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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Emerging Authorities in Restoration Theatre:
Women's Entry into Self-Representation

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Drama and Theatre

by

Amy Elizabeth Shine

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Ian Munro, Chair
Professor Emeritus Janet Smarr
Professor Jayne Lewis
Professor Anthony Kubiak
Associate Professor Julie Burelle

2023

DEDICATION

To

Mom, Gma, Autumn, Becki, Alex, Kelsi, Dad, Deborah
and to
Shane, my WWU Drama family, and my dearest Dr. Prince

in gratitude for their invaluable contributions to this work, my education, my sanity, my
emotional and spiritual and corporeal health.

Without you, I would not be here, and this work would not exist.

Thank you.

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And thank you to Doctor Luann Venden who not only introduced me to the incredible world of Restoration theatre and its female playwrights, but who allowed me to continue her legacy with the generous gifts from her library. I cherish them and, indeed, you will find them present in these pages.

VITA

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FIELD OF STUDY

English Restoration playwrights, actresses, paratextual information, and women's voices in emerging mass media

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Emerging Authorities in Restoration Theatre:

Women's Entry into Self-Representation

by

Amy Elizabeth Shine

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

University of California, Irvine, 2023

Professor Monro Irvine, Chair

When the theaters in England were closed by the Puritans at the leading of Oliver Cromwell, the plays, playwrights, and actors were put away in metaphorical – literal, in the case of the plays – storage. Theatre and its immorality, as portrayed by antitheatricalists, was to be illegal until the end of the Interregnum period. When the Commonwealth had been done away with, and Charles II had returned to England, he granted charters for the (re)opening of two Theatres Royal: Drury Lane with the King's Men company of actors under Thomas Killigrew and the Duke's Company, in Lisle's Tennis Court in Lincoln's Inn Fields under William Davenant. Rather than returning to men playing women's role, Charles II decreed that all women's role must be played by women.

New to the Restoration would be the roles that prologues, epilogues, and various other paratextual texts would play in the theatrical world. The addresses coming directly to the present audience from the actors talking to them from the stage edge felt inclusive and exclusive: including those present in a very tangible way and excluding those present who would only read

the prologues and epilogues from broadsheets (until they, too, came to the play to be part of the exclusive set). Additionally, low literacy rates of the period meant that the news, the gossip, the military and commercial updates, and opinions meant that the presentations of this information were better disseminated than the information being spread via print, making the theatre a source of mass media and the women introduced to the Restoration stage, the first women in English-speaking Western mass media. With them comes fame and the concept of celebrity; the title of first celebrity being conferred on playwright, philosopher, poet, scientist, and author, Margaret Cavendish. Through historical records and current scholarship applied to such works as Margaret Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure*, Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Mary Pix's *The Spanish Wives* and their contemporary paratextual material, this dissertation explores the emerging roles of women playwrights and actresses.

INTRODUCTION

This project is driven by examination of the emergence of embodied female voices in the mass media of the Restoration theater. Unless indicated otherwise, my references to "women" or "woman" will refer to female-presenting people whose performed gender is not currently contradicted by any historical evidence suggesting that they were identified or presented as anything other than female. Accusations of that person's behavior being unwomanly, unnatural, or masculine – a common criticism leveled at those defying societal gender role expectations – rather than contradicting the person's gender as presented reifies their contemporary community's acceptance of their performed gender.

When the theaters in England were closed by the Puritans at the leading of Oliver Cromwell, the plays, playwrights, and actors were put away in metaphorical – literal, in the case of the plays – storage. Theatre and its immorality, as portrayed by antitheatricalists, was to be illegal until the end of the Interregnum period. When the Commonwealth had been done away with, and Charles II had returned to England, he granted charters for the (re)opening of two Theatres Royal: Drury Lane with the King's Men company of actors under Thomas Killigrew and the Duke's Company, in Lisle's Tennis Court in Lincoln's Inn Fields under William Davenant. Having grown up on the continent, Charles II had seen theatre performed with women playing women's roles and was befuddled and displeased when his theatres re-opened presenting men in women's roles. This casting situation was complicated by the years that had passed between when the theatres closed and when they were allowed to reopen. Acting companies that had once maintained boys apprenticing to learn to play girls, then women, as they aged, had been dismantled and the boys were now grown, with no young boys having been trained to continue

the craft. So, while the men playing women's parts in those first Restoration plays may have been beautiful and well-trained as boys, they were now men and no longer suited to play the young women's parts. Also complicating Charles II's thoughts on casting was the influence of his favorite mistress, Nell Gwyn who desperately wanted to be an actress. As history shows, Charles' mind was fairly quickly made up, and he decreed that all women's roles must be played by women.

New to the Restoration would be the roles that prologues, epilogues, and various other paratextual texts would play in the theatrical world. The addresses coming directly to the present audience from the actors talking to them from the stage edge felt inclusive and exclusive: including those present in a very tangible way and excluding those present who would only read the prologues and epilogues from broadsheets (until they, too, came to the play to be part of the exclusive set). Additionally, low literacy rates of the period meant that the news, the gossip, the military and commercial updates, and opinions meant that the presentations of this information were better disseminated than the information being spread via print, making the theatre a source of mass media and the women introduced to the Restoration stage, the first women in English-speaking Western mass media. With them comes fame and the concept of celebrity; the title of first celebrity being conferred on playwright, philosopher, poet, scientist, and author, Margaret Cavendish.

We start in the first chapter for discussion of paratextual material and the agency, celebrity, and intimacy inherently possible through application of these texts. The second chapter then shifts to examine embodied representation and the genre-changing shift of women on stage. In the third chapter, we move further out to consider the possibilities of media – including questions of access, authority, and sensation – brought about by the opportunities furnished by

the complete upheaval of the Interregnum period. I will examine early English Restoration female playwrights and the first actresses, tracing their movement from behind and off-stage to onstage and analyzing how their changing roles negotiated political power structures as women gained the ability to speak as and for themselves. Through select texts chosen for their ability to capture broader moments in history in microcosm, I will be exploring who was writing these women's parts and plays and why and for whom they were written. As the field of studying the emergence and acceptance of Restoration women's theatrical authorship and representation is a relatively young field, this project will be framed by the acknowledgment of and in discussion with the current scholarly consensus of themes within the Interregnum closet dramas. This project will use as exemplary of their eras and genres Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* and Aphra Behn's use of convent life in *The Rover*. Moving the project into the historical positioning, I will be leaning initially on Diana Solomon's Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender and Comedy, Performance and Print, and Peter Holland's The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy. Through Cavendish, Behn, Solomon, Holland, and numerous other historians and theoreticians, I will position the tumultuous religious upheavals in England with the subsequent role those events had in informing the establishment of national identity and new gender and performance norms as revealed in popular culture through the theatre and its associated paratexts.

In the first chapter, specifically and revisited throughout the dissertation, I will carry out an examination of performance possibilities or fulfillment. Considering Solomon and Holland's work will allow me to bring essential paratextual framing into the discussion of communication through and surrounding Restoration theatrical texts. The actresses' presence and the playwrights' words were most present and most visible on the stage edge, in the liminal space of

the prologues and the epilogues. It's at the threshold that the women directly address their audiences, presenting an identity that is both them and not them, words that are theirs and not theirs. This double nature is critical to creating spectacle and holding the attention of an audience there equally to entertain each other as to be entertained. The theatre managers and playwrights had to make cunning and calculating prologue choices to ensure that audience members stayed long enough to forfeit their entrance fees (refundable until after the first two acts).

This commercial pressure raised the stakes for the playwright to create something captivating enough to get them paid (on the third day) and for the actress delivering lines directly to restless audiences. Solomon has diligently compiled prologues and epilogues, allowing an excellent place to start research into specific plays and their paratextual information. Holland's arguments that the environment is necessarily part of the text of a realized performance creates a jumping-off point into commercial, political, and cultural understanding of the emulsion of personality, charisma, sexuality, wit, and talent that actresses used to captivate their audiences. Primary text from Samuel Pepys and broadsheets accessed via digital online databases will assist in supporting examinations of reception, as Marcie Frank and Dane Farnsworth Smith have demonstrated in their works on early criticism. Kristina Straub, Lisa Freeman, Helen E. Brooks, and Felicity Nussbaum will inform all conversations of spectacle and perceptions of actresses' bodies during this era.

Research into the Restoration era and its theatrical culture has only recently moved to a discussion focusing on the paratextual material that started to be published. My work addresses yet unexplored aspects of the distinctly Restoration characteristics of theatrical performance. The timing of my decision to include Behn is also crucial as the first volume of Claire Bowditch and

Elaine Hobby's project—the first complete, critical collection, sponsored by Cambridge, of Aphra Behn's works—is set for release.

With its use of *The Rover* in the second chapter, I explore the shifting representation of women from Renaissance conventions to the first English actresses. Stephen Orgel, Felicity Nussbaum, Elizabeth Howe, Joseph Roach, and Medhavi Menon bolster and guide this endeavor. Felicity Nussbaum's recent and thorough work, *Rival Queens*, will provide the groundwork for the second chapter of this text with historical accounts and factual biographical details of the actresses who led women onto the English stage. Chapter Two additionally explores Valerie Traub's theories of gender identification and establishment in *Desire and Anxiety*, Jose Esteban Muñoz's theories of disidentification as expressed in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color*, and Joseph Roach's theories of fame and celebrity as explained in his book, *It*, to examine how the initial female actresses on the English stage of the early Restoration period used intentional misrecognition of their identities and assumptions of the associated sexual behaviors as a tactic to reframe societal expectations, delimiting their prescribed scope and access to both stage and societal roles, all while un-queering English theatre. It is through their reclaiming of a space on which they had been queerly portrayed that these first actresses had to un-queer English theatre through either a hyper-sexualization, a de-sexing, or a hybridization of othering: a disidentification of sexuality that allowed them to be both women and public figures. These misidentifications and disidentifications by actresses and the perpetuation by female playwrights such as Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish presented accessible representation for those forming and creating new identities while manipulating audiences into accepting rounded, dynamic female characters who furthered plots challenging both the treatment of women and the very completeness of personhood “that surpass[ed] the limits prescribed by the dominant

culture.” To consider the negotiation and social mobility achieved by the actresses of the early Restoration stage as discussed throughout this chapter, this section concludes with an examination of Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and her treatment of Thomas Killigrew’s *Thomaso* as a vehicle for early actresses to establish and represent female bodies on stage.

In the third chapter, we take advantage of the renaissance of public interest in Margaret Cavendish, as demonstrated by the release and popular reception of Danielle Dutton’s semi-biographical novel *Margaret the First*. In this chapter, this project will move from the current scholarly focus on the spectacle of the theatrical women and contribute insight into power structures being created and adapted. Cavendish’s theatrical creations—though off- and away from the stage—and her staging of them within her writing and through her meticulous direction of those performing readings of her work will serve my argument for reexamining the role of closet dramas. Cavendish writes her first volume of plays in exile as the Age of Enlightenment begins to creep into Europe. Access to the salons of France and the discussions of Natural Philosophy taking place therein inform her work; in *The Convent of Pleasure*, in particular, she responds to and reflects on the role of women. In exploring in the third chapter that text and its possibility of realized performance, I will consider how it responds to and signals a shift in women’s public roles and pursuit of knowledge.

In Margaret Cavendish’s *Convent of Pleasure*, published under her own name in 1668 in her second collection of plays, *Plays, Never Before Printed*, women funded and led by lead character Lady Happy, look to avoid marriage and withdraw from the sexual economy by retreating to a sanctuary they call a convent. Here, they purpose to enjoy all the natural pleasures, with demonstrated focus on educational pursuits, gardening and landscaping the grounds, and pursuit of theatrical representation as a form not only of entertainment but as teaching tool and

expression of political dissatisfaction with inequality of social expectation and limitations. In this chapter, I propose that it was in this historically semi-accurate and societally gender-appropriate setting that Cavendish was able to push back against the systematic exclusion of women in the pursuit of science while demonstrating through the metatheatrical staging of the women's performances the validity of the voices of women on stage. It is within this play that Cavendish stakes a flag for women both in the territory of natural philosophy and on stage. In *Shakespearean Neuroplay*, Amy Cook argues for differing creations of meaning when information is transmitted linguistically through performance rather than through reading, bolstering my argument for the efficacy of Cavendish's use of staging for instruction. These claims are considered in conjunction with Felicity Nussbaum's and Marcie Franks' exploration of the Restoration stage as the inception of the English female public media presence and the beginning of English literary criticism with acceptance of the female critical voice.

Finally, this work will end with an epilogue, a coda. This dissertation came together over and throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic and its mass casualties, lockdowns and isolation, fear and uncertainty, extreme political ideology turning many – even dying patients – into violently anti-science and anti-medical personal conspiracy theorists, and through the author's multiple bouts of varying degrees of incapacitation with the various mutations of the virus. Much like the era explored in this work, the world turned upside down for not just a single country but the entire globe. At the time of writing this final section, COVID rates are on the rise again, and there seems to be a general consensus that there is no "getting back to normal," leaving us all with no choice but to create a new "normal." This closing text presents contemporary lived Pandemic experiences not only for historical posterity but also to offer future readers a glimpse into the lived experiences of the Interregnum and Restoration periods.

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUES, EPILOGUES, and BROADSHEETS: Extra-textual Performance of Familiarity and the Beginning of Women's Voices in Western Mass Media

For early actresses and female playwrights to make a success of their new-found access to the stage, they had to be competitive in the new market of celebrity-hood. As Restoration plays frequently were marketed and played off of the novelty of the female body now accessible, on display, and objectifiable for audience consumption, early female Restoration performers learned to leverage the desire this created into a sexual economy. Since they were removed from the traditional marriage market, the women discovered that creating a clear divide between their professional lives and their private lives would drive demand for inclusion in their private lives. Some leveraged this demand into access to private drawing rooms and salons, invitations to exclusive parties and events, and more than one actress used her exclusive access to self to achieve movement through marriage into the aristocracy. However, to create this dichotomy between a clear interiority and exteriority is performative, and such a performative act, to be taken seriously, must come from sources that are held beyond question or reproach. This is an approach that can now be observed in our current entertainment industry being utilized by marginalized female actresses presenting what they would have the audience understand to be a documentation of their intimate day-to-day life and authentic reactions to their experiences in ways that gain trust and build intimacy.

Emerging as uniquely popular to the English Restoration theatre, meta-theatrical prologues came to be regarded as integral elements of any play's production. These prologues were commercial in nature and distributed via broadsheet previous to production, meant to sell

the audience on the play before its opening. They were the first glimpse the audience had into the world they were about to be welcomed into and often featured the voice and direct address of the playwright or the playwright's representative. Remarkably, the prologues became so popular that when plays were published for sale, the printers would not only include the prologue but also faithfully acknowledge its author (if distinct from the playwright) and who had spoken the lines. The prologues contributed to a lively theatrical discourse, sometimes attempting to justify elements of the play or to sway audiences in favor of what they were about to see, sometimes offering commentary on contemporary happenings in the theatrical world, and occasionally even observations on the political or commercial climate. A successful prologue convinced audiences to stay for the entire play rather than leave—with a full refund—after “the two curtain-tunes and the prologue” according to Diana Solomon.¹ For the tactic to be successful, however, the identity of the speaker was critical.

In this era of newly-emerging actresses, having a woman speak the prologue layered meaning and implication into the words, developing the written text from what Diana Solomon approaches through Gerard Genette's theory of paratext—“a part of the text that can exist independently of its main text yet stands to influence the reception of that text”—into a more experiential event.² Considered with the accompanying dedicatory prefaces of the published plays, the performance of the prologues provided a unique platform for the voices of female playwrights. Useful here are Felicity Nussbaum's³ ideas of “inbetweenness,” in which the audience perceives the actor and the character both independently and concurrently, as

¹ Diana Solomon. *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater Gender and Comedy, Performance and Print*. Newark: U of Delaware, 2013. 17

² *Ibid.*, 6

³ Felicity Nussbaum. *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

well as Victor Turner's⁴ theories of liminality, in which when a liminal space or threshold is entered and crossed, the subject is changed and becomes something new and different, incapable of moving back to what they were. For women playwrights, the dedicatory prefaces and performed prologues were the first time in England that the professional female playwright's voice was granted its own agency, being able to borrow the authority of the stage for itself. Here is where she can testify to her character and have it be heard. Nevertheless, the female playwright found herself continuously apologizing for possessing and employing this agency.

With the performance of the prologue, the woman writer had not only the opportunity to write her own words but to speak them, should she decide herself the best tool for delivery, as well. As she could also choose an actress or an actor to speak the words she had written, she could imbue her words with different meanings and authority depending on the perceived sex of the speaker. In this way, the female playwright enjoyed an unprecedented new degree of agency, being able not only to speak her mind but also to manipulate the audience's reception through her choice of speaker. Nevertheless, while women were for the first time speaking for and representing themselves on stage, they also immediately started to apologize for their presence and their work. The tone of women's prologues turned apologetic early in the era while their very presence was still novel. Yet even throughout the eighteenth century, women continued to speak apologetically within and for what they were being paid to do.

⁴ Victor W. Turner. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982. Print.

In contrast, men held no such apologetic tone, even when not yet established in their careers. In one notable dedicatory preface, William Davenant solicited permission to stage a theatrical presentation in 1656 (while commercial theatre was still banned) by claiming that he “rather deserve[s] approbation [for the work he had put into transforming the production into something stageable] than need[s] excuse.” While this is when he should be at his most ingratiating, asking to commit illegal acts, the only pardon he asks is for the length of his “epistle” as he has to write so much to “vindicate [him]self.”⁵ In his boldness, he is not alone.

Even men lesser known as writers and those not running their own companies write prologues bold in their tones, some directly challenging critics or insulting audiences. George Villiers writes in the prologue to *The Rehearsal*:

Now critics, do your worst, that here are et;
For, like a rook, I have hedged in my bet.
If you approve, I shall assume the state
Of those high-flyers whom I imitate;
And justly, too, for I will teach you more
Than ever they would let you know before:
I will not only show the feats they do,
But give you all their reasons for ‘em too.

⁵ William Davenant. “Sir William Davenant” in *Plays of Restoration and Eighteenth Century; as They Were Acted at the Theatres-Royal by Their Majesties' Servants*. By Douglas MacMillan. New York: H. Holt, 1931. 6

Some honor may to me from hence arise;
But if, by my endeavors, you grow wise,
And what you once so praised shall now despise,
Then I'll cry out, swelled with poetic rage,
'Tis I, John Lacy, have reformed your stage.⁶

He is so certain that those who are critical can be answered for as either being appeased by his wit and content as to have been taught new pleasures in the theatre—and should be grateful for the experience—or will be mollified by the person of actor John Lacy, self-identifying, in his well-beloved state, within the play as the actor and imitator of John Dryden. In this role, Lacy claims that he had so “reformed the stage” that audiences had refined their tastes beyond what they once loved, implying that the critics should be once more grateful for their gain at his hand.

In the performance of this prologue, Villiers, the male playwright, expresses his voice through Lacy, a popular male actor, presenting as the popular and well-known male playwright and theatrical personality John Dryden. These layers of masculine authority allow him, as a not-well-known playwright, to be so bold as not to take up the convention of seeking the audience's favor or pleading for their patience and positive consideration of his work. Instead, Villiers is able to triple-layer masculinity, and the security that these performed gendered identities bring him, writing a defiant prologue to be boldly delivered in place of a subservient or apologetic

⁶ *The Rehearsal*, 52

prologue to be poignantly or comically delivered, such as those of many of the female playwrights.

For a Restoration audience creating meaning of the performance, the performer, and the text, the embodiment by a masculine body of the voice of a masculine author, self-assured in its ability to teach them something new, leaves them little to doubt. It is a performance of masculine sureness and swagger, the playwright bolstered in his new position by the proven provenance of not only the popular actor, Lacy, but the even more dependable and longer-lasting legend in the theatre which Lacy and Villiers are manifesting: Dryden. Swagger must be acceptable if Dryden agrees it is warranted, and in these ways Villiers' *Rehearsal* prologue sold the audience on his right to write, created within them a presupposition of his skill in playwriting, and intrigued them enough both to come to the play and to stay long enough to forfeit the price of their tickets. They were moved from the real world, from the outside world, by Villiers' words in Dryden's voice through Lacy's body placed in front of the curtain before the play had even begun. With the performance of the prologue and while the curtain was still down, the audience had moved through a liminal space in which their expectations and understanding of what the play was, what it could be, and how they perceived the performers would change their own reception of the tale about to unfold for them.

This space in front of the curtain, before the play, was an opportunity of empowerment and agency, a moment for the playwright—given they possessed enough power, influence, or assurance of position—to speak directly to their audience and advocate for causes, their own work, or express an opinion regarding world affairs.

For such a direct address, the mouthpiece had to be carefully chosen, as Villiers had cannily done with Lacy, to guarantee that the audience would favorably receive the messenger

and correctly interpret the meaning the writer intended. For male playwrights, putting forward their work through male actors, these choices were fairly straightforward; there was little to consider as far as bleed-over from the actor's personal life and reputation. This is quite the contrary for women, both actresses and playwrights. Their publicly perceived lives are intertwined with their professional or stage personas. This is the "in-betweenness" that Felicity Nussbaum refers to in *Rival Queens*. For women to be virtuous, particularly for publicly appearing women to be truly respected as virtuous, they must make a show of their virtuous interiority. What better place than the stage edge in the performing of a prologue or epilogue in which performers are both themselves and not themselves?

And, so, it is here at the stage edge at the in-betweenness of not-the-play but part-of-it and the in-betweenness of theatrical performer and performer of virtuous interiority and the in-betweenness of female actor and sex object that women get to address London audiences directly in their own voices and bodies. The necessity of proclaimed virtue is a challenge, however, and the assumption of impurity and whorish behavior is already imposed upon women who take to the stage. Behn tempers this by addressing the readers directly in the preface to the distributed published play and by having Thomas Betterton speak the prologue at the production of *Sir Patient Fancy*. Behn defends her play against women who would claim it is bawdy, asserting that she has rushed to print it so that they may "tak[e] it into serious consideration in their cabinets, [and] they would find nothing that the most innocent virgins can have cause to blush at."⁷ This may have been a preemptive defense before criticism was levied; this is unclear. Whether there was a genuine complaint or not, she has taken the opportunity to defend her work,

⁷ Behn, *Patient Fancy*, 23

and by extension her own character, as free from “bugbear bawdry.”⁸ Taking the opportunity and having the readers’ attention thus far, she continues:

The play had no other misfortune but that of coming out for a woman: had it been owned by a man, though the most dull, unthinking, rascally scribbler in town, it had been a most admirable play. Nor does its loss of fame with the ladies do it much hurt, though they ought to have had good nature and justice enough to have attributed all its faults to the author’s unhappiness, who is forced to write for bread and not ashamed to own it, and consequently ought to write to please (if she can) an age which has given several proofs it was by this way of writing to be obliged, though it is a way too cheap for men of wit to pursue who write for glory, and a way which even I despise as much below me.⁹

Even Behn, who is already known and accepted as a successful playwright at this point in her career, demonstrates that she feels pressure to continue to construct and perpetuate her performed identity to document an interiority for her audience. Behn is simultaneously defensive and pleading—“no misfortune but to be the product of a woman, but that that woman is writing to earn a humble living”—yet proud and chastising; though she may do better than a “dull, unthinking, rascally scribbler,” yet the task is “below” her and the “ladies” ought to “have had good nature and justice enough” to be merciful to Behn’s work. Her identity as a working playwright, one successful in making a living by her art, is reinforced by her simultaneous confession that she is both made “unhappy” to have been “forced” to do so but “unashamed to own it”: a subtle brag at her own accomplishment in a competitive field. Behn’s chastisement of the women for not receiving her play with more enthusiasm or welcome—again, likely pre-

⁸ Ibid., 23

⁹ Ibid., prologue

emptive—is strategic; this gauntlet might stir women to her side in support of one who must earn her own living, and it might stir men to her defense as being a woman in dire circumstances whilst shunned by her own sex.

To respond to Behn’s criticism of women not being supportive of her with a lack of support makes the female audience member seemingly prove her point: appearing either simply unfeeling and calloused towards the plight of another woman and too prudish and harshly judgmental to overlook and forgive what might be offensive in order to understand the theatre with which she’s been presented. Behn does not apologize for the style or content of the play because what she has produced has been in an attempt to please them. She is simply imitating what has worked for others—particularly male playwrights—many times previously. Though this may take the form of a request for excusing her pursuit of both publishing and even writing the play in the first place, with each line there is an equal criticism or admonishment to others lest they not accept her work, and by extension, her as a playwright.

In the performed prologue, in which she allows her words to be embodied by a popular male actor of outstanding moral character, she takes a completely different tactic: here she derides all contemporary playwrights, “poets,” and claims that “a poet’s good for nothing now; / Unless he have the knack for conjuring too.”¹⁰ What’s cunningly done here is that as she derides all modern poets, accusing the audience of having “commonwealth” tastes—a barbed accusation in 1678—she slips in that women are part of the horde of poets taking their turn in the fleeting favors of the crowd. She doesn’t acknowledge that she’s a woman poet but instead lets Betterton attack her ilk without the gendered association.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26

This lack of association and his insulting commentary, spoken before a play that many had undoubtedly come to see precisely because Behn had written it—she'd become a regular writer for the Duke's Company in 1670—would have led the savvy audience member to realize either that it was humorous or that Betterton was going to be the villain of the piece. As he was going to end up being a deceitful character in a play with twisting and intertwining plots, both would have been valid receptions of his delivery. This is the complexity of the liminal space of the prologue stage. As the performer of words not his own, Betterton embodies a layered identity beyond that of both perceived performer and character but has now taken on the mantle of peer and fellow country-man, knowable and relatable to his audience. The prologue stage has extended the possible receptions of the sources of and influences upon his authority and identity. In selecting him to help her craft and solidify her identity, Behn has placed on stage not only Betterton's gender performance, but his popularity, his reputation associated with his roles, and his ability to perform accessible and authentic interiority.

The gendered change in delivery affects the documentation of her identity. When Betterton, the villain of the piece—but still able to be seen in performance of the prologue as the popular male actor—accuses the women of the audience of failing to support Behn, an authority is placed in the words that would not have been there had they been spoken by an actress.

Similarly, when Betterton proclaims Behn's success as a playwright as being “below” her, even if she is “forced” into it, there is a sexualization of her identity. Her art, as being described by the man she's providing words for, is now a commodification; she's been forced to provide him with the entertainment he's now sharing publicly with the audience, much to her “unhappiness.” Behn risks this association with the prostituting of her work by gleaning the

authority Betterton gives to her claims and the evidence his words will provide of her constructed identity that she's put in his mouth to deliver and verify.

In another canny use of public personas and cultivated reputations, Aphra Behn wrote the prologue and epilogue for her late friend, the Earl of Rochester's *Valentinian* – his second reworking of John Fletcher's *Valentinian* – selecting actresses long rumored to have been privately trained in the theatrical arts by the Earl himself. Widely known as a sexually appealing and alluring man, Rochester had a reputation for successful seduction. In Behn's choice of Sarah Cooke for the prologue and Elizabeth Barry for the epilogue, the playwright leverages the likely apocryphal bawdy tales of Rochester's relationships with the women, firmly setting audience expectations of a sexually heightened and erotic theatrical experience, “courting female favor by encouraging women to fantasize about sex with the dead poet.”¹¹ Cooke's delivery of Behn's prologue establishes her as an authority on Rochester and an actress experienced and beautiful enough to make this introduction. Solomon notes that having drawn in the women, the prologue turns to thwart the men, the critics in the pit, “encouraging them to gossip instead of watching the play, so that they cannot slander it afterward.” Behn suggests that they chatter about the unexpectedly low costs to acquire a prostitute at the “‘Blanket Fair,’ a festival held on the frozen Thames during the winter of 1683-1684.”¹² The men dispensed of, Behn completes the prologue with sensual descriptions of Rochester, painting him as a seducing siren before turning back to the female spectators and giving them permission to fantasize about the dead poet, assuring them that their reputations are safe and that Rochester would have been flattered at their attention, “Twill please his Ghost even in th' Elizian shade,/To find his Power has such a conquest

¹¹ Solomon, 110-111

¹² Ibid., 112

made.”¹³ The play over, Barry delivers an epilogue reminding the audience that what is seen on stage is not reality but fantasy, warning that if the characters followed the proper actions as criticism will be sure to point out, the play would cease to exist, and the drama and tragedy would be lost. She reminds them of the empathy they felt for her – “Like me you Underwent the Killing pain. / Did you not pity me, Lament each groan” – validating their shared experience. But, like the prologue, Behn brings the epilogue to a conclusion by suggesting that through the events of the play, “Each had her *Valentinian* in her Heart,”¹⁴ returning her focus to the women in the audience.

Mary Pix is not as bold and turns in her printed preface of *The Spanish Wives* (1696) to a dedicatory letter “To the Honorable Colonel TIPPING OF WHITFIELD” in which she uses the letter to establish her virtuous relationship with him: “You have known me from my childhood, and my inclination to poetry; and ‘tis from the happiness of that acquaintance, I presume to make so worthless an offering.”¹⁵ This performed virtue and paratextual testimony and imagery of a long-held childhood acquaintance conjures images of girlhood innocence and associates her playwrighting with childhood and places it as a shield against any accusations of impropriety in the act; if a man of honor can attest that a child was drawn to such predilections, surely they must be natural and should be permitted? Her humbleness and declaration that the play is worthless is clearly only a performance of humbleness, or else she would not take the time and effort to print it or dedicate it to someone from whom she seeks its protection. That she is seeking protection

¹³ Behn, *Prologue Spoken*, prologue

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, epilogue

¹⁵ Pix, 134

for it shows that it has worth. One does not seek to protect something that is worthless. However, as she must make a show of demonstrating a virtuous interiority, she declares her humbleness.

Like Behn, Pix changes tactics for her prologue. She also uses a popular actor, William Pinkethman, to speak her prologue and embody her words. He, like Lacy, comes out in the pieces of the costume he will wear for the play: not quite in the play, but not entirely out of its world. His male body is one layer of security for her words, his established popularity a second; whatever he tells the audience, they're preconditioned to believe as coming from a reliable and likable source. The prologue to *The Spanish Wives* that he delivers is one that transports the audience into the world of the play before the curtain is raised. He speaks in the dialect of the press-master he'll be playing. In this character, as an officer on a ship, he also takes on authority, even if it is of a rough rather than refined kind. He immediately uses this authority to threaten to "press to sea all those who damn this play."¹⁶ With that sort of power, Pinkethman represents a brutish force of life and death, or corporeal punishment, that Pix has sent forth as her avatar to protect her from critics. These critics, her menacing avatar observes, "hiss...nine plays in ten...Like pirates too, while honest men they're breaking," but continues on to wonder why they bother:

Yet why should they hiss plays not worth regarding?

Do we bombard a town not worth bombarding?¹⁷

¹⁶ Pix, 132

¹⁷ Ibid., 132

His and, as he is Pix's avatar, Pix's argument is that if the critics take the time to attend a play and then choose to take further time to continue their attendance while hissing (and possibly booing), there must be something worth responding to.

The prologue ends with an acknowledgment of Pix as a woman being the author not only of this piece but also of a previous more serious drama. In addition, she teases the audience, suggesting that she will offer them sexual satisfaction:

But show you can oblige a woman twice.

The first time she was grave, as well she might,

For women will be damned sullen the first night;

But faith, they'll quickly mend, so be n't uneasy:

Tonight she's brisk, and tries new tricks to please ye.¹⁸

Coming from the unrefined sailor, the sexual overtones are blatant and as they come from the writer's chosen proxy, unmistakable. The first, second, and third lines are a challenge to the masculinity and sexual prowess of the men in the audience: they may have attempted to please a woman but left her "grave" with the commentary that "well she might [be]" suggesting that it is by lack of skill, effort, or talent on the part of the man, that she is left un-obliged, "damned sullen," and unhappy. The third line gives the impression that this is to be expected, however, and that this has happened to other women. Through the implications of the plural usage, that this has happened to other men: the audience should feel a sense of solidarity in knowing this is

¹⁸ Ibid., 132

a common short-falling. The fourth line assures the audience that they'll have another shot at fulfilling and obliging her, so they should be calm in that knowledge. Finally, the fifth and concluding line of the prologue declares that "she's brisk," full of energy and spirit, and going to take the lead in trying new techniques to make this meeting a success, leaving the audience "please[d]" that they came and tried again with her. These lines fall far from the protestations of innocence that her dedicatory preface offered, but while it was Pix herself "speaking" the words of the preface directly for the reader to observe, this is a proxy twice removed—once through the distance of being a hired actor on the stage, in front of the curtain, and a second time by being the actor in character—and clearly not Pix speaking lines implicating herself in any behavior unsavory or immoral, moreover, that of a male actor and a sea captain, for whom this kind of sexual talk is accepted, even expected. If pressed, she could declare that the prologue referred only to her first play, *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks*, and that the sullenness of the woman referred only to the tragedy of that initially staged drama and was challenging the audience to come to see her second play, a comedy: no need for licentious over-analysis.

The publication and production of *Ibrahim* differed from *Wives* in that it received a dedicatory letter, a preface, and a prologue that was performed by a woman. The dedicatory letter has the expected apologetic tones from a female playwright while asking for protection—"the reading may prove tiresome as a dull, repeated tale: Yet I have still recourse to what I mentioned first, your good nature, that I hope will pardon and accept it"—but, with a cunning twist, in which she grovelingly claims that she's "always pleased" when she's accused of having not written her works, but is assured that upon closest "view [the reader] will too soon find out the Woman, imperfect Woman there."

That theme continues in the paratext of the preface in which she claims that she would never have “troubl’d the Reader with anything of a Preface” since she’s aware of how critical readers can be of “what falls from a Womans Pen” and “may soon find more faults than [she is] ever able to answer,” but she’s forced to write one as she’s learned since the play was first printed that Ibrahim was the Twelfth Emperor and not the Thirteenth. She “beg[s] Pardon for the mistake” and explains that she had “trusted too far to [her] Memory” of her reading of “Sir Paul Ricault’s Continuation of the Turkish History.” Once again, this apology serves as a tool to facilitate a performance of virtuous interiority by a woman—humbleness, ability, and quick willingness to apologize when incorrect, and a demonstrated effort to have bettered herself through self-education. Simultaneously, she is also defending her work as having been researched and based on the solid and respected work of a man. If one is going to challenge her historical account of Ibrahim, then one is actually challenging the work of Sir Paul Ricault. Rather than hiding behind a man’s authority, as in the prologue to *Wives*, Pix cleverly hides a man’s authority in this preface.

Spoken by Miss Cross, a girl of only twelve years old, the prologue starts innocent, perhaps coy, and perhaps with stage fright: “I’m hither sent, but Heaven knows what to say” and then proceeds to explain all the things the play is not, but assures the audience that it is, in fact, based on “Solid History.” The speaker appeals to the “Ladies” to “own it” and “protect it” for none will go against them. The prologue ends by referring to the gathering of support Miss Cross is calling on:

If in that charming Circle you will oft appear,
An Empty House we shan’t have cause to fear.

Such a line both flatters the hearer as being charming—a reference to looks, manners, and class—and ends with a declaration of vulnerability by an innocent. Pix has taken an emotionally poignant strategy—of using a girl child to appeal to the women—while bracing her appeal in logic, reason, and some small portion of flattering manipulation: that the women have the power to sway the men and that they may be doing so in part through their charms.

Such an embodiment is a drastic change from the use of the male form from which the female playwright could pull surrogated authority. Rather, the power to be had from the use of a female form as an avatar for the female playwright comes from the layers of meaning that the appearance and performance of innocence and youth bring to the stage when the prologue text is spoken by a young girl. The audience is still being called on to interactively overlay their own understanding of who is speaking to them and what the circumstances are that bring them the words they are hearing: meaning to be taken from the prologue must come from the playwright working with the performer, the character the performer inhabits there in front of the curtain, and the audience in their ability to relate their contemporary culture and society to what is being presented, experiencing the production through lenses of familiarity.

The dedicatory letters worked in similar ways in that they were published and distributed with the plays, just as the prologues, used as letters of reference or recommendation to give paratextual information about the play. The reader could choose to read the letters and glean something new about the script, or they could choose to ignore them; they held meaning either way, each enhanced by the consumers' awareness of the other. Unlike the prologue, however, the dedicatory letters were the directly discernable addresses of the playwright. Further, unlike the prologues, these letters were not addressed to the reader or the audience but to whomever the playwright was (ostensibly) dedicating the play. The reader must, in a way,

eavesdrop on the conversation of others to see the performed (and published) interiority of the playwright. While the stage may require an avatar for the delivery of a prologue, for female playwrights these dedicatory letters provided precisely the necessary stage in order for them, in their own words and personhood, to acceptably and modestly demonstrate their prowess while defending or advertising their works.

In times of widespread political and cultural unrest, we seek connection. We seek an immediacy, an instant validation that what we are experiencing we are not alone in. We seek shared experience. While reading and discussing is certainly of value, the shared experience of theatre delivers a far greater connection. It is the liveness, the lived moment, the shared moment that creates in theatre its necessary niche. From the early sharing of oral histories and epochs to our contemporary desire to physically share the space of experienced performance, theatre is more than spectacle. It is in the shared space, air, felt and expressed reactions to the experience that we build connection, feeling ourselves a part of something larger, something beyond our own reaction, our own lived experience, that we feel the impact and possibility of society and the hope of being a piece of a larger whole.

This approach can now be observed in our current entertainment industry being utilized by marginalized female actresses presenting what they would have the audience understand to be a documentation of their intimate day-to-day life and authentic reactions to their experiences in ways that gain trust and build intimacy. Like the Restoration actresses, multiple Emmy-award-winning writer and actress Phoebe Waller-Bridge and performers like her use this technique of performed disclosure to disarm and prompt intimacy with the audience on shows like Saturday Night Live's opening monologue. Here, the guest hosts, the monologue-presenters have the opportunity to self-mock, to draw attention to their latest project(s), and to address any societal,

political, environmental, or other such issues while presenting a created version of themselves, scripted for public consumption, offered for evaluation and recognition. Here is where the direct access to the audience for the actress or playwright or those speaking on her behalf, through the Restoration prologue and through the contemporary comedic address segment, is key to attesting to her character, documenting her thoughts, motives and intentions: her interiority becoming an exterior documentary theatrical performance.

Waller-Bridge, in our contemporary culture, uses a similar technique through reporting and performing a sexualized exteriority while maintaining a virtuous interiority that she seemingly makes accessible to her audience through, in this instance, the platform allowed her on Saturday Night Live's opening monologue. She establishes humility and a discomfort with fame, particularly that which is at that moment putting her directly into the evaluatory gaze of both the live audience in the studio and the millions of people watching the live production from outside the studio. At the very beginning of the monologue, she declares that she is "from the U.K., which means [she] find[s] everything embarrassing," confessing that "this monologue is probably the most embarrassing thing [she's] ever done."¹⁹ She continues, "And standing in front of a jazz band, in high heels on live television, joking about [her] accomplishments, well, actually, that sounds pretty fun." She delivers the final bit winkingly, allowing the audience to decide if she really enjoys talking about her accomplishments or if she's trying to put a brave face on actual discomfort. This last line also reminds the audience that this woman has won multiple Emmy awards and, at the time of filming this monologue, was the writer and star of a

¹⁹ "Phoebe Waller-Bridge Monologue - SNL." YouTube, 5 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8jXm_UNPF8.

ratings-topping²⁰ television show, *Fleabag*.²¹ She continues, “When I asked, ‘Do we have to do this bit?’ They said, ‘Yes, it’s part of your visa.’” The implied “they” hold power over her; they control her access to free travel while within the United States. By claiming – even winkingly – that she has been coerced into the coming self-disclosure, she has freed herself from judgment by the audience of her immodesty, her ego, her arrogance. Regardless of her successes, she publicly identifies as a woman and is, therefore, subject to societal rules for appropriate behavior for a woman. Only after she has cleared herself of any potential accusations of immodesty does she actually move into what the audience expects will be the meat of her monologue: discussing her work.

Describing *Fleabag*, she explains that “it’s about a woman who is trying to navigate her life in London,” commenting that “people often assume that [she] is like the character, Fleabag, simply because [she] wrote it: sexually depraved, foul-mouthed, and dangerous, and [she] always ha[s] to say to them,” and here she pauses, allowing the audience to mentally continue the response they expect from her. Because she’s already made it clear that self-disclosure is unpleasant to her, and the intimacy of speaking directly to an audience makes her uncomfortable enough that she had to be coerced into this monologue, her audience is led to expect a reiteration of that modesty, a vehement denial of any of the listed traits being applicable to her.

However, after a pause just long enough to allow those assumptions, she continues, “Yes, you’re absolutely right,” eliciting laughter at this highly ridiculous claim. The audience knows

²⁰ *Fleabag* still holds a rare 100% rating on the entertainment crowd-ranking site, Rotten Tomatoes

²¹ “Fleabag.” *Rotten Tomatoes*, Fandango, 21 July 2016, www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/fleabag.

her claim can't be true because they know her. Didn't she just intimately confess how uncomfortable she is with self-disclosure? She is a modest woman. The claim that she is foul-mouthed can't be sincere; they've never heard her, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, swear. And they should know; they're all now friends in the SNL studio.

Obviously, she isn't sexually depraved; she is conservatively dressed in black slacks, sensible heels, and a simple, opaque black blouse that shows no cleavage nor clings to her frame. The audiences inside and outside the studio have seen far more revealing outfits on many of the show's hosts and guest musicians. Even with her squeaky-clean public persona, this show's guest musician, Taylor Swift, shows more skin than Waller-Bridge during one of her musical numbers.²²

As for the third claim – that Waller-Bridge is dangerous – the audience must again evaluate what they've come to know of her in their time here with her. She is well-spoken, uses a modulated tone – enough to be interesting to listen to but not modulated enough to cause even the slightest apprehension of possible confrontation or erratic behavior – is self-deprecating, has a posh British accent, is dressed in clean, well-cut, monochromatic clothing: this woman is no threat.

Having set, affirmed, and reaffirmed such a firm groundwork of respectability, she then actually moves into talking about her very successful shows. She doesn't have to make the claim that they are successful: both of her shows, *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*, are smash hits. Waller-bridge can simply refer to them directly. As expected, she throws in jokes about her love life and

²² Swift's second song of the show, however, she wears a turtleneck shirt and what seems to be slacks as she remains seated behind a piano to perform.

moves on to comment on her research for *Killing Eve*, psychopathy, and that she wrote *Fleabag* to get her costar to get dressed up as a priest and tell her he loved her. She can make these jokes, and the audience will not attach psychopathy, manipulation, sexual depravity, or emotional neediness: she's already deterred those suspicions from forming.

Her audience disarmed, she moves into social commentary, revealing that what made the priest character so attractive to viewers that he quickly became known as "Hot Priest," was that he listened, really listened. Without lingering to lecture, guilt, or shame, she moves on to joke about how "we all find weird things sexy" and that, now, "women can speak much more openly about their desires without being burnt at the stake, which is nice." Without pause, she continues, "Back in the day, horny women were to be feared, and now they're given Emmys." Only at that point does she pause for applause, using gestures and body language to imply that she's referring to herself and is unbothered by the implication. The rest of her monologue draws parallels between the treatment in the past of women seen as unnatural and the treatment today of men seen as unnatural, and a non-crude description of anthropomorphized genitals.

Unlike Behn and Pix ventriloquizing their entire monologues, and thus identity creations, through male performers, Waller-Bridge performs her own. However, like Behn and Pix, Waller-Bridge uses this introductory prologue-monologue to establish herself as having authority by virtue of not only her public awards of notoriety but of her acceptability as a proper, modest woman. Yes, she was speaking her own words by her own authority and at her direction, but not as a respected male performer would. She first had to present a sculpted and scripted interiority for the audience's evaluation, acceptance, or rejection. Having assured them that she offered no threat, no arrogance, and no danger, she was then able to access the public authority to claim her accomplishments and speak directly to her contemporary audience and the mass media which

would go on to publish critiques, summaries, think-pieces, and other written and spoken responses to what she'd offered.

Leading her themes of relatable vulnerability and performed available interiority is her repeat self-exposure of her humanity and sexuality. This type of presentation reminds her viewers that she is still a sexual being and has value, but brings into question the potential danger of a woman willing to speak so frankly about her sexuality. Although she has worn an all-black outfit similar to those she wore while in the character of Fleabag, Waller-Bridge has used this monologue to distance herself from her character. The outfit is a calculated choice: she has chosen to draw a connection of likenesses between herself (as being performed) and the character she has written and embodies. Her choice to directly address suspicions of the show being autobiographical and that she is that pitiable, not completely likable creature, is her acknowledgment of the information the audience believes they deserve. She knows that they struggle to separate the character and the artist, and so she self-others in claiming they are alike with such delivery as to assure the audience that Waller-Bridge is, in fact, nothing like *FLeabag*. Such self-othering is a powerful tool in that she takes from critics the possibility to level criticism against her self-portrayal – as she is performing during this monologue – based on shallow disapproval rooted in fear of accomplished and sexually aware women, an evaluation as a human based on her revealed (or not) physical form, characters she has written and/or portrayed, and if she is inoffensive and unthreatening. Instead, she reclaims her image and performs her self on her own terms and in her own words, using her authority and inoffensive sexuality as her own tool of criticism leveled at society.

Waller-Bridge's self-authoring through creating and reporting her own narrative allows her a measure of protection against the constant barrage of sexualized valuation and evaluation

that women encounter in the space of mass media. This self-sexualization, prefaced by her initial confessional moment testifies to her virtuous representation of self. With a virtuous interior—in that the interior matches the performed exterior—there can be no shameful, secret interior to expose by those wishing to hurt her sense of self, nor her image with her fans and audiences. Waller-Bridge’s ability to maintain her claim to an authentic performance of an exteriority consistent with her interiority allowed her the same type of protection the early Restoration actresses and playwrights were seeking and working to build through their performances of authentic selves via prologues and paratextual literature.

The assumptions of *Fleabag* being an autobiographical representation of Waller-Bridge speaks highly of her skill in communicating sincerity and authenticity in performance. Her audience has been led to believe that when *Fleabag* refers to and imitates the people in her life, Waller-Bridge is referring to and performing past interactions with real people. This is unlikely, but the assumptions lead to increased intimacy felt for and towards her.

Conversely, we know that the people whom Behn and Pix refer to in their paratextual literature existed. Their London audiences were small enough to be either be acquainted with the people and scandals to which the authors would be referring or, at the very least, be aware of what the authors were referring to. These events already happened and already exist in the minds and memories of those who lived them. When Behn, Pix, and Jones collect the facts, the circumstances, the dialogue, and the results to retell these stories in ways that relate to their own identities, they’re working in documentary theatre. They’re presenting and commenting on events of interest to their community; they are building intimacy and a feeling of connection between those on and those in front of the stages. They have found a way to relate their work to the world of their audiences and write their own stories, justifying their own work at the same

time. Much can be forgiven or simply not taken as an offense when one is familiar with and feels a sense of intimacy with the questionable individual. The perceived connections built at the stage edge also build in the audience a relationship bias:

[W]e tend to be attracted toward (and like) people we know well and to whom we know share similar interests. The stronger our relationship with another person, the more likely we are to believe them when they tell us something.²³

With high illiteracy rates – “by 1600 this had fallen to about 70 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women, and by 1700 about 50 percent of men and 70 per cent of women were illiterate”²⁴ – Londoners often received their military and international news, their celebrity news (and gossip), political commentary, and updates for and the insights into the Court from the actors and actresses delivering prologues and epilogues commenting on such matters. The familiarity of constructed intimacy made the performers trustworthy, their observations and commentary sincere, and their facts likely correct. They were dispersing information and opinions to the masses partially through broadsheets but with a much greater reach through the prologues and

²³ Rich Gasaway. “Relationship Bias – a Barrier to Situational Awareness.” Situational Awareness Matters!TM, 28 Dec. 2021.

²⁴ “Around 1500 perhaps about 90 percent of men and 98 per cent of women were illiterate; by 1600 this had fallen to about 70 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women, and by 1700 about 50 percent of men and 70 per cent of women were illiterate. The numbers were probably higher in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. These are maximum figures, however, and it is likely that forms of rudimentary reading literacy were significantly higher. And, of course, there were other ways of accessing the contents of books that did not involve buying or reading them, including religious and political communities where texts were read aloud.” Joad Raymond, Editor, *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture. Volume 1, Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*. Oxford, 2011. 4.

epilogues sandwiching the presented entertainment. With most things, we can often determine the impact of a phenomenon by the criticism it receives.

Thomas Shadwell, a moralist and critic of libertinism, was happy to provide just such criticism in *A Lenten Prologue Refus'd by the PLAYERS*.²⁵ The work begins with a general disdain for prologues and the wit beloved within:

OUR Prologue-Wit grows flat: the Nap's worn off;
And howsoe're We turn, and trim the Stuff,
The Gloss is gone, that look'd at first so gaudy;
'Tis now no Jest to hear young Girls talk Baudy.
But Plots, and Parties give new matter birth;
And State Distractions serve you here for mirth!²⁶

Shadwell speaks as a plurality, though it is unclear who else he serves as representative. Shadwell, et al are tired of the spectacle and predictable wit of theatrical prologues, their charm having worn thin, their bawdy jokes no longer amusing. He does recognize in the last two lines quoted above that news, gossip, and politics are still providing new entertainment material, seemingly quite upset that actresses are finding humor in matters of national identity and security. Continuing on, he presents – in this, his prologue – comparisons of actors to “wanton Neroes fiddl[ing] to the Flame,” and the stage to “old Rump-Pulpits” which are now the “Scene of News.” To make his point he lists a good quantity of political issues and threats, implying that

²⁵ Thomas Shadwell. *A Lenten prologue refus'd by the players*. London: 1683. Early English Books Online.

²⁶ Shadwell, *Lenten*

the performers' "jingling Rhime for Reason" turns otherwise reasonable and logical people into spectators willing to "swallow" whatever they're being fed. Nearly halfway through his rant, he returns to the stage-players:

Behind the Curtain, by Court-Wires, with ease

They turn those Plyant Puppets as they please.

Shadwell is boldly accusing not only the players of being under the control of the Crown, but the Crown of surreptitiously using the theatres to control and minds and will of the people. Not willing to stop there, he goes on to offer that:

To save our Faith and keep our Freedom's Charter,

Is once again to make a Royal Martyr.

To call for the violent martyr-worthy death of the King is an incredible thing to put into print and then publish and distribute with one's name right there by the title. Should this "prologue" have ever been actually offered to a theatre, it is little wonder that it was "refus'd;" no artisan sponsored and working at the will of the King would dare endanger not only their livelihood but their lives. Shadwell quickly follows those treacherous lines with a clarification and an accusation that "This Logick is of Tories." In that vein, he winds down his assault, explaining that if the King isn't careful, those he considers friends and political allies will bring about his and England's downfall.

This is just such a text that was suited to broadsheets and quick dispersion to the masses, only to be destroyed by weather, rough handling, or other use rendering them unreadable. If this text has managed to survive, it isn't beyond imagining that there were other tirades of similar theme. What matters in this moment, though, is that this text by a well-known playwright and author exists, created to address what Shadwell (and possibly others) perceived to be a dangerous amount of power held by the theatres in their dispersion of information.

For Londoners forging a new culture and new national identity after decades of political and geographical upheaval, this living connection must have been similar to the reactions of contemporary Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. In being quarantined, removed from gathering in familiar groups, and barred from coming together in shared experiences, not just the entertainer and performers but the general public sought to create lived shared experiences. With our modern technology, we attempted to recreate live theatre. We attempted, through forging new paths in new digital mediums, to share theatrical, musical, and artistic endeavors with audiences composed of individuals separate and alone but seeking connection.

For London's population, once familiar with the common experience of theatre and regular holiday celebrations and festivals, their absence during the Interregnum must have been jarring, alienating the populace from outlets in which they'd once found and reaffirmed their place in and contribution to their society. With the return of Charles II and his mandates reopening theatres, there was a sense of relief and rejoicing in the new stability. The return to theaters meant a return to, or the ability to create a new normal. Prologues and epilogues reinforced the new status quo. The epilogues following "A prologue written by Mr. Dryden, to a new play, call'd, The loyal brother," Dryden gives Sarah Cooke the lines:

There's Loyalty to one: I wish no more:

A Commonwealth sounds like a Common Whore.

Let Husband or Gallant be what they will,

One part of Woman is true Tory still.²⁷

In which Dryden equates the loyalty of a wife with loyalty to the King. For another play, Dryden wrote upon the theme, “Prologue to the King and Queen at the opening of their theatre. Spoken by Mr. Batterton; written by Mr. Dryden” in which he celebrates the return to the theatre and assures the Royal couple that:

Old Men shall have good old Plays to delight 'em:

And you fair Ladies and Gallants that slight 'em,

We'll treat with good new Plays; if our new Wits can writ'em.^{28,29}

But he is not alone. In Edward Ravenscroft's “Prologue to Dame Dobson the cunning woman spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the same: spoken by Mr. Jevorn,” the author spends both the prologue and epilogue extolling the ways of Tories in contrast to treacherous Whigs.³⁰ In “York and Albany's welcome to England. or, The loyal subjects joy for his most miraculous deliverance

²⁷ John Dryden and Thomas Southerne. *A Prologue Written by Mr. Dryden, to a New Play, Call'd, The Loyal Brother*. Ann Arbor, MI ; Oxford (UK) :: Text Creation Partnership, 1682.

²⁸ John Dryden. *Prologue to the King and Queen at the opening of their theatre. Spoken by Mr. Batterton; written by Mr. Dryden*. London. 1683. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership.

²⁹ An interesting choice of words as the women playwrights whose work was being celebrated on the Restoration stages were about to be labeled The Female Wits.

³⁰ Edward Ravenscroft. *Prologue to Dame Dobson the Cunning Woman Spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the Same: Spoken by Mr. Jevorn*. Ann Arbor, MI; Oxford (UK): Text Creation Partnership, 1683.

To a new play-house tune, much in request” the Tories are again pitted against the Whigs, but the god of theatre and wine joins the Loyalist forces:

Come round about your Claret fill,
to Bacchus we will quaff;
Though factious Whigs they repine still,
we'l drink our Wine and laugh,
And cry long live the King and Duke,
in spite of all their foes;
And Heaven the Factious Rout rebuke,
that would procure their woes.³¹

The recognition of Bacchus serves to declare this scene a joyful one, a situation for celebration and mirth, regardless of what mood the quarrelsome Whigs would like to inflict on others.

Although the name of the author has been lost – the woes of broadsheets – it is likely they are associated with one or both of the chartered theatres, the King’s or the Duke’s, as they are boldly calling on Roman and Christian gods to protect and bless those two men. This likelihood is bolstered by the epilogue authored by the same hand which calls for better behavior in the theatre by unruly “sparks,” calling on those who employ them to not only curb their rowdy disruptions but to forcefully encourage them to pay for their theatre tickets.³² With complaints about

³¹ *York and Albany's welcome to England. or, The loyal subjects joy for his most miraculous deliverance To a new play-house tune, much in request.* London: Printed for I. Iordan, at the Angel in Guiltspur-street, 168-?. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2011.

³² It is possible this public request for help and gentle remonstrance of out-of-control men in the employ of the nobles was taken seriously by Charles II as on July 23, 1670, he put forth a decree that tickets were to be paid for, money was not to be demanded returned, and that the unruly men

audience etiquette, lack of fair payment, and appeals to sponsors, the normalcy of Restoration theatre can be identified in the quotidian life of our own contemporary theatres.

Into this reclaimed place of community and shared experience, the popularity of prologues can be easily understood. Into this desperately needed place and moment of connection, a moment of presentational performance being transgressed to acknowledge their contemporary moment – the royal and society scandals, the military news, the political news, the audience members, themselves – would have been welcome. Recognized as coming from the place of influence and authority – gleaned by actors from speaking in theatres under the protection and occasional funding of the king and his cousin, the Duke of York – reports of their community to their community in that moment, in that space, with others intensified the liveness of the event. Similar to touring bands acknowledging the city in which they’re currently performing – “Hello, Los Angeles! We’re so thrilled to be back here on the West Coast! We have missed this sunshine!” – actors acknowledging the moment they are in and the people they are with adds to the audience’s sense of belonging, being seen, and being a part of a greater community.

Of course, prologues were then capitalized upon. If sending them out via broadsheet previous to a production – or during a run to drum up new attendees – roused potential audience members seeking that shared experience with others, the prologues could serve double duty. And, again, if they were successful and well-received within the production, what savvy theater manager wouldn’t want to tease new audiences with the lure of the moment they’d missed?³³

would behave or face loss of wages and whatever further punishment was seen fit by their masters.

³³ Fear of missing out is not a new experience, unique to this current generation.

Well-received prologues sent to public distribution promised a chance for Londoners to come to see, hear, and feel what they'd missed, to join in the mass experience in which others had already found connection and entertainment. Of course, it is difficult to assess the popularity of prologues and epilogues based solely on the surviving body of broadsheets.

We will never truly know for certain the real size of this market, and the true extent of production. Single-sheet publications were notoriously susceptible to destruction and loss... file copies were not always kept. Many broadsheets were subsequently reused for humble domestic purposes. It was self-evidently much easier to use single sheets in this way than the pages of a book. Most examples from the first age of print survive in only a single copy: statistical modelling of rates of loss in the early book world tends to exclude broadsheets because the samples are so small and the estimates of lost editions seem so astronomical. But we know enough to discern that the scale and variety of output played a vital role in sustaining the publishing industry, and in lubricating the process of information exchange underpinned by the new world of the printed book.³⁴

We know that what remains accessible from recovered broadsheets represents only the smallest fraction of what was produced and published. It is fortunate that with the popularity of the prologues and epilogues of the Restoration theatre, that the playwrights or editors compiling and publishing the plays separately or in collection chose to include the associated extratextual materials and, generally, a record of their authors and of the actors and actresses selected to deliver the material to audiences.

³⁴ Bruni and Andrew Pettegree (eds.), *Lost Books. Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 55–72, 160–201.

What remains is the evidence of connections created between performers and audiences, sincerity and authenticity of interiority so well performed that audiences came to trust the players to keep the community informed of both factual news and titillating gossip. For women, the stage edge became a place of fleeting authority in which they were looked to for their performed intimacy, their creation of connection, and their establishment of desire within their audiences to know them more, know them better, know the *real* them: celebrity in which they must learn to control the public consumption of their performed *real* identity while deciding how much of themselves they would share, what they would serve to their hungry fans.

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CHAPTER TWO

Representation Through Misrepresentation: Disidentification in Theatrical Gender Performance as Women's Bodies Come to the Restoration Stage

For early actresses and female playwrights to make a success of their new-found access to the stage, they had to be competitive in the new market of celebrity-hood. As Restoration plays frequently were marketed and played off of the novelty of the female body now accessible, on display, and objectifiable for audience consumption, early female Restoration performers learned to leverage the desire this created into a sexual economy. Since they were removed from the traditional marriage market, the women discovered that creating a clear divide between their professional lives and their private lives would drive demand for inclusion in their private lives. Some leveraged this demand into access to private drawing rooms and salons, invitations to exclusive parties and events, and more than one actress used her exclusive access to self to achieve movement through marriage into the aristocracy. However, to create this dichotomy between a clear interiority and exteriority is performative, and such a performative act, to be taken seriously, must come from sources that are held beyond question or reproach. This is an approach that can now be observed in our current entertainment industry being utilized by marginalized female actresses presenting what they would have the audience understand to be a documentation of their intimate day-to-day life and authentic reactions to their experiences in ways that gain trust and build intimacy.

Emerging as uniquely popular to the English Restoration theatre, meta-theatrical prologues came to be regarded as integral elements of any play's production. These prologues were commercial in nature and distributed via broadsheet previous to production, meant to sell the audience on the play before its opening. They were the first glimpse the audience had into the world they were about to be welcomed into and often featured the voice and direct address of the

playwright or the playwright's representative. Remarkably, the prologues became so popular that when plays were published for sale, the printers would not only include the prologue but also faithfully acknowledge its author (if distinct from the playwright) and who had spoken the lines. The prologues contributed to a lively theatrical discourse, sometimes attempting to justify elements of the play or to sway audiences in favor of what they were about to see, sometimes offering commentary on contemporary happenings in the theatrical world, and occasionally even observations on the political or commercial climate. A successful prologue convinced audiences to stay for the entire play rather than leave—with a full refund—after “the two curtain-tunes and the prologue” according to Diana Solomon.³⁵ For the tactic to be successful, however, the identity of the speaker was critical.

In this era of newly-emerging actresses, having a woman speak the prologue layered meaning and implication into the words, developing the written text from what Diana Solomon approaches through Gerard Genette's theory of paratext—“a part of the text that can exist independently of its main text yet stands to influence the reception of that text”—into a more experiential event.³⁶ Considered with the accompanying dedicatory prefaces of the published plays, the performance of the prologues provided a unique platform for the voices of female playwrights. Useful here are Felicity Nussbaum's³⁷ ideas of “inbetweenness,” in which the audience perceives the actor and the character both independently and concurrently, as

³⁵ Diana Solomon. *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater Gender and Comedy, Performance and Print*. Newark: U of Delaware, 2013. 17

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6

³⁷ Felicity Nussbaum. *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

well as Victor Turner's³⁸ theories of liminality, in which when a liminal space or threshold is entered and crossed, the subject is changed and becomes something new and different, incapable of moving back to what they were. For women playwrights, the dedicatory prefaces and performed prologues were the first time in England that the professional female playwright's voice was granted its own agency, being able to borrow the authority of the stage for itself. Here is where she can testify to her character and have it be heard. Nevertheless, the female playwright found herself continuously apologizing for possessing and employing this agency.

With the performance of the prologue, the woman writer had not only the opportunity to write her own words but to speak them, should she decide herself the best tool for delivery, as well. As she could also choose an actress or an actor to speak the words she had written, she could imbue her words with different meanings and authority depending on the perceived sex of the speaker. In this way, the female playwright enjoyed an unprecedented new degree of agency, being able not only to speak her mind but also to manipulate the audience's reception through her choice of speaker. Nevertheless, while women were for the first time speaking for and representing themselves on stage, they also immediately started to apologize for their presence and their work. The tone of women's prologues turned apologetic early in the era while their very presence was still novel. Yet even throughout the eighteenth century, women continued to speak apologetically within and for what they were being paid to do.

³⁸ Victor W. Turner. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982. Print.

In contrast, men held no such apologetic tone, even when not yet established in their careers. In one notable dedicatory preface, William Davenant solicited permission to stage a theatrical presentation in 1656 (while commercial theatre was still banned) by claiming that he “rather deserve[s] approbation [for the work he had put into transforming the production into something stageable] than need[s] excuse.” While this is when he should be at his most ingratiating, asking to commit illegal acts, the only pardon he asks is for the length of his “epistle” as he has to write so much to “vindicate [him]self.”³⁹ In his boldness, he is not alone.

Even men lesser known as writers and those not running their own companies write prologues bold in their tones, some directly challenging critics or insulting audiences. George Villiers writes in the prologue to *The Rehearsal*:

Now critics, do your worst, that here are et;
For, like a rook, I have hedged in my bet.
If you approve, I shall assume the state
Of those high-flyers whom I imitate;
And justly, too, for I will teach you more
Than ever they would let you know before:
I will not only show the feats they do,
But give you all their reasons for ‘em too.

³⁹ William Davenant. “Sir William Davenant” in *Plays of Restoration and Eighteenth Century; as They Were Acted at the Theatres-Royal by Their Majesties' Servants*. By Douglas MacMillan. New York: H. Holt, 1931. 6

Some honor may to me from hence arise;
But if, by my endeavors, you grow wise,
And what you once so praised shall now despise,
Then I'll cry out, swelled with poetic rage,
'Tis I, John Lacy, have reformed your stage.⁴⁰

He is so certain that those who are critical can be answered for as either being appeased by his wit and content as to have been taught new pleasures in the theatre—and should be grateful for the experience—or will be mollified by the person of actor John Lacy, self-identifying, in his well-beloved state, within the play as the actor and imitator of John Dryden. In this role, Lacy claims that he had so “reformed the stage” that audiences had refined their tastes beyond what they once loved, implying that the critics should be once more grateful for their gain at his hand.

In the performance of this prologue, Villiers, the male playwright, expresses his voice through Lacy, a popular male actor, presenting as the popular and well-known male playwright and theatrical personality John Dryden. These layers of masculine authority allow him, as a not-well-known playwright, to be so bold as not to take up the convention of seeking the audience's favor or pleading for their patience and positive consideration of his work. Instead, Villiers is able to triple-layer masculinity, and the security that these performed gendered identities bring him, writing a defiant prologue to be boldly delivered in place of a subservient or apologetic

⁴⁰ *The Rehearsal*, 52

prologue to be poignantly or comically delivered, such as those of many of the female playwrights.

For a Restoration audience creating meaning of the performance, the performer, and the text, the embodiment by a masculine body of the voice of a masculine author, self-assured in its ability to teach them something new, leaves them little to doubt. It is a performance of masculine sureness and swagger, the playwright bolstered in his new position by the proven provenance of not only the popular actor, Lacy, but the even more dependable and longer-lasting legend in the theatre which Lacy and Villiers are manifesting: Dryden. Swagger must be acceptable if Dryden agrees it is warranted, and in these ways Villiers' *Rehearsal* prologue sold the audience on his right to write, created within them a presupposition of his skill in playwriting, and intrigued them enough both to come to the play and to stay long enough to forfeit the price of their tickets. They were moved from the real world, from the outside world, by Villiers' words in Dryden's voice through Lacy's body placed in front of the curtain before the play had even begun. With the performance of the prologue and while the curtain was still down, the audience had moved through a liminal space in which their expectations and understanding of what the play was, what it could be, and how they perceived the performers would change their own reception of the tale about to unfold for them.

This space in front of the curtain, before the play, was an opportunity of empowerment and agency, a moment for the playwright—given they possessed enough power, influence, or assurance of position—to speak directly to their audience and advocate for causes, their own work, or express an opinion regarding world affairs.

For such a direct address, the mouthpiece had to be carefully chosen, as Villiers had cannily done with Lacy, to guarantee that the audience would favorably receive the messenger

and correctly interpret the meaning the writer intended. For male playwrights, putting forward their work through male actors, these choices were fairly straightforward; there was little to consider as far as bleed-over from the actor's personal life and reputation. This is quite the contrary for women, both actresses and playwrights. Their publicly perceived lives are intertwined with their professional or stage personas. This is the "in-betweenness" that Felicity Nussbaum refers to in *Rival Queens*. For women to be virtuous, particularly for publicly appearing women to be truly respected as virtuous, they must make a show of their virtuous interiority. What better place than the stage edge in the performing of a prologue or epilogue in which performers are both themselves and not themselves?

And, so, it is here at the stage edge at the in-betweenness of not-the-play but part-of-it and the in-betweenness of theatrical performer and performer of virtuous interiority and the in-betweenness of female actor and sex object that women get to address London audiences directly in their own voices and bodies. The necessity of proclaimed virtue is a challenge, however, and the assumption of impurity and whorish behavior is already imposed upon women who take to the stage. Behn tempers this by addressing the readers directly in the preface to the distributed published play and by having Thomas Betterton speak the prologue at the production of *Sir Patient Fancy*. Behn defends her play against women who would claim it is bawdy, asserting that she has rushed to print it so that they may "tak[e] it into serious consideration in their cabinets, [and] they would find nothing that the most innocent virgins can have cause to blush at."⁴¹ This may have been a preemptive defense before criticism was levied; this is unclear. Whether there was a genuine complaint or not, she has taken the opportunity to defend her work,

⁴¹ Behn, *Patient Fancy*, 23

and by extension her own character, as free from “bugbear bawdry.”⁴² Taking the opportunity and having the readers’ attention thus far, she continues:

The play had no other misfortune but that of coming out for a woman: had it been owned by a man, though the most dull, unthinking, rascally scribbler in town, it had been a most admirable play. Nor does its loss of fame with the ladies do it much hurt, though they ought to have had good nature and justice enough to have attributed all its faults to the author’s unhappiness, who is forced to write for bread and not ashamed to own it, and consequently ought to write to please (if she can) an age which has given several proofs it was by this way of writing to be obliged, though it is a way too cheap for men of wit to pursue who write for glory, and a way which even I despise as much below me.⁴³

Even Behn, who is already known and accepted as a successful playwright at this point in her career, demonstrates that she feels pressure to continue to construct and perpetuate her performed identity to document an interiority for her audience. Behn is simultaneously defensive and pleading—“no misfortune but to be the product of a woman, but that that woman is writing to earn a humble living”—yet proud and chastising; though she may do better than a “dull, unthinking, rascally scribbler,” yet the task is “below” her and the “ladies” ought to “have had good nature and justice enough” to be merciful to Behn’s work. Her identity as a working playwright, one successful in making a living by her art, is reinforced by her simultaneous confession that she is both made “unhappy” to have been “forced” to do so but “unashamed to own it”: a subtle brag at her own accomplishment in a competitive field. Behn’s chastisement of the women for not receiving her play with more enthusiasm or welcome—again, likely pre-emptive—is strategic; this gauntlet might stir women to her side in support of one who must earn

⁴² Ibid., 23

⁴³ Ibid., prologue

her own living, and it might stir men to her defense as being a woman in dire circumstances whilst shunned by her own sex.

To respond to Behn's criticism of women not being supportive of her with a lack of support makes the female audience member seemingly prove her point: appearing either simply unfeeling and calloused towards the plight of another woman and too prudish and harshly judgmental to overlook and forgive what might be offensive in order to understand the theatre with which she's been presented. Behn does not apologize for the style or content of the play because what she has produced has been in an attempt to please them. She is simply imitating what has worked for others—particularly male playwrights—many times previously. Though this may take the form of a request for excusing her pursuit of both publishing and even writing the play in the first place, with each line there is an equal criticism or admonishment to others lest they not accept her work, and by extension, her as a playwright.

In the performed prologue, in which she allows her words to be embodied by a popular male actor of outstanding moral character, she takes a completely different tactic: here she derides all contemporary playwrights, "poets," and claims that "a poet's good for nothing now; / Unless he have the knack for conjuring too."⁴⁴ What's cunningly done here is that as she derides all modern poets, accusing the audience of having "commonwealth" tastes—a barbed accusation in 1678—she slips in that women are part of the horde of poets taking their turn in the fleeting favors of the crowd. She doesn't acknowledge that she's a woman poet but instead lets Betterton attack her ilk without the gendered association.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26

This lack of association and his insulting commentary, spoken before a play that many had undoubtedly come to see precisely because Behn had written it—she'd become a regular writer for the Duke's Company in 1670—would have led the savvy audience member to realize either that it was humorous or that Betterton was going to be the villain of the piece. As he was going to end up being a deceitful character in a play with twisting and intertwining plots, both would have been valid receptions of his delivery. This is the complexity of the liminal space of the prologue stage. As the performer of words not his own, Betterton embodies a layered identity beyond that of both perceived performer and character but has now taken on the mantle of peer and fellow country-man, knowable and relatable to his audience. The prologue stage has extended the possible receptions of the sources of and influences upon his authority and identity. In selecting him to help her craft and solidify her identity, Behn has placed on stage not only Betterton's gender performance, but his popularity, his reputation associated with his roles, and his ability to perform accessible and authentic interiority.

The gendered change in delivery affects the documentation of her identity. When Betterton, the villain of the piece—but still able to be seen in performance of the prologue as the popular male actor—accuses the women of the audience of failing to support Behn, an authority is placed in the words that would not have been there had they been spoken by an actress.

Similarly, when Betterton proclaims Behn's success as a playwright as being “below” her, even if she is “forced” into it, there is a sexualization of her identity. Her art, as being described by the man she's providing words for, is now a commodification; she's been forced to provide him with the entertainment he's now sharing publicly with the audience, much to her “unhappiness.” Behn risks this association with the prostituting of her work by gleaning the

authority Betterton gives to her claims and the evidence his words will provide of her constructed identity that she's put in his mouth to deliver and verify.

In another canny use of public personas and cultivated reputations, Aphra Behn wrote the prologue and epilogue for her late friend, the Earl of Rochester's *Valentinian* – his second reworking of John Fletcher's *Valentinian* – selecting actresses long rumored to have been privately trained in the theatrical arts by the Earl himself. Widely known as a sexually appealing and alluring man, Rochester had a reputation for successful seduction. In Behn's choice of Sarah Cooke for the prologue and Elizabeth Barry for the epilogue, the playwright leverages the likely apocryphal bawdy tales of Rochester's relationships with the women, firmly setting audience expectations of a sexually heightened and erotic theatrical experience, “courting female favor by encouraging women to fantasize about sex with the dead poet.”⁴⁵ Cooke's delivery of Behn's prologue establishes her as an authority on Rochester and an actress experienced and beautiful enough to make this introduction. Solomon notes that having drawn in the women, the prologue turns to thwart the men, the critics in the pit, “encouraging them to gossip instead of watching the play, so that they cannot slander it afterward.” Behn suggests that they chatter about the unexpectedly low costs to acquire a prostitute at the “‘Blanket Fair,’ a festival held on the frozen Thames during the winter of 1683-1684.”⁴⁶ The men dispensed of, Behn completes the prologue with sensual descriptions of Rochester, painting him as a seducing siren before turning back to the female spectators and giving them permission to fantasize about the dead poet, assuring them that their reputations are safe and that Rochester would have been flattered at their attention, “Twill please his Ghost even in th' Elizian shade,/To find his Power has such a conquest

⁴⁵ Solomon, 110-111

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 112

made.”⁴⁷ The play over, Barry delivers an epilogue reminding the audience that what is seen on stage is not reality but fantasy, warning that if the characters followed the proper actions as criticism will be sure to point out, the play would cease to exist, and the drama and tragedy would be lost. She reminds them of the empathy they felt for her – “Like me you Underwent the Killing pain. / Did you not pity me, Lament each groan” – validating their shared experience. But, like the prologue, Behn brings the epilogue to a conclusion by suggesting that through the events of the play, “Each had her *Valentinian* in her Heart,”⁴⁸ returning her focus to the women in the audience.

Mary Pix is not as bold and turns in her printed preface of *The Spanish Wives* (1696) to a dedicatory letter “To the Honorable Colonel TIPPING OF WHITFIELD” in which she uses the letter to establish her virtuous relationship with him: “You have known me from my childhood, and my inclination to poetry; and ‘tis from the happiness of that acquaintance, I presume to make so worthless an offering.”⁴⁹ This performed virtue and paratextual testimony and imagery of a long-held childhood acquaintance conjures images of girlhood innocence and associates her playwrighting with childhood and places it as a shield against any accusations of impropriety in the act; if a man of honor can attest that a child was drawn to such predilections, surely they must be natural and should be permitted? Her humbleness and declaration that the play is worthless is clearly only a performance of humbleness, or else she would not take the time and effort to print it or dedicate it to someone from whom she seeks its protection. That she is seeking protection

⁴⁷ Behn, *Prologue Spoken*, prologue

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, epilogue

⁴⁹ Pix, 134

for it shows that it has worth. One does not seek to protect something that is worthless. However, as she must make a show of demonstrating a virtuous interiority, she declares her humbleness.

Like Behn, Pix changes tactics for her prologue. She also uses a popular actor, William Pinkethman, to speak her prologue and embody her words. He, like Lacy, comes out in the pieces of the costume he will wear for the play: not quite in the play, but not entirely out of its world. His male body is one layer of security for her words, his established popularity a second; whatever he tells the audience, they're preconditioned to believe as coming from a reliable and likable source. The prologue to *The Spanish Wives* that he delivers is one that transports the audience into the world of the play before the curtain is raised. He speaks in the dialect of the press-master he'll be playing. In this character, as an officer on a ship, he also takes on authority, even if it is of a rough rather than refined kind. He immediately uses this authority to threaten to "press to sea all those who damn this play."⁵⁰ With that sort of power, Pinkethman represents a brutish force of life and death, or corporeal punishment, that Pix has sent forth as her avatar to protect her from critics. These critics, her menacing avatar observes, "hiss...nine plays in ten...Like pirates too, while honest men they're breaking," but continues on to wonder why they bother:

Yet why should they hiss plays not worth regarding?

Do we bombard a town not worth bombarding?⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pix, 132

⁵¹ Ibid., 132

His and, as he is Pix's avatar, Pix's argument is that if the critics take the time to attend a play and then choose to take further time to continue their attendance while hissing (and possibly booing), there must be something worth responding to.

The prologue ends with an acknowledgment of Pix as a woman being the author not only of this piece but also of a previous more serious drama. In addition, she teases the audience, suggesting that she will offer them sexual satisfaction:

But show you can oblige a woman twice.

The first time she was grave, as well she might,

For women will be damned sullen the first night;

But faith, they'll quickly mend, so be n't uneasy:

Tonight she's brisk, and tries new tricks to please ye.⁵²

Coming from the unrefined sailor, the sexual overtones are blatant and as they come from the writer's chosen proxy, unmistakable. The first, second, and third lines are a challenge to the masculinity and sexual prowess of the men in the audience: they may have attempted to please a woman but left her "grave" with the commentary that "well she might [be]" suggesting that it is by lack of skill, effort, or talent on the part of the man, that she is left un-obliged, "damned sullen," and unhappy. The third line gives the impression that this is to be expected, however, and that this has happened to other women. Through the implications of the plural usage, that this has happened to other men: the audience should feel a sense of solidarity in knowing this is

⁵² Ibid., 132

a common short-falling. The fourth line assures the audience that they'll have another shot at fulfilling and obliging her, so they should be calm in that knowledge. Finally, the fifth and concluding line of the prologue declares that "she's brisk," full of energy and spirit, and going to take the lead in trying new techniques to make this meeting a success, leaving the audience "please[d]" that they came and tried again with her. These lines fall far from the protestations of innocence that her dedicatory preface offered, but while it was Pix herself "speaking" the words of the preface directly for the reader to observe, this is a proxy twice removed—once through the distance of being a hired actor on the stage, in front of the curtain, and a second time by being the actor in character—and clearly not Pix speaking lines implicating herself in any behavior unsavory or immoral, moreover, that of a male actor and a sea captain, for whom this kind of sexual talk is accepted, even expected. If pressed, she could declare that the prologue referred only to her first play, *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperor of the Turks*, and that the sullenness of the woman referred only to the tragedy of that initially staged drama and was challenging the audience to come to see her second play, a comedy: no need for licentious over-analysis.

The publication and production of *Ibrahim* differed from *Wives* in that it received a dedicatory letter, a preface, and a prologue that was performed by a woman. The dedicatory letter has the expected apologetic tones from a female playwright while asking for protection—"the reading may prove tiresome as a dull, repeated tale: Yet I have still recourse to what I mentioned first, your good nature, that I hope will pardon and accept it"—but, with a cunning twist, in which she grovelingly claims that she's "always pleased" when she's accused of having not written her works, but is assured that upon closest "view [the reader] will too soon find out the Woman, imperfect Woman there."

That theme continues in the paratext of the preface in which she claims that she would never have “troubl’d the Reader with anything of a Preface” since she’s aware of how critical readers can be of “what falls from a Womans Pen” and “may soon find more faults than [she is] ever able to answer,” but she’s forced to write one as she’s learned since the play was first printed that Ibrahim was the Twelfth Emperor and not the Thirteenth. She “beg[s] Pardon for the mistake” and explains that she had “trusted too far to [her] Memory” of her reading of “Sir Paul Ricault’s Continuation of the Turkish History.” Once again, this apology serves as a tool to facilitate a performance of virtuous interiority by a woman—humbleness, ability, and quick willingness to apologize when incorrect, and a demonstrated effort to have bettered herself through self-education. Simultaneously, she is also defending her work as having been researched and based on the solid and respected work of a man. If one is going to challenge her historical account of Ibrahim, then one is actually challenging the work of Sir Paul Ricault. Rather than hiding behind a man’s authority, as in the prologue to *Wives*, Pix cleverly hides a man’s authority in this preface.

Spoken by Miss Cross, a girl of only twelve years old, the prologue starts innocent, perhaps coy, and perhaps with stage fright: “I’m hither sent, but Heaven knows what to say” and then proceeds to explain all the things the play is not, but assures the audience that it is, in fact, based on “Solid History.” The speaker appeals to the “Ladies” to “own it” and “protect it” for none will go against them. The prologue ends by referring to the gathering of support Miss Cross is calling on:

If in that charming Circle you will oft appear,
An Empty House we shan’t have cause to fear.

Such a line both flatters the hearer as being charming—a reference to looks, manners, and class—and ends with a declaration of vulnerability by an innocent. Pix has taken an emotionally poignant strategy—of using a girl child to appeal to the women—while bracing her appeal in logic, reason, and some small portion of flattering manipulation: that the women have the power to sway the men and that they may be doing so in part through their charms.

Such an embodiment is a drastic change from the use of the male form from which the female playwright could pull surrogated authority. Rather, the power to be had from the use of a female form as an avatar for the female playwright comes from the layers of meaning that the appearance and performance of innocence and youth bring to the stage when the prologue text is spoken by a young girl. The audience is still being called on to interactively overlay their own understanding of who is speaking to them and what the circumstances are that bring them the words they are hearing: meaning to be taken from the prologue must come from the playwright working with the performer, the character the performer inhabits there in front of the curtain, and the audience in their ability to relate their contemporary culture and society to what is being presented, experiencing the production through lenses of familiarity.

The dedicatory letters worked in similar ways in that they were published and distributed with the plays, just as the prologues, used as letters of reference or recommendation to give paratextual information about the play. The reader could choose to read the letters and glean something new about the script, or they could choose to ignore them; they held meaning either way, each enhanced by the consumers' awareness of the other. Unlike the prologue, however, the dedicatory letters were the directly discernable addresses of the playwright. Further, unlike the prologues, these letters were not addressed to the reader or the audience but to whomever the playwright was (ostensibly) dedicating the play. The reader must, in a way,

eavesdrop on the conversation of others to see the performed (and published) interiority of the playwright. While the stage may require an avatar for the delivery of a prologue, for female playwrights these dedicatory letters provided precisely the necessary stage in order for them, in their own words and personhood, to acceptably and modestly demonstrate their prowess while defending or advertising their works.

In times of widespread political and cultural unrest, we seek connection. We seek an immediacy, an instant validation that what we are experiencing we are not alone in. We seek shared experience. While reading and discussing is certainly of value, the shared experience of theatre delivers a far greater connection. It is the liveness, the lived moment, the shared moment that creates in theatre its necessary niche. From the early sharing of oral histories and epochs to our contemporary desire to physically share the space of experienced performance, theatre is more than spectacle. It is in the shared space, air, felt and expressed reactions to the experience that we build connection, feeling ourselves a part of something larger, something beyond our own reaction, our own lived experience, that we feel the impact and possibility of society and the hope of being a piece of a larger whole.

This approach can now be observed in our current entertainment industry being utilized by marginalized female actresses presenting what they would have the audience understand to be a documentation of their intimate day-to-day life and authentic reactions to their experiences in ways that gain trust and build intimacy. Like the Restoration actresses, multiple Emmy-award-winning writer and actress Phoebe Waller-Bridge and performers like her use this technique of performed disclosure to disarm and prompt intimacy with the audience on shows like Saturday Night Live's opening monologue. Here, the guest hosts, the monologue-presenters have the opportunity to self-mock, to draw attention to their latest project(s), and to address any societal,

political, environmental, or other such issues while presenting a created version of themselves, scripted for public consumption, offered for evaluation and recognition. Here is where the direct access to the audience for the actress or playwright or those speaking on her behalf, through the Restoration prologue and through the contemporary comedic address segment, is key to attesting to her character, documenting her thoughts, motives and intentions: her interiority becoming an exterior documentary theatrical performance.

Waller-Bridge, in our contemporary culture, uses a similar technique through reporting and performing a sexualized exteriority while maintaining a virtuous interiority that she seemingly makes accessible to her audience through, in this instance, the platform allowed her on Saturday Night Live's opening monologue. She establishes humility and a discomfort with fame, particularly that which is at that moment putting her directly into the evaluatory gaze of both the live audience in the studio and the millions of people watching the live production from outside the studio. At the very beginning of the monologue, she declares that she is "from the U.K., which means [she] find[s] everything embarrassing," confessing that "this monologue is probably the most embarrassing thing [she's] ever done."⁵³ She continues, "And standing in front of a jazz band, in high heels on live television, joking about [her] accomplishments, well, actually, that sounds pretty fun." She delivers the final bit winkingly, allowing the audience to decide if she really enjoys talking about her accomplishments or if she's trying to put a brave face on actual discomfort. This last line also reminds the audience that this woman has won multiple Emmy awards and, at the time of filming this monologue, was the writer and star of a

⁵³ "Phoebe Waller-Bridge Monologue - SNL." YouTube, 5 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8jXmUNPF8.

ratings-topping⁵⁴ television show, *Fleabag*.⁵⁵ She continues, “When I asked, ‘Do we have to do this bit?’ They said, ‘Yes, it’s part of your visa.’” The implied “they” hold power over her; they control her access to free travel while within the United States. By claiming – even winkingly – that she has been coerced into the coming self-disclosure, she has freed herself from judgment by the audience of her immodesty, her ego, her arrogance. Regardless of her successes, she publicly identifies as a woman and is, therefore, subject to societal rules for appropriate behavior for a woman. Only after she has cleared herself of any potential accusations of immodesty does she actually move into what the audience expects will be the meat of her monologue: discussing her work.

Describing *Fleabag*, she explains that “it’s about a woman who is trying to navigate her life in London,” commenting that “people often assume that [she] is like the character, Fleabag, simply because [she] wrote it: sexually depraved, foul-mouthed, and dangerous, and [she] always ha[s] to say to them,” and here she pauses, allowing the audience to mentally continue the response they expect from her. Because she’s already made it clear that self-disclosure is unpleasant to her, and the intimacy of speaking directly to an audience makes her uncomfortable enough that she had to be coerced into this monologue, her audience is led to expect a reiteration of that modesty, a vehement denial of any of the listed traits being applicable to her.

However, after a pause just long enough to allow those assumptions, she continues, “Yes, you’re absolutely right,” eliciting laughter at this highly ridiculous claim. The audience knows her claim can’t be true because they know her. Didn’t she just intimately confess how

⁵⁴ *Fleabag* still holds a rare 100% rating on the entertainment crowd-ranking site, Rotten Tomatoes

⁵⁵ “Fleabag.” *Rotten Tomatoes*, Fandango, 21 July 2016, www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/fleabag.

uncomfortable she is with self-disclosure? She is a modest woman. The claim that she is foul-mouthed can't be sincere; they've never heard her, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, swear. And they should know; they're all now friends in the SNL studio.

Obviously, she isn't sexually depraved; she is conservatively dressed in black slacks, sensible heels, and a simple, opaque black blouse that shows no cleavage nor clings to her frame. The audiences inside and outside the studio have seen far more revealing outfits on many of the show's hosts and guest musicians. Even with her squeaky-clean public persona, this show's guest musician, Taylor Swift, shows more skin than Waller-Bridge during one of her musical numbers.⁵⁶

As for the third claim – that Waller-Bridge is dangerous – the audience must again evaluate what they've come to know of her in their time here with her. She is well-spoken, uses a modulated tone – enough to be interesting to listen to but not modulated enough to cause even the slightest apprehension of possible confrontation or erratic behavior – is self-deprecating, has a posh British accent, is dressed in clean, well-cut, monochromatic clothing: this woman is no threat.

Having set, affirmed, and reaffirmed such a firm groundwork of respectability, she then actually moves into talking about her very successful shows. She doesn't have to make the claim that they are successful: both of her shows, *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*, are smash hits. Waller-bridge can simply refer to them directly. As expected, she throws in jokes about her love life and moves on to comment on her research for *Killing Eve*, psychopathy, and that she wrote *Fleabag* to get her costar to get dressed up as a priest and tell her he loved her. She can make these jokes,

⁵⁶ Swift's second song of the show, however, she wears a turtleneck shirt and what seems to be slacks as she remains seated behind a piano to perform.

and the audience will not attach psychopathy, manipulation, sexual depravity, or emotional neediness: she's already deterred those suspicions from forming.

Her audience disarmed, she moves into social commentary, revealing that what made the priest character so attractive to viewers that he quickly became known as "Hot Priest," was that he listened, really listened. Without lingering to lecture, guilt, or shame, she moves on to joke about how "we all find weird things sexy" and that, now, "women can speak much more openly about their desires without being burnt at the stake, which is nice." Without pause, she continues, "Back in the day, horny women were to be feared, and now they're given Emmys." Only at that point does she pause for applause, using gestures and body language to imply that she's referring to herself and is unbothered by the implication. The rest of her monologue draws parallels between the treatment in the past of women seen as unnatural and the treatment today of men seen as unnatural, and a non-crude description of anthropomorphized genitals.

Unlike Behn and Pix ventriloquizing their entire monologues, and thus identity creations, through male performers, Waller-Bridge performs her own. However, like Behn and Pix, Waller-Bridge uses this introductory prologue-monologue to establish herself as having authority by virtue of not only her public awards of notoriety but of her acceptability as a proper, modest woman. Yes, she was speaking her own words by her own authority and at her direction, but not as a respected male performer would. She first had to present a sculpted and scripted interiority for the audience's evaluation, acceptance, or rejection. Having assured them that she offered no threat, no arrogance, and no danger, she was then able to access the public authority to claim her accomplishments and speak directly to her contemporary audience and the mass media which would go on to publish critiques, summaries, think-pieces, and other written and spoken responses to what she'd offered.

Leading her themes of relatable vulnerability and performed available interiority is her repeat self-exposure of her humanity and sexuality. This type of presentation reminds her viewers that she is still a sexual being and has value, but brings into question the potential danger of a woman willing to speak so frankly about her sexuality. Although she has worn an all-black outfit similar to those she wore while in the character of Fleabag, Waller-Bridge has used this monologue to distance herself from her character. The outfit is a calculated choice: she has chosen to draw a connection of likenesses between herself (as being performed) and the character she has written and embodies. Her choice to directly address suspicions of the show being autobiographical and that she is that pitiable, not completely likable creature, is her acknowledgment of the information the audience believes they deserve. She knows that they struggle to separate the character and the artist, and so she self-others in claiming they are alike with such delivery as to assure the audience that Waller-Bridge is, in fact, nothing like *FLeabag*. Such self-othering is a powerful tool in that she takes from critics the possibility to level criticism against her self-portrayal – as she is performing during this monologue – based on shallow disapproval rooted in fear of accomplished and sexually aware women, an evaluation as a human based on her revealed (or not) physical form, characters she has written and/or portrayed, and if she is inoffensive and unthreatening. Instead, she reclaims her image and performs her self on her own terms and in her own words, using her authority and inoffensive sexuality as her own tool of criticism leveled at society.

Waller-Bridge's self-authoring through creating and reporting her own narrative allows her a measure of protection against the constant barrage of sexualized valuation and evaluation that women encounter in the space of mass media. This self-sexualization, prefaced by her initial confessional moment testifies to her virtuous representation of self. With a virtuous interior—in

that the interior matches the performed exterior—there can be no shameful, secret interior to expose by those wishing to hurt her sense of self, nor her image with her fans and audiences. Waller-Bridge’s ability to maintain her claim to an authentic performance of an exteriority consistent with her interiority allowed her the same type of protection the early Restoration actresses and playwrights were seeking and working to build through their performances of authentic selves via prologues and paratextual literature.

The assumptions of *Fleabag* being an autobiographical representation of Waller-Bridge speaks highly of her skill in communicating sincerity and authenticity in performance. Her audience has been led to believe that when *Fleabag* refers to and imitates the people in her life, Waller-Bridge is referring to and performing past interactions with real people. This is unlikely, but the assumptions lead to increased intimacy felt for and towards her.

Conversely, we know that the people whom Behn and Pix refer to in their paratextual literature existed. Their London audiences were small enough to be either be acquainted with the people and scandals to which the authors would be referring or, at the very least, be aware of what the authors were referring to. These events already happened and already exist in the minds and memories of those who lived them. When Behn, Pix, and Jones collect the facts, the circumstances, the dialogue, and the results to retell these stories in ways that relate to their own identities, they’re working in documentary theatre. They’re presenting and commenting on events of interest to their community; they are building intimacy and a feeling of connection between those on and those in front of the stages. They have found a way to relate their work to the world of their audiences and write their own stories, justifying their own work at the same time. Much can be forgiven or simply not taken as an offense when one is familiar with and feels

a sense of intimacy with the questionable individual. The perceived connections built at the stage edge also build in the audience a relationship bias:

[W]e tend to be attracted toward (and like) people we know well and to whom we know share similar interests. The stronger our relationship with another person, the more likely we are to believe them when they tell us something.⁵⁷

With high illiteracy rates – “by 1600 this had fallen to about 70 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women, and by 1700 about 50 percent of men and 70 per cent of women were illiterate”⁵⁸ – Londoners often received their military and international news, their celebrity news (and gossip), political commentary, and updates for and the insights into the Court from the actors and actresses delivering prologues and epilogues commenting on such matters. The familiarity of constructed intimacy made the performers trustworthy, their observations and commentary sincere, and their facts likely correct. They were dispersing information and opinions to the masses partially through broadsheets but with a much greater reach through the prologues and

⁵⁷ Rich Gasaway. “Relationship Bias – a Barrier to Situational Awareness.” *Situational Awareness Matters!*TM, 28 Dec. 2021.

⁵⁸ “Around 1500 perhaps about 90 percent of men and 98 per cent of women were illiterate; by 1600 this had fallen to about 70 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women, and by 1700 about 50 percent of men and 70 per cent of women were illiterate. The numbers were probably higher in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. These are maximum figures, however, and it is likely that forms of rudimentary reading literacy were significantly higher. And, of course, there were other ways of accessing the contents of books that did not involve buying or reading them, including religious and political communities where texts were read aloud.”

Joad Raymond, Editor, *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture. Volume 1, Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*. Oxford, 2011. 4.

epilogues sandwiching the presented entertainment. With most things, we can often determine the impact of a phenomenon by the criticism it receives.

Thomas Shadwell, a moralist and critic of libertinism, was happy to provide just such criticism in *A Lenten Prologue Refus'd by the PLAYERS*.⁵⁹ The work begins with a general disdain for prologues and the wit beloved within:

OUR Prologue-Wit grows flat: the Nap's worn off;
And howsoe're We turn, and trim the Stuff,
The Gloss is gone, that look'd at first so gaudy;
'Tis now no Jest to hear young Girls talk Baudy.
But Plots, and Parties give new matter birth;
And State Distractions serve you here for mirth!⁶⁰

Shadwell speaks as a plurality, though it is unclear who else he serves as representative. Shadwell, et al are tired of the spectacle and predictable wit of theatrical prologues, their charm having worn thin, their bawdy jokes no longer amusing. He does recognize in the last two lines quoted above that news, gossip, and politics are still providing new entertainment material, seemingly quite upset that actresses are finding humor in matters of national identity and security. Continuing on, he presents – in this, his prologue – comparisons of actors to “wanton Neroes fiddl[ing] to the Flame,” and the stage to “old Rump-Pulpits” which are now the “Scene of News.” To make his point he lists a good quantity of political issues and threats, implying that

⁵⁹ Thomas Shadwell. *A Lenten prologue refus'd by the players*. London: 1683. Early English Books Online.

⁶⁰ Shadwell, *Lenten*

the performers' "jingling Rhime for Reason" turns otherwise reasonable and logical people into spectators willing to "swallow" whatever they're being fed. Nearly halfway through his rant, he returns to the stage-players:

Behind the Curtain, by Court-Wires, with ease

They turn those Plyant Puppets as they please.

Shadwell is boldly accusing not only the players of being under the control of the Crown, but the Crown of surreptitiously using the theatres to control and minds and will of the people. Not willing to stop there, he goes on to offer that:

To save our Faith and keep our Freedom's Charter,

Is once again to make a Royal Martyr.

To call for the violent martyr-worthy death of the King is an incredible thing to put into print and then publish and distribute with one's name right there by the title. Should this "prologue" have ever been actually offered to a theatre, it is little wonder that it was "refus'd;" no artisan sponsored and working at the will of the King would dare endanger not only their livelihood but their lives. Shadwell quickly follows those treacherous lines with a clarification and an accusation that "This Logick is of Tories." In that vein, he winds down his assault, explaining that if the King isn't careful, those he considers friends and political allies will bring about his and England's downfall.

This is just such a text that was suited to broadsheets and quick dispersion to the masses, only to be destroyed by weather, rough handling, or other use rendering them unreadable. If this text has managed to survive, it isn't beyond imagining that there were other tirades of similar theme. What matters in this moment, though, is that this text by a well-known playwright and author exists, created to address what Shadwell (and possibly others) perceived to be a dangerous amount of power held by the theatres in their dispersion of information.

For Londoners forging a new culture and new national identity after decades of political and geographical upheaval, this living connection must have been similar to the reactions of contemporary Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. In being quarantined, removed from gathering in familiar groups, and barred from coming together in shared experiences, not just the entertainer and performers but the general public sought to create lived shared experiences. With our modern technology, we attempted to recreate live theatre. We attempted, through forging new paths in new digital mediums, to share theatrical, musical, and artistic endeavors with audiences composed of individuals separate and alone but seeking connection.

For London's population, once familiar with the common experience of theatre and regular holiday celebrations and festivals, their absence during the Interregnum must have been jarring, alienating the populace from outlets in which they'd once found and reaffirmed their place in and contribution to their society. With the return of Charles II and his mandates reopening theatres, there was a sense of relief and rejoicing in the new stability. The return to theaters meant a return to, or the ability to create a new normal. Prologues and epilogues reinforced the new status quo. The epilogues following "A prologue written by Mr. Dryden, to a new play, call'd, The loyal brother," Dryden gives Sarah Cooke the lines:

There's Loyalty to one: I wish no more:

A Commonwealth sounds like a Common Whore.

Let Husband or Gallant be what they will,

One part of Woman is true Tory still.⁶¹

In which Dryden equates the loyalty of a wife with loyalty to the King. For another play, Dryden wrote upon the theme, “Prologue to the King and Queen at the opening of their theatre. Spoken by Mr. Batterton; written by Mr. Dryden” in which he celebrates the return to the theatre and assures the Royal couple that:

Old Men shall have good old Plays to delight 'em:

And you fair Ladies and Gallants that slight 'em,

We'll treat with good new Plays; if our new Wits can writ'em.^{62, 63}

But he is not alone. In Edward Ravenscroft's “Prologue to Dame Dobson the cunning woman spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the same: spoken by Mr. Jevorn,” the author spends both the prologue and epilogue extolling the ways of Tories in contrast to treacherous Whigs.⁶⁴ In “York and Albany's welcome to England. or, The loyal subjects joy for his most miraculous deliverance

⁶¹ John Dryden and Thomas Southerne. *A Prologue Written by Mr. Dryden, to a New Play, Call'd, The Loyal Brother*. Ann Arbor, MI ; Oxford (UK) :: Text Creation Partnership, 1682.

⁶² John Dryden. *Prologue to the King and Queen at the opening of their theatre. Spoken by Mr. Batterton; written by Mr. Dryden*. London. 1683. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership.

⁶³ An interesting choice of words as the women playwrights whose work was being celebrated on the Restoration stages were about to be labeled The Female Wits.

⁶⁴ Edward Ravenscroft. *Prologue to Dame Dobson the Cunning Woman Spoken by Mrs. Currer. Epilogue to the Same: Spoken by Mr. Jevorn*. Ann Arbor, MI; Oxford (UK): Text Creation Partnership, 1683.

To a new play-house tune, much in request” the Tories are again pitted against the Whigs, but the god of theatre and wine joins the Loyalist forces:

Come round about your Claret fill,
to Bacchus we will quaff;
Though factious Whigs they repine still,
we'l drink our Wine and laugh,
And cry long live the King and Duke,
in spite of all their foes;
And Heaven the Factious Rout rebuke,
that would procure their woes.⁶⁵

The recognition of Bacchus serves to declare this scene a joyful one, a situation for celebration and mirth, regardless of what mood the quarrelsome Whigs would like to inflict on others.

Although the name of the author has been lost – the woes of broadsheets – it is likely they are associated with one or both of the chartered theatres, the King’s or the Duke’s, as they are boldly calling on Roman and Christian gods to protect and bless those two men. This likelihood is bolstered by the epilogue authored by the same hand which calls for better behavior in the theatre by unruly “sparks,” calling on those who employ them to not only curb their rowdy disruptions but to forcefully encourage them to pay for their theatre tickets.⁶⁶ With complaints about

⁶⁵ *York and Albany's welcome to England. or, The loyal subjects joy for his most miraculous deliverance To a new play-house tune, much in request.* London: Printed for I. Iordan, at the Angel in Guiltspur-street, 168-?. Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership, 2011.

⁶⁶ It is possible this public request for help and gentle remonstrance of out-of-control men in the employ of the nobles was taken seriously by Charles II as on July 23, 1670, he put forth a decree that tickets were to be paid for, money was not to be demanded returned, and that the unruly men

audience etiquette, lack of fair payment, and appeals to sponsors, the normalcy of Restoration theatre can be identified in the quotidian life of our own contemporary theatres.

Into this reclaimed place of community and shared experience, the popularity of prologues can be easily understood. Into this desperately needed place and moment of connection, a moment of presentational performance being transgressed to acknowledge their contemporary moment – the royal and society scandals, the military news, the political news, the audience members, themselves – would have been welcome. Recognized as coming from the place of influence and authority – gleaned by actors from speaking in theatres under the protection and occasional funding of the king and his cousin, the Duke of York – reports of their community to their community in that moment, in that space, with others intensified the liveness of the event. Similar to touring bands acknowledging the city in which they’re currently performing – “Hello, Los Angeles! We’re so thrilled to be back here on the West Coast! We have missed this sunshine!” – actors acknowledging the moment they are in and the people they are with adds to the audience’s sense of belonging, being seen, and being a part of a greater community.

Of course, prologues were then capitalized upon. If sending them out via broadsheet previous to a production – or during a run to drum up new attendees – roused potential audience members seeking that shared experience with others, the prologues could serve double duty. And, again, if they were successful and well-received within the production, what savvy theater manager wouldn’t want to tease new audiences with the lure of the moment they’d missed?⁶⁷

would behave or face loss of wages and whatever further punishment was seen fit by their masters.

⁶⁷ Fear of missing out is not a new experience, unique to this current generation.

Well-received prologues sent to public distribution promised a chance for Londoners to come to see, hear, and feel what they'd missed, to join in the mass experience in which others had already found connection and entertainment. Of course, it is difficult to assess the popularity of prologues and epilogues based solely on the surviving body of broadsheets.

We will never truly know for certain the real size of this market, and the true extent of production. Single-sheet publications were notoriously susceptible to destruction and loss... file copies were not always kept. Many broadsheets were subsequently reused for humble domestic purposes. It was self-evidently much easier to use single sheets in this way than the pages of a book. Most examples from the first age of print survive in only a single copy: statistical modelling of rates of loss in the early book world tends to exclude broadsheets because the samples are so small and the estimates of lost editions seem so astronomical. But we know enough to discern that the scale and variety of output played a vital role in sustaining the publishing industry, and in lubricating the process of information exchange underpinned by the new world of the printed book.⁶⁸

We know that what remains accessible from recovered broadsheets represents only the smallest fraction of what was produced and published. It is fortunate that with the popularity of the prologues and epilogues of the Restoration theatre, that the playwrights or editors compiling and publishing the plays separately or in collection chose to include the associated extratextual materials and, generally, a record of their authors and of the actors and actresses selected to deliver the material to audiences.

⁶⁸ Bruni and Andrew Pettegree (eds.), *Lost Books. Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 55–72, 160–201.

What remains is the evidence of connections created between performers and audiences, sincerity and authenticity of interiority so well performed that audiences came to trust the players to keep the community informed of both factual news and titillating gossip. For women, the stage edge became a place of fleeting authority in which they were looked to for their performed intimacy, their creation of connection, and their establishment of desire within their audiences to know them more, know them better, know the *real* them: celebrity in which they must learn to control the public consumption of their performed *real* identity while deciding how much of themselves they would share, what they would serve to their hungry fans.

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CHAPTER THREE

Representation Through Misrepresentation: Disidentification in Theatrical Gender Performance as Women's Bodies Come to the Restoration Stage

In fact, her greatest play, “The Convent of Pleasure”, was to be the penultimate work in the 1668 *Playes Never Before Printed*. Without the “Convent” (and a handful of other plays) it might be easier to argue that Cavendish did not write for performance. But with its concision, wit, and spectacular action, “The Convent of Pleasure” crystallizes all the dramatic talent scattered piecemeal in her other works. Its richness has generated in recent years a hefty volume of scholarship that has neither exhausted the play nor produced any major interpretive consensus.⁶⁹

- John Shanahan

Through tracing historical shifts in the changing staging of women's roles from late English Renaissance theatrical traditions through the reopening of theatres in 1659 and the re-establishment of theatre in England, it becomes clear that spatial and technological advances during the Interregnum period demanded that women take over their own representation on the English stage. In application of the preceding discussion of Muñoz's theories of disidentification, this section examines Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and her treatment of Thomas Killigrew's *The Parson's Wedding* as a vehicle for early actresses to establish and represent female bodies on stage. Through these plays, the chapter will consider the negotiation and social mobility achieved by the actresses of the early Restoration stage.

In her article for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, describing her experience at the “world's only reconstruction of the Blackfriars Theatre”—an edifice based upon the theatre in which Shakespeare's acting troupe would often spend their winters performing—Lindsey Walters

⁶⁹ John Shanahan, *The Convent of Pleasure* in *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 54-55.

confesses being unable to keep her hands to herself.⁷⁰ Four hundred years and an ocean away from the original staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the journalist seeing an actor with his feet dangling off the Blackfriars' stage can't help herself: "The actor's bare feet were hanging off the stage, right in front of my face, and I just couldn't help myself. I tickled his toes."⁷¹ Staged bodies are public bodies. They are open to scrutiny and consumption. They are bodies with influence that house temptation and yearning and symbolism and beauty and are placed in an intimate relationship with the consumer spectator's visual and, apparently, physical grasp. When what is being portrayed is not real, cannot be real, then what consumer spectators are grasping and become conditioned to yearn for is not reality but a queered portrayal of the real: a portrayal of what is naught.

In the centuries of men portraying women on the English public stage leading up to 1660, when women began to portray themselves, the scripts written for men-as-women on the English stage must be read as written for male bodies representing female bodies. The staged bodies being consumed by spectators are representational. They are imitations and illusions of women but are not reality. It is a fantasy being offered and consumed by the audience. These bodies and voices are the imaginings of male authors and the conjurings of male actors offered for consumption. After the fantasy is consumed, the male actors can leave the stage disembodied from the fantasy they have offered, disconnected from the identity they have portrayed, and unencumbered by the representation they have offered into societal recognition.

⁷⁰ Katherine Calos, "American Shakespeare Center Stages Shakespeare's Plays as He Would Have." in *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (BH Media Group, Inc., 23 Apr. 2016).

⁷¹ *Ibid*, Calos.

The texts being spoken and embodied, the texts being portrayed—given portrait—were not written for women playing women. The authors—Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Middleton, Massinger—all knew that they were writing for all-male acting troupes. As such, these texts reflect men interacting with men: even within the bounds of performance, and taking into account the suspension of disbelief that happens when we, as the audience, experientially invest in the worlds created in theatrical art; these performances were a perpetuation of patriarchal male society communicating its own perceptions, opinions, and notably its own anxieties through its own bodies in communication with other male bodies and voices. Though conventional, the textual awareness of the bodies communicating reveals that these performances were queer spaces. Descriptions of the women remain vague if present at all—Shakespeare refrains from giving us much about most of his heroines—preserving what can keep an audience from noting biological markers of transvestism.⁷² For example,

Perhaps the best-known moment of physical cataloguing occurs in *Twelfth Night* when Olivia haughtily lists her glories for Viola: ‘item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth’ (1.5.2.33-4). Notice the implicit androgyny of this description: necks and chins rather than breasts, grey eyes rather than woman’s soft

⁷² This lack of detailed description does not apply to his accountings of Rosalind in *As You Like It* in which we are told of her: height (uncommonly tall for a woman, “as high as [Orlando’s] heart”); her eyes (chaste); her face (fair); her body (“fill’d / With all graces wide-enlarg’d”); her cheek (“Helen’s”); her majesty (“Cleopatra’s”); her “better part” (Atalanta’s); her modesty (“Sad Lucretia’s”); and, her hand (white). In all, nothing is scripted that exceeds vague androgyny with the possible exception of her height making her passable as a boy. However, as Shakespeare’s assigning Rosalind the alias Ganymede must bring a deeper discussion of performed male homoeroticism and homosexuality within the Renaissance theatre, and as this paper is focused on women and the representation of women, I humbly suggested further reading on the subject of theatrical Renaissance male homoerotic representain in Stephen Orgel’s excellent work, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge, 1996) or Bruce Smith’s *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England* (Chicago, 1991).

curves. Red lips remain the only specifically gendered body part; and their color is easily remedied by stage make-up.⁷³

Through such lines not drawing attention to biological markers, the text is explicit in its self-consciousness of the symbolic bodies onstage and the queerness of the representation audiences were supposed to ignore, to not see while seeing.

Audiences still understood, however, that when those bodies spoke for, and as women, it was through a man's words and a man's thoughts; to have been written or spoken by a woman would have been clearly and purposefully advertised as an anomaly. Such an anomaly would undoubtedly have gathered an audience such as those who flocked to experience Mary Frith's "solo performance at the Fortune Theatre," an event "announced as forthcoming in the epilogue to [Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's play,] *The Roaring Girl*."⁷⁴ Such opportunities to effortlessly gather paying crowds would not have escaped savvy theatre managers' strategies for making a profit. To an audience comprised of varying social classes of both men and women, with no other option of female representation available to those outside of court beyond glimpses of the aristocracy, these representations were the rhetoric through and by which women had access to socially constituted definitions of appropriate performances of their gender. Orgel asserts that "Theatre here holds the mirror up to nature - or more precisely, to culture: this is a world in which masculinity is always in question."⁷⁵ If masculinity is challenging to locate and recognize, then those defining and portraying femininity, historically situated through opposition to masculinity, must also be interrogating where these identities lie. Through control of theatrical

⁷³ Michael Dobson. "Adaptations and Revivals" in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 84.

⁷⁴ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145-46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 153.

staging for the diverse audiences, for both women and men of the Early Modern era, men controlled what performed rhetoric and representation was available to demonstrate the correct and appropriate way to perform gender, specifically, how to perform being a woman. It is important to reiterate that

[t]he theatre was a place of unusual freedom for women in the period; foreign visitors comment on the fact that English women go to theatre unescorted and unmasked, and a large proportion of the audience consisted of women. The puzzle here would be why a culture that so severely regulated the lives of women in every other Sphere suspended its restrictions in the case of theatre. The fact of the large female audience must have had important consequences for the development of English popular drama.⁷⁶

Lacking public representation in performance left women at the mercies of court masques for openly representational demonstrations of idealized femininity, but only for those with privileged access. Far from reproducing quotidian feminine behavior in response to the daily responsibilities women shouldered, court masques scripted women in exoticized and frequently highly symbolic disguises. One such fantastical display featured Queen Anne and her ladies in the January 6, 1605 performance of *The Masque of Blackness* in which Inigo Jones costumed them as blackamoors: blackface painted on, hiding not only their race but their performance of English feminine gender; assuring that they were not only unrecognizable as themselves but as English aristocratic women at all.⁷⁷ Court masques were notoriously extravagant events created to celebrate the monarch and his power, often glorifying and memorializing military or

⁷⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁷⁷ Sarah Schmalenberger, "Hearing the Other in The Masque of Blackness." *Blackness in Opera*, (University of Illinois Press, 2012), 32–35.

diplomatic achievements, presented through historical, allegorical, or legendary-based figures and allusions. Women taking part in such events generally danced and sang, rarely speaking, the scripted, spoken lines being reserved for featured men. The men chosen to be the center of the Court's attention, to be watched and listened to as they delivered their recitations, were men of high standing and favor, occasionally featuring the king himself as the lead actor. Though not actually illegal, women acting, speaking, and portraying a fantasy onstage was culturally unacceptable within the contemporary views of women's morality and linked sexuality. The conspicuous lack of women performing speaking roles in these closely elite production venues — restricting even Queen Henrietta Maria, trained in acting at a young age by professionals, to non-speaking roles⁷⁸ —demonstrated and reinforced for the English people what was and was not appropriate and acceptable, regardless of legality.

These and other theatrical entertainments faced the vociferous, printed, and published chastisements of moralizers such as Stephen Gosson and John Rainolds, who both ideologically agreed with William Prynne's assessment that to "admit men-actors in women's attire are not altogether so bad, so discommendable as women stage-players; yet since both of them are evil, yea extremely vicious,"⁷⁹ it would certainly be far more sinful should women be on stage in their own clothing where they would be "a mannish impudency, or a temptation to whoredom, and

⁷⁸ Melinda Gough, in "Courtly *Comédiantes*: Henrietta Maria and Amateur Women's Stage Plays in France and England" included in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage* edited by Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Ashgate Publishing, 2005) make a well-supported and convincing argument for French queen regent Marie de Medici hiring professional Italian actresses to train her children, including Henrietta Marie in acting, dance, and linguistic graces.

⁷⁹ William Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix...*, (London, Printed by E.A and W.I for Michael Sparks, 1633), 179.

adultery.”⁸⁰ It was already a moral pitfall, a dangerous hotbed of temptation for men attending the theatre that the audience also included unaccompanied female spectators, lacking chaperones to shield the women from strangers’ attention lingering too long or too intensely and, conversely, to assure the women controlled their attentions and appearance so as not to be a sexual stumbling block to vulnerable onlookers. So intertwined was the theatre with a reputation of inciting uncontrolled and unregulated sexual promiscuity that detractors assumed that women actively partaking in the presentation of spectacle would exacerbate and enflame the lustful audiences into immorality. Orgel explains, “The problem here is obviously not with theatre but with women, on whom the culture projects a natural tendency towards promiscuity of all kinds, and for which theatre is being seen as a release mechanism. Behind the outrage of public modesty is a real fear of women’s sexuality, and more specifically, of its power to evoke men’s sexuality.”⁸¹ Women and their uncontrollable feminine libidos were a threat to men’s ability to control their own sexual appetites. Women on public display had access to the power of captivation, access to seduction of the masses: their feminine vanity and indefatigable libidos rendering them treacherous.

In a culture already anxious about gender performance, masculinity was found in the qualities valued in opposition to accepted feminine weaknesses. Whereas women were weak of mind, weak of body, and weak to resist temptation, men were expected to demonstrate maleness through strength: strength of body, strength of rational and controlled thought, and the strength to resist intemperance. Given a platform from which to represent and claim the power to be seen

⁸⁰ S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davis, *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, (London, Routledge, 2006), 170.

⁸¹ Orgel, 49.

and heard, women's 'natural tendency towards promiscuity' would test even the most steadfast man's self-control. In avoidance of these moral pitfalls, women must be kept from the stage.

Thus, women had only limited available representations of societal expectations of feminine gender performance. Theatrical performances readily attended for the affordable fee of only a penny, served as a visual aide for illiterate women lacking meaningful access to the "handbooks of deportment for gentlemen."⁸² For women receiving instruction or correction of their comportment from sermons or "more informal means, such as the lessons implicit in the biographies accompanying funeral sermons," these accessible embodied representations of socially acceptable femininity would have been a welcome model.⁸³ Governing conventions of women's performance of gender "were informed by notions of godliness, comeliness and fear of excessive display and pandering to men's lust."⁸⁴ Such authors as Philip Stubbes⁸⁵, Thomas Taylor⁸⁶, William Harrison⁸⁷, Barnaby Rich⁸⁸, and, of course, William Prynne⁸⁹ wrote forcefully and often at length decrying ungodly conceits in women's appearance, praising women of what they perceived to be natural, untouched beauty as had been given them by God. Too much beauty was suspect, too little was sloppy and inadequate stewardship of the gifts divinely given them:

⁸² Anne Laurence, "Women, Godliness and Personal Appearance in Seventeenth-Century England," (*Women's History Review*, 2006), 71.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 71.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 72.

⁸⁵ Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses*, (London, 1583).

⁸⁶ Thomas Taylor, *Three Treatises: The Pearle of the Gospell, The Pilgrims Profession And a Glasse for Gentlewomen to Dress Themselves By*, (London, 1633).

⁸⁷ William Harrison, (London, 1587).

⁸⁸ Barnaby Rich, *My Ladies Looking Glasse*, (London, 1616).

⁸⁹ William Prynne, *The Unloveliness of Love-lockes* (London, 1628).

They stressed the virtues of modesty and propriety over great beauty in a wife, for she needed only so much beauty as ‘to win her husbands affections ... She is as fair as nature intended her, being helped perhaps to a more pleasing grace by the sweetness of education not by the sleight of art’ ... But while it was important not to overstep the mark in rectifying God’s handiwork, not to take trouble over her appearance was a bad reflection on a woman’s character and, at the very least, it was her duty to indicate her gender and her social status in her dress and demeanour.⁹⁰

This indication of gender and social status was more than signaling her biological sex and the wealth of her family; through her “dress and demeanour,” a woman should be perceptibly displaying her breeding, training, graces, modesty, marital status or marriageability, good temper, spirituality, religiosity, and appropriate deference to tradition, frugality, and the church and state hierarchies. The weight of failure to correctly perform the identities dictated and demonstrated to them through the depiction presented by boy actors could mean for Early Modern women the destruction of their reputations and decline or destruction of their sexual commodity within the marriage market or the shaming of their family:

Despite the oft-preached doctrine that all physical defects would be remedied on the day of judgment, godly husbands were as concerned as any others to have good-looking wives. And despite cant about beautiful souls, godly women were no less subject to earthly pressures about their appearance, and to misogynistic arguments about women’s subjection, than any other women.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Laurence, 73-74, 78

⁹¹ Laurence, 78.

Being married was not a legal requirement for Early Modern women, but the legal and material protections offered within marriage, and through the hovering specter of a husband protecting his human property through the English Common Law of Coverture, allowed the possibility of living with slightly greater personal and legal freedoms. Of course, marriage more frequently led to greater responsibility in domestic matters and the real possibility of being abused, abandoned, or impoverished by the offending spouse.⁹²

However, entrance onto the theatrical stage “[a]rguably...gave seventeenth-century women an unusual degree of freedom, including freedom to be impudent”.⁹³ Able to move into a space in which women could self-represent through their own bodies, they could become not only complicit in the public performance of feminine gender roles but responsible for determining appropriate portrayals of women, progressing how women were to be depicted in dynamic public spectacle. These representations, by virtue of being reclaimed by the very bodies being signified, were an improvement over the impressions put forth on the stages in the past. Previous impressions could be nothing but that: an impression, a fleeting imprint of an identity pressed onto the body of an actor, a body foreign to the lived experience of inhabiting a woman’s corporeal existence.⁹⁴ These performances could only be gestural, and as Renaissance theatrical

⁹² For further insights into Early Modern English women’s legal rights and standing in the eyes of the court consider: Mary Beth Rose’s “Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance” (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1991); Betty S. Travitsky’s “Down-Home Bacon, or, A Seventeenth-Century Woman’s ‘Considerations concerning Marriage’”(ANQ: *A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 1992); *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* edited by Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson (Wayne State University Press, 1987); and, Marjorie K. McIntosh’s “The Benefits and Drawbacks of Femme Sole Status in England, 1300-1630, (*Journal of British Studies*, 2005), 410-438.

⁹³ Fisk, 80.

⁹⁴ As all acting is impressions of one who is different, who is apart from the character. While performance of one of a specific social status, political position, or other marker able to be acquired or shed is acceptable, as a society we have moved towards preferring or requiring that

chronicler Andrew Gurr describes them, “[s]hort-hand in the conventions of body language that mimed the internal passion must have been essential to the Elizabethan actor,” since productions rarely ran for more than two days in a row in the repertory system “and opportunities for rehearsal can have been few in comparison with modern standards.”⁹⁵

As explained by Joseph Roach: rushed character development and blocking determinations rely on the actors’ skill in recitation and vocal delivery for presentations of complex, multifaceted, dynamic characters with interwoven and multi-layered relationships with physical and gestural actions beyond those provided by the scripts.⁹⁶ In order to efficiently achieve quick turnaround times from script acquisition to performance, acting companies were composed of actors whose careers often hinged on the types they played. Already having played similar characters, when assigned the next play’s role, they could pull on their repertoire of memorized predetermined poses and gestures, allowing them to memorize quickly and then call to mind vast quantities of lines, “reduc[ing] the strain on the actor’s ability to ‘personate’ and [leaving] him to concentrate as he had to.”⁹⁷ At their height of production popularity, the Admiral’s company, playing “their 1594-5 season...performing six days a week, offered their audiences a total of thirty-eight plays of which twenty-one of them were new to the repertory, added at more or less fortnightly intervals.”⁹⁸ These numbers didn’t slip much for the following

when a character is being portrayed with an identity unable to be gained or shed – sex, race, varying (dis)abilities, etc – that the performer be of that (unchosen) identity. This is most strongly enforced when the portrayer is one of great social power impersonating a character of lesser social power.

⁹⁵ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 122.

⁹⁶ Joseph Roach. “The Performance” *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 122.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 124.

two seasons—thirty-seven plays, nineteen new in the 1595-6 season; thirty-four plays, fourteen original in the 1596-7 season—showing that the actors were continuously under pressure to learn new lines, knowing that they could be called on at a moment’s notice to cancel a planned performance and have another demanded of them.

Theirs was not an empty, baseless fear: in 1601, the Essex conspirators demanded that instead of the scheduled entertainment, the Chamberlain’s Servants present *Richard II* and, on the same morning it was to open, the Master of Revels forbade the King’s Men from performing Fletcher’s *The Tamer Tamed* and they quickly “replaced it with *The Scornful Lady* that same morning.”⁹⁹

Under such political chaos and desperate circumstances when “changes had to be made at extremely short notice, a player’s mindset guaranteed the use of stock poses.”¹⁰⁰ These character types and their associated poses allowed muscle memory to shift the body unthinkingly into the gestures assigned to coincide with the words being said. These frantic schedules lacked the luxury of extended fine-tuning of physical interpretation, depending instead on the actors’ automated responses and conditioned impressions of human expression. While the production turnaround could be breathtakingly quick, these timelines could not allow adequate time to develop or manifest the subtleties of embodiment necessary to convey an authentic, realistically imitative portrayal of the characters, women and men, they staged.

In this rapidly responsive and shifting theatre culture, realism wasn’t the goal or measure of a good actor. Audiences understood that the actors in front of them represented the person – or, in the case of Shakespeare’s *Rude Mechanicals*, the object – they were instructed to

⁹⁹ Ibid, 122.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 122.

recognize. In *Impersonations*, Orgel explores at length these questions of representational versus realistic presentations of gender on the Renaissance stage. His most convincing evidence comes from the era's contemporary authors. One of two quotations of note is Orgel's inclusion of an excerpt from Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* in which "Wroth implies that the consciousness of the boy beneath the costume is both controlling and an erotic" citing an episode in which, though a lover is passionately pursued, " '...yet he unmoveable, was no further wrought, than if he had seene a delicate play-boy acte a loving woman part, and knowing him a boy, lik'd only his action.'"¹⁰¹ The second author Orgel turns to as evidence of audiences recognizing the male body beneath the female costume is Thomas Heywood, who "agrees that audiences are always aware they are not watching women:

To see our youths attired in the habit of women, who knowes not what their intents be?
who cannot distinguish them by their names, assuredly, knowing they are but to represent
such a Lady, at such a time appoynted."¹⁰²

Female characters draped on boys' bodies were to be accepted as representing women. Perhaps it was through the audiences' suspension of disbelief and through immense actors' skill that the male bodies were occasionally forgotten to be only representing female forms, or perhaps it was because these representational performances came to epitomize male expectations of feminine gender performance. Orgel observes:

Thomas Coryat was surprised to find that Italian actresses were quite as good at playing women as English boys were, and after the Restoration, when Edward Kynaston was playing female roles, he was declared by John Downes to be more convincingly female

¹⁰¹ Orgel, 31

¹⁰² Ibid, 31

than any of his colleagues. For both these observers, realism was clearly not the major factor; the assumption is that the best actor makes the best woman.¹⁰³

The bodies playing the scenes presented—when Cleopatra seduces Antony, when Desdemona collapses under Othello—were men’s bodies in play with other men’s bodies. While the 3000-seat auditoriums such as the Theatre and the Globe may have made the view less clear, and for the thousand standing Groundlings, the view was mostly of the actors’ ankles, natural daylight and suspension of disbelief could only overcome to a degree hastily memorized lines and feigned, symbolic poses, implying femininity. Such scenes of dubious gender identifications left the audiences reliant on the actors’ voices and their own imaginations to be stirred to response, emotional or otherwise. Valerie Traub, in *Desire in Anxiety*, considers gender identification and the role it plays in desire, observing first that gender “does not pre-exist representation; rather, it is constructed through representation, specifically through the acquisition of language and clothing which are gender encoded.”¹⁰⁴ If gender must be performed to be publicly coded and defined, the actors, through Traub’s explanation, were not portraying an individually unique, nuanced behavior based on the varying expressions of gender inevitable across social and wealth classes, educational levels, occupations, and vocations, but were instead recreating and reinforcing their own smoother interpretations of gender expression every time they took to the stage.

For Renaissance women and the men who played authoritarian roles in their lives, seeing portrayals of women onstage would have been only representations licensed and approved by

¹⁰³ Ibid, 70

¹⁰⁴ Valerie Jean Traub, *Desire & Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. (Routledge, 1990), 99.

those in the positions of power, those appointed to such positions as above reproach and expected to safeguard the morals and ethical consumptions of the empire. This granting of a license by the Master of Revels to run a production would seemingly have indicated approval that men's bodies in romantic and occasionally erotic negotiation with one another were appropriate portrayals of gendered performance and, therefore, re-creatable. This must mean that if Traub is correct that "gender is a matter of gender role (the degree to which one complies with the societal expectations of 'appropriate' behavior) and gender style (the personal choices one makes daily to assert agency within the confines of gender)," then the actual performances of gender by female bodies become influenced by what was performed by the male bodies symbolically, queerly, in homosocial and homoerotic interplay, gesturing towards femininity onstage.¹⁰⁵

Given the actors that they were to work with and the amount of material the writers were expected to produce in a limited amount of time—the Admiral's Men were in competition with Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, and other acting troupes for the shillings of the Renaissance audiences—the playwrights wrote scripts which would not only be most likely to be accepted and purchased by the companies or playhouse managers but were most likely to be performed more than once. The larger and settled companies had their own resident poets—Shakespeare wrote for the King's Men, after having been earlier acquired by the Chamberlain's Men, and Marlowe and his plays had been acquired by the Lord Admiral's Men. Such writing specifically for a company of settled actors in repertory meant that roles were written to best suit their talents and abilities; lines and implied gestures were written for the company's material bodies to give physical form, action, and meaning to the playwright's linguistic sculpture.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 99

Therefore, as Renaissance playwrights wrote their scripts, predetermined in the writing were the male bodies in homosocial and homoerotic interaction that would be symbolically gesturing and posturing to signify heterosexual romantic and erotic situations. Written into the scripts, “[t]he material conditions of the early modern theatre offered a de facto homoerotic basis upon which to build structures of desire, which were then, through theatrical representation, made available not only to male but to female audience members.”¹⁰⁶

For these Early Modern audiences, male and female, gender representation was not only the purveyance and discretion of the actors but likewise was the actors’ representation of desire, heteronormative and homonormative. For women, lacking representation of their own bodies meant lacking the ability to represent or determine their own presentation of either their own gender expression or their own avenues of desire. In these ways, a lack of representation disallowed the possibility of the creation of identification.

The identity politics and struggles to find public media representation are hardly of interest to the moralists who rise up in the vehement antitheatrical rantings in the Jacobean period. They are far more interested in the presentation of truth, and that the sales of their collections of sermons are far lower than those of printed plays. It is Prynne, after “[w]riting his *Histrion-Mastix* in 1633, [who] laments that in that last two years, forty thousand play books have been printed, and have sold more than the stateliest volumes of choicest sermons; what else, he shrugs, can one expect from ‘a Play-adoring Age’?”¹⁰⁷ Unprecedented sales represented an enormous spread of printed theatrical text, some staying in London but much undoubtedly

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 122

¹⁰⁷ Madhavi Menon. *Wanton Words: Rhetoric and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama*. (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 27.

leaving the City to extend its influence beyond those who would have been able to access the live performances. This is mass media to a mass market. This represents the spread of popular gender identification instruction and regulation of communication between those within relationships as portrayed in London by queered bodies onstage. However, it is now being spread to those who cannot see or experience the performance as it was in the empowered male bodies of the patriarchy who can step back into roles of independence and security after performing onstage.

Instead, for those unable to travel to London, those having never seen a live performance of these plays, it must be imagined by naïve readers as either: performed and spoken truly by female bodies, tho must remain inhabiting whatever reality they have spoken into being and whatever reputation they have cloaked onto their personhood—for lack of other ability to create identification—after the role is completed; or, attempt to imagine masculine voices – even when the masculinity have been lessened by using boy actors – impersonating feminine voices, and all gestures and actions written as performed by female characters being embodied by male bodies in female garb.

For both those with and without access to theatre and the observation of male bodies impersonating female bodies, this creation and over-riding of feminine gender performance was problematic. With access, female identity was being created by rushed symbolic gestures and impersonations, stereotypes and posturing turned into roles for which the boy actors that played them are not even recorded. Without women's access, female identity was being created by the consumption of these roles, written for young actors in training while they were still youthful enough to play girls' roles as foils to the established members of the companies so that they might display their prowess and impress the audiences. Or alternatively, demonstrating enough

prowess and popularity with the audience to continue playing women with the earned choice of roles. For those advocating the closing of the theatres, their objections were lodged in the embodiment of immorality through the lack of truth in theatrical imitation, in “making flesh the many possibilities that a clever use of language has at its disposal.”¹⁰⁸ Though the arts were flourishing in other material forms, it was theatre, with its embodied narratives, that “spawned a violent antitheatrical tradition that vociferously identified the theatre as the site of corruption.”¹⁰⁹ Menon quotes Quintilian, the authority on all things rhetorical and oratory, and his dismay at finding that at the heart of beauty is obscenity. Similarly, Gosson, Prynne, and their contemporaries found that, under close scrutiny, theatrical performance and the performers—especially those playing the roles of women—were not as they appeared. Though beautiful from a distance, they were obscene under inspection. If they were not as they were attempting to appear, then they were both unnatural and obscene. Therefore, these men imitating women were unnatural, obscene, and could not portray any truth to an audience.

To both the antitheatricalists and those following their writings, this criticism was expected. Antitheatricalism had reached its full voice in criticism by Papists of Tyndale and company encouraging the reading and hearing of the Holy Scriptures by the common man in language they would understand, threatening the authority and necessity for Roman intermediary interpretation. Antitheatricalism not being limited to only one religious body, the emerging Protestants counted with criticism of Rome’s theatricality of rich and ornate vestments and decor in expensive, ostentatious settings as “gawdie,”¹¹⁰ “tawdry,” and comparable to “a masquery of a

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 28

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 28

¹¹⁰ Thomas Bacon. *The Displaying of the Popish Masse* (London, 1637 [originally published c. 1555]), Sigs C11-C12, D3 (incorrectly signed C3).

stage play.”¹¹¹ As Jesuits embraced the theatricality and began staging lavish, sumptuous, and Puritan-rage-inducing productions to teach the Bible, its morals, and stories, the Puritans moved deeper in to antitheatricalism, using theaters and references to them as the prevailing metaphor and accompanying lexicon in the description of wickedness, deception, and general sinful condition of man.¹¹²

It is not the rhetoric or even the content of the scripts that the Puritans most admonish, but the spectacle and necessary calculation to inspire the desired effect from spectators. To greatly generalize their specific criticism of performances – whether in a theatre or in the court – it is artifice calculated to deceive the audience, intended or unintended, into believing a virtue, a character, a reality of a person or relationship that may in no way represent or perhaps even resemble reality. Contemporary guides and manuals for courtiers likewise use theatrical terms, but to the purpose of drawing parallels to being always on display, warning members of the court to always be prudent in their conversations, appearance, and actions as they are always visible, always being watched, and constantly being reported upon. These texts did nothing to assuage the Puritans’ criticism of performance as deception and public displays of identity as calculated to inspire inauthentic reputations, a hateful hypocrisy. This particular adoption of court personas may have been a contributing factor to the Puritans’ seeming inability – or refusal – to separate in their criticisms of the character within the fantastic play from the actor (apart from the play) in real life. Exhibitionism is, simply put, exhibitionism; its deception lies at the feet of the performer, the exhibitionist, revealing their willingness to pretend to something they are not,

¹¹¹ John Jewel. *Zurich Letters*, I, 23, quoted in William Pierce, ed. *The Marprelate Tracts 1588-1589* (London, 1911), xxi.

¹¹² Jonas A. Barish. “Exhibitionism and the Antitheatrical Prejudice.” *ELH* 36, no. 1 (1969), 1-29.

their willingness to lead others to believe of them something they are not. It is hardly a leap to recognize the connection between the criticism being leveled at the Papacy and its outposts and the representational spectacle of the theatre. Stephen Gosson in his 1582 *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*, minces no words in connecting the anti-Papist rhetoric of the theatre back to the actual institution:

That stage plays are the doctrine and invention of the devil may be gathered by Tertullian, who noteth very well that the devil, fore-seeing the ruin of his kingdom, both invented these shows and inspired men with devices to set them out the better thereby to enlarge his dom-inion and pull us from God.¹¹³

If Catholic worship, in all its excesses, is of the devil, then it must be evident that the theatre is also of the devil's making. Among the reasons he later goes on to explain in his disparagement of the theatre, Gosson argues that human wits are dull and easily fooled, making it difficult for audiences to know what's real and what is pretend. This seems to be the initial issue that leads into one of his oft-quoted and oft-discussed¹¹⁴ passages:

The law of God very straightly forbids men to put on women's garments.¹¹⁵ Garments are set down for signs distinctive between sex and sex; to take unto us those garments that are manifest signs of another sex is to falsify, forge, and adulterate, contrary to the express rule of the word of God, which forbiddeth it by threatening a curse unto the same.

¹¹³ Stephen Gosson. *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582). In *Shakespeare's Theater*, T. Pollard (Ed.), (2004). A4v. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470752975.ch6>

¹¹⁴ Laura Levine, Derek Hughes, Robert Ormsby, etc.

¹¹⁵ Referencing Deuteronomy 22:5. NOTE: this passage lies between instructions on lost and found items, stumbling livestock, and, directly following, how to deal with a fallen nest, to not plant grain in one's vineyard, to not plow with a mixed team of livestock, and not to wear garments of mixed fabrics.

All that do so are an abomination unto the Lord; which way, I beseech you, shall they be excused that put on, not the apparel only, but the gait, the gestures, the voice, and the passions of a woman?¹¹⁶

Curiously, the passage Gosson is pulling from only speaks to objects associated with masculinity or femininity and the use of them by others unaligned with the associated identity; in Jewish culture contemporary to the time of Deuteronomy's writing, there was little to distinguish men's and women's garments except to recognize it as associated with a specific person.¹¹⁷ While Gosson very likely lacked the historical and cultural context, as a well-read theologian, having studied at Oxford, he would have had command of multiple ancient languages. Therefore, his application of the word "garment" is an editorial one.

In Gosson's earlier work, *The School of Abuse* – written in 1579, one year after he left London having failed as a playwright and actor – he is much less direct in his condemnation of theatre as a whole and leans more into specific corruptions he sees as needing correcting. He is concerned that spectators will be seduced unwillingly and unknowingly:

There set they abroach strange consorts of melody, to tickle the ear; costly apparel, to flatter the sight; effeminate gesture, to ravish the sense; and wanton speech, to whet desire to inordinate lust... But these by the privy entries of the ear slip down into the

¹¹⁶ Gosson, *Plays*, E3v-E4r.

¹¹⁷ Rhoda Ayomiotan Bamisile. "Interpreting Deuteronomy 22:5 In The Light Of Jewish Dressing Culture: A Case For 21st Century Christian Dressing." *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, volume 21(38) September 20, 2020.

heart, and with gunshot of affection gall the mind, where reason and virtue should rule the roost.¹¹⁸

Here, Gosson is most concerned about the theatrical spectacle dazzling the senses such that reason and conscience can no longer guide the spectator. In their addled state, they are now slaves to sexual titillation. As such, the deception of a male actor using “effeminate gesture” and “wanton speech” to portray a female character is particularly dangerous to “reason and virtue.” Whether in his more gentle *School of Abuse* or in his far more pointed *Plays Confuted*, Gosson’s work is widely seen as representative of the antitheatricalism movement of the late Renaissance.

For these reasons, among many others’ moral complaints, the Puritan political faction led by Oliver Cromwell was able to pass through Parliament an ordinance in 1642 against the production of stage plays. Five years later, in 1647, they passed yet another regulation, this time much stricter, banning completely all stage acting and running of theatres, arresting and imprisoning any found to be disregarding the dictate. The public theatres remained closed until William Davenant reopened the Cockpit Theatre in 1659.

With the new era of theatre came essential changes. The purpose-built theatres and the previously-trained actors were nearly gone; tennis courts were transformed, and women were trained to portray themselves. Whereas once actors had apprenticed for seven years before taking the stage to play their own gender, now women (and the rest of the new actors) were going to have to take to the boards with often only a month’s rehearsal after (or during) an unpaid three-

¹¹⁸ Stephen Gosson, *The School for Abuse* (1579) in *Shakespeare’s Theatre: A Source Book*, ed. Tanya Pollard, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004. B7r.

month trial period which they were evaluated for their potential to join the company.¹¹⁹¹²⁰ And, unlike the boys of two decades earlier on the Globe or Rose stages, the women were now on stages with much closer proximity to a greater percentage of their audiences. Thought to be designed after Blackfriars, the new Restoration theatres were made to feature a forestage. This new space was an open platform, stretching wide across the front of a proscenium area, which could be separated by a curtain or flats from the rest of the staging area.¹²¹ This separation allowed the actors to maneuver on the platform in front of the designated acting space while the curtain or flats were still blocking the rest of the stage, interacting with the audience and creating a relationship and intimacy within the interactions of the epilogues and prologues that took place from there.

Unlike on the Globe or Swan stage, where “even the groundlings, although pressed close to the stage, were positioned to see ankles better than face,” a Restoration stage positioned most of the audience sitting at level with, or above the stage: nearly all had a clear view of the actors’ faces. Not only did this space provide closer physical proximity to the actors – above their feet, as was previously the view offered even the closest audience member at theaters like the Globe – but unlike the area upstage of and behind the proscenium arch, it was left free of set design pieces.¹²² Fully uncluttered and accessed by doors permanently installed in the proscenium and quite near the spectators, the forestage also had the “best illumination” as not only the multiple

¹¹⁹ Deborah Payne Fisk. “The Restoration Actress.” *A Companion to Restoration Drama*. (Oxford, 2008), 77.

¹²⁰ Felicity Nussbaum. *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater*. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37.

¹²¹ Edward A. Langhans. “The Post-1660 Theatres as Performance Spaces.” *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, edited by Susan J. Owen, (Oxford, 2008), 10.

¹²² *Ibid*, 11

chandeliers but also the footlights lit it.¹²³ By modern equivalents, that is similar to being in the light of a “75 or perhaps 100 watt lamp,” which would be jarringly bright to those who lit the rest of their non-daylight hours by candlelight. In this intimate, well-lit space, a powdered and rouged boy would be easily seen not to be the woman a production might pretend him to be. Lines relying on the acceptance of his gender would become comic. Particularly when young actors would have not been in training for the years that apprentice boys would have once been, and when gestural poses would no longer have been accepted as signals of gender, it is further unlikely that audiences would accept anything less than the genuine article. Rather, it becomes clear that having a woman as a woman had become necessary.

The shift in theater size from venues like the Globe holding 3000 audience members, to theaters such as Blackfriars’ holding only 500 people,¹²⁴ created a constant physical intimacy that both required the casting of women to play women’s roles and concurrently demanded a relational and emotional intimacy requiring a shift in acting styles from the previously more representational style of gestural poses to one more fluid, natural, and conversational. Unlike the “[s]hortland in the conventions of body language,” “mimed gestures,” and “stock poses” that the men had been able to fall back on under pressure, the new actresses were expected to maintain a relational intimacy that paralleled the spatial closeness.¹²⁵ What now matters is the acting, the speaking, the performance; there’s now no hiding from the audience. Restoration theatre isn’t

¹²³ Ibid, 12

¹²⁴ “Indoor Theatres.” Shakespeare’s Globe, www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/shakespeares-world/indoor-theatres/. Accessed 26 May 2023.

¹²⁵ Gurr, 122.

any less grueling than late-Renaissance theatre, as Joseph Roach describes at the opening of “The Performance,” his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*:

Restoration actors and actresses worked very hard. Acting on approximately two hundred days of the year over the course of an eight- or nine-month season (not counting summer tours and fairs), key company members could each be expected to play on relatively short notice perhaps as many as thirty different roles. The bills changed quickly, alternating between stock plays, revivals from recent seasons, and new plays. In the face of sometimes fickle demand for drama (daily attendance at plays varied considerably throughout the period), the actors and actresses supplied a specialized and highly skilled service - the performance.¹²⁶

Though they were new to acting and new to memorizing lines, the actresses, like the men before them, were also now in “companies mount[ing] between forty and sixty productions each season” and were not only expected to act in natural ways without stilted muscle-memory to fall back on, but to sing and dance “if the play or *entr’acte* entertainment asked it of her.”¹²⁷ While not all excelled right away—diarist Samuel Pepys complained of “several performances that were ‘wronged by the womens being much to seek in their parts,’ a complaint lessened over time”—the audience quickly grew discerning in their tastes, expressing a preference for the newer more complex forms of acting. It was Pepys himself, though holding a lifelong interest in the Virgin Queen, who, after attending an August 1667 revival of Thomas Heywood’s “chronicle of the youthful sufferings and triumphant reign of Elizabeth I, *If You Know Not Me, You Know*

¹²⁶ Joseph Roach. “The Performance” *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

¹²⁷ Fisk, 77.

Nobody, parts 1 and 2” produced in 1605 and 1606, respectively, was left unimpressed by the writing, saying ““the play is merely a puppet-play, acted by living puppets. Neither the design nor the language better; and one stands by and tells us the meaning of things.””¹²⁸ Women have already been on the stage for seven years, and Pepys has come to judge harshly what should have been a spectacular production for its “principle female roles [as] clearly inadequate, reducing their players to mere clothes-horses.”¹²⁹ However, the roles have not been reduced. The roles are as they were written, and Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth were not given “the display of the female interiority identified with the female body itself” that Pepys has come to expect of plays featuring women’s roles, especially roles as respected and admirable as the Queens Mary and Elizabeth. ¹³⁰ How then have audiences so quickly reached this point of such high expectations—true representation and expressed interiority aligned with outward form in just seven years—with inexperienced, overworked actresses?

Scripts first brought to the stage at the beginning of the Restoration period were initially refashioned pre-Interregnum plays. Two remaining members of the King’s Men—Shakespeare’s former company—joined Killigrew and formed the King’s Company. As such, they claimed an upper hand in negotiating with Davenant the rights to established scripts and left with “the monopoly on the only Jonson plays the Restoration would ever revive...much of the Shakespeare canon...[and, p]erhaps more advantageously still, they were able to appropriate most of the safest bets in the Fletcher canon.”¹³¹ Having these older scripts locked in meant that the companies knew precisely with what they were dealing and with what material they would be

¹²⁸ Michael Dobson. “Adaptations and revivals” *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, edited by Susan J. Owen, (Blackwell, Malden, Mass., 2008), 46.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 46.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 46.

¹³¹ Dobson, 43.

working. Davenant's Duke's Company quickly became known for their innovation and radical adaptations and new works; Killigrew's King's Company was conservative, working with the generally unchanged scripts, but being forced to find new ways to stage them as they no longer were working in the vast theatres of the Globe, Swan, or Rose, but in the Bridges Street Theatre, a far more intimate, indoor space requiring a full re-blocking of all the plays to which they now had the sole rights. New blocking allowed for the new consideration of the new female bodies for the King's Company. For the Duke's Company, unencumbered with a set repertoire, female bodies meant more than new blocking, it meant new lines, new roles, and new playwrights with which to give new voices to the new identities being crafted.

To be differentiated from the boys' bodies that had so long impersonated them, the women's bodies now being displayed were displayed in as many compromising situations as would allow them to be tightly clad or their skirts lifted; soon, playwrights began to craft works suited for female bodies rather than male bodies working as female impersonators. Again, there is very little space between the audience and the actors: "In the physical arrangements of Restoration spectatorship, audience members could be seated on the stage, and at times they were there in sufficient numbers to impede the actors' entrances and exits. Spectators could also move about freely during the acts as well as between the acts.." ¹³² It was necessary to unqueen the space, to sexualize both men and women. Whereas once women were held to standards of behavior and decorum dictated to them by male bodies in conversation through staged interaction with one another taking place from locations of publicly granted authority, as the licensed stages must be seen to have been, the audience now could see female bodies and hear women's voices communicating propriety and standards of behavior and societal interaction as

¹³² Roach, "Performance," 21.

they fought off rape attempts, argued for their chastity, or argued for their right to be sexually libertine, earning their keep through their skilled manipulations of men: all three singular situations that the various primary female characters in Aphra Behn's *The Rover* perform as the author challenges the virgin/whore dichotomy.

In Florinda, we have a modest, mild, virtuous Spanish noblewoman whose dowry was secured by her father and whose marriage to wealthy Don Vicentio has been arranged for her by her father, while her brother, Don Pedro schemes to marry her to his friend and son of the Viceroy, Don Antonio. Through such marriages, her greedy brother will bring more wealth to the family for his use or access to the power of the throne. Florinda is, unfortunately, in love with Belvile, a match lacking her family's approval, although he had once saved her from being raped by soldiers during the "Siege of Pampulona."¹³³ Her sister, Hellena, will be left with no dowry as families could only afford one attractive enough dowry to attract a spouse of equal or higher societal ranking. With such a marriage the fortunes and standing of the family would be assured and safe, but without such a marriage the family's standing would be endangered by allowing a contract with a lesser person. To avoid this threat to the status quo, all other women in the care of the household – sisters, aunts, cousins, etc. – unmarriageable through lack of dowry or other blight, were sent to live in convents. I'll discuss these arrangements in greater depth in the next chapter.

Hellena is confident, witty, and knows her own mind. She is also destined by her brother's greed to become a nun and join convent life. Her inheritance from her uncle has not been regarded as a dowry for the second sister but has only made her the target of her brother's

¹³³ Aphra Behn. *The Rover, or, The Banish'd Cavaliers* (1677), The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Works of Aphra Behn, Vol. 1, 2007. 1.1

cruelty; as he holds control over the household and, therefore, over his sisters' fates, he has devised to send Hellena to a convent so that her inheritance, as part of the family fortunes, will come to him. Despite her decided fate, *Rover* begins with Hellena confiding in Florinda about how she plans to disguise herself and sneak out to participate in Carnival, determined to find love. This goal can serve two very different outcomes. If she is successful and finds love with someone of standing and wealth, her brother will have little choice but to approve the advantageous marriage. However, if she finds love with someone completely inappropriate, she can enjoy the satisfaction of having had that kind of connection before she is locked away: her fate is the same in this scenario whether she maintains her chastity and protects her virginity or loses it.

Rover's third primary character is Angellica, a courtesan who has recently lost her protector who had kept her safe from poverty, homelessness, common prostitution, and the need to entertain other men. All of those conditions are now in jeopardy with her loss of him and she must find another protector. Angellica is smart, witty, and beautiful. She is also far out of the social and financial reach of the Cavaliers. It is not for their patronage that she hangs outside her quarters her own portrait, a displaying of the wares, and makes known that her company and fidelity can be secured for a thousand crowns a month.

In each of the women's fates, the root of decision is firmly embedded in money. All three are determined to control what aspects of their own futures that they can. For Florinda, the choice to pursue love will deny her the wealth and security of a life married to a rich nobleman in favor of a marriage of poverty and questionable safety and security. For Hellena, the pursuit of love can potentially save her from a life behind walls: if she gains her family's blessing she will have love and a wealthy husband, their marriage secured by her inheritance. If she falls in love

with a man unable to gain her family's blessing, she can either abandon her inheritance, her family, and the security offered by a nunnery, or she can enjoy the fruits of Carnival until she must enter the convent. Angellica is keenly aware of what stands to be her fate if she cannot secure another wealthy protector; she is not so far removed from the activities and brutalities of the street. For her, there is only suffering if she chooses anything other than her own survival. For all three women, love is dangerous, risky to their safety and security, and likely to bring only a future of poverty.

Behn makes it clear that these are the machinations and demands of the marriage market and dowry culture. And as in any Capitalist society, in the world of the *Rover*, the acquisition and retention of money undergirds all systems and lives introduced in the play. Elaine Hobby explores at great depth through close reading the connections between Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or, the Wanderer* and Behn's *Rover*. She concludes that what Behn keeps, changes, and leaves out of *Thomaso* loudly declares "that the definitions of femininity available in Restoration Britain are all bad news for women" and that "[i]f a solution is to be found, it lies neither in virginity, nor in sexual activity as wife or whore, but in women's 'third estate' of widowhood, where women can have economic control."¹³⁴ Hobby ties it to the contemporary events preceding and surrounding the creation of Behn's play:

Indeed, the return of exiled royalists, whose estates had been sacked or confiscated during the Commonwealth and Protectorate, led to an increase in the number of marriages between the aristocracy and the nouveaux riches, as those with titles sought to

¹³⁴ Elaine Hobby. "No stolen object, but her own: Aphra Behn's *Rover* and Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso*," *Women's Writing*, volume 6, issue 1 (1999), 113.

recover their economic superiority. It should come as no surprise to us that economic questions are central to the matches established in *The Rover*¹³⁵

Behn's play demonstrates the Restoration's anxiety in reestablishing or bolstering the old system and in the uncertainty and fear inherent in rejecting the old hierarchies and bloodlines and, instead, creating a new system, a new English identity. There is a weight that hangs over the play, a darkness always on the periphery. Our initial introductions to the Cavaliers are not flattering as they're shown to be broke, lecherous, raunchy opportunists: not a great look for men written by Behn to remind audiences of the exiled Royalist forces. These men are a threat. Though not all of the group are as vocal in their denigration of women, all tolerate the conversation, making them all conspirators in the use and abuse of women. This is verified when Florinda is nearly raped by Willmore, a captain in the navy, who drunkenly decides that she must be a whore as she is in a semi-public space, her garden, and wearing a nightgown (because she has snuck down for a pre-arranged meeting with her beloved Belvile). What makes this particularly egregious is that he is coming from manipulating, using, and lying to Angellica when he swore his fidelity. Behn has made it clear that there is no virgin/whore dichotomy to be applied to the men: likely not one among them if facing such labels, would be fit for the virgin category. If the men all are whores, what hope can the women have of love and a secure future?

It's into this hopelessness that the women maneuver. Before it's over, Florinda will have to fight off a gang rape led by her own brother with pleas to consider Belvile and his claim on her, providing a ring to prove she is promised to him and he has claimed her. But it won't be enough, and Valeria, her cousin, will have to save her from ruin – a complete loss of value on the

¹³⁵ Ibid, 115.

marriage market – through distracting and deceiving Don Pedro. Hellena will be the assistance Angellica needs as she attempts to decide whether to continue her association with Willmore or to banish him from her doorstep and affections. As disguised Hellena – in a breeches role – discloses her own situation with Willmore, embellished slightly, Angellica finds that further knowledge of Willmore’s deceptions “has render'd back [her] heart.”¹³⁶ In her revelations, Hellena has saved Angellica from financial ruin; Willmore will never marry her, but should she allow herself to remain in his thrall, she will fail to secure a new protector and become destitute. Angellica, in turn, attempts to kill Willmore not only for her own “Injuries,” but also to protect other women from his treachery and deceit.¹³⁷ As Hobby so succinctly puts it: “This cooperation between women is one of Behn’s key inventions.”¹³⁸ This behavior stands in contrast to plot progression relying on women hating each other for inexplicable, illogical, or dubious reasons. In Behn’s *Rover*, the women can only turn to and depend on each other for help, reaching across societal and wealth divides to band together in search of safety and agency. Even Angellica is brought into the events, both receiving and attempting protection. According to Hobby:

Writing in a society where women were often the source of wealth to men through their dowries, but were economically powerless after marriage, Behn indeed uses the courtesan in a way quite distinct from Killigrew’s. In *The Rover*, Angellica Bianca appears not as the opposite of the virtuous lady, but as a symbol of a common female fate. As part of this move, Behn has Angellica retort to Willmore’s condemnation of her

¹³⁶ Behn, 4.2.

¹³⁷ Behn, 4.3

¹³⁸ Hobby, 116.

money-making through sex, by pointing out that this is exactly what men do when they marry for financial gain (*Rover* 2.2.89–94).¹³⁹

There are no heroes and no hapless damsels in *The Rover*. No one is beyond reproach or unwittingly stumbling into trouble. Good or bad, right or wrong, Behn's characters are difficult to root for as they make questionable and likely dangerous choices. Both men and women are driven by desires for financial security, for sexual appreciation, for power, and for freedom.

Aphra Behn's *Rover* was popular for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was that it was also, in part, an adaptation from a closet drama that Killigrew wrote in 1641, during the Interregnum, called *The Parson's Wedding*. Killigrew's raunchy play's action revolves around the escapades of two rogues who so thoroughly destroy two women's reputations that they're forced into matrimony to redeem the women. Accompanying the leads were a cadre of libertine-philosophy-touting men and women who "were to become stock figures in later Restoration comedy."¹⁴⁰ From that, Behn took the plot of Cavaliers seeking sexual gratification and left the libertine prostitute but changed the free-thinking women to flouting the will of their patrilineal authority in regard to whom they should marry (rather than being libertines seeking sexual pleasure outside of marriage). In doing this, Behn was able to maneuver between what was expected and accepted of women, a normative behavior, and, on the other hand, the sought-after but forbidden fantasy that could be portrayed by male bodies—bodies who could disengage and walk away from the identities they had just embodied and presented—but would be disastrous to the career and reputation for a woman to perform.

¹³⁹ Hobby, 119.

¹⁴⁰ Maximillian E. Novak. "Libertinism and Sexuality." *A Companion to Restoration Drama*. (Oxford, 2008), 56.

Through her playwrighting, Behn created roles that provided the opportunities for women to disidentify with the previous representations of women embodied on the English stage and begin to create their own, to unqueen the embodiments that for so long had stood in for their own. According to Jose Esteban Muñoz's theories of disidentification, as expressed in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color*: "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship."¹⁴¹ For the women, long lacking representation not only on the stage but in the public sphere of society, these scripts were the first opportunities to negotiate representation into identities that would be both societally accepted as normative and not completely repugnant to the women forced to accept the performance of public femininity as a newly created gender performance they could sell as authentic.

To convince a consuming public audience that the presentation of the female gender was authentic, the performance had to pull on what was already familiar, both the legacy of an already accepted identity and accepted representation of what feminine identity is 'supposed' to look like, sound like—hazy in the memories of inherited traditions of the female-impersonator actors—and the quotidian experience of women whom they knew in the real world. As Muñoz points out, the "fiction of identity is one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects."¹⁴² For the women having had no access to a public voice, nor to the means to correct the visible impression that had left even the most noble of them looking, in comparison, only seven short years later like "clothes-horses" onstage, the precarious creation of an identity

¹⁴¹ Jose Esteban Muñoz. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 20.

acceptable for public consumption was now in their hands. To push too far into immorality would be to lose their audiences' support, and to be too sexually accessible would brand them prostitutes and undermine the professionalism they were striving to achieve, anxious to be seen as equal practitioners with the men. However, in the new and intimate settings of the close indoor theatres, it was important to *seem* at all times intimately available. There was little point in having women's bodies onstage if they were not appealing, available, or near to the audience, expressing an interiority that made the audience want to reach out and touch them. Fame had come to the theatre, swallowing these first actresses, and with it, the burdens of commodification inherent in celebrity and the need to find balance between the public and private self while fighting for personal agency. In this new world, female playwrights had ready talent and ample fodder for commentary, satire, drama, and, of course, comedy. With women now on stage, there was now the possibility for female playwrights to ventriloquize their actresses as mouthpieces of their own agendas. In the next chapter, we'll look at how Margaret Cavendish played with that new opportunity and how she saw ventriloquizing possibly being used.

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***AN EPILOGUE on the Occasion of the gathering of distinguished Scholars to attend a
Dissertation Defense, written by A. E. Shine, spoken by the Author in her own Guise***

Dear friends, you must know the truth. As you well know, pandemic lockdowns and COVID-19 quarantines turned the live performance field completely topsy-turvy, leaving vast numbers of theatre and entertainment workers destabilized. My own experiences with COVID and then Long COVID have left me in countless medical appointments and struggling through hours, and days, and weeks of treatments and physical therapy to restore my breathing and regain circulation and full mobility in my hands and feet. Hardly alone through these processes, I've

joined my peers and colleagues in forced waiting: waiting to be able to move, waiting for decisions, waiting for those in power to give permission and directions. And, through all this waiting, new artists emerged. They started sharing their songs, words, and stories through any medium they had access to, not content to wait for direction, for permission.

This dissertation examines similar moments in history: moments in which artists in turbulent times and far from their familiar settings didn't seek permission but simply created and shared. I've discussed three different women playwrights and their determination to share their art and stories. I've explored their roots, their contemporary societies' expectations and limitations, their exile and separation from all that was familiar, recognizing how that political and societal chaos provided unprecedented opportunities. These opportunities led to, I've argued, the beginning of women's embodied voices in English mass media through women not only appearing on the English stage – replacing the pre-Interregnum convention of men playing all women's parts – but leading to plays written by women briefly representing the majority of plays produced in London. These events would have been barely imaginable, and far from acceptable before the English Civil War and the execution of our dear Charles I.

Writing delays during this process have allowed me to observe the emergence of a changed entertainment landscape during this pandemic and the creation of opportunities in the creative vacuum left in the wake of theaters, both live and cinema, closing. I've been endlessly impressed and excited to see actors, playwrights, and content creators who are traditionally underrepresented coming forward with Zoom, YouTube, TikTok, and other forms of recorded live and live-streamed plays and storytelling. As the last three years have unfolded, it has become clear that the entertainment world must find and create a new normal rather than try to regress to what we once were.

In the unpleasant, in the situations beyond understanding, we seek the distraction and escape that theater and television and movies can offer: a source of Catharsis and optimism and rejuvenation for those struggling to handle the burdens that have been placed upon them in a world in which they feel they have little control. Celebrity provides distraction. Celebrity allows us to focus on the shiny thing, the sparkling thing, the unattainable thing that we can still see and hear and learn about, to revel in. Celebrity allows us to lose ourselves in the distraction and fantasy of those who seem to walk above the mud and the mire the rest of us are sinking into, slogging through. This phenomenon is no different today than during the COVID-19 pandemic or during the re-forming of a country and national identity during and following England's Civil War. War is a scary and unknowable place, particularly for those who have been ripped from the familiar and are living in uncertainty, for those who are displaced, for those who are in an alien existence. Unpredictable and previously unimaginable, this existence is mired in trauma and the impossibility of self-determination.

Stories allow us to connect. Stories allow us to not be the Other. Stories allow us to be together, to be familiar, to be reminded of the things we hold in common, and the relationships that we've had, we currently have, and we hope to have. Plots of finding or creating freedom, creating a space, characters who can make their own decisions and break free from the authority of the societal pressures and rulers and authoritarians who have set the path our hero is supposed to follow, free will and the ability to choose one's own partner, home, journey's fate, help us all to remember that even when we don't feel we have control over the circumstances of our lives, that perhaps an opportunity will arise in which we will have the courage to choose our own fate, to change our path, to throw off the bonds that hold us.

But what happens when celebrity becomes accessible and available and is no longer limited to the wealthy, the privileged, and those in power? What happens when opportunities for visibility are equalized?

Margaret Cavendish was able to gain celebrity through her family, her position, her closeness and time spent with the court, through her husband, and through the protection of privilege that allowed her to be outrageous, to be ostentatious, and to be rebellious.

Aphra Behn remained in the background, present if not visible. Instead of the sparkle of celebrity, she provided stories and settings for those seeking celebrity. For the first generation of English actresses, fame offered a change of their fate. Their fantastical visibility provided the possibility to rise in the classes, to achieve stability and comfort and safety, performing fame in exclusive salons while masking their native Irish, Cockney, or lower-class accents with the posh mannerisms and speaking rhythms of the privileged. Celebrity provided a chance to rise above their circumstances.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the opportunities for achieving celebrity became vast, even widespread. Visibility was no longer limited to those with studios and cameras and producers and lighting designers and stylists to help create perfect public sightings. Instead, media personalities were reduced to makeshift broadcasting areas in their own homes via Zoom, via TikTok, via other media streaming services. Everyone became a talking head having to rely on whatever equipment and technology they had originally had in their possession. For many public personalities, this meant suddenly relying on their cell phone or tablet as their broadcasting medium. With sudden runs on ring lights, purpose-created cameras, and other home digital communication equipment, globally, we all faced reduced access to production values. Communications companies suddenly faced bandwidth and service challenges. With the sudden

equalization of reach and visibility, YouTube and TikTok creators experienced a rapid expansion in access to the celebrityhood no longer at the mercy of design and public relations teams.

For anyone who has ever been part of or adjacent to the process of producing a theatrical event, there is an expectation that long hours spent both inside and outside of the rehearsal and production spaces will lead to intense relationships with the others involved in that entertainment-making process. Exhaustion, frustration, self-doubt (and other insecurities), and the constant appearance of new challenges and issues to be resolved bring members of a production physically, emotionally, psychologically, and, ideally, professionally close. The shared vulnerabilities create an intimate, though temporary, village of communal experience.

Long days and long nights spent in production meetings and design spaces bring a deep awareness of collaborators' creative processes, design and technical preferences, personal strengths, communication styles, quirks, and, yes, pet peeves. Actors and crew coordinating back- and on-stage timing; the choreography of shifting sets, props, and costume changes; and ever-moving bodies brings awareness of others' presence; their energy; their patterns; their emotional state and present-ness; and general physicality.

Professional bonds are formed as production members discover whom they can rely upon, whom they can trust to solve the constant and inevitable emerging issues, whom they artistically click with, and whom they'll aim to work with in the future. Emotional bonds are formed in the long hours of rehearsal as actors wait to hurry onto the stage to work their scenes. Jokes, meals, relationship issues, dreams, and disappointments are shared in the hours spent before, during, and after rehearsals. Shared dressing rooms, costume changes, and shared blocking all create physical intimacy that must be properly acknowledged and monitored for trust and comfort. Maintaining the safety and trust of these spaces falls on all shoulders involved;

those who support and encourage become trusted colleagues and friends, while those who don't become seen as difficult and as a challenge to work with. Because of the vulnerability constantly required of performers and designers alike, as they offer up pieces of themselves for critique and praise, there is in theatre productions an expectation of praise, kindness, patience, and reassurance.

Because of the closeness built during the production process, kind words offer courage, and unoffered reassurance speaks loudly. Personality clashes happen. Design disagreements happen. Directorial decisions are questioned, even challenged. The manner in which these issues are approached and handled can bring understanding and peace or create rifts in the company. The production becomes a family. The bonds are deep and face the impossibility of longevity, bringing an underlying sense of *carpe diem* and bittersweet pressure to be present every moment together.

And then, the show closes, and everyone disperses to new projects, new families, and new impending loss.

Hope drives entertainers and theatre people. Without the hope of what a new project might bring, the impermanence of the theatre would be crushing. The inevitable post-show blues would be too much, too often to stand. The empty hours away from newly discovered family, the physical absence of bodily contact and nonverbal communication, the echoing silence recently filled with the reassuring protection of kindness and encouragement, and the desolate stillness where energy and feedback from audiences once roared are a steep price for pursuing the profession.

But that cost fell heavy on all of us in March 2020 as we were exiled from sites of danger and quarantined into separate, solitary existences away from COVID-19. We were in all states of production: pitching, revising, rethinking, recruiting, hiring, planning, casting, designing, buying, dramaturging, staging, composing, blocking, choreographing, restaging, building, installing, sewing, dressing, fitting, painting, lighting, advertising, recasting, rehearsing, memorizing, working, reworking, teaching, previewing, responding, reconsidering, opening, running, touring, traveling, closing, grieving, and continued variations on the cycle. Some were newly building production families, some were working through the growing pains of new families, and some were grieving the loss of cherished production families and the displacement from the space that had housed their production family, their home. But, for all, regardless of production progress or popularity, was a sudden banishment from theatre families and homes.

For those newly evacuated from offices, construction sites, classrooms, call centers, and any other places of labor where employee concentration was too dense to be safe, hours of sudden isolation stretched before them, looming with emptiness, loneliness, and boredom. Eventually, many would turn to physical activities: baking, gardening, remodeling, knitting, crocheting, painting, playing an instrument, and numerous other activities that offered a tangible product as reward for efforts made. But, immediately, and lasting through lockdowns, was the need for human connection, the basic human need to have community, to have reassurance and shared experiences: to fight loneliness. The world turned to the entertainment community. How would we offer the scared, angry, lonely, confused world shared experiences and the reassurance of hope? How would we help them pass the hours? Escapism? Avoidance? Connection? How would we bring populations together while we, too, were isolated, scared, angry, confused, and lonely?

At the beginning of the pandemic, my partner's mother left her position of nearly two decades in her local, rural county hospitals' emergency rooms and became a travel nurse. She was driven to help. She was driven to serve a population in dire need of help. She yearned to help in communities that weren't in complete denial of the pandemic, violently rebelling against any strategies to stem the soaring waves of fatalities, continuing to attack and curse healthcare professionals until they were sedated so that respirators could be inserted down their throats, having become their only chance of survival. (That scenario would become more and more prevalent, with vast swaths of the US population unable to process or accept the overwhelming numbers of deaths, so they turn to conspiracy theories and any other mental gymnastics to deny reality and their own vulnerability to the pandemic.)

My partner's mother bought a travel trailer and chose her first travel assignment in Chinle, Arizona, in the heart of the Navajo Nation. There, her work with COVID patients was much the same as it would have been in any metropolitan area – body bags, refrigerated trailers for storing the deceased, and the constant struggle of not having enough respirators – with the marked difference that the lands of the Diné have very little infrastructure. Most of the Navajo Nation lacks running water, electricity, phone lines or cell towers, and paved roads. Mail is collected from post office boxes, food is acquired from a single unpredictably stocked grocery store or what produce a family grows, or livestock they've raised, and water is transported from filling stations to homes off dirt roads in the back of pickup trucks in large plastic tanks. Families live in multigenerational homes and often rely on wood fires for heat. Her new hospital had one ambulance to serve an area roughly the size of Rhode Island. Emergency transports were regularly two-to-three hours away, requiring the emergency medical technicians working to

stabilize patients in critical danger with limited resources in the back of a truck bouncing over rutted dirt roads for hours.

During the spring of 2020, the Nation was under a strict 8 am to 5 pm curfew, including 57-hour, full weekends that began at 8 pm on Friday and expired at 5 am on Monday. These curfews included closing off access to the Navajo Nation from non-residents and enforcing steep punishments for curfew-breakers of heavy fines or a minimum of thirty days in jail. However, even with what was considered the strictest stay-at-home order in the US, by May 2020, the Navajo Nation had eclipsed every US state, including New York, to have the highest per capita coronavirus infection rate.

She had lived in her small hometown her entire life. She had no idea places like this existed in the modern world outside of developing countries. She had never worked somewhere where staff frequently left shortly after taking the assignment because they just couldn't take living and working in such rough conditions. COVID patients were desperate to protect others, thankful for any tools to quell the spread, fearful of passing on the sickness to the vulnerable and elderly, respected members of their community. However, in small multigenerational homes with shared rooms and no resources to create or acquire more or larger accommodations nor running water to constantly scrub and sanitize any and all surfaces that a COVID-positive family member might have infected, the transmission of the virus through a family was nearly certain and transmissions rates through the Navajo nation became the highest in the US.

She stood out. And the community knew who, or at least what, she was. The only bilagáana (white people) living in or near Chinle were there to work in the hospital. As she stood six feet apart from the rest of the well-spaced, masked people in the line for the post office, she was thanked by strangers for being there, for working at the hospital. She learned to make beans

and how to cook mutton with the supplies she could buy at the only grocery store for miles and miles. She continued to choose exile and volunteered for another assignment in Chinle, staying with the People through the hot, dusty summer. And then she took another and another posting. She was there through the brutal summer and numbingly cold winter, a full year.

We arranged a brief meeting at the end of that year as she traveled near us on her way to another assignment, having reached the contractual limit of time she could stay in Chinle. We joined her in her hotel room for the evening, ordering Doordash, and watching TV. We were all physically tired, soul-weary, and probably a bit giddy at seeing each other. Apart from her work in the hospital, she had been out away from running water, consistent power, reliable cell service, and, obviously, cable and internet providers or any type of food delivery for a year.

As we sat talking, one of the late-night shows came onto the nearly muted TV just to the right of the couch my partner and I were sitting on. Although we thought nothing of it, his mother was the image of abject horror and scrambling to find the remote so that she could make audible whatever it was she was seeing.

Can you guess what had so dramatically caught her attention? Do you remember what happened with live television shows like Saturday Night Live, morning news shows, late-night talk shows, etc.? (Or, did it so quickly become your new normal that you're currently struggling to picture what the issue could have been?)

She began asking us, "Is this what y'all have been watching?? What is this?? When did this start?? Is everything like this??" alternating between horror and nearly hysterical laughter.

She had left the world of glossy, high production value entertainment and returned to find vaguely disheveled, oddly positioned, and weirdly lit talking heads partitioned into separate

boxes like some grim, apocalyptic *Brady Bunch* opening sequence. I thought she'd lost her mind. But only momentarily until I realized what was happening and how absolutely valid her response was.

Desperate for human connection and a feeling of shared community, we had quickly accepted the new standard of celebrities using whatever technology they could get their hands on – and figure out how to use – with whatever lighting they could set up to film themselves in their kitchens, their dining rooms, their bedrooms, and for those with such spaces, their offices. They had no wardrobe nor hair and makeup crews to cultivate their appearance, and for many public figures, their teams' absences were visible. But we'd accepted that, and fairly quickly, at that.

My partner's mother had a rather sensible response to having returned to a world suddenly and strongly resembling scenes from post-apocalyptic science fiction movies. What she had expected and had recognized as entertainment had dramatically changed. Aspects of the pre-pandemic world would remain changed, unlikely to return.

For a notable proportion of the US employed population, a reevaluating of core values shifted what work meant to them, what is truly important to them, and has changed the face of work-life balance and where their energy and time are invested. For many, the realization that their jobs can be done just as, if not more efficiently from home and that their lives are more fulfilling without lengthy commutes has notably changed employees' expectations of employers and created a new form of widespread hybrid and fully remote positions.

We are nearly three years out from global lockdowns and isolation, and this summer is the first since that of 2019 that blockbuster movies – *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* – were made possible by audiences willing to return to theaters and close proximity to others.

In the time of trying before this summer, while theaters were driven to lure consumers back in, a prologue of sorts was played in AMC Theaters and quickly became widely shared online, achieving some level of having become “viral.” Upon first seeing it in a theater, I recognized it for what it was: a cunning attempt to co-opt the unique essence and appeal of live theatre.

Nicole Kidman’s AMC Promo¹⁴³ – A Contemporary Prologue:

[Simple, sincere set and costume on Ms. Kidman. She slowly, intentionally walks towards the camera]

We come to the place for magic.

We come to AMC Theaters to laugh, to cry, to care.
Because we need that: all of us.

That indescribable feeling we get when the lights begin to dim and we go somewhere we’ve never been before.

Not just entertained, but somehow reborn together. Dazzling images on a huge silver screen. Sound that I can feel.

Somehow, heartbreak feels good in a place like this.

Our heroes feel like the best parts of us, and stories feel perfect and powerful...
Because here... they are.

Choosing the respected and trusted Nicole Kidman was a brilliant move for a message they want to appeal to all genders without feeling abrasive or like an insincere sales pitch. They focus on

¹⁴³ “AMC Theaters. We Make Movies Better.” AMC Theaters, 8 September 2023.
<https://youtu.be/KiEeIxZJ9x0?si=slw0c34qH2rpv7Ih>

sensory experiences to make viewers relive in the playhouse of their minds the feeling of gathering for an experience.

But they don't refer to any experience; they refer to something transformative, but only when we are "reborn together." They must offer the liveness of shared entertainment because they otherwise lack reasons for us to squash together in an enclosed space. So many have built incredible home viewing set-ups that provide equal or great visual impact (depending on where one sits in the theater) excellent sound capabilities – which, even if it isn't Dolby level, isn't going to talked, whispered, laughed, squalled, etc. over and *can* be adjusted to tone down overly loud action scenes or other scenes that have been edited at levels decibels greater than quiet dialogue scenes – and all in the comfort and convenience of one's own home (allowing for pajama-wearing, pausing for bathroom or snack breaks, and a variety of physical positions whilst viewing). So, AMC sells us the liveness of gathering together for entertainment. They sell us the space to hope for different, for better endings than the ones we know are coming: a place to indulge in mass delusion and a place for catharsis when the unavoidable comes to pass.

When discussing this with a friend, he offered me his experience as reflected upon after attending *Hadestown*:

We know the myth. We know the story. We know how it ends. When I heard the recording, I secretly hoped it would end differently. When I saw the recreation here on stage, I still secretly hoped for it to work out. Despite knowing the myth, knowing the story, knowing the script. Despite all of that, I still hoped for a brighter ending. "It's a sad song, but we'll sing it again and again."

AMC is selling through Nicole Kidman theatre, live theatre. They are selling connection and hope. They know that when in unpredictable, dangerous, and lonely times, we yearn for connection. We yearn to know we're not alone.

But what of live theatre? Where do we go? For so many reasons we can't – and would be unlikely to choose to – go back, to return to “normal.” Funding models have changed, theaters have closed, and companies have disbanded. We, like every other field, have lost many to COVID-19, ill health, retirement, and changed priorities. We must change to grow again – a necessity in our culture of live performance, particularly theatrical productions – in a landscape changed drastically by the difficulties of the pandemic environment.

While AMC might be trying to capitalize on the fantasy and escape of shared entertainment, we know that theater is not only an escape; it is a place of rebellion, it is a place of taking a stand, it is a place of actions and corporeal presence in disregard and protest against policies, actions, authority. Upheaval in the theatrical world brings opportunities for the voices and presence to the voiceless.

In these weeks, as I am writing this chapter, Tennessee has the dubious honor of having passed the first ban on drag performance. While many states across the US are rapid-fire implementing bills targeting trans people, gay people, and queer performers, I am writing about performed identities. It is a scary time to live in Tennessee for anyone not white, not evangelical Christian, and not politically conservative. Johnson City, from where I am currently writing, was the regional center of care and treatment during the AIDS epidemic. It is also a university town supporting our queer community members, proudly maintaining a very successful and well-attended drag club in the newly reviving downtown. However, it is still in Tennessee.

Tonight, on his way to join me at the newly opened Martin Center for the Performing Arts, my friend, a highly visible gay man, had a gun pulled on him in traffic. When he showed fear and apologized for whatever imagined slight, choosing a submissive approach, the man pointing the gun at him continued swearing at him and reiterated what my friend had said: that “[he was] damn right [he was] sorry!” before proceeding to return to his pickup and leave my terrified friend. That happened tonight, in the late spring of 2023, not in 1956, not in 1968, not even in 1992. That happened in a relatively progressive city. But that happened in Tennessee.

That event stood in stark contrast to the end of our evening.

During the pandemic, East Tennessee State University collected donations enough to build the Martin Center for the Performing Arts. The large, modern structure is shared by symphonies, orchestras, ETSU's own theatre, drama, music, and dance programs, and, most recently, touring Broadway shows. This current series of productions has sold out nearly every show months in advance. There is clearly support here for theater.

Tonight was my first time stepping back into a theater to see a live musical. I had worried about how the visiting production of *Chicago* would be presented in its Tennessee stops with the new ban on drag performances. Mary Sunshine, one of the featured female-presenting characters, is traditionally played by a man who is spectacularly revealed at the end of the show as such and not the performer with an impressive vocal range presented as female throughout their time onstage. I wasn't terribly nervous knowing that scene was coming, but I did have a bit of a knot in the pit of my stomach. When the moment arrived, the audience went wild.

The joyous, defiant reaction gave me hope. It gave hope to my highly visible queer friend, who had had a gun pulled on him only hours ago. During the final bows, the actor playing

Mary Sunshine returned to the stage fully clothed in the traditional attire of a man, even perhaps a stereotypically masculine manual laborer, in a white tank top, black suspenders, and black pants. There was no question of his gender performance as this character before the reveal, and there was now no question of the intended gender performance post-reveal. All deniability regarding a performer in drag had been solidly rejected.

Again, the audience responded enthusiastically with cheers and yells and screams and clapping and hooting and hollering, and for the first time since moving here at the end of the pandemic lockdowns, I felt that I had community.

My companion for the evening had already been considering leaving the state previous to that night's threat. The evening didn't change his mind. He has since moved forward with his plan to move back to New Orleans. I fully accept and understand that he must leave Tennessee. I wish that the community I felt tonight was large enough, loud enough, powerful enough to keep our queer friends, neighbors, family safe. I wish that the man who pulled the gun, and others like him, didn't choose hate and fear. I wish that, if they are incapable of expanding their worlds and minds, that they didn't have access to guns. I wish that their ilk redirected their fear towards the consequences I wish they could be sure to face.

I wish many things. But, as we're taught in *Into the Woods*, a wish can be a dangerous thing. Instead, at this moment, I am focusing on the community, the connections, and the shared experience of escaping into another world altogether for 2 1/2 hours. I am focusing on the coalition, the bond we felt and expressed as a community as we applauded and came out of that world to which we'd been invited and welcomed. At that moment, The applause, the cheers, and the joy were our own. We were cheering for the people, our people, the performers, the crew, the audience. We were cheering for theatre. We were cheering for the Arts. We were cheering for

the freedom to live true to oneself. We were cheering in anger and fear and helplessness, but we were cheering with hope.

That one man on the stage, surrounded by hypersexualized cis-gendered bodies and costumed dancers, starkly stood out from the rest of the black-clad cast. Even if the reveal is in the script and we knew it was coming, it still was a powerful gesture we valued and celebrated.

This experience and this type of moment are not new. These are the embodied morals of the stories. This is the humanity recognized, identified in these stories. This is the reflection in these stories of who we are. And this is the shimmer of people and lives that we can hope to be or learn from. As I learned eavesdropping in the lobby, for many, this was the first show for which they had stepped back into the theater, returning to a once familiar world, to a community gathering, to a collective action that once was familiar and has felt lost for years.

That coming together from exile, coming back together in an unknown and uncertain world, must be, in small measure, how Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn must have felt when they returned to England and raised their pens in the formation of a new national identity. Celebrity achieved through privilege and proximity to those now in power granted Cavendish and Behn visibility. Whether that celebrity was gained from hate-readers and their book clubs or from throngs of enthralled fans simply wanting to catch a glimpse to confirm the real-world existence of what seemed so fantastical or through hard work and travel and learning more about the ways of the theater to improve one's writing, they became women with embodied voices. The Martin Center for the Performing Arts and those within it that night were a tiny microcosm in the spirit of the Convent of Pleasure as Cavendish dreamt and recorded it: a world inhabited only for the Arts and learning and growing together in a safe place, exiling those who would take advantage or control or attempt to manipulate and squash the pursuits of those within the walls.

Within the Convent of Pleasure, the performers and the artists created freely, knowing that they were within community. I think we got a tiny sample of that attending *Chicago*. This post-pandemic world is still foreign in so many ways. We don't know what is going to be our new norm, but are living in the unpredictable, in the unknown, in the unknowable. Perhaps we are also building an identity, performing contrast, performing uniqueness, performing traits that will set us apart from what we were. We have no script but write it every day, living in improvisation. Where we go from here is up to us.

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