and the state to set up a critical audience. Paratexts license spectators' divided feelings and sense of conflicting emotions about political issues. This is particular to the context of Frances Boothby's *Marcelia* (1669) and Aphra Behn's *The Amorous Prince* (1671) which were staged after the honeymoon period of the Restoration which celebrated the return of the monarchy and during which subjects felt uneasy about the future. Pachecho rightly observes in relation to Behn's work, that tragicomedy portrays 'wronged subjects grappling with the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of royalty.'⁵¹¹ Spectators are shown that it is natural to feel conflicted between duty and emotion. However, theatregoers' placement within these conflicts makes tragicomedy arguably the most uncomfortable genre to watch; an uneasy atmosphere is created in the prologue to *Marcelia* and continues in asides and soliloquies in the play. The prologue

⁵¹¹ Anita Pachecho, "'Where Lies this Power Divine?': The Representation of Kingship in Aphra Behn's Early Tragicomedies', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38 (2015), 317-344 (p. 331).

to *Marcelia* confronts spectators and encourages critics to leave, creating an oppressive atmosphere.⁵¹² Spectators are made to feel as though they are upsetting the off-stage dramatist, ‘you’l croud her Wit to death in such a Throng’, along with the performer who ‘prays ye to be gone’ as the ‘Poetess does angry grow.’⁵¹³ The hostile dynamic created between playwright, performer, and audience in the prologue establishes an oppressive hierarchy which situates spectators within the restrictive atmosphere of King Sigismund’s Court. The ‘angry’ Poetess pressures her messenger into courting spectators ‘one by one’, just as Melinet is bullied into courting Marcelia on behalf of the King (A4V). The messenger’s comment that he ‘cannot make ’em whether they will or no’ in response to the dramatist’s command, forces the will of the performer, just as Marcelia’s will is forced by King Sigismund. The performer immediately establishes an intimate relationship with all spectators by expressing his/her frustration at being forced to petition their approval and therefore transmits his/her frustration to them. The fragmentary nature of the prologue spoken by a messenger who frequently exits and re-enters sets the tone for the rest of the play, making extensive use of paratexts to erratically switch the mood from comic to tragic; positioning spectators as confidants and confidantes within a highly-charged emotional environment.

Tragicomedies feature political wit which offers a bold critique of the Court. The performer’s enactment of inner conflict through paratexts generates empathy in female spectators by drawing attention to the expectation that women should conceal their emotions. This is exemplified in Boothby’s *Marcelia* (1669) by Marcelia’s gesture of pointing to her heart before delivering a soliloquy (III.iii Fv). Marcelia’s gesture

⁵¹² Frances Boothby, *Marcelia; or, The Treacherous Friend* (London: Printed for William Cademan, 1670).

⁵¹³ *Ibid*, A3r.

reflects the way in which culturally women are discouraged from displaying their feelings, that they must make their bodies their ‘troubles Urn’ to uphold the rule of decorum within the Court (IV.ii.H1v). In Act Three, Scene Three Marcelia uses this gesture to confide that she must force herself to ‘show disdain’ towards Lotharicus, highlighting the contrast between what she feels and what she has promised Melinet she will show (III.iii.E4v). This gesture, accompanied by Marcelia’s use of rhetorical questions which invite spectators to consider whether they will be ‘slaves to Love? Resign the Field?’, demonstrates the role she has been instructed to play by a male figure of authority, the King’s favourite and her cousin (E4v). Marcelia’s performance would probably have generated empathy within women in the Court present in the audience, whose choice of partner was often influenced by a male figure of authority and considerations of political strategy. Marcelia’s conflict over upholding decorum in order to appease her superiors may also have appealed to those of the serving class in the theatre, particularly maidservants who would have been governed by their mistresses and would have been able to identify with Desha’s difficult position as maidservant to Marcelia (D2v, Hr). Paratexts politically empower those spectators who would not ordinarily be enfranchised, by addressing them in the prologue as a ‘Throng’ of ‘Wits’ whom she hopes will ‘plead her cause’ (A3r, A4r). This flatters audience members by providing them with the opportunity to elevate themselves as wits. Spectators of all classes are flattered in that they are given insight into the workings of the Court through the play.

The affect generated by political wit on the audience from prologues, epilogues, and asides is that audience members are invited into the Court and drawn into the conflict between private and public, personal and political, through soliloquies which generate feelings of frustration. These paratexts would have appealed to those spectators

who held powerful positions in government and business, who managed a public and private identity. The political language of King Sigismund's soliloquy foreshadows the conflict of the King's private desires with his public role. The King 'points to his heart', confiding that he is caught in 'a civil war' between emotion and reason (E3r, C1v). King Sigismund replaces the world for the sphere of his heart, stating 'nothing beyond thy Circulation's found' (I.i.C1v, II.vii.E3r). The desires of the other characters are repressed in favour of upholding duty to the King. The monarch's inability to regulate his desires as the catalyst for emotional tension within the play contrasts with the over-regulated desires of the other characters within the Court.

Soliloquies delivered as outbursts of pent up emotion theatrically enact the conflict caused by repressed desire in the play; this develops the intimacy set up between performer and spectators in the prologue through positioning spectators as confidants and confidantes. These soliloquies not only generate feelings of sympathy, but also frustration within spectators, who identify with the obstacles faced by the characters which govern their behaviour, such as gender and class restrictions, with the former appealing mostly to female spectators, while the latter probably appeals to male spectators. Lotharicus's soliloquy in Act Three, Scene Seven expresses his frustration due to his low status compared to the King, to whom he must yield his love Marcelia. After witnessing the King publicly courting Marcelia, Lotharicus '*stays behind*' and waits until the guests have gone before crying 'Hell and [...] Furies!', expressing his jealousy through soliloquy (F4v). Lotharicus's pent up emotions and position of enforced passivity mirrors spectators' position as passive observers sharing in the characters' frustrations; neither Lotharicus nor spectators are in a position of power or high enough status to act. This would have alienated spectators as it takes away the agency and political empowerment initially offered to them, and highlights the nature of

tragicomedy as a genre which makes its spectators uncomfortable in order to engage them in political critique.

Paratexts therefore enhance this uncomfortable atmosphere and transmit the characters' feelings of disenfranchisement to spectators, to set up a critical audience. In contrast to the notions of upholding honour from tragicomedy's heroic roots, the paratexts in *Marcellia* and *The Amorous Prince* align spectators with the women in the play. Discomfort is generated in relation to King Sigsimund's and Prince Frederick's inability to control their sexual desires, which is a critique of Charles II's habit of mixing business with pleasure by having multiple mistresses live with him at Court. Anita Pachecho has commented on 'on the moral deficiencies of divine right and its failure to provide any anchor for monarchical virtues beyond the will of the man who wears the crown' in *The Amorous Prince*.⁵¹⁴ Paratexts display this sense of discomfort in relation to gender and women's position in the Court to encourage spectators to empathise with the women in the play. Soliloquies and asides generate a Sapphic network of wit with female spectators, actors, and characters, making a connection between government and tyranny against women. This can be seen in the way in which spectators are made privy to the emotions of the King's mistress through aside. Calinda reveals to the audience that she knows that King Sigsimund is inconstant, but conceals this from Ericinea as the discovery would breach Court decorum and cause her further pain (I.ii.B2v).

In *The Amorous Prince* (1671) Behn places witty asides in the mouths of male characters which comment on the inequality between the sexes. Having such asides

⁵¹⁴ Anita Pachecho, "'Where Lies this Power Divine?': The Representation of Kingship in Aphra Behn's Early Tragicomedies', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38 (2015), 317-344 (p. 332).

spoken by the male actor would probably have appealed to male spectators of both classes as Behn has a low status character (Galliard) and a high status character (Lorenzo) address the audience.⁵¹⁵ The Prince's servant Galliard speaks *solus* to inform spectators that Cloris will be 'Lay'd by now, and *Laura* must succeed her' (II.i.79, p. 105). Galliard comments that 'gallantry' in Frederick would be deemed 'ill nature and inconstancy' in those of lower rank (II.i.82-83, p. 105). The dual plot structure of tragicomedy which features a serious high plot and a comic low plot engages sympathy from a range of spectators, both the 'lovers of smutty jests' mentioned in the prologue to *The Amorous Prince* and the serious-minded spectators or 'grave Dons' (lines 13-22). Galliard is aligned with those spectators of lower-rank who love 'smutty jests', but the serious tone he adopts in soliloquy aligns him with those characters in the tragic plot and inspires sympathy for Cloris's situation. Similarly, Lorenzo questions the higher 'burthen of [...] honour' placed on his sister (V.i.90, p. 142). Despite being presented as a rake, Lorenzo adopts a moral tone, pondering why he 'may commit / A thousand villainies' but his sister should 'have more vertue than myself' (V.i.93, p. 142). In contrast to Derek Hughes's view that Lorenzo is purely 'Frederick's pimp', I would argue that Lorenzo is not a Vice figure because his asides provide moral commentary, questioning the inequality between sexes.⁵¹⁶

The play then moves toward a female perspective in Act Five: Cloris undercuts the Prince's authority promising Lucia to Guillian in an aside, upstaging Frederick's centre-stage position through her intimacy with Guillian and the audience (V.iii, p. 152). The epilogue to *The Amorous Prince* leaves female spectators feeling empowered as they are positioned as confidantes to Cloris and patronesses of the actress and

⁵¹⁵ Aphra Behn, *The Amorous Prince* (1671), in *Behn The Plays Volume 5*, ed. by Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), pp. 83-156 (p. 118, p. 105).

⁵¹⁶ Derek Hughes, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 42.

playwright. Behn transfers authority from the Prince to female spectators in Cloris's epilogue which informs the 'Ladies, 'tis your hands alone, / And not his power can raise me to a Throne.' Cloris's epilogue gives female spectators the power to judge. The epilogue's argument that Cloris 'cannot happy be till you approve / [Her] hasty condescension to his Love', casts doubt on marriage as closure in comedy (p. 155).

In addition to commenting on marriage, the epilogue works as a political intervention in its manipulation of spectators. Paratexts such as this unsettle the generic pattern of happy resolution which made early tragicomedies a popular genre during the Restoration due to their plot structure which effectively re-enacted the pattern of the Civil War, Interregnum and happy ending in the form of the Restoration of the monarchy. These plays do not meet audience expectations of celebrating the restoration of the monarchy. Cloris's epilogue to Behn's *The Amorous Prince* breaches the decorum of the generic pattern of happy resolution of early tragicomedy. The epilogue provides a bold critique of members of Court who may have been present in the audience. After Frederick's closing speech the stage direction reads 'the curtain falls.'⁵¹⁷ Having the curtain fall before the epilogue was unusual and marks a clear separation between the play and reality. The actress's delivery of the epilogue in character does not mask the fact that it can be read as a direct criticism of Charles II's Court. This is an example of the way in which the political wit of paratextual material in tragicomedies, not only problematizes genre but provides insight into the way in which dramatists and spectators viewed the Court throughout the period.

Earlier tragicomedy such as Boothby's *Marcelia* may have influenced Behn's critique of the Court. Boothby makes use of combative wit in the play's epilogue to

⁵¹⁷ Janet Todd, *Behn The Plays Volume 5* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), p. 154.

radically criticize the authority of the monarch and spectators' authority as paying customers. The epilogue to *Marcelia* rejects the convention of 'asking for pardon' for the play 'with low submission' (line 3). In contrast to Derek Hughes's and Marguérite Corporaal's reading of *Marcelia* as a 'conservative work' which provides 'tactful criticism of the King's morals,' I would argue that the epilogue's refusal to ask for pardon can be read as a critique of the hierarchy of King and subject which reinforces the critical attitude towards the Court—a bold move to make during a period in which the theatres were explicitly patronised and attended by members of the Court (M4r).⁵¹⁸ This supports my view of the Restoration stage as part of the public sphere. As Jane Milling points out, Boothby's affiliation with the Aston family and the Somerset family, along with Lady Yate, demonstrates that she had connections within the Court.⁵¹⁹ The epilogue defies audience criticism, threatening them with the Poetess's 'malicious snare', that they are 'cowards...that give her blows', but out of 'Honour' they must not 'publick scorn nor laughter move.'⁵²⁰ Spectators are threatened that they will be judged for breaching decorum as they must be unjust either to their wit or honour if they criticise Boothby's play (M4r). This places audience members under each other's scrutiny as well as that of the playwright, sharing the position of the oppressed characters in Sigsimund's Court. However, this striking epilogue also licenses

⁵¹⁸ Derek Hughes, 'Frances Boothby' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/article/68250>>, [Accessed 9 October 2017].

Marguérite Corporaal, 'Love, Death and Resurrection in Tragicomedies by Seventeenth-Century English Women Dramatists', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 12 (2006), para. 17 of 24.

⁵¹⁹ Jane Milling, "'In the Coasts of Fame": Women's Dramatic Writing on the Public Stage 1669-71', *Women's Writing*, 7:2 (2000), 267-293 (p. 277, p. 280).

⁵²⁰ Frances Boothby, *Marcelia; or The Treacherous Friend* (London: Will Cademan and Giles Widdows, 1670), M4r.

spectators to criticize the Court, publicly arguing that they might legitimately hold such views.

Vengeful Wit in Tragic Paratexts

Prologues to tragedy adopt a respectful tone towards all spectators, flattering them by placing them in the omniscient position of judges and patrons of the stage. Wycherley's prologue to *Agnes de Castro* (1695) adopts a polite register, addressing 'Ladies and Gallants.'⁵²¹ The prologue to Pix's *Ibrahim* (1696) lays 'Th' humble offering at your Feet.'⁵²² The aim of tragedy was to raise passions within spectators and enact a process of catharsis. This is achieved through shared sympathy generated through soliloquies which instruct, praise virtue and expel vice. However, in practice, tragedy's depiction of 'Parricides, Incests and Wickedness' carried the risk that the distinction between virtue and vice would be blurred due to the seductive power of the performer and their engagement with spectators in paratexts.⁵²³ Witty paratexts establish an intimate connection between spectator and villain in horror tragedies, inviting spectators to share in the villain's triumph. In Elkanah Settle's *Love and Revenge* (1675), the two vengeful characters, Queen Fredigond and the moor Nigrello have the most engagement with spectators through asides and soliloquies which create complicity between spectators and the villains.

Vengeful wit or plotting exhibited in asides and soliloquies in the horror plays of the 1670s appeals to those spectators who may have felt marginalised or disempowered, such as servants, Whigs who opposed the Restoration of the monarchy and Catholics

⁵²¹ Catharine Trotter, *Agnes de Castro* (London: Printed for H. Rhodes, 1696), A2r.

⁵²² Mary Pix, *Ibrahim* (London: Richard Wilkin, 1696), A4r.

⁵²³ Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), p. 36.

who were excluded from holding public office in 1673. Anne Hermanson argues that 'horror tragedy' emerged in the 1670s as a result of the 'social dislocation' and deep-seated anxieties which lingered after the Civil War.⁵²⁴ Asides produce a mixed response in spectators. The adoption of the witty Vice figure from Jacobean revenge tragedy due to the heightened climate of political intrigue, generates humour and pleasure through a shared sarcastic confidence with spectators. This appropriation of the Vice is best exemplified by Settle's *Love and Revenge* in which Nigrello's aside 'was ever such a bawd, or such a mother?' in relation to Queen Fredigond, uses humour to align spectators with Nigrello (p. 7). Soliloquies engage audience members for longer periods of time than comic asides, therefore they develop a more intimate relationship with spectators in tragedy as in tragicomedy. Vengeful wit can produce feelings of admiration for the plotter's skill from male and female spectators of all ranks, along with feelings of shared sympathy from disempowered spectators in the case of Elkanah Settle's Chlotilda/Nigrello whose desire for revenge is motivated by feelings of marginalisation and injustice. Asides and soliloquies which display the wit involved in constructing a carefully plotted revenge, invite audience complicity in an illegal act. As Bacon states revenge 'doth but offend the law' and 'putteth the law out of office.'⁵²⁵ The appeal of such illegal acts to spectators would be both exciting and dangerous in moral terms. Revenge provides the moor Nigrello with a forbidden form of agency and its representation in drama as a recourse for disadvantaged members of society may have evoked a sense of empowerment within the audience. This would have been particularly pertinent for those whose families supported Cromwell and suffered during

⁵²⁴ Anne Hermanson, *The English Horror Plays of the Restoration* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 2, p. 3.

⁵²⁵ Francis Bacon, 'Of Revenge' in *Essays*, eds. by Samuel Harvey Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), pp. 34-35.

the English Civil War and Restoration and felt neglected by the Law, along with those who feared Catholic succession, associating it with tyrannical rule, personified in the play by the tyrant King. Between 1679-1682 Settle himself was involved in producing Whig and anti-Catholic propaganda.⁵²⁶ Therefore, spectators are invited to experience triumph in relation to Nigrello's successful plots despite the fact that he is a moor. This demonstrates Nigrello's appeal as a villain who represents a forbidden form of agency for spectators. Scholarship on tragedy often neglects or pushes aside the seductive nature of and pleasure the audience derive from watching tragic villains take risks. This has been observed by David Konstan who challenges Aristotle's tragic model outlined in *Poetics*:

What prevents the audience, then, from feeling confidence and indignation with those characters in the drama who are safe and successful as opposed to pity and fear with those who are defeated and humiliated? [...] Tragedy could be more complex than this [Aristotle's model], eliciting the conflicting feelings of confidence and compassion simultaneously, and hereby generating the kind of emotional stasis that Aristotle associated with the souls of wicked men.⁵²⁷

Konstan raises a valid point, this is an example of dark territory avoided by playwrights such as Dryden and Congreve in their discourses on tragedy. Deborah Lupton has argued that the risks taken by those who practise extreme sports promotes personal growth, and that the risk-taker's willingness to gamble with uncertainty is admired by others.⁵²⁸ This reflects the pleasure some spectators, in particular those fond of gambling, may have experienced in viewing the villainous characters taking risks,

⁵²⁶ Abigail Williams, 'Elkanah Settle' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008), <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/article/25128>> [accessed 12 October 2017] (para. 5 of 12).

⁵²⁷ David Konstan, 'The Tragic Emotions', *Comparative Drama*, 33:1 (1999), 1-21 (pp. 2-3, 12).

⁵²⁸ Deborah Lupton, *Risk* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 158-159.

honing their skills and exercising their wit. Despite Nigrello's smug attitude expressed in aside that he/she possesses the ultimate ability to 'countermine', Nigrello's wit is momentarily at a loss after Fredigond foils his plot (p. 8). Queen Fredigond cleverly has her lover Clarmount disguise himself as the late King to prevent her son from discovering her affair. The scene may have generated humour amongst Royalist spectators who supported the monarchy, represented by Queen Fredigond and King Clotair, as it demonstrates that the rebel Nigrello is not always successful.

Soliloquies are forms of paratext which showcase heightened emotions ordinarily concealed and transmit raw emotion to the audience. Settle constructs Nigrello as the emotional director of the play through his numerous soliloquies and asides which, on a superficial reading, appear to operate in the tradition of the Vice. They invite spectators, positioned as confidants and confidantes, into sympathising with Nigrello's triumphs and frustrations in his revenge plot. The expression of emotion through soliloquy transfers dangerous emotions to spectators. Nigrello's soliloquies transmit his increasing annoyance at being unable to complete his revenge in Acts Two and Five (p. 34, p. 49). Spectators are carried along on the emotional rollercoaster of Nigrello's revenge which appears to be out of control at the end of Act Two Scene One, threatening to 'engage / The fury of a Kingdom in my Rage' (III.i, p. 34). Angelina del Balzo highlights the risk of 'physical contagion' beyond audience control due to 'identification with [...] exotic characters.' Balzo's term 'horrid sympathy', which describes the way in which spectators can be contaminated by the passions exhibited by

the actor, can be applied to paratexts as vehicles for contagion which transmit passions that affect spectators.⁵²⁹

Settle challenges his audience's fears of racial and emotional contamination through paratexts delivered by the blackface character which have a curative, rather than a contaminative effect. Nigrello's soliloquies position other characters' revenge as more dangerous than his own. Nigrello's soliloquy in Act One argues that as Queen Fredigond's blood grows more 'black and tainted' with her sins, Nigrello appears more innocent (p. 10). While the blackface character Castrato in *The Fatal Contract* (1653), whom Nigrello is based on, becomes morally darker as the play goes on, torturing Aphelia in Act Three Scene Two, Settle only has Nigrello implicated in Clotair's plot to rape Aphelia.⁵³⁰ In soliloquy Nigrello confides that he has persuaded Clotair to refrain from using force, to win Aphelia a gentler way (p. 54). This depicts the blackface character as having a curative influence on the other characters. In addition to challenging the stereotype of racial contamination, Settle employs soliloquy to alter the perception of the rape victim as contaminated.

Soliloquies make connections between the contaminated rape victim and her black disguise to challenge gendered and racial stereotypes. Misty Sabrina Krueger explores the relation between the contaminated body of the rape victim and that of the black disguise which she adopts.⁵³¹ Krueger goes further than merely exploring the relation between blackness and contamination mentioned by Morwenna Carr. Krueger importantly observes the way in which *Love and Revenge* 'prompts its audience to take

⁵²⁹ Angelina del Balzo, 'The Sultan's Tears in *Zara*, an Oriental Tragedy', *SEL*, 55:3 (2015), 501-521 (pp. 503-4, p. 509).

⁵³⁰ William Hemings, *The Fatal Contract* (London: Printed for J.M, 1653), E4v.

⁵³¹ Misty Sabrina Krueger, 'The Last Dear Drop of Blood: Revenge in Restoration Tragic Drama', Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Tennessee, 2010), p. 46.

note of the metaphorical and physiological associations with Chlotilda/Nigrello's 'dark' body' and the interior of the 'tainted, ravished [...] young woman.'⁵³² This is exemplified by Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece* in which Lucrece's blood runs half red (pure) and half black (putrefied) after she has been raped.⁵³³ Settle draws his audience's attention to the way in which women's reputations are blackened by their sexual behaviour. This can be seen in the descriptions of Queen Fredigond as a 'Monster Woman' possessing 'black and tainted blood' due to her lust, along with Clotair's labelling of Aphelia as a 'Woman-Devil' a 'Monster, as deform'd, as...black / As Angels when they fell' when he believes that she has been unfaithful to him (pp. 45-6). This comparison would probably have appealed to female spectators whose behaviour in public was under constant surveillance. Spectators would have been able to recognise the actress in a breeches role at the same time that they would have seen Nigrello, the black servant character; thus, conflating the black character with the rape victim. In addition to this, Nigrello's soliloquy in which he states, 'my Revenge calls for black and tainted blood', refers to payback for the way in which Chlotilda's blood has been contaminated through the act of rape (p. 10). George Acton refers to the blood of the Ethiopians as 'very black.'⁵³⁴ This image of black and polluted blood provides a clue to Nigrello as the ravished Chlotilda and simultaneously fits with audience preconceptions about blackness when delivered by the blackface character.

⁵³²Ibid.

Morwenna Carr, 'Material / Blackness: Race and Its Material Reconstructions on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage', *Early Theatre*, 20 (2017), 77-96.

⁵³³ William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, pp. 1720-1745, lines 1738-43.

⁵³⁴ George Acton, *Physical Reflections upon a Letter Written by J. Denis, Professor of Philosophy and Mathematicks to Monsiuer de Montmer, Counsellor to the French King, Master of Requests* (London: T.R., 1668), p. 5.

Settle manages to dissipate the illicit pleasure generated by Nigrello's successful plots by using the denouement and the epilogue to manipulate his audience further. Nigrello turns 'woman' and is unable to perform the final act of his/her revenge and meta-theatrically states that 'revenge' was merely a costume put on as she 'put[s] on [her] own Sex agen, to dye' (p. 82). The epilogue attempts to mitigate the powerful emotions explored in the tragedy by asserting that 'there's no such thing in Nature' and that 'so much Rage, / Is none of the Diseases of this Age', firmly stating that what the audience have experienced in the theatre is an illusion and bears no resemblance on their experience of day-to-day life (A6r). The vehemence of these statements is testimony to the affective power of villainesses Fredigond and Nigrello/Chlotilda along with the disturbing elements of the play. Settle employs paratexts to celebrate his heroine's wit and to challenge the racial and gender stereotypes in relation to revenge.

Moralising Wit in Tragic Paratexts

Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697) adopts a didactic approach in paratexts, to manage the contaminative effects of its representations of passion and vice onstage. Through exercising moralising wit, Congreve exorcises passion and promotes catharsis. Witty paratexts in Congreve's tragedy ventriloquise the playwright's voice which directs spectators' critical gaze on tragedy itself. The prologue focuses on debates associated with the risk of the tragic form to address the learned critics in the audience. The prologue's metaphors of malnourishment in relation to tragedy, which 'starves the Stage' and has its 'poor Actors' labour at 'their Lungs Expence', are highly critical of

tragedy, encouraging spectators to ‘take your Revenge on the coming Scenes.’⁵³⁵ The playwright is in strict control of his audience, initially inviting spectators to ‘freely judge’, before redirecting them to ‘judge with Candour’ (A4r). In contrast to the use of paratexts in she-tragedy to promote pity and sympathy for those of exemplary virtue, soliloquies which distance spectators from the female exemplar in *The Mourning Bride* can be read as a critical response to the trend in she-tragedy. The prologue depicts tragedy as retrograde, associating it with the ‘Dearth of Wit’ on the stage, while comedy is aligned with the city and current affairs (A3r). Congreve challenges tragedy as the higher form of drama, through showcasing its potential to overwhelm spectators, and in this way, promotes himself as a witty comic dramatist through critiquing the problem of catharsis in tragedy.

Congreve’s use of moralising wit in soliloquies and comic wit in the epilogue exorcises negative emotions from the audience. The play opens powerfully with Almeria ‘in Mourning’ moving toward spectators to inform them through soliloquy that she is ‘senseless grown’ to music, which should ‘sooth a savage Breast’ (p. 1). However, Congreve immediately exposes Almeria’s grief as unnatural. On the portrayal of grief in the theatre, Bridget Escolme states that ‘prolonged or immoderate expression of sadness’ may not lead to these emotions being expelled, exemplified by Almeria’s cry of ‘why am I not at Peace?’ which generates an uncomfortable atmosphere for spectators.⁵³⁶ The way in which mirror neurons encourage spectators to empathise with Almeria’s grief draws attention to the risk of contagion from the expression of powerful emotions. Despite tragedy’s reputation as a cathartic form, there is a risk of negative

⁵³⁵ William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697), A3r, A4r.

⁵³⁶ Bridget Escolme, *Emotional Excess on the Shakespearean Stage* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2013), p. 182.

Ibid, p. 1.

emotions, invoked by the number of deaths, lingering after the play has finished. Maik Goth cites Philip Sidney and Philip Gosson on the role of the tragedian, arguing that ‘the pen is to the writer [...] what the knife is to the physician, namely, a surgical, analytical instrument that can probe the cause of an infection in order to expose an inner corruption or depravity.’⁵³⁷ Congreve can be compared to ‘the barber-surgeon’ who seeks to remove ‘the actual inflammation.’⁵³⁸ Congreve tackles the risk of transmission of negative emotions in tragedy in several ways, through the play’s comic epilogue and soliloquies and asides which guide spectators through a process of emotional release, followed by relief, to exorcise negativity as I shall discuss.

Osmyn’s soliloquies distance spectators from the virtuous exemplar Almeria by the use of philosophical, rational language. Despite Almeria’s frequent engagement with the audience through paratextual material, spectators are encouraged to view the play through the critical eyes of Alphonso, disguised as the moor Osmyn, whose soliloquy directs spectators’ response as well as their gaze:

OSMYN This Woman [Zara] has a Soul,
 Of God-like Mould, intrepid and commanding,
 [...]
 But she has Passions which out-strip the Wind
 And tear her Virtues up, as Tempests root
 The sea.
 [...]
 Enter Almeria
 The Cause and Comfort of my boding Heart.
 My Life, my Health, my Liberty, my All.

(p. 33)

⁵³⁷ Maik Goth, “‘Killing, Hewing, Stabbing, Dagger-drawing, Fighting, Butchery’: Skin Penetration in Renaissance Tragedy and its Bearing on Dramatic Theory”, *Comparative Drama*, 46 (2012), 139-162 (p. 147).

Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1579), 5a. Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry, or The Defence of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. and expanded by R. W. Maslen, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 98.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

Osymn encourages spectators to compare the two women, to view Zara as a destructive figure and Almeria as a nourishing one. The division created between these characters reflects Sianne Ngai's and Erin M. Keating's work on affect and envy, as the ideal of a virtuous heroine versus a passionate heroine is set up. However, both heroines are critiqued through envy; meaning that the exemplar of Almeria's virtue is questioned through the rivalry depicted between her and Zara.⁵³⁹

Osmyn's soliloquies demonstrate metatheatrical awareness of the audience, of himself, and of the introspective and emotional form of the soliloquy, to engage spectators' intellect, rather than their emotions:

OSMYN Yet I behold her—Now no more.
 Turn your Lights inward, Eyes, and look
 Upon my Thought; so, shall you still behold her.
 [...]
 Thus, do **our Eyes**,
 [...]
 Successively reflect
 [...]
 Not what they would, but must; a Star, or Toad:
 [...]
 Not so the Mind, whose undetermin'd View
 Revolves, and to the present adds the past:
 Essaying further to Futurity;
 But that in vain. I have *Almeria* here.
 At once, as I have seen her often;
 I'll muse on that, lest I exceed in thinking.
 (emphasis mine, p. 22)

The philosophical and scientific discourse in this speech changes the tone, providing critical distance from the lovers' separation. Osmyn's soliloquy offers a wider view of the world beyond himself, one which considers the past, present, and future. In the final

⁵³⁹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).
 Erin M. Keating, 'Envious Productions Actresses, Audiences and Affect in the Restoration Playhouse', *Restoration*, 37:3 (2013), 37-53.

lines of this speech he deliberately breaks the inward-looking mode of soliloquy to expose the danger of intense self-reflection. Osmyn's optimism and patience is contrasted with Almeria's melancholic self-absorption.

Osymn's soliloquy in Act three which asks 'what is reward? Or, what is Punishment?' questions the basis of she-tragedy as pleasure derived from witnessing innocent suffering. Osmyn provides spectators with a philosophical debate which draws attention to the fine line between 'Shade' and 'Shining', wrong and right, and emphasises 'Reason', or the 'Will to think' (p. 28). Osmyn's soliloquies ventriloquise the dramatist as puppet-master, guiding the audience's response, encouraging them to critique the excess of passion present in tragedy.

The positioning of paratexts contributes to the overall emotional arc of the tragedy, Congreve stresses the importance of the positioning of lines within in the play in eliciting the 'correct' response in and moral instruction of spectators. His preface to *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* reminds his critics that 'after the Play is over, and the Delight of the Representation at an end; there is generally Care taken, that the Moral of the whole shall be summ'd up, and deliver'd to the Audience' because the 'last thing said [...] make[s] the last Impression' (pp. 12-13). Congreve denies spectators the bleak ending expected when viewing a tragedy. Osmyn/Alphonso enters at the very last moment before Almeria drinks the bowl of poison, revealing that he is alive. Osmyn/Alphonso encourages spectators to mourn Zara's death, an unusual approach toward the villainess, which exemplifies Congreve's expulsion of negative emotions at the play's close.

The comic epilogue to *The Mourning Bride* is an example of subversive wit which disrupts genre to exorcise negative emotions. The actress Anne Bracegirdle, who

played Almeria, comically addresses spectators as herself, actively removing them from the world of the play. Bracegirdle points out that she is ‘no more a Princess, but in statu[s] quo’, leaving spectators in no doubt that the play’s illusion has come to an end (p. 75). As Angelina Del Balzo rightly notes, prologues, epilogues, and after-pieces were often performed out of character, and ‘drew attention to the abilities of specific actors [...] rather than requiring that their personal celebrity disappear into the role.’⁵⁴⁰ Bracegirdle’s comic address to spectators in the epilogue creates distance between the tragic character Almeria and Bracegirdle the actress. The images in the epilogue recall scenes of suffering within the play and expel them through comedy, exemplified by the analogy of the play as a ‘Body to dissect’ (p. 75). This simultaneously recalls the beheading of the King in the play and the shared memory of Charles I’s execution, drawing attention to Congreve the tragedian, or surgeon, who ‘openeth the greatest wounds’, before healing spectators through the comic epilogue.⁵⁴¹ Congreve demonstrates awareness of the dangers of the tragic form and employs his wit to expose spectators to overwhelming emotions which are critically reflected on in soliloquies, before surprising his audience with an uplifting ending to expel the melancholy emotions released throughout the play.

Rewriting she-tragedy

Paratexts in Trotter’s *The Fatal Friendship* develop Congreve’s criticism of she-tragedy in their use of empathetic wit, which appeals to various groups of spectators.

⁵⁴⁰ Angelina Del Balzo, ‘The Sultan’s Tears in *Zara an Oriental Tragedy*’, *Studies in English Literature*, 55:3 (2015), 501-522 (p. 504).

⁵⁴¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry, or The Defence of Poesy*, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 98.

Trotter's soliloquies adopt a sentimental mode of instruction, rather than a moralistic mode, to challenge Aristotelian ideas about tragedy. Soliloquies in Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* feature empathetic wit which shift focus from the concerns of the Court onto the emotional dilemmas of ordinary characters through the equal weight given to each of the four protagonists' engagement with spectators through soliloquy and asides. The prologue is inclusive and flatters spectators as connoisseurs of tragedy, stating that those who consider themselves a wit will stay (A6r). All spectators are treated as wits and connoisseurs of tragedy, just as the characters in the play are given equal engagement with spectators. Asides from Bellgard place spectators in a position of superior knowledge as in the prologue, and this knowledge generates sympathy toward Felicia's unawareness of rumours of Gramont's marriage to Lamira. Conflict in the play stems from Bellgard's multiple and conflicting duty of friendship, rather than inherent villainy.

Shared sympathy for each character is generated through the character's admission of their flaws. Gramont's soliloquy on maintaining his code of honour in friendship is especially moving as he cannot uphold his promise to Felicia, Bellgard, or Lamira without betraying one of them; this justifies the decisions made by the characters and firmly engages audience sympathy. Although Trotter upholds honour and morality, her tragedy touchingly and tastefully shows that each character is flawed and such failings are a natural part of being human. Trotter modifies heroic tragedy through her rejection of Aristotle's notion of the irreversible tragic flaw leading to the hero's downfall and death. Instead Trotter's characters admit and attempt to atone for their faults before the play's tragic conclusion (p. 29, p. 36, p. 56). Trotter's model of tragedy which depicts the failings of a group of friends, provides a didactic guide for spectators'

daily lives. This invokes greater empathy in spectators, who can more easily identify with flawed characters who are redeemed.

The self-aware and self-critical nature of the characters' soliloquies prevent spectators from experiencing overwhelming emotions as Trotter has the characters control their passions. Castalio states in soliloquy that 'stifling my passion may extinguish it' (p. 15). Trotter's characters are morally aware in the midst of their passion: Gramont's soliloquy in Act Two self-consciously expresses his concern that his actions may cause him to 'Turn villain' (p. 20). The play's final speech warns spectators to regulate their passions; Gramont is held up as an 'example' who though 'by 'Nature Honest, Just and Brave', was by 'one sharp Assault...vanquish'd', to demonstrate that the 'Danger's, when we are most secure' (p. 56). These soliloquies adopt an instructive mode for spectators.

The epilogue's depiction of the playwright who 'perhaps... [will] mend, at least her faults, she'll own', encapsulates the essence of the play in which faults are admitted and rectified (p. 57). Having Elizabeth Barry, who played the villainess Lamira, deliver the epilogue reiterates the point that reform is possible for all and encourages spectators to regulate their behaviour. Trotter avoids the pitfall of having spectators delight in morally reprehensible scenes through the construction of characters who err, but are not wholly immoral. Trotter rejects the conventions of she-tragedy along with the tragic flaw to create a model of sentimental tragedy which prioritises equal engagement with each character.

Women dramatists critique the genre she-tragedy and its female exemplar through paratexts which exercise Sapphic wit, generating empathy for victims of rape, along with performative wit which deconstructs the ideology of virtue. The 'female

wits' rewrite the genres she-tragedy and heroic tragedy through their focus on the actress's delivery of paratexts which address female spectators and draw attention to the actress's skill in performance. Pix, Manley, and Trotter bring women's roles and networks in history to the foreground to create a female genealogy. This Sapphic network of women dramatists, actresses, historical figures, and female spectators is fully established during the reign of Queen Anne who supported the arts. Sapphic wit in tragedy suits the genre's aim to generate sympathy within female members of the audience, whilst being a means by which women dramatists can counter earlier representations of women as rivals in she-tragedy.

Pix's prologue and epilogue to *Queen Catharine* place emphasis on female sovereignty and position spectators as part of a network of Sapphic wit between characters, dramatist, and actress. Pix seeks to rewrite women's position in history through paratextual material which focuses on the legacy of women dramatists, performers, and historical figures. The prologue invites 'the fair [sex]' to focus on 'Catharine's Love and Isabella's Grief' and places emphasis on female sovereignty in history, literature, and performance and encompasses ideas of playhouse's and playwright's legacy, re-imagining women's place within the tradition of Holingshed, Stow, and Shakespeare (A3r). The prologue refers to the 'Salique Law' which Pix rejects to construct Queen Catharine as the founder of the Tudor dynasty. Mihoko Suzuki rightly argues that 'the play's emphasis on female sovereignty carries resonance for the contemporary historical situation', which anticipated Anne's succession as Queen.⁵⁴² Pix draws on conventions of heroic drama, along with soliloquies from

⁵⁴² Mihoko Suzuki, 'Recognizing Women's Dramas as Political Writings: The Plays of 1701 by Wiseman, Pix and Trotter' *Women's Writing*, 18:4 (2011), pp. 547-564 (p. 552).

female characters which encourage spectators to focus on women's role in history, to position herself, the actresses, and female spectators as part of a genealogy of women dramatists, performers, monarchs, and patronesses of the stage. This is exemplified by the epilogue in which female spectators are positioned as patrons encouraged to support new talent in the form of the young actress Miss Porter who 'cannot yet expect to move' but 'practising so young [...] may improve' (A3v). By supporting the play, women are investing in the next generation of actresses such as Porter who 'may come to act Queen Kate.'⁵⁴³

The epilogue to Pix's *Ibrahim* also positions female spectators as protectors, informing them that 'the play is past / the danger's yet to come', the danger being the play's and by extension the playwright's virtue, which are at risk of metaphorical violation from male criticism (G1v). Female spectators are given the power to pass the ultimate judgement on Morena's and the playwright's virtue. This elevates the position of the women in the audience to one of patronesses of the stage who through supporting actresses, play a role in the development of representation of women on stage and in the public sphere of the theatre.

Soliloquies in Pix's *Queen Catharine* encourage sympathy within female spectators by placing the female characters' emotions centre-stage. Pix positions Isabella and her emotions at the heart of the play through soliloquies which generate sympathy; Pix cleverly links Isabella's soliloquy to lines spoken by other characters, such as her question 'what must I think on?' in response to Tudor's desire that Catharine '*think of nought but Love*' (pp. 22-23). This draws attention from Tudor back to Isabella and her conflict between love and duty. Pity is generated towards Isabella

⁵⁴³ The epilogue to *The Fatal Friendship* also petitions the support of female spectators, asking them to 'protect' Felicia's character, whose virtue was inspired by them.

who expresses her isolation from the Queen whom she wishes would notice her ‘tumults of...Soul’ (p. 23). Perhaps, the focus on Isabella’s placement at the side-lines of the political action and her isolation from Catharine, is a deliberate device to dramatize the way in which women had been relegated to the margins of history and makes a conscious effort to include female spectators of all rank and generation within the playwright’s ambition to bring women to the forefront of the stage.

The intimate expression of emotion through soliloquy and asides which reach out to female spectators through Sapphic wit, cross boundaries of social class. The appeal to audience members to ‘trust in’ the friendship depicted between Queen Catharine and her young ward would have appealed to serving women and their mistresses (A3r). Similarly, Lamira’s aside that her ‘Sex must seem shy of what they wish’ in *The Fatal Friendship*, also reaches out to female spectators of all rank (p. 22).

Performative Wit

Performative wit functions in paratexts in Pix’s *Ibrahim* and Manley’s *Almyna* to ventriloquise patriarchal prejudices and undercut them simultaneously. Soliloquies which move the suffering heroines of she-tragedy from far upstage to a downstage position challenge the depiction of the female exemplar as passive and virtuous. Morena’s soliloquy in *Ibrahim* points out the disparity between her words (‘Fain wou’d I believe my Virgin Purity remains’) and the way in which she is physically presented to the audience ‘Drest in these robes of Innocence’ (p. 37). This is a form of wit, or dissimilitude in miniature which only works in performance to draw attention to contradictions within the text and set up a critical audience. Male spectators’ expectations of discovery scenes depicting the actress in erotic disorder are undercut by

the way in which Pix has the violated women address spectators in soliloquy. Direct address obliges spectators to engage with the female character and to critique the female exemplar in tragedy.

Manley employs performative wit through soliloquies which position the actress centre-stage and appear to present an obedient subject, but undercut the Sultan's and the actor's authority. Almyrna's dying speech which causes the Sultan to kneel before her, is an example of the way in which paratexts place certain characters centre-stage and others upstage. Almyrna's soliloquy appears to conform to the performance of martyrdom, but one line in her soliloquy draws the Sultan down from his elevated position on the balcony and undercuts the representation of Almyrna as a willing victim: 'and be my loss of Life, the last of our/ Great Emperor's *wilful Crimes*' (emphasis mine, p. 63). Almyrna's spectacle coupled with soliloquy draws spectators in, inspires pity, and commends female political agency to effect change, empowering female spectators. The power of Almyrna's speech is such that 'at but imagining [her] death' the Sultan is 'pain'd' (pp. 63-64). Rina Arya observes the powerful position of the martyr who is 'elevated' during sacrifice rituals and the way in which these rituals generate feelings of a shared community through catharsis.⁵⁴⁴

I would argue that the dramatist intended for these paratexts which deconstruct the female exemplar to be directed more toward male spectators. This is exemplified by asides from the Sultan in *Almyrna* which direct male spectators toward the impact of moments of performative wit on figures of male authority, magnifying them through the aside's direction. Examples of this are Alamanzor's aside, is it 'her Eyes, or Tongue, this Change has caus'd?' and Sheker's petition to the Vizier to 'speak' as the Emperor

⁵⁴⁴ Rina Arya, 'Ritualized Violence and the Restoration of Community', *Parallax*, 18 (2012), 32-44 (p. 36).

‘stands confounded’ in *Ibrahim* (p. 45, p. 23). The Sultan legitimates male spectators’ confusion toward the scene, drawing attention to its importance. Ros Ballaster has argued that spectators ‘are seduced’ by the actress’s ‘physical presence at the expense of her witty speech’ and that this constrains Almyra’s wit in the play.⁵⁴⁵ However, Pix and Manley deliberately capitalize on the spectacle of the actress’s body. Their combination of verbal wit in soliloquy and performative wit display resistance and appeal to male spectators, to rewrite the passive heroines of she-tragedy.

Paratexts employ various types of wit to manipulate audience response, depending on the genre of play in which they appear. The satiric wit of prologues, epilogues, and asides in comedy confronts spectators in a combative manner which is divisive, splitting spectators up into fools and wits. This is because humour in comedy relies on rivalry between different social types. For a comedy to be witty, it must contain a final surprise in the epilogue which turns spectators’ expectations and confronts them, to undercut their position as a wit, so that the theatre company’s wit will be applauded. Asides feature most in comedy as they provide a means of communicating secret knowledge, or omniscient wit to flatter spectators with this knowledge.

Paratexts in tragicomedy feature political wit which flatters those spectators not normally enfranchised by inviting them to see the workings of the Court. Asides and soliloquies in tragicomedy generate feelings of anxiety as they position spectators as confidantes in highly-charged emotional and political situations. Omniscient wit in asides and soliloquy is incorporated in tragicomedy to achieve an oppressive

⁵⁴⁵ Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orientals: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 89.

atmosphere. Paratexts in tragicomedy dramatize the individual's position within the State and place spectators in a disenfranchised position of knowledge without power, to generate alienation and individual introspection.

Paratextual material in tragedy features universal, moralising and sympathetic wit and is strictly controlled so as to encourage the desired emotional or moral impact on the spectator. Paratexts in tragedy court the favour of the audience as a whole due to the genre's aim to instruct and its desire to produce a singular experience shared by spectators. Soliloquies in the horror plays appeal to those spectators who feel disempowered or marginalised through their exhibition of vengeful wit which generates a sense of vigilante justice. Female playwrights capitalize on the actress and employ performative wit in soliloquies in their tragedies. This subtle form of wit appeals to male spectators' expectations of erotic spectacle often found in she-tragedy and enables women dramatists to challenge the representation of the passive exemplar, whilst seemingly adhering to the conventions of the genre.

Women dramatists demonstrate a greater sense of awareness of the actress's presence in their work and use the intimate potential of paratextual material to foreground connections between female character, actress, dramatist, and female spectators. Paratexts which incorporate Sapphic wit in asides, soliloquies, and epilogues generate a network between women playwrights, performers, characters, and spectators to elevate the female spectator to the position of judge and patroness.

Conclusion

My research has shown that wit in drama is an empowering force, one that can be used to outwit or challenge existing forms of authority, transcend gender roles, extend an individual's agency, and incite critical public debate in the theatre. By shining a spotlight on women's wit my thesis has generated new insights for wit studies, Restoration and eighteenth-century studies, feminism, and performance scholarship. It has shown that women's wit emerged as a distinct category with the introduction of women professionals on stage and became a mode of female agency and resistance, one which shaped the representation of women and the development of wit on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century stage. My own concept of Sapphic wit between women dramatists, actresses, female characters, and spectators demonstrates that women's wit generated an alternative academy for women in which creativity and collaboration were promoted, practical knowledge shared, female concerns expressed, and ingenuity celebrated. The bonds of Sapphic wit created an opportunity for women to unite in engaging in public debates, publicly criticising patriarchal methods of governing, and proposing alternatives. This observation extends feminist criticism on private friendships and networks between women writers and actresses in seventeenth and eighteenth-century literature, to read Frances Boothby, Aphra Behn, Elizabeth Polwhele, the Female Wits, Susanna Centlivre, and female spectators in the theatre as part of an academy of women's wit that was a collaborative, creative, critical, and empowering force on the public stage.

My reading of performative wit, a mode of resistance which deconstructs the abject, has contributed to a rethinking of she-tragedy and has provided an alternative way of reading abject figures in early drama by establishing that deconstruction of the feminine as abject in performance occurred in the seventeenth century with the advent

of the actress on the public stage. This reading also makes an important contribution to scholarship on feminism and performance in demonstrating that deconstruction of the abject through performance predates the 1960s.

I have shown that the metatheatrical nature of wit in drama, which directly addresses and comments on different groups of spectators, places wit at the centre of energising and shaping current public debates because wit includes men and women of high, middling, and low status across society. This demonstrates that the theatre existed as a socially inclusive public sphere of debate which preceded the exclusive political and intellectual debates held in coffee-houses between male members of the social elite. I expand the work of Jürgen Habermas, who has argued that the public sphere of debate came into existence during the eighteenth century, and the writers of *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* who acknowledge pamphlets rather than drama as contributing to public debate in the seventeenth-century.⁵⁴⁶ In so doing, I have contributed to existing scholarship by Alison Findlay and Rachel Willie, who argue that early drama is part of the public sphere, to show that wit played a central role in energising debate on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage.⁵⁴⁷

By extending the view of wit to include skilful actions which display resistance I have anchored wit to its material context as embodied in drama and this should promote further research on wit's connection to the body in Restoration drama. My research has shown how verbal and physical wit combine in performance to produce a critical spectacle which challenges spectators to read the body and its relationship with objects

⁵⁴⁶ Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-30 (pp. 9-10).

⁵⁴⁷ Alison Findlay, 'Shakespeare, Ceremony and the Public Sphere of Performance', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (2018), 26-37.
Rachel Willie, *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647-72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

and others in new ways. I have shown that women's existing position as an object in the seventeenth century contributed to their deft understanding and successful manipulation of the subject/object relation and expansion of their agency through wit as a skilful action. Through the critical spectacle of performative wit in tragedy, which relies on the combination of verbal, intellectual, and physical wit, women dramatists contributed to an interrogation of the association of the female body and mind as abject. This importantly shows that after the publication of Descartes the mind/body relationship remained fluid. My thesis extends Charis Charalampous's recent research on intellectual body in Milton's work to include the Restoration stage.⁵⁴⁸

I have identified a correlation between wit, risk, and the creation of the Credit state. In so doing, I have moved beyond the view expressed in scholarship on Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy that witty comedy offered cathartic release from the events of the English Civil War to argue that wit played an integral role in shaping social relations in a society characterised by financial risk and uncertainty. Wit, which functioned as an alternative form of social capital based on personal credit rather than wealth, embraced risk and helped to shape attitudes toward the role of trust and risk in social relations in the Restoration. Through wit, women both on and off stage capitalised on this climate of opportunism and social mobility.

Exploration of the uncharted territory of women's wit prompts consideration of wit as a device used by the disempowered rather than as an intellectual capacity associated with the wealthy male elite. This approach extends current thinking about wit in Restoration and eighteenth-century drama. Comparison of plays penned by female and male playwrights led to a difference in representation of women's wit. Women's

⁵⁴⁸ Charis Charalampous, *Rethinking the Mind-Body Relationship in Early Modern Literature, Philosophy, and Medicine: The Renaissance of the Body* (London: Routledge, 2017).

wit in the work of women dramatists is distinctly collaborative and criticises authority from a feminine perspective. In contrast, male dramatists' representation of women's wit emphasises female rivalry. There is also a noticeable shift in the representation of wit onstage between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Wit on stage in seventeenth-century comedy and tragedy promotes freedom from social convention, posing a challenge to authority in response to the collapsing status of the landed gentry and an increase in social mobility. However, on the eighteenth-century stage the turn towards sensibility renders wit subtle, collaborative, and conservative. Although wit on the eighteenth-century stage exhibits the same sense of agency, it becomes preoccupied with plotting to reform vice, uphold familial harmony, financial security, and social obligation.

I have opened up the concept of wit from a linguistic micro-study generally associated with men, to a broader definition of wit which includes the following sub-categories; competitive, vengeful, political, subversive, performative, Sapphic, and pregnant, many of which overlap. This thesis's acknowledgement of the empowering nature of subversive wit is a significant development for wit studies and studies of Restoration drama which have tended to focus on wit as the sphere of the upper-class male. I have shown that wit is used by characters of all ranks, across gender and genre in the work of male and female dramatists. Subversive wit featured in both comedy and tragedy in plots involving characters challenging existing hierarchies of class, gender, and race. Competitive wit and Sapphic wit feature in comedy and tragedy, with Sapphic wit most commonly employed by women dramatists. Although competition is an element of wit, wit is not always rivalrous: it must be co-operative when it operates in dialogic form.

From the plays discussed it is clear that women have a distinctive form of wit celebrated by both male and female dramatists on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage. Women's wit is characterised by spontaneity, defence, and the need to act out of necessity. While the principles of masculine wit are based upon the idea of rational judgement, one-upmanship, financial reward, and self-promotion, women's wit relies on creative fancy (or imagination), personal reward, self-preservation and is not always rivalrous.

My thesis develops existing scholarship on women dramatists, such as Pilar Cuder-Dominguez's *Stuart Women Playwrights* by exploring the work of women dramatists within the context of their canonical and lesser known male contemporaries. My work on wit which compared a total of 30 plays by canonical and non-canonical dramatists has drawn attention to the skill of Lacy's adaptation of an early comedy and paved the way for further connections between this adaptation and the original that inspired it, along with interest in Lacy, Settle, Boothby, and Polwhele as non-canonical dramatists.

This in-depth study of the varied and shifting characteristics of wit has expanded the narrow view of the subject in previous studies of wit in drama to include stage action as wit. My own concepts of 'pregnant wit' and 'Sapphic wit' draw on existing scholarship which identifies women's knowledge as practical and material in the seventeenth century, adding women's wit to the list of skills shared between groups of women. These concepts of 'Sapphic' and 'pregnant' wit make an important addition to feminist scholarship and studies of the representation of women in history. The increase in the phrase 'pregnant wit' after women dramatists' public entry onto the stage positions the Restoration as a key historical moment for female self-representation as it provides important evidence of the way in which the term previously gendered

masculine is re-appropriated to connect women's creative production to their bodies' reproductive capacity. This insight into female self-representation will help to inform studies of woman professionals and their relationship with creativity.

There is a correlation between the rise in frequency of the phrase 'her wit' and the decrease in frequency of 'his wit' in Literature from 1660 to 1720, and this is evident in the drama: the plotting heroine takes centre stage and the hero becomes more effeminate. The reason the hero becomes more effeminate in 1670s tragedy and 1690s comedy is not only due to concerns about the monarch prioritising pleasure and Collier's reaction against Restoration comedy's celebration of the rake's sexual appetite, but also the firm establishment of the actress on stage and the rise of actresses as female celebrities. This thesis has traced the development of the heroine's wit on stage from her use of language in comedy, skilful plots in comedy, to wit as a mode of feminine resistance in tragedy, therefore expanding wit scholarship's view of the heroine as mirror image of the male rake by considering the development of her wit throughout time and genre. Rather than mirroring the rake as other scholars have argued, female characters on the Restoration stage appropriate the rake's wit to showcase their own and challenge stereotypes about women, wit, and sexuality. In comedy, the cross-dressed heroine uses a combination of language and action to out-perform the rake. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the witty heroine had evolved into a character distinct from the Restoration rake.

In both comedy and tragedy wit functions as an alternative measure of status, a means by which women and marginalised groups elevate status, through witty language and action in the comic wit duel and plotting revenge in tragedy. In both cases wit is related to personal credit, balancing a debt through revenge or gaining capital through showcasing one's wit which determines one's value. This draws attention to the impact

that the emergence of the credit state had on the representation of social relationships after the Restoration and this connection between wit, credit, and social relations is particularly significant for emerging scholarship on trust and risk in Literature. The witty heroine who plots revenge to settle personal injustice and slurs on her honour is celebrated by male and female dramatists as wit becomes a kind of reward and alternate measure of status. Dramatists have the heroine cross-dress to assume the mode of avenger, appropriating the masculine mode of honourable revenge to challenge the trope woman as Fury in tragedy.

My consideration of wit in tragedy as a deconstructive performance of abjection makes an important contribution to feminism and performance by establishing that performance of the abject as a form of resistance predates the 1960s and actually began with the actress on stage. I have demonstrated that the performance of women's wit in tragedy challenges patriarchal structures and exposes the feminine abject as a construction. Female characters, particularly in tragedy, use their wit to appropriate the centre-stage position through performative wit. Dramatists capitalize on the spectacle of the actress. My thesis extends Marsden's work on she-tragedy as a genre that drew attention to the spectacle of the actress, to argue that this is not a passive, but an active spectacle which relies on the tripartite relationship of dramatist, character, and performer. My thesis has considered the way in which swooning and self-conscious performances of the abject are forms of wit, expanding scholarship on the swoon in eighteenth-century literature to consider its relationship with the female body before the cult of sensibility. I have argued that this spectacle promotes a Sapphic and sympathetic wit. The representation of swooning as a self-conscious, defensive strategy in moments of crisis in tragedy provides scope to consider the impact of feigned swoons as witty strategy in comedy devised between networks of women. Women dramatists use

performative wit to bring women's history and female performers to the fore in drama. The moving spectacle of female characters who are friends rather than rivals uses wit to challenge women as monstrous in tragedy.

I have identified a correlation between the pleasure of wit and that of taking risks, such as the risk involved in tragic revenge plots, and comic and tragicomic intrigues for the characters in the play. The verb 'risk' enters the English language in 1660 and there is a strong connection between wit and risk in drama and the establishment of the credit state, as gambling and the notion of witty language as exchange are prevalent in wit comedy. This importantly situates the Restoration as a key moment for the emerging field of risk in literature. Although the main focus of this thesis is women's wit, my research provides insight into the relationship between wit and masculine subjectivity which may be useful for studies of masculinity, such as the way in which witty interruptions castrate speech and wit elevates status. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the view of wit as capital plays an important role in the rake's masculinity and the movement from status defined by property to possession of credit affects male status. This is particularly apparent in relation to male tricksters' wit which relies on expanding their knowledge, in order to enter the household through taking the risk of trusting others. By contrast, female tricksters' risk-taking does not seek to enhance their credit but involves the pleasure of taking risks and the personal freedom achieved through this. The relationship between wit and risk in the household and in the public sphere makes an important contribution to wit studies by placing wit in its social and historical context of consumerism and materialism.

Part of the reason for the risk involved in witty responses in discourse and active forms of wit is due to time constraints of the hero and heroine being under pressure. Timing is an integral feature of verbal and physical wit displayed by men and women,

from the sharp turn in the linguistic duel between the gay couple to resourceful concealment of lovers behind chimney breasts, curtains, in closets, and barrels in the form of pregnant wit most frequently employed by female characters. My thesis has explored open and enclosed spaces in the household in drama, but more work could be done on the closet as the setting for over-hearing scenes and sexual intrigue in Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy and tragedy. The closet as a site of wit in action is a space in which personal and public merge in an unsettling manner, such as the scene in Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* in which Berenthia and Loveless are revealed committing adultery in the closet. In Mary Pix's *Queen Catharine* (1698) public and private space merge and power dynamics in gender diverge when the Queen orders her unarm'd lover Owen Tudor to 'step into this closet' while she fights intruders to the castle.⁵⁴⁹

My thesis extends Adam Zucker's observation that a character's knowledge of place which they use to their advantage is a marker of wit. My own concept of 'wit in action' or embodied wit has broadened the view of wit to include manipulation of objects and people in addition to place. My analysis of the relationship between people, clothing, objects, horses, and subjectivity will expand approaches to human/object relations in early modern Literature and eighteenth-century consumer culture.

I have shown that wit is empowering because it positions the theatre as part of the public sphere of debate and serves a vehicle for political discussion, contributing to recent scholarly debates which argue that the public sphere of debate existed prior to the

⁵⁴⁹ Mary Pix, *Queen Catharine* (London: Printed for William Turner and Richard Basset, 1698), p. 34.

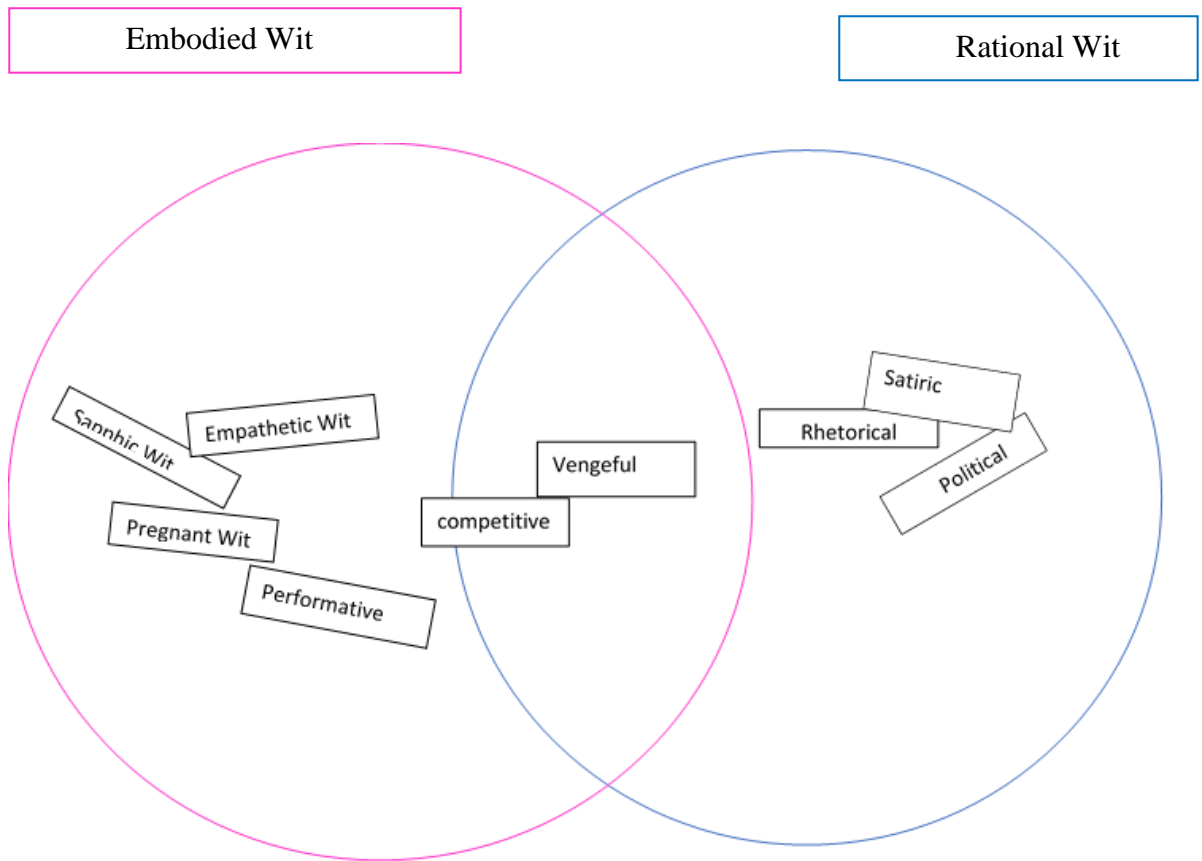
eighteenth century.⁵⁵⁰ My analysis of political wit, which featured in all three dramatic genres but was most strongly foregrounded in Restoration tragicomedy, has demonstrated the way in which witty prologues and epilogues encouraged spectators to participate in public debate. Tragicomedy featured the most political form of witty address due to its direct engagement with the current political situation, namely conflicting opinions about the strength and currency of monarchical authority. The genre's continued popularity during the 1670s was indicative of public concern about future succession following the reinstatement of the monarchy. Analysis of the way in which wit in tragicomic prologues and epilogues encouraged spectators to participate in political debate is therefore useful for historians and literary scholars analysing shifting attitudes towards Charles II's rule and the Restoration of the monarchy. This is because wit appeals to members of the public and encourages them to take a critical stance towards institutions and hierarchies. Wit in drama therefore played a significant role in shaping spectators' responses to political and historical events.

My interpretation of wit as a process of exchange in which power dynamics of gender and class continually shift, draws attention to witty moments which complicate spectators' reception of the play. I have extended analysis of wit from witty language in the text to include witty collaboration between the performer and the dramatist. My chapters have shown that wit is a dynamic element in drama which puts genre, rank, and gender into a liminal space, making these issues part of a public sphere of political

⁵⁵⁰ Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England' in *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Lake and Steven Pincus, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-30 (pp. 9-10).

debate. Wit therefore is a vital tool for energising dramatic texts as, like drama, it is fluid, shifting and temporary.

Venn Diagram of the overlapping characteristics of Wit



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