THE PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY IN SELECTED PLAYS BY
JONSON, ETHEREGE, CIBBER, AND CROWN

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Connor J. Trebra
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APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE, INTERNATIONAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES:

__________________________________________________________
Susan E. Place, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Robert Davidson Ph.D.
Graduate Coordinator

Robert V. O’Brien, Ph.D., Chair

Lois E. Bueler, Ph.D.

John Traver, Ph.D.
DEDICATION

To my father, Paul Edward Trebra (1925-2009) who led a long and industrious life. His passing reminds me that “Love is reckless, not reason” because, in the final analysis, love and family is the only thing that truly sustains even the sharpest of intellects.
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This study focuses on the performance of gender and social identities found in selected plays of the seventeenth-century theater. Primary texts include Jonson’s *Epicoene* and *Bartholomew Fair*, Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift*, Crowne’s *Sir Novelty Fashion*, and Etherege’s *The Man of Mode*. The playwrights of the seventeenth and eighteenth century used theater to delight as well as to instruct and critique its audience members, English culture, and politics. While plays tended to uphold the status quo, portrayals of gender, especially masculinity, also subtly paved the way for changing cultural and societal roles. If gender is, as Judith Butler posits, performative, then gender as performed on the early all male seventeenth-century stage is particularly complex. Furthermore, although the later seventeenth-century introduced women actors to the stage, the complex layers of gender performance that we see in the character of both the libertine and the fop continued to both defend and challenge prevailing masculine standards. This thesis intends to discuss those defenses and challenges seen in the above
plays in connection with class, gender, and power, and provide readings based on theories from Rom Harré, Robert W. Connell, Thomas A. King, Andrew P. Williams, and others.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Stage Playes for a boy to put on one the attire, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a meane person to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte, and train, is by outward signs to shewe them selves otherwise then they are, and so with the compasse of a lye.

Stephen Gosson, Playes confuted in five actions

It is written in the 22 of Deuteronomie, that what man so ever weareth womans apparel is accursed, and what woman weareth mans apparel is accursed also. Now, whether they be within the bands and limits of that curse, let them see to it them selves. Our Apparell was given us as a signe distinctive to discern betwixt sex and sex, & therefore to weare the Apparel of another sex is to participate with the same, and to adulterate the veritie of his owne kinde. Wherefore these Women may not improperly be called Hermaphroditi, that is Monsters of both kinds, half women, half men.

Phillip Stubbes, Anatomy of Abuses

Beginning as early as 1541, and continuing well into the eighteenth century, a variety of published materials criticized theatrical performers and citizens for what some, especially those from religious communities, saw as violations of the natural orders of gender and class. Such views, and the publications which proclaimed them, did not go away easily. The anti-theatrical controversy, commonly grounded in the moralistic
values exemplified by Stubbes’s Puritanism and Gosson’s class-consciousness¹,
reappeared nearly forty years after the Restoration of Charles II in Jeremy Collier’s A
Short View of the Immorality and Profaness of the English Stage (1698). Collier made his
attack personal and singled out several of the most well-known playwrights of the day:
Colley Cibber, John Vanbrugh, William Wycherly, and William Congreve. Although The
Short View is one of the stronger articulations of seventeenth-century anti-theatricality,
Collier’s was not the lone voice. ² While Stubbes and Gosson focused on the theater’s use
of costumes by professional actors portraying nobility, gentlemen, and female characters,

¹ See Stephen Gosson, Playes Confuted in five actions. Peter Stubbes. Anatomy of
² The 1691 pamphlet Mundus Foppensis: The Fop Display’d focuses on similar traits and
behaviors, describing the exaggerated tragedy a Beau endures as a result of a broken
mirror, a “Stocking cut, and a bloody shin.” Here we find a critique that again relies upon
a concerns for physical appearance and attire. Pamphlets, poems, and weekly publications
contributed to the eighteenth-century commentary on the fop. The Levellers: A Dialogue
of 1703 attributes the degradation of their sex to the fop, claiming that men “are grown
full and effeminate as the Women; we are Rivall’d by ‘em even in the Fooleries peculiar
to our Sex; They Dress like Anticks and Stage-Players, and are as ridiculous as Monkeys;
they sit in monstrous long Periwigs, like so many owles in Ivy Bushes, and esteem
themselves more upon the Reputation of being a Beau, than on the Substantial
Qualifications, of Honor, Courage, Learning, and Judgement … If you heard ‘em talk
you’d think yourself at a Gossiping at Dover, or that you heard the learned Confabulation
of the Boys in the Piazzas of Christ’s Hospitals. Did you ever see a Creature more
ridiculous than that Stake of Human Nature which dinned the other Day at our House,
with his great long Wig to cover his Head and Face, which was no bigger than an
Hackney-Turnep, and much of the same Form and Shape?” (5-6). Once again this
example criticizes the fop’s attire and overindulgence and his obsession with the female.
And on January 13, 1715 John Addison’s The Spectator No. 275 describes a dream
detailing the “dissection of a Beau’s Head.” His essay includes a description of the
various glands, cavities, muscles and ducts found within. “Cavities were filled with
“Ribbons, Lace and Embroidery” or “stuffed with invisible Billet-doux, Love-Letters,
pricked Dances” and “Spanish” snuff. Others filled with “Fictions, Flatteries, and
Falsehoods, Vows, Promises, and Protestations; … Oaths and Imprecations,” as well as a
one filled with “a Spongy Substance, which the French Anatomists called … the English
Nonsense.” This description focuses not on male anatomy but on female attire.
Collier focused especially on what he saw as the affirmative portrayal of the transgressive fop and the positive reaction audiences had to him.

Even before Gosson or Stubbes penned their diatribes against the evils of the theater, others began voicing their disapproval of women for their apparent failure to assume proper gender roles. Certainly the most famous of these is Joseph Swetnam’s *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615). However, the debate on women began some time before Swetnam’s vicious attack. In 1541 the publication of two documents, the semi-anonymous *The Schoolhouse of women* which attacks women and Edward Gosynhill’s response, *The praise of all women, called Mulierum* which defends them, initiated a vigorous and extended dialogue on both the virtues and evils proponents saw within the female sex. At times venomous, the debate continued well into the seventeenth century.

The plays addressed in the following chapters appeared at the height of both the anti-theatrical and the woman question controversies and, like many plays of the period, they reflected, critiqued, and commented on these movements. Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), discussed in Chapter 2, contains elements which reflect and mock the Puritan critique of the stage. The subject of Chapter 3 is *Epicoene; or The Silent Woman* (1609), also by Jonson, addresses certain aspects of the woman question and demonstrates the ambiguity of gender as embodied by both male and female characters. Certainly the theme of Chapter 4, with its focus on the character Collier most directly maligns—the fop—addresses the anxiety about masculine behavior that he and others expressed. The chapter argues that while the fop’s performance of masculinity
may be transgressive, it is both conscious and valid. While this study does not focus explicitly on clothes it does concentrate on the presentation and performance of identity as limited and defined by clothing, gestures, speech, accessories, expectations, or behaviors implicitly or explicitly regulated by seventeenth-century legal or cultural pro- and prescriptions.

Culture, history, and changing class structures determine the performance and perception of social identities. A series of internal and external economic, religious, political and scientific developments produced significant changes in seventeenth-century English society. Although the Restoration of Charles II re-established the wealth and the power of the English aristocracy and gentry, prior to 1660, concepts of public and private power had already begun to shift (Morrah 31-50). The days of self-sufficient, home-based economies, centered in large country estates and small tenant farms continued to fade, helped along by process of land enclosure, which drove men and women of nearly all class background into the towns. There they sought financial relief in the burgeoning industrial and trade economy, shifting the focus from the country to the town, from an agricultural society to one focused on the acquisition of goods and merchandise. As a result, the merchant class grew in both numbers and in strength, altering not only the financial landscape, but also the social landscape. These changes in family, personal, and social dynamics began to disrupt and redefine concepts of gender and class.³ This

challenge to the natural order of things—these shifts in social identities—produced, if not outright anxiety, then controversy and opposition, which the writings of Stubbes, Gosson, Swetnam, and Collier represented, and the plays of the period performed.

In much the same way, the late Renaissance and Stuart period experienced social, political, religious upheavals. In addition to the slow yet steady rise in power of Puritan interests and values, the financial difficulties caused by the monopolies of the London export companies, and the dissolution of Parliament in 1610, the aristocracy and the propertied classes saw an erosion of the peerage. Both James I and Charles I diluted its bloodlines by the creation and “barefaced sale” of new titles. While this resolved some of the state’s financial difficulties, it created anxiety among the leading landed families. This in turn resulted in tensions between classes.4

The Restoration stage reflects the highly complex relationship between effeminacy and power seen in seventeenth-century society. Steven Szilagyi suggests that the fop’s cross-gendered performance of gender qualifies as a contemporary masculine norm and that he appropriates the power and autonomy that lay in performance of both the masculine and the feminine. In the first volume of *The Gendering of Men 1600-1750*,

detailed discussion of the historical shift from a one-sex model based on hierarchy, to a two-sex model based on difference as theorized by Thomas Laqueur. McKeon discusses the disintegration of a “domestic economy” predicated on a flexible, home-based, agrarian culture in which men and women worked both “inside” and “outside” to one which was drastically altered as a result of enclosure and “consolidation of large estates.” The political and religious crises between the 1640s and 1690s led to the questioning of “absolute royal prerogative” and the “hierarchical notion of authority” analogous to the state and the family, a demand by women for more autonomy, the discovery of other lands and cultures that challenged ethical imperatives, and the emerging power of the merchant class.  
4 See Hill 1-55.
argues that the degree of power held by men (or even women) during this period relates directly to their proximity to those who wield influence, links effeminacy to a lack of power, and defines an individual’s subjection to or authority over others. However, masculine power was not necessarily “a set of privileges accruing to the membership of a ‘natural group’ of biological men, but the performative effect of preferment and autonomy within” the society (5). Effeminacy through much of the seventeenth century indicates both a lack of access to power and a increased dependence of one individual on another: a playwright on a patron, a woman on her husband, and even the dependence of “boys, the elderly or debilitated men” (68) on female authority. On the other hand, the new codes of aristocratic masculinity became associated with the performance of culture. King remarks that:

The ideal Elizabethan and Jacobean courtier embarked on a new heroic task of appropriating behaviors once thought soft, luxurious, and useless—singing, dancing, painting, trading witticisms, and composing love letters—and practicing them within the mixed-sex space of a court that frequently foregrounded its aesthetic and behavioral distance from the strict regulation of patriarchal sex differences (71).

Power depended increasingly on one’s ability to practice cultural arts previously thought of as effeminate, but now associated with the power of the court. Those who desired patronage sought consent through a public structure of super- and subordination, often through very personal and at the same time public displays that were excessively theatrical in nature.

In addition to polemics bemoaning the deterioration of religious morals and class structures seventeenth-century writers produced a plethora of pamphlets and conduct books that carefully outlined proper behaviors for both men and women. It
should surprise no one that the good breeding, manners, and behaviors of the propertied classes, became the ideal model of masculinity for the new English gentleman. Henry Peacham’s *The Complete Gentleman* (1636) is one of many such conduct manuals which provided a detailed outline of standards for acceptable masculine deportment. Written in the shadow of the waxing English Civil Wars Peacham’s book advises moderation in all things and stresses the importance of an “evenness of Carriage, and [the] care of our Reputation” (221). Implicit in Peacham’s argument is the uneasiness many English men felt as they watched their sons, nephews, and brothers embark on the “grand tour” of Europe. A trip abroad, especially to Paris often resulted the remaking of a stout English lad into a voguish, modish, and affected youth barely recognizable to his relatives. In addition to repeating the cautionary message of moderation, Peacham also suggests that a man’s discourse should be “free and affable, giving entertainment in a sweete and liberall manner; and with a cheereful courtesie, seasoning your talk at the table … with conceits of wit and pleasant invention” (231). He maintains that a society knows a man “by gate, laughter, and apparel” or by what the body does (221 italics in original). By the mid-eighteenth century, when Lord Chesterfield writes to his son, and later to his godson, he urges them to demonstrate “civility, affability” and “good breeding” in all things. Not surprisingly, he uses the French as a positive exemplar. He states that the English, “often awkward in their civilities,” should emulate their continental cousins because Europeans “excel in … politeness [which] seems as easy and natural as any part of their conversation” and exhibit an obliging, agreeable address and manner” (17-18).

Acceptable masculine demeanor relies on moderation, civility, entertainment, manners
and wit. These are the characteristics of masculinity and class by which men like Ben Jonson’s Truewit, for example, measure one another. They make up the social identity that Jack Daw, Sir Amorous La Foole, Sir Courtly Nice, Sir Novelty Fashion, and the women of the College strive, if not to emulate then to reap the privileges that accompany it.

Rom Harré defines social identity as a set of constructed and often stereotypic characteristics and behaviors that one shares, or seeks to share, with others who constitute a “relevant reference class” (38). Individuals who seek membership in or association with a particular reference class adopt and perform those characteristic behaviors practiced by that class of individuals. In the plays addressed in the following chapters, individuals fancy themselves in a variety of identities, and each must choose, isolate, adopt and then perform, or at least attempt to perform, the particular qualities and characteristics associated with that identity; and do so in an “appropriate social context” so that they are easily recognizable.

As social psychologists Harré and his colleague Bronwyn Davies argue, in the appropriate social context, in order to establish viable social identities, individuals reveal autobiographical fragments that define themselves and others through discursive interactions: metaphors, images and other speech acts. These revelations allow participants to demonstrate how they see, conceive, or position themselves (reflexive positioning) and others (interactive positioning) in the social structure of that discursive moment (Davies and Harré 48). Both types of positioning may be a contradictory and non-linear part of one’s autobiography, and one’s response to interactive positioning
depends upon a number of factors: how one views oneself, one’s “political or moral commitments,” the “availability of alternative discourses,” or the attitude one has towards other speakers (49). Positions may be seen or implied by one or more of the participants as “shifts in power, access, or [as] blocking access, to certain features of claimed or desired identity” (49). What individuals gain from successful positioning is what Harré describes as “having a footing”: a discursive situation in which the illocutionary power of an individual’s speech allows him or her to either enter into conversation or competition between other individuals or to interact, even interfere, with another’s private business (Harré, Moghaddam, et al. 12). We see both the process of positioning and the establishing of “footing” within the texts of the plays under consideration here. While some individuals struggle to adopt class, professional, or gendered identities, and the privileges associated with them, characters, such as Truewit in Jonson’s *Epicoene*, Quarlous and Grace Wellborn in *Bartholomew Fair*, and Sir Novelty Fashion in Cibbers’s *Love’s Last Shift*, establish the “footing” needed in order to interfere with and influence the outcomes of the personal affairs of others. In the seventeenth-century, gender and class often determined an individual’s ability to influence and interfere in this manner.

Along with Harré, Robert W. Connell studies social identities especially masculinities and argues convincingly for the social construction of identity, whether social class or gender. Connell reasons that while gender is most often thought of as the physical structures and reproductive capabilities of the body (an obvious elision with
genital sex) gender extends, more importantly, to what bodies do in the social arena, or how they (bodies or genders) perform in society (71).

In the early twenty-first century, it is difficult to have a conversation about gender without discussing sexual preference. As we read plays in which fops appear, modern readers are apt to assume that because he displays certain affectations—exaggerated speech and gestures, an obsession with bows, lace, and frills, or an aversion to confrontation—the fop is a homosexual male. However, although early modern English society recognized the existence of sodomy and criminalized the practice, the homosexual, as such, did not exist. Instead sodomy, the term and behavior we now associate with male homosexuality, referred to any man who participated in “overindulgence” or “nonnormative … heterosexual” behavior taken to the extreme, behavior that all men, fop, libertine, merchant, or aristocrat, might practice. Still, modern readers might see the fop as effeminate. The term, both now and in the past, aptly refers to an individual seen as “womanish,” “enervated, feeble,” soft, or “unbecomingly delicate” But it also describes someone who is “self-indulgent” or “over-refined,” while

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5 See Michel Foucault. The History of Sexuality: an Introduction. Vol 1. In his discussion of the repression of sexuality, Foucault asserts that it was only during the 19th century that “the entire medico-sexual regime took hold of the family,” defined “the specifications of individuals” and their “perversions,” that “the homosexual became a personage.” At the same time, the practice of sodomy, identified as a practice of “sexual relations,” was separated from homosexuality, identified as “sexual sensibility” or a “hermaphroditism of the soul” (42-3). During the Elizabethan and Stuart reigns the aristocracy as well as gentlemen often kept boys as catamites, such as the young boy referred to in Epicoene. See also Thomas A. King’s chapter, “Mollies’ Privacies” in The Gendering of Men 1600-1750 Vol. 2, 139-234, for an excellent and extended discussion on “mollies.” The term defines men who “(cross-)dressed as prostitutes, shepherdesses, milkmaids, and gossips” who “parodied marriage and the lying-in of women” (143)
an obsolete etymology renders a definition of someone “devoted to women.” 6 Michael McKeon, Michael Kimmel, Andrew Williams, and Thomas King all agree that until the middle of the eighteenth century the term effeminacy did not equate with homosexual behaviors. While it described men who were “like women” in their apparent “physical weakness and delicacy,” 7 men like Sir Fopling Flutter and Sir Novelty Fashion, and it also described men “obsessed” with the liking of women, men like Dorimant and Loveless as well as Lord Foppington.8 The appearance of such behaviors and characteristics (coinciding as it did with the ostentation of the Restoration court) produced a heightened level of anxiety about men who appeared to be “abandoning their traditional [masculine] roles” (Kimmel 137). This dis-ease evidences itself in the direct attacks on the fop by contemporary print culture and in the plays discussed in this study.

Chapter 2 looks closely at Ben Jonson’s comedy Bartholomew Fair (1614) and how its broad spectrum of characters consciously create their own scripts, assume or impose alternative social identities to direct and control those around them in order to acquire financial gains and establish professional or class identities. Like many of Shakespeare’s comedies, Jonson includes a play within a play in the final act. The play, performed by a troupe of hand puppets, is a travesty of drama written by a gentle but inept Proctor who exceeds his capacities. While this device is neither new nor Jonson’s

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8 Sir Fopling and Dorimant appear in George Etherege’s The Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter (1676); Sir Novelty Fashion and Loveless appear in Colley Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift; or A Fool in Fashion (1696); Lord Foppington is the newly elevated Sir Novelty and appears in John Vanbrugh’s The Relapse (16) and Cibber’s The Careless Husband (1704).
invention, it becomes more than a mere comic interlude or an opportunity for the multiple plots of the play to resolve. It evolves into a vehicle for yet another staged performance: a debate between one of the puppets and a Puritan fanatic and an opportunity for Jonson to criticize religious objections to the theater. However, as we reread the play in its entirety, we find that scripting and manipulation—puppeteering—goes beyond that seen in the overriding work or the puppet play.

In writing *Epicoene*, Jonson once again toys with identity, this time focusing on gender. Seen by many as misogynistic the play appears to simply denigrate women and champion the intellectual, physical, and social superiority of men. However, in Chapter 3 I argue that this play is simply not that black and white, and that a close reading uncovers a surfeit of evidence to the contrary. Not only is the silent woman of the play not silent but the words that she and other women speak are not representative of those whom Swetnam characterized as a “crooked rib of man” (Henderson 193).9 Furthermore, while the men of the play proclaim themselves superior in all things, they are all in fact missing certain elements of masculinity. Finally, while Jonson’s refusal to reveal the identity of a primary character to his audience until the final few lines of the play not only breaks one of drama’s most fundamental rules, that of dramatic irony, it complicates the underlying motif of gender ambiguity.

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9 As Henderson and McManus point out both anti-woman screeds and conduct books encouraged women to refrain from “contentious discourse” and advised that silence “enhanced their femininity.” While there is little to suggest that all women remained silent and submissive, these authors maintain that many “accepted silence as a feminine ideal” (54)
The subject of Chapter 4 is the Restoration fop. The plays included in this chapter—Colley Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift; or The Fool in Fashion* (1696); John Crowne’s *Sir Novelty Fashion* (1685); George Etherege’s *The Man of Mode or Sir Fopling Flutter* (1676); and John Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse: or Virtue in Danger* (1696)—also construct, critique, and complicate gender and social identities. It is here that we see the anxiety felt by Englishmen regarding the continued Frenchification of its young men, and the associated discomfort engendered by the ostentation and excess of such transformation. I argue that the fop consciously constructs himself as an alternative to English masculinity, a version based entirely on his interpretation and adaptation of the speech, gestures, and manners seen within a much narrower social set of the wealthy City gentlemen.

This study is by no means complete. For example, it is missing a chapter devoted to Molière whose satirical comedies on religion, class, and gender not only exerted great influence on Restoration comedy, but also bridge the periods covered in the following chapters. Absent also is a discussion of how the changing face of English theater companies—the move from an all male acting troupe of young boys and men to an ensemble consisting of more mature men and women—effected the complexities of the theatrical performance of gender, including the addition of breeches roles for women. Finally, were there “world enough, and time,”10 the development of Colley Cibber’s *Sir Novelty Fashion* as he moves from Knight to Lord, and from fop to Beaux to father, deserves at least a chapter or two.

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10 Andrew Marvell, *To His Coy Mistress*. 
In act 5 scene 5 of Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), after Lantern Leatherhead’s puppets perform *Hero and Leander; or, The Touchstone of Truelove*, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, a simple-minded religious zealot, enters into a debate with the puppet Dionysius about the wickedness of the theater. Busy repeats the “old stale” Puritan screed which labels the stage profane and the actors, men performing as women, including Dionysius and “his kind,” “abomination[s]” (91-6). The puppet responds by pulling up his robe and revealing not just his naked but also his sexless nature. While he is not what he seems, the puppet proves that his “standing is as lawful as” “a tire-woman ... a bugle-maker ... [a] French fashioner,” or Busy himself (104, 77, 87-8). Not only is

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5.5.102-106 and 109-110. The puppet Dionysius argues with Zeal-of-the-Land Busy about the legitimacy of his profession.
Busy “confuted” by the puppet’s logic, but he is also “converted” (106-7). The comedic value of this play within a play within a play, as a jab at both Puritan and the theater’s detractors, is obvious. However, Jonson’s play is much more than this. It is also an extended comedic observation of London society, and this chapter looks closely at the way individual characters manipulate appearance and behavior, assume alternative identities, and create new situational scripts to achieve their goals or elevate their worth. In their new roles characters become, like Lantern Leatherhead (who is first a toy-maker, then a dramatic producer) puppeteers who compel others to assume different identities and do their bidding. To support their physical manipulations, characters also create written documents: the play written by Littlewit; the contract of the Induction; the marriage license acquired, stolen, and then altered; the written agreement between Grace Wellborn, Quarlous, and Winwife; and the signed blank warrant issued by Justice Adam Overdo. While ultimately achieving their desires, the puppeteers create chaos that results in the temporary breakdown of family and social groups, and the blurring of class lines, while exposing the foibles of human nature.

*Bartholomew Fair* follows the exploits of a mixed group of English gentry (Bartholomew Cokes, Quarlous, Winwife, and Grace Wellborn) and middle-class citizens (Overdo, Littlewit and their wives, and Dame Purecraft) during a daytime visit to the St. Bartholomew’s Day celebration in the heart of London. Once they enter the Smithfield district they encounter the baser types of street merchants, criminals, and tavern owners (Knockem, Whit, Ursula, Edgeworth, Nightingale, Leatherhead, and Joan Trash). Through a series of elaborate physical and structural manipulations based on pretense,
disguise, and misunderstanding, the play takes these individuals, initially clustered in
groups based on family and/or class relationships, and subjects them to internal and
external desires associated with financial gain or professional recognition. The result is a
redistribution of group members into different clusters manipulated by a controlling
puppeteer. However, rather than merely exploring class differences, the play reveals the
fine lines that separate the socially well-off from the socially marginalized, the wit from
the witless, and the criminal from the citizen.

The manipulative and theatrical nature of the play begins in Jonson’s
Induction, which opens with the theater’s stage-keeper who apologizes for an unseen
delay caused by “a stitch new fallen” in a character’s “silk stockings” (3-4). The
reference to a failed costume reminds the audience that what they are about to witness is
a theatrical performance in which actors must don appropriate costumes. The Induction
includes the setting of the scene, a brief introduction of the characters, and a request from
the author that those who watch his play do so with an open mind and judge it on what
they see and not on the opinions of others. Although any play’s Prologue provides
disclaimers, brief plot summaries, and appeals for audience attention, the device Jonson
employs is unique. Following the stage-keeper’s announcement, a scrivener reads from a
legal document drawn up by the playwright. The contract, complete with legal jargon,
requires the audience to “remain in the places their money and friends have put them,” to
exercise self-censure “provided always his place get not above his wit” (91-92), and to
“expect [no] more than he knows” (78-118). It provides a framework for order: the
performance of the Induction presents the actors according to their importance or rank,
speaking the language appropriate to their station (stagehand, prompter, scrivener-clerk), and the contract requires the audience to adhere to the same rules. The document suggests also that what follows will be modeled on this agreement. Although Jonson self-consciously reminds his audience that the play is a fiction, his use of legal terminology creates a sense of authenticity and legitimacy, and establishes a context for pretentiousness and wit. While the Induction orders society, both on the stage and off according to a set of social rules, previous mention of the fallen stitch demonstrates the fragility of both the rules that define it and the order itself.

Before they enter Smithfield’s infamous market class boundaries and familial relationships remain relatively intact, and the characters initially follow the societal script that outlines accepted behaviors and legitimizes desires and goals appropriate to their class, though it becomes quickly apparent that characters have already begun to re-invent themselves. Members of the gentry comprise the first group; since they do not belong in Smithfield the members of this group are slumming. Bartholomew Cokes comes to the city for two purposes: to obtain a license to marry the ward of one of the middle-class citizens, but primarily to enjoy childish pleasures—eating confections, spending money, and finding entertainment—associated with the Fair. While a member of the landed gentry and of age, he is young, foolishly naïve, and impulsive. His truculent, acerbic-tongued, and arrogant servant/tender, Humphrey Wasp, treats those above him with little respect, and his remarks, although witty, drip with sarcasm. Winwife and his friend Quarlous, young gentlemen fallen on hard times, seek fortune and diversion in the pastimes reserved for their class and in the mean streets of Smithfield. While Winwife
pursues moneyed widows, Quarlous gambles and drinks. However, while Cokes visits the Fair for the first time and is hopelessly inexperienced about its dangers, Quarlous appears quite familiar with both the area and its hazards. Finally, Grace Wellborn technically belongs in this group. However, her middle-class guardian purchased her wardship from the king, and she enters the play with that group.  

As citizens and minor officials, the middle class or middling sort, Proctor John Littlewit and Justice of the Peace Adam Overdo, supported by their wives Win-the-Fight Littlewit and Mistress Overdo, have their own agendas for visiting the Fair, both focused on professional gain. While the Justice dons a disguise in order to discover “enormities”—minor offences committed against the King and Commonwealth—Littlewit seeks modest fame through a play he has written. The disguised Overdo wanders the Fair and lurks in the corners of the pig-woman’s tavern in order to hear with his own ears and see with his own eyes the offences committed in his district. Littlewit, a writer of contracts, images himself a playwright. Littlewit must convince his mother-in-law Dame Purecraft and Busy, her spiritual guide and suitor, to attend the Fair in order to view the “profane motion” of his play (1.5.147). Busy, a recently converted “one time baker” from Banbury, exchanges his ovens and morris cakes for religious visions and fancies himself a prophet (1.3.114-124). The widow Purecraft, courted by both Busy and Winwife, by self-proclamation a righteous woman, is also not quite what she seems. As she searches for her missing husband, Mistress Overdo falls prey to the same enormities the Justice seeks to discover. While she is not a member of this socioeconomic group,

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12 See BF 3.5.275 fn: “from the king, who had the right to sell the guardian ship and marriage of royal wards (minors who were heirs to tenants holding land from him).”
Grace Wellborn initially travels with it, albeit unwillingly. Promised to the immature Cokes by Overdo her guardian, she expresses her frustration at this match early in the play. However, while she is young and legally powerless, she is not foolish and proves herself more than capable of directing her own future. Like many of her fellow Fair-goers, Wellborn will leave the Fair in far different circumstances than when she entered.

The world the gentry and middle-class enter is home to a rich collection of petty thieves, hustlers, and street vendors. It is a world dependent on an individual’s ability to author his own life. Ursula the pig woman, the street-vendors Leatherhead and Joan Trash, Captains Jordan and Whit, Edgeworth, Knockem, and assorted whores, wrestlers, bumbling watchmen, and fruit sellers permanently reside in the district. There are few secrets in this group of individuals: while the Captains are not military men their status as unofficial and powerful leaders in this community allow them the title. The scripts followed by the residents involves knowing one another’s entrance and exit lines, and the familiar daily patter that permits them to work together as skim what they can from the purses of the rich and middle-class. Among the area’s vagrants is Trouble-all who was once an officer in the Pie-Powders court that Overdo oversees. His dismissal by the Justice pushed him into madness, and Trouble-all now wanders the streets of Smithfield. His lines are pat and rigid with little deviation as he polices the area and demands the authority evoked by the same law that Overdo wishes to uphold: “I do only hope you have a warrant, for what you do” (4.1.13-14); “If you have Justice Overdo’s warrant, ‘tis well: you are safe; that is the warrant of warrants. I’ll not give this button, for any mans warrant else” (18-20). In spite of his dismissal, or perhaps because of it, his
devotion to the authority that warrants provide intensifies and separates him from his
identity and family. In this capacity, Trouble-all now literally drifts in and out of the
play’s multiple plots and unknowingly holds the key to many of the play’s resolutions.

The gentry and middle-class attend the Fair not only for the amusement it
offers, but also to accomplish goals and to realize personal desires. In order to do so,
several assume other identities and attempt to direct the actions of others; or they become
puppets manipulated by others whose goals and desires directly conflict with their own.
However, once inside the Fair—an urban equivalent of the magical green world—all
become fair game for its residents who systematically cull the weak and foolish from this
herd of their betters. What is more, the actions of the marks themselves contribute to
cluster disruption and the blurring of lines between classes. As internal desires and
external forces intensify the groups intermingle, new clusters composed of dissimilar
classes with conflicting goals appear, and identities shift once again. Good wives become
whores, gentlemen become madmen, thieves become “honest gentlemen,” honest
gentlemen become thieves, self-styled wits become fools, and prophets become madmen
while the true madman’s prophesies prove true. Yet, while the centers collapse, the group
of vendors, cutpurses, and horse thieves of the Fair remains intact.

The actions taken and the decisions made by the gentry and middle-class
characters facilitate their disruption. For example, Justice Overdo’s self-importance and
failure to persecute those who break the law violates the sense of social order proposed
by Jonson at the start of the play, even as it demonstrates the premise that reality can be
manipulated and social order disrupted. In his quest to discover enormities Overdo dons a
disguise which the residents of Smithfield recognize as the addled Arthur Bradley. His performance of a “Justice in the habit of a fool” proves too successful and leads to mistaken identities, beatings, detainment, and the stocks (2.1.11). Although his disguise provides easy access to the conversations and dealings that take place in Ursula’s pig-shop, he is ignorant of the world in which he hides and soon mistakes a common cutpurse for a “civil … young man” (2.4.29). Overdo vows to rescue him from his unsavory companions and begins to follow him about the Fair. When the thief successfully steals Cokes’ purse, not once but twice, witnesses see Overdo as just another itinerant vagrant, thief, and madman, and the blame falls on him. In this instance, he becomes not simply the victim of enormities—petty thievery and fraud—but is also identified as the perpetrator. In addition, arrested and detained by the watch, Overdoe falls prey to the often ineffective justice of the system he so heartily defends. Though he believes he is a “Junius Brutus,” Overdo becomes “a fool in the habit of a Justice” (2.1.8-48). At the same time, both his assumed identity and his ignorance, position him for exploitation first by Edgeworth the true cutpurse and later by Quarlous the true wit.

In order to attend the performance of his play, written to demonstrate his expertise as wit and playwright, Littlewit must invent an additional set of scenes and accompanying dialogues to manipulate his pious mother-in-law and her suitor into visiting the Fair voluntarily. To accomplish this Littlewit orchestrates another sort of puppet-show and feeds the pregnant Win her lines. He first directs her to express an initial longing “to eat of a pig, sweet Win, i’ the Fair” (1.6.151) and later to “long to see some hobby-horses, and some drums, and some rattles, and fine devices” (3.6.5-7). The
constructed dialogue is reasonable considering Win’s implied pregnancy: cravings for rich foods and toys for the forthcoming baby. Nevertheless, while Littlewit’s promptings successfully manipulate Purecraft and Busy they result also in the physical disruption of the family. After Win satisfies her craving for pork, and as Littlewit pleads a second time with her to prolong the family’s visit, Joan Trash and Leatherhead approach the group with their baked goods and toys. Their hard-sell and offerings offend Busy who views their “basket of popery … nest of images: and whole legend of ginger-work” as things they are not—“dragons,” Apocryphal dogs, and idols (70-71). He argues with Leatherhead the toy-vendor who, encouraged by a prompting (a shilling) from Littlewit, summons the watch. As they arrest Busy for disturbing the Fair and drag him off to the stocks Purecraft follows. While Littlewit and Win are now left on their own to do as they please, Busy becomes a common criminal. Immediately following this, Win confesses a pressing need to relieve herself, and husband and wife subsequently return to Ursula’s to beg “a dripping pan, or an old kettle” (3.6.124). In his anxiety to supervise the preparations for his play, Littlewit leaves his wife in the care of Captain Whit the bawd and Knockem the horse-courser whom he identifies as “honest gentlemen” and believes will use Win “civilly” (4.5.8-9). This final manipulation paves the way for the honest gentlemen to create their own performance, and this will be the last Littlewit sees of his wife until she appears, much changed, in the final scene of act 5.

In their assumed identities as honest gentlemen, Knockem and Whit—captains only of horse thieves and whores—construct and act out a complex theater piece of their own that includes the seduction and exploitation of Win and the overly fed and
presumably inebriated Mistress Overdo. The men remake erstwhile respectable women into whores. The good Captains, aided by Ursula, pitch their plot to the Proctor’s wife, designing an irresistible tableau of life as a “freewoman” and as a lady entertaining “guests o’ the game” (4.5.34, 92). They convince Win that an “honesht woman’s leef is a scurvy, dull leef” and provide her with a costume of “[g]reen gowns, [and] crimson petticoats” (13-91). Whit and Ursula have already culled Mistress Overdo from her group, the watch arrest Wasp for his part in the game of “vapors” at Ursula’s pig-booth, and Cokes has been lost to Nightingale and Edgeworth.

Knockem and Whit are not the only residents of Smithfield who hide behind false identities or orchestrate performances in order to carve out a living from those foolish enough to be taken in by their schemes. Edgeworth the cutpurse and Nightingale his shill pose as a civil young man and a ballad-singer. While the Nightingale distracts fair-goers with song—for Cokes he sings a ballad entitled “A caveat against cutpurses” (3.5.31)—Edgeworth steals their purses. After acquiring Cokes’ last purse in this manner, the two men, in concert with the Costermonger, perform an orchestrated routine—“‘Dorryng the Dotterel’”—that is pure buffoonery. It results in the theft of his hat, cloak, and sword, the parts of Cokes’ costume that identify him as a member of the gentry. The theft of these markers, along with the physical separation from those of his social class and family, Mistress Overdo his sister, and Wasp his keeper, temporarily reduce Cokes to just another homeless and penniless inhabitant of Smithfield.

Not only does Littlewit’s pregnant wife voluntarily assume the trappings of a whore and the watch take the pious baker into custody, but Busy’s detainment for
disturbing the Fair, orchestrated by Leatherhead and Littlewit, introduces Dame Purecraft to Trouble-all the madman. Before the excursion to the Fair, the “cunning men in Cow-Lane” tell Dame Purecraft that only a marriage to a madman will ensure a lifetime of happiness (1.1.44). With this prophesy in mind Trouble-all’s appearance and performance as madman earn Purecraft’s declaration of eternal devotion. Though part and parcel of his distraction, Trouble-all’s demand that only a warrant from Justice Overdo can authorize imprisonment provides interference to Busy’s arrest. Furthermore, Trouble-all’s continued insistence for proof of a warrant and his confrontational manner distract the watch, and they mistakenly release both the Justice and Busy. While Truewit is obviously mad, a prerequisite for the prophesy, Purecraft sees the logic and truth in his madness, and she casts him as both an honest man and her future husband. Purecraft follows her own secret script, which she confesses in the final scenes of the play. At home, in her role as a “holy widow,” she extorts favors and presents from potential suitors knowing that she will ultimately reject them and keep their gifts. In addition, she acts as a “maker of marriages” for “decayed brethren and rich widows” and brokers marriages between “poor handsome young virgins” and “wealthy bachelors or widowers” (5.1.53-60). Her own deceptions and scams, performed outside Smithfield and under the illusion of the respectable country, are no less examples of enormities than those Overdo searches for within the Fair; nor are they any less morally reprehensible than the behaviors Busy’s fanaticism condemns. In the end, it is Purecraft’s belief in folklore (pagan rituals) and prophesy and the ability of a member of the gentry to defraud her, and not her religious faith or the enormities of Smithfield, that determine her destiny and
bring about her undoing. Although the original prophesy comes to fruition and Purecraft
does marry a lunatic, it is not the natural fool but rather the cleverest man of all,
Quarlous.

Quarlous appears more familiar with the workings and the residents of
Smithfield than he might otherwise admit: a familiarity that sets him apart from the
gentlemen and gentry with whom he aligns himself and which he uses to create his own
script. His progressively transgressive behavior demonstrates the very thin line—perhaps
even a simple matter of the accident of birth—that exists between the law-abiding citizen
and the common criminal. As Quarlous and Winwife enter the Fair, Leatherhead and
Joan Trash offer up the wares they sell, and Knockem greets the two gentlemen by name:

WINWIFE. That these people should be so ignorant to think us
chapmen for 'em! Do we look as if we would buy ginger-
bread? or hobby-horses?
QUARLOUS. Why, they know no better ware than they have, nor
better customers than come. And our very being here
makes us fit to be demanded, as well as others. . . .
KNOCKEM. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Who’s yonder! Ned
Winwife? And Tom Quarlous, I think! Yes. . . . . . . . . . . . . .
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. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
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WINWIFE. Do not see him! He is the roaring horse-courser, pray
thee let’s avoid him: turn down this way.
QUARLOUS. ‘Slud, I’ll see him, and roar with him too, an’ he roar’d
as loud as Neptune; pray thee go with me. (2.5.11-27)

While the vendors’ approach offends Winwife and Knockem’s personal greeting appears
to unnerve him, Quarlous remains unalarmed, even stimulated. He seems at ease and
familiar with the vendors’ aggressive sales-pitch and open to the diversion that sharing a
“froth and smoke” with Knockem might offer (33). At Ursula’s he easily trades insults
first with the pig-woman and then with the dishonest horse dealer. When Knockem
threatens a brawl, Quarlous meets the challenge. Despite denouncing Knockem’s reputation as a “roarer,” Quarlous seems equally as anxious to roar with him. This same familiarity appears again in act 3 when Whit the pimp hails Quarlous, calling him “Duke” and “Prince” and offering a “vife vorth forty marks” for a mere twelve-penny (3.2.4-16). Although Quarlous puts him off, Whit’s good-natured rejoinder, “if tou hasht need on me, tou shalt find me here” (17) suggests the possibility that Quarlous has enjoyed the company of Whit’s twelve-penny women in the past.

However, although Quarlous tries to distance himself from the baser types of Smithfield, his actions are as illegal and as fraudulent as those committed by the characters he claims to despise. Quarlous witnesses Edgeworth’s stealing of Cokes’ second purse, but rather than calling the watch or demanding the return of the purse, Quarlous employs blackmail and forces the cutpurse to steal the marriage license now carried by Wasp. After he claims the license from the thief, even Quarlous must acknowledge that his actions put him in league with the thieves and pimps he rejects: “I’m sorry I employ’d this fellow; for he thinks me such” and quips “Facinus quos inquinat, aequat”—“Crime levels those whom it pollutes” (4.6.29fn). While he brushes the thievery aside, declaring that it was just for “sport,” the fact remains that he continues to deceive and extort those around him. He goes on to alter the license, procures a signed blank warrant from Overdo under false pretenses which he uses to obtain Grace’s fortune, and marries Dame Purecraft disguised as the madman she believes destined to be her husband.
While Grace may not pretend to be someone she is not, she works against a role that society, Overdo, and the law prescribe for her. She is the sole heir to the land her family owns, but she is also an underage female. By purchasing her wardship, the Justice controls her future. In this capacity, he arranges a marriage to Cokes, his bother-in-law, and Grace must work within the limits of her role as Overdo’s ward to change her future. In order to do so, she must rewrite not only her lines, but also those of Quarlous and Winwife. Although dependent on the kindness and decisions of others, she is neither foolish nor without cunning. In act 4 scene 3, she devises a clever plan to test the sincerity of the two men who profess to have fallen in love with her and to afford her time to get to know them. She asks each man to choose “a word, a name, what you like best” (49) and write it on a tablet, and then she will commandeer the “next person that comes this way” (51) to select between the two words, and agrees to “fix [her] resolution, and affection” on the chosen suitor (54). Her suitors adopt the names of characters from other romantic and dramatic narratives: Quarlous becomes Argalus from Sidney’s *Arcadia*, and Winwife chooses Palemon from Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Although Grace allows destiny to select her husband for her, she is the ultimate puppeteer of this skit; guiding and prompting the two actors to “work together, friendly, and jointly, each to the other’s fortunes” to ensure the success of her script (63-64). Moreover, in her role as prompter, she directs her small but dedicated cast to play their roles by the rules she lays out.

Quarlous’s disguise as Trouble-all further demonstrates the extent to which his financial desires and association with the thieves of Smithfield corrupt him, the lengths to
which a he is willing to go to achieve his goals, and the disruptive effect his actions have on the cluster with whom he enters the fair. His behavior sets him apart from the relatively honest Winwife and the virtuous Grace. Quarlous is willing to lie, cheat, and steal his way to financial ease. In order to learn whose name the madman Trouble-all has noted in Grace’s book, Quarlous assumes the madman’s identity and violates the contract he made with Grace and Winwife. While he ultimately loses Grace’s hand, his disguise as a madman places him in a position to mislead Dame Purecraft, stealing her from the hapless Busy. By disguising himself, and following a script in which Purecraft believes, Quarlous transforms himself. After Purecraft reveals that she is not as pure as she pretends and has 1000 pounds a year, Quarlous weighs his options and consents to her proposal of marriage. Although he initially chastises Winwife for “widow-hunting” and for “raking himself a fortune in an old woman’s embers” (1.3.62-78), Quarlous marries the very widow he rejected for his friend. Finally, while disguised as the hapless Trouble-all, Quarlous obtains a blank and signed warrant from a penitent Overdo, which he uses to award himself (part/all) of Grace’s “value” (5.6.7-88).

Despite the disruption of the clusters, nearly all the alternative scripts written by the play’s characters succeed, though not necessarily in the way first imagined. Whit and Knockem have, at least for a time, new “green women” to parade about during the well-attended puppet show and advertise the services the Captains provide. Edgeworth retains the purses he steals, Ursula does a brisk and lucrative business in her role as pig-woman, and Lantern and Joan Trash make a significant amount of money on Cokes’ impulsive and extravagant purchases of their stock. Littlewit’s play is not only successful,
but inspires a humiliating confrontation with Busy resulting in a conversion experience. Cokes recovers his markers of his class and, despite losing his purse and his future bride, enjoys his time at the Fair. Winwife wins Grace’s hand, and Grace escapes a marriage to the childish Cokes. Win has a taste of life more exciting than her own, and both she and Mistress Otter reunite with their husbands. By far the man who comes out on top is Quarlous. Not only does he win a wife, though not one he originally pursued, but also solves his financial problems.

The losers in these deceptions and well-laid plans are Busy, and to some degree, Justice Overdo. The puppeteering of other more accomplished wits thwarts the efforts of these two men to create and control the scripts they propose to follow, and they lose because the identities they adopt stem from either fanaticism for the law or religion or self-aggrandizement as a justice or a prophet. Busy’s script calls for the manipulation of Dame Purecraft, the damnation of Littlewit as a “claw of the Beast” (1.2.71) and his puppet-show as a “profane motion” (1.5.147), all the while spouting the screed of religious fanaticism. Yet his initial conversion from baker to Puritan visionary dissolves when bested by the verbal manipulations of a hand-puppet controlled by a common toy-maker, and Busy experiences a second conversion from Puritan fanatic to a “beholder” of plays (5.5.109-10.). In his attempt to control and manipulate others, the role or identity that the Justice assumes produces disastrous and painful results. However, despite beatings and his failure to expose and prosecute the crimes he witnesses, Overdo returns to his family and will once again “sit at the upper end o’ [his] table” (3.3.11) and “be merry” (21).
In *Bartholomew Fair*, characters manipulate their appearance and behavior and create new identities and scripts in order first to conceal and then achieve their goals and elevate their worth. In doing so, they become playwrights, puppeteers, and actors—often simultaneously—within the context of the overriding play. However, multiple and conflicting scripts, along with actors who continually adopt new identities and write their own lines, produce chaos. While new costumes and identities provide new freedoms and opportunities, they also subject each character to the manipulations of other identities. Ultimately, only a puppet-master with the confidence and skill of Ben Jonson could succeed in controlling and directing the resulting disorder.
CHAPTER III

WITS, FOOLS AND WOMEN:
HERMAPHRODITICAL AUTHORITY AND
THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

IN *EPICOENE*

Why, is it not arriv’d there yet, the news? A new foundation, sir, here i’ the town, of ladies that call themselves the collegiate, and order between courtiers and country madams, that live from their husbands and give entertainments to all the Wits and Braveries o’ the time, as they call ’em, cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine or rather hemaphroditical authority, and every day gain to their college some new probationer.

Ben Jonson, *Epicoene*

The basic plot of Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene* (1609) follows the conventions of New Roman Comedy: a bitter and reclusive old man (Morose) threatens the financial and social future of his young nephew (Dauphine) through a marriage to a young woman (Epicoene) with whom the older man hopes to have an heir. Dauphine must prevent the marriage without damaging his right to inheritance and his gentlemen friends, Truewit and Clerimont, more or less assist him in this. There are fools, Jack Daw and Sir Amorous La Foole, and women, the Collegiates, and an assortment of stock characters used by the principals to accomplish their goals. While the play moves quickly, revealing
complexities and subplots, and concerns power, *Epicoene*’s staging, with its smaller cast of characters, is far simpler than *Bartholomew Fair*. In addition, unlike *Bartholomew Fair*, whose characters represent all classes except the aristocracy, the principal characters in *Epicoene* share a similar socioeconomic background: they are predominantly urban and landed gentry and as such are equals. Instead, the performance of gender, especially masculinity, determines to what degree a character authors, or governs, his life and moves in the world. And while the play appears to uphold stereotypical standards of gender performance, it also challenges those standards by subtly imbuing each character with qualities “adopted” or positions “inhabited by” “both sexes” that render them epicene.  

As he does in *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson orders the characters in *Epicoene* into distinct groupings. Two are homosocial: one occupied by gentlemen Truewit, Dauphine, and Clerimont; a second occupied by the women Collegiates, Lady Haughty, Lady Centaur, and Mistress Mavis. Jack Daw, La Foole, and Captain Otter and his wife form a third group, a heterosocial one in which each strives for membership in one of the first two. However, their social and gender performances render them unfit for or, at best, pretenders to either. Although the members of the first two groups work more or less in concert with one another towards a common goal, this third group tends to work against one another as their goals directly overlap or conflict.

*Epicoene* and Morose constitute a fourth group. They are also outsiders because they cannot hold or will not accept membership in any other. Morose, a man

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plagued by a neurotic hypersensitivity to all noise save the sound of his own voice, has but two desires: to retain control over his environment and to disinherit his nephew. He not only does not seek membership in a group, he refuses it: he wants simply to be left alone. Epicoene is, to all appearances, a young, eligible, and silent gentlewoman, the perfect bride for Morose. However, Epicoene is the key to Dauphine’s plan to undermine his uncle’s attempt to leave him penniless: she is a plant. In collusion with Cutbeard, a barber supposing to act as Morose’s agent, Dauphine orchestrates her “discovery” and subsequent introduction to his uncle. While first courted by and then married to the old man, and later accepted into the Collegiate’s homosocial circle, Epicoene is, according to Truewit, “insectae”; a boy “(a’most) of years” but not quite a man (5.4.224-226).14 Although Dauphine removes her perruke in act 5 and describes her as a “gentleman’s son” whom he directs and uses as a tool against Morose, we never actually see Epicoene as a male (182-4). The character’s gender remains ambiguous and as such she/he technically belongs to neither group.

Truewit, Dauphine, and Clerimont present their homosocial network as the model for masculinity. As men born into the upper-class, they have no profession; they rely instead on inheritances or allowances that provide them financial independence.

14 The correct spelling of this Latin term, a neuter noun (insectum) of the second declension, in the accusative case plural would be “insecta.” The accusative is used when the noun is the direct object of a transitive verb and answers the question Who? or What? Although the “ae” ending may indicated a first declension nominative plural, used for groupings, the addition of the “e” by Jonson does alter the word and indicates it as either dative singular (the indirect object of the verb, used most often with from or to) or genitive singular (the possessive case) of the first declension, in which all nouns are female. See D’ooge 14, 19-20, 26. The intent must be purposeful, and coincides with a second an orthographic “error” that occurs in the spelling of the French Dauphine. Both errors complicate the already ambiguous nature of the play’s characters.
Their activities consist of inventing ways to amuse themselves, and they spend their time engaged in sexual intrigue, gambling, drinking, attending court or creating other diversions for themselves, usually at the expense of others. All are educated, as their language, true grasp of classical literature, and knowledge of Latin demonstrates. They banter easily and wittily with one another in lively exchanges, jests, and debates regarding their society and the events and gossip of the day. They believe their pursuits, language, and behaviors reflect the normative characteristics of an upper-class, urban, seventeenth-century masculinity and move through the world with the authority this identity affords them. Even their names reflect normative masculine characteristics: Truewit is cleverness personified; Dauphine is by rights the heir to Morose’s fortune; and Clerimont performs brilliantly in the social arena. As upper class men, they measure, especially Truewit, all other masculinities against their own model.

What the accident of birth and the law provide to this first group of men, the women of the College, Lady Haughty, Lady Centaur, and Mistress Mavis, must create. As upper-class women, they should rely on their husbands for necessities as well as for permission to move freely in society. However, they reject these societal limitations. In order to attain the same sexual, intellectual, and social independence as their male counterparts, the Collegiates willfully and consciously manipulate their circumstances. They accomplish this by dominating and manipulating their husbands, living apart from them, and most importantly, organizing a strong and supportive homosocial society. However, because they blatantly challenge masculine authority, Truewit dismisses their
“most masculine” desire for and display of self-governance as “hermaphroditical” (1.1.76).

The social pretenders and outsiders seek membership in the men’s or the women’s groups but remain outsiders due to their social or gender performances. Both La Foole and Daw claim the social authority that places them in the same socioeconomic class as the three gentlemen and rely in similar ways on the power of language to secure that place, but their efforts are ineffective. La Foole displays an abundance of fashion sense, some grace, but little true wit. He is an earlier, and somewhat paler, version of the Restoration fop. He overwhelms listeners with an almost endless recitation of his ancestry, the names of prominent socialites, and the value and quantity of his material possessions (2.1.34-63). In contrast, Daw is neither graceful nor fashionable, nor very clever, with little to offer except, as his name indicates, empty chatter. Where La Foole overwhelms with pretentious gossip, Daw underwhelms his listeners with poor poetry and inferior Latin. Although he also name-drops—a long list of Greek and Roman philosophers and poets—his grasp and assessment of their worth is shallow and pedestrian. Finally, while they are like the libertine and the fop from the Restoration plays in that they are obsessed with women, they are quite unsuccessful and remain the “rook” and the “wind-fucker” (73, 72) which reduces them to subordinate status.

Captain Tom and Mistress Otter seek entrance into the homosocial worlds of their respective genders, yet their marital relationship and personalities, as their name suggests, reflect an inversion of gendered authority. Mistress Otter’s dominating personality appropriates the authority of her husband’s title as Captain and limits his
participation in the world occupied by the three gentlemen. While she believes her behavior qualifies her for membership into the college, her social status even as a wealthy china-shopkeeper prevents Mistress Otter from “ordinary” or full membership in the upper-class sorority and consigns her to its periphery. Once “a great man at the Bear Garden in his time” (2.6.57), Tom Otter must now wheedle both time and money from his wife in order to “carouse” with other men. He falls victim to both his wife’s acerbic tongue and the pranks of the young gentlemen whose company he seeks.

What these groups and individuals have in common is that they all seek the privileges that come with being male and a gentleman: the freedom to say and do as they wish and go where they please. Personal or group success hinges on the performance of gender, especially behaviors and markers that create identities, exploit circumstances, and provide the social freedoms of masculine privilege. While the Collegiates must appropriate this authority, the gentlemen in the play believe they have already acquired it naturally—with perhaps the exception of Tom Otter who knows profoundly that he does not—and subsequently only work to convince others of their ability to use it appropriately. The judgment rests with Truewit who designates himself as the ultimate authority on both feminine and masculine behaviors. From the onset, Truewit establishes that the production, manipulation, and control of language and knowledge is the prime standard of measurement.

In Epicoene, characters use both reflexive and interactive positioning, sometimes successfully and sometimes ineffectively, to establish or preserve masculine privilege (freedom) and identity. Morose uses both types of discourse effectively until
Truewit’s superior control of language thwarts his efforts. Because they lack natural
talent, Daw and La Foole’s use of discursive positioning (the ability to acquire a superior
status through effectively creating a believable and acceptable storyline) is purely
mimetic. For example, in act 1, scene 4 La Foole embarks on a compulsive disclosure of
his family, his possessions, and his acquaintances:

They all come out of our house, the La Fooles o’ the north,
the La Fooles of the west, the La Fooles of the east and
south—we are as ancient a family as any is in Europe—but
I myself am descended lineally of the French La Fooles—and
we do bear for our coat yellow or or, checker’d azure and
gules, and some three or four colors more, which is a very
noted coat and has sometimes been solemnly worn by divers
nobility of our house—but let that go, antiquity is not
respected now— . . . (34-63).

La Foole continues with a list of who will attend his soirée, the expensive delicacies and
extravagant entertainments provided, an allusion to the latest gossip (the appearance of
Epicoene), more name-dropping, and a parting nod to his success as a wealthy landowner
and ladies’ man. The response to this breathless pretentious litany is much less than what
La Foole has intended. Instead of impressing his listeners, the reader hears only contempt
as Clerimont refers to La Foole as a “wind-fucker” (72). While this discourse should
reflexively emphasize his superiority and his credentials, it proves ineffective. Not only is
he unable to convince others of his ability to maintain a superior, or at least equal,
standing with the gentlemen but both La Foole, along with Daw, fail to interactively
reposition their rivals (the gentlemen in general and Dauphine in particular) inferiorly.

In his own eyes, Truewit’s performance is successful because he establishes
his own position as normative, measures all others against it, and interactively positions
others as inferior. Dauphine succeeds, first by reflexively positioning Epicoene as the perfect woman through her silence, and then by interactively positioning Morose and others through her newfound voice. Both maneuvers provide Dauphine with the power to reposition himself. Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, the women of the College also succeed. Despite falling victim to Dauphine’s ruse, along with even the witty and duplicitous Truewit, there is no indication that they will disband their group or amend their behavior.

Ironically, Morose’s discursive performance is similar to that of Truewit: both use language to manipulate, harangue, critique, and control others. At home, Morose dominates through his ability to out-talk others and to limit or prevent their speech (servants, his barber, even those who live on or venture to travel down his street). Dispensing with the “speaking-tube,” presumably used to magnify the whispered speech of his servant, Morose resourcefully creates a new method for communication. He instructs his man Mute, and later Cutbeard, to “make a leg” in answer to the questions he poses:

MORSE (to Mute). You have taken the ring off from the street door as I bade you? Answer me not by speech but by silence, unless it be otherwise. (At the breaches, still the fellow makes legs or signs) Very good. And you have fastened on a thick quilt of flock-bed on the outside of the door, that if they knock with their daggers or with brickbats, they can make no noise? But with your leg, your answer, unless it be otherwise. (Mute makes a leg) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . if it be otherwise, shake your head or shrug. (Makes a leg) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . How long will it be ere Cutbeard come? Stay, if an hour, hold up your whole hand; if half an hour, two fingers; if a quarter, one. . . (2.1.7-23)
Morose effectively removes the necessity for even whispered speech and establishes physical domination over others through the submissive gesture of “making a leg.” Morose’s conversations with both Mute and Cutbeard consist of questions regarding tasks that demand completion and that mediate his environment. In limiting those around him to gestures, merely responses to questions that can only have affirmative answers, Morose demonstrates his control of language as well as his inability to converse. While communication occurs, it does not take the form of talking with a person; there is no “interchange of ideas” or reciprocity. There is merely Morose holding forth.

Morose’s success at disinheriting his nephew depends also on how he positions himself in the patriarchal hierarchy, and how well he performs and maintains that position: how well he manipulates the law and how successfully he demonstrates sexual virility—he will acquire a wife and sire an heir. However, once Morose puts this plan in motion, his reflexive positioning as recluse, his lack of social ability, and Truewit’s superior capacity for positioning both himself and repositioning others through language undercuts Morose’s success. Although Morose retains his legal status as a wealthy male citizen, his inability to maintain domination through language renders him socially impotent. This inability and his ultimate and manipulated confession to sexual impotence, although a lie, annuls his position as husband and neutralizes his performance of masculinity.

Truewit uses his superior language skills and his knowledge of Morose’s affliction to incapacitate the old man. During their first interaction, in act 2, Truewit

enters the old man’s sanctuary as loudly as he can and begins a non-stop harangue
invoking the threats a woman poses to an old man’s masculinity. This verbal onslaught
interrupts the old man’s newly discovered method of communicating with his servants
and prevents Morose, enamored of his own voice and language, from interrupting and
controlling their interaction. Truewit renders the man—who at the beginning of this scene
rails on uninterrupted for some thirty-six lines—virtually mute. Truewit simply out-talks
Morose. Even in moments when he does not personally harass Morose, Truewit’s proxies
do so for him. Truewit’s final gambit employs the full force of language and
argumentation through the orchestrated, or performed, debate between the “parson” Otter
and the “canonical lawyer” Cutbeard. Summoned to advise Morose about his options for
divorce or annulment from Epicoene, the “learned men” corner him and rapidly place
him on the defensive:

MOROSE. I understood you before; good sir, avoid your impertinency
    of translation.
OTTER. He cannot open this too much, sir, by your favor.
MOROSE. Yet more!
TRUEWIT. Oh, you must give the learned men leave, sir. To your
    impediments, master doctor.
CUTBEARD: The first is impedimentum erroris.
OTTER. Of which there are several species.
CUTBEARD. Ay, as error personae.
OTTER. If you contract yourself to one person, thinking her another.
CUTBEARD. Then error fortunae.
OTTER. If she be a beggar, and you thought her rich.
CUTBEARD. Then, error qualitatis.
OTTER. If she prove stubborn or headstrong, that you thought
    obedient.
MOROSE. How? Is that, sir, a lawful impediment? One at once, I
    pray you gentlemen.
OTTER. Ay, anis copulam, but not post copulam, sir.
CUTBEARD. Master parson says right. Nec post nuptiarum benedictionem. It
doeth indeed but irrita redder sponsalia, annul the contract;
after marriage it is of no obstancy. (5.3.78-98)

Under Truewit’s direction, the two disguised men—with the occasional remark from one of the three gentlemen—weave a pattern of linguistic foolery which lasts for some two-hundred lines. Jonson presents this ambush as a series of rapid-fire stichomythia that deprives Morose of the silence he desires and, because he understands the Latin, leaves him progressively more linguistically vulnerable and leads him to claim sexual impotence.

In addition to dominating the first six scenes of the play, Truewit asserts his will and morality throughout the work and controls the language and actions of others. For example, Truewit uses his knowledge of Clerimont’s social pursuits and sexual intrigues to admonish his friend for his fashionable idleness and dissipation and to wax pedantically about the incorporeity of time and the “common disease” of vanity (1.1.49, 54). Once he has exhausted this topic, Truewit moves on to a brief and mean-spirited discussion of the Collegiates followed by yet another lecture in which he champions the use of costume and cosmetics to enhance a woman’s beauty or cover her flaws. While he claims authority, his arguments and examples are tiresome, encumbered with images and metaphors of women as gardens, as works of architecture, or as paintings “gilded” and “burnished” (99, 112, 117). Such arguments position women, including those of the College, as objects rather than individuals. Despite Clerimont’s dismissal of this argument about time as “tedious …. stoicity” (1.2.60-62) and his resistance to Truewit’s argument regarding beauty, Truewit maintains control of the conversation. Truewit seems always to manage the last word and, during his interaction with Clerimont in act 1,
initiates three separate and abrupt topic changes. Throughout the play, as he tires of one subject or meets resistance to another, Truewit simply refocuses the conversation. This move allows him to retain his linguistic domination and consign others to the position of seconds or agents. Truewit is as enamored of his own voice as is Morose.

Sandwiched between his lectures on idleness and beauty, Truewit gossips about and denounces the College for their mimicry of masculinity. Clerimont, who despite his implied intimacy with their president, knows nothing of this “new foundation,” and Truewit takes obvious pleasure revealing who they are and what they do:

TRUEWIT. As if you knew not!
CLERIMONT. No, Faith, I came but from court yesterday.
TRUEWIT. Why, it has not arriv’d there yet, the news? A new foundation, sir, here i’ the town, of ladies that call themselves the collegiates, an order between courtiers and country madams, that live from their husbands and give entertainment to all the Wits and Braveries o’ the time, as they call ‘em, cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority, and every day gain to their college some new probationer. (1.1.70-77)

His language reflects his “moral commitments” (Harré, “Positioning”, 43) to the prescribed performances of gender and invokes the image of an improper woman. That the women “cry down and up what they like or dislike” suggests the loud and public voices of street vendors crying their wares and stigmatizes their free expression of opinion. Swetnam and his ilk promote similar images in their anti-woman pamphlets.

There is a dismissive implication in his description of their College as “an order between courtiers and country madams.” By giving them no status other than something not quite
of the one place and not quite of another, Truewit’s remarks disparage their fellowship and the literary purpose implied by this title. In essence, Truewit compares it to nothing.

Because we meet all the other characters before the Collegiates, our impressions of these women come only from Truewit and Clerimont’s negative characterizations of them. Unlike the gentlemen, even their names suggest certain negative traits: One expects Lady Haughty to be overconfident, arrogant, somber, and physically unattractive but also vain, a portrait supported by Clerimont’s declaration that she has an “autumnal face” and a “piec’d beauty” and Truewit’s description of a “grave and youthful” woman (1.1.79-80). We expect Lady Centaur, whose name suggests a creature half-man, half-horse, to be some monstrous anomaly, perhaps one of the women “who when they laugh, you would think they brayed” (4.1.43-44). We expect them to be as loud, masculine, and heavy-handed as Mistress Otter, who utterly dominates her husband and treats him as her “servant.” We expect them to be the sort of women who control their husbands’ actions, provide him but “a half-crown a day,” food for his horses, his “man’s meat,” “three suits a year,” as well as contacts with “courtiers [and] great personages” (3.1.32-39). We expect them to be poor imitations of masculinity.

But that is not what we actually see. The women of the College do not want to be men, they want only access to what men have. Nevertheless, while Truewit intends his description of their hermaphroditic nature to be cruel, it is accurate because it refers not to their bodies but to “their location in the social order” (Connell 188). In order to gain

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16 Under other circumstances, the casting of the lover or devoted husband as a woman’s servant might be seen as Petrarchan—an vestige left behind by the precepts of Courtly Love—in this case Mistress Otter treats her husband no better than Morose treats Mute or Cutbeard.
access to social, sexual, and intellectual independence, Ladies Haughty, Centaur, and Mistress Mavis must appropriate and incorporate certain masculine behaviors into their gender performance. They must author their own lives, and they go about doing so in a fashion more civilized and organized than Truewit or Clerimont suggest or that Mistress Otter models. They succeed in organizing their own homosocial group, similar to that of the gentlemen, one that “every day … gain[s] some new probationer” (1.1.77). Their treatment of each other is collegial and egalitarian: they adopt a masculine form of address for one another, dropping their titles of “Lady” and “Mistress” and referring to one another by last names only. They control their bodies and social lives. They entertain men—Wits and Braveries—in their homes, and maintain personal freedom, by entering into relationships outside their marriages. Each propositions or courts Dauphine: one provides a gift, another writes a him billet-doux, and each invites him to her chamber, where maids “shall be ever awake” for him, whether “one o’ these mornings early, or late in an evening” (5.2. 19-21, 35-6). Instead of bullying their husbands, they train them, and suggest that a woman permit her spouse to provide her with “your coach and four horses, your woman, your chambermaid, your page, your gentleman-usher, your French cook, and four grooms” as it will “open the gate” to a woman’s fame (4.3.19-26). Yet while they believe a woman should be free to say and to do what she pleases, and to go where she would, when we finally meet them they are anything but screeching, pompous, or mannish.

Whereas Truewit, Clerimont, and Dauphine engage in a series of underhanded deceptions and subterfuges, competitively undercutting and mocking all but themselves,
the Collegiates maintain a civilized and relatively supportive demeanor. Although they candidly voice their opinions throughout the play, they remain polite. Nowhere is this more obvious than as Haughty and Morose encounter one another at the impromptu wedding celebration:

HAUGHTY. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . —Master bridegroom, where are you?
MORSE. Oh, it was too miraculously good to last!
HAUGHTY. We see no ensigns of a wedding here, no character of a bride-ale: where be our scarves and our gloves? I pray you, give ‘em us. Let’s know your bride’s colors and yours at least.
CENTAUR. Alas, madam, he has provided none.
MOROSE. Had I known your ladyship’s painter, I would.
HAUGHTY. He has given it you, Centaur, i’ faith. But do you hear, Master Morose, a jest will not absolve you in this manner. You that have suck’d the milk of the court and from thence have been brought up to the very strong meats and wine of it, been a courtier from the biggen to the nightcap (as we may say), and you to offend in such a high point of ceremony as this, and let your nuptials want all marks of solemnity! How much plate have you lost today (if you had but regarded your profit), what gifts, what friends, through your mere rusticity?
MOROSE. Madam—
HAUGHTY. Pardon me, sir, I must insinuate your errors to you. No gloves? no garters? no scarves? no epithalamium? no mask?

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EPICOENE. Come, you are a rude bridegroom to entertain ladies of honor in this fashion.
CENTAUR. He is a rude groom, indeed. (62-84, 95-97)

While the Collegiates remain uncowed in the face of Morose’s bluster and bad manners, their interactions resist the image of genderless, artificial, and ineffective harpies.

Haughty’s remarks simply, though pointedly, highlights Morose’s failure as a host.

Except when competing for Dauphine’s attention in act 5 scene 2, where they regress to
personal insults, the Collegiates’s behavior only underscores the openly judgmental and cruel remarks and manipulative behaviors of their male counterparts.

After disparaging the Collegiate, and in the midst of his torment of Morose, Truewit, along with Clerimont, turns his attentions to Daw and La Foole, first mocking and baiting them, then inventing an elaborate ruse which ridicules their masculinity. Like Truewit and Morose, La Foole and Daw talk incessantly. In order to position themselves as virile men of culture or learning, the first prattles on about lineage, society, money, fashion and food while the latter writes verses and peppers his speech with Latin tags and the names of philosophers and poets whom he dismisses as “Grave asses! Mere essayists!” (2.3.46):

DAW. There’s Aristotle, a mere commonplace fellow; Plato, a discourser; Thucidides and Livy, tedious and dry; Tacitus an entire knot, sometimes worth the untying, very seldom.
CLERIMONT. What do you think of the poets, Sir John?
DAW. Not worth to be nam’d for authors. Homer, an old tedious prolix ass, talks of curriers and chines of beef. Virgil, of dunging of land, and bees. Horace, of I know not what. (53-59)

Despite being able to drop their names, Daw lacks the intellectual capacity to correctly interpret and assess their work, believing that his disparagement of them suffices for criticism. He remains, again like Truewit and Morose, enamored of his own voice. Neither fool sees that the crafty gentlemen merely lead them on. Daw and La Foole lack the wit to reason, the intelligence to recognize or construct a ruse, and personal courage, all traits that Truewit believes he himself retains. Thus, Truewit can exploit their weaknesses and use them in an elaborate performance that refocuses the amorous attentions of the College onto Dauphine. Spurred on by comments from La Foole and
Daw, the Collegiates believe that the young man is but a “very pitiful night” (4.4.143), a “very shark” at cards (146), who “has not a penny in his purse” (145). Truewit sets the stage, provides the lines, the costumes and props, and directs the players—Daw and La Foole—in their exits and entrances, once again demonstrating his superior control through language and manipulation. The gulling of Daw and La Foole accomplishes several things. It compares the masculine values that Truewit esteems and performs—reason, wit, and courage—to those Daw and La Foole perform—artifice, incompetence, and cowardice—and marks the former as superior. It portrays Dauphine’s masculinity as authentic and aligns it with Truewit’s own masculine vision. Once drawn to La Foole and Daw by their misinterpretation of Dauphine’s financial and social status, the Collegiates now believe that Dauphine is worthy of their attention. Thus, Truewit’s ruse appears to demonstrate that the Collegiates’ powers of judgment are easily influenced and shallow. Finally, it provides Truewit with an amusing diversion.

Along with other gentlemen in his social circle, and despite Truewit’s admonitions, Clerimont establishes his social identity as a virile gentleman through his interests and pursuits—women, drinking, gambling, and fashion. He positions his masculinity through his homosocial relationships with Truewit and Dauphine. He plays the confidant to Dauphine’s plot against his uncle, faithfully keeping the part of the secret he knows, and he facilitates Truewit’s gulling of Daw and La Foole. However, unlike the other men of his circle and the play, Clerimont is the only man presented as sexually active with both a “mistress abroad and his ingle at home” (1.2.23). He is in this sense virile, a characteristic that becomes especially important in his interactions with Daw and
La Foole. Because Clerimont holds both men in contempt—he calls the first “a neighing hobbyhorse” (4.4.49) and both a “cast of kastrils” (171)—he eagerly manipulates Daw and La Foole. Clerimont, as Harré notes, adopts a “story line [homosocial affability] which incorporates a particular interpretation” of a cultural stereotype—the successful libertine—and invites the men to conform to this standard (Harré 50):

Faith, now we are in private, let’s wanton it a little and talks waggishly. –Sir John, I’m telling Sir Amorous here that you two govern the ladies; where’er you come, you carry the feminine gender affore you. (5.1.24-27)

Here Clerimont creates a sense of camaraderie by exploiting their drunken state and appealing to their masculine self-interests. As one “prime” man to another (30), Clerimont builds on their pretension to “divide the kingdom or commonwealth of ladies’ affections” between them, and encourages them to admit to the “tasting” of Morose’s bride (42). While Daw and La Foole resist “wound[ing Epicoene’s] reputation” and initially avoid admitting the first taste, their reluctance to admit to a failure of virility and Clerimont’s agile performance of homosocial affability and superior verbal manipulations forces them to ”adopt complementary subject positions” (Harré 50) and admit to a story-line or autobiography constructed for them and not by them. Clerimont interactively positions them as “common slanderers” (5.4.214).

Dauphine’s success relies less on his language skills than on his ability to avoid any verbal conflict with his uncle and on his ability to keep Epicoene’s identity secret. He must keep as silent as Morose’s future bride and insure the silence of others. On his entrance in act 1, Dauphine responds to Truewit’s mention of the “tales o’ thine uncle” by demanding that he “lose this subject … for … [t]hey are such as you that have
brought me into that predicament” (1.2.4-6). Because Morose believes that his nephew and his friends “are the authors of all the ridiculous acts and monuments … told of him” (8-9), Dauphine does not want to engage in any further gossip about his uncle. Truewit’s failure to keep silent, in the initial verbal bullying of Morose, threatens to derail Dauphine’s plan and forces Dauphine to reveal his true relationship with Epicoene. However, that Epicoene is a plant and not a silent woman at all is only a half-truth, and Dauphine successfully maintains his silence regarding the most important aspect of the silent woman—that she is a gentleman’s son—until the final scene of the play.

Although Dauphine exploits the prattling and effusive natures of Daw and La Foole and includes them, along with the College and the combative Otters, in the impromptu wedding celebration that he organizes to invade Morose’s silent fortress, Dauphine remains relatively silent and unobtrusive until his revelation of Epicoene’s gendered identity. He is so solicitous to, and quiet in the presence of, his uncle that Haughty and Centaur mistake him for his uncle’s keeper, an assumption that encourages disparaging comments about Dauphine’s grace and social status (4.4.140). Curiously, Dauphine’s successful performance of gender depends not on how he does masculinity, but hinges rather on how poorly others perform theirs. Dauphine’s only public exhibition of masculinity occurs under the direction of Truewit, wherein Dauphine plays the disguised bully and the master wit by preying on Daw and La Foole’s lack of courage, wit, and grace. Moreover, Dauphine’s success at masculinity depends ultimately on how well Epicoene performs as a woman and how thoroughly that performance meets the expectations and definitions of gender held by others. If the men and women of the play
cannot perceive Epicoene’s femininity, then Dauphine’s own plan fails. However, if Epicoene’s performance is successful, then Dauphine’s plan succeeds, and the revelation that she is not a woman renders Morose’s masculinity ineffective.

In keeping with the theatrical conventions of humour comedies, a genre he promoted, Jonson chooses names for his characters that reflect their types: Morose is dour and humorless, Jack Daw a talkative fool and Sir Amorous La Foole a foolish knight, the Otters represent an inversion of gender roles, Cutbeard is a barber, and Mute doesn’t speak at all. Yet the names given to the Collegiates—Haughty, Centaur, and Mavis—do not reflect who they are, but rather how the men in the play see them; thus their names are misleading. Like their female counterparts, the names of the three gentlemen are also somewhat misleading. For although their names suggest versions of successful masculine performance or qualities, all three of the supposedly normative men—Truewit, Clerimont, and Dauphine—remain strikingly ambiguous in terms of their gender. Clerimont’s sexual involvement with both boys and women is an obvious example. However, Clerimont’s on-stage involvement with women remains limited to sexual punning in homosocial exchanges with Truewit or decrying women’s use of cosmetics. Despite admitting that he has “come around” (4.1.29-30) to Truewit’s assessment of Haughty’s attractiveness, Clerimont seems compelled to point out the ways in which women fail to perform gender. As for Dauphine, in naming this character, Jonson has curiously added an “e” to Dauphin, turning the French masculine into the French feminine—an anomaly in itself. Although Dauphine professes to be in love “with all the Collegiates” (4.1.128) after he becomes the focus of their sexual attention his
response to them lacks any enthusiasm or engagement. Instead, he notes that they “haunt me like fairies” and he complains that he “cannot be rid of ‘em” (5.2.45-46), comments that do not suggest a man who wants women—or at least these women. Furthermore, Truewit, like Clerimont, remains romantically and sexually uninvolved with the women of the play. When Dauphine asks, “On what courtly lap hast thou late slept” (4.1.121-125), Truewit’s response merely deflects the question of sexual/romantic involvement back to Dauphine. He expresses no active interest in women other than as types or creatures to study and manipulate. He uses his knowledge of women to refocus their interest on Dauphine, both for his friend’s advantage and for his own amusement. He peppers his discussions of women with allusions to architecture, books, science, or other masculine pursuits: one observes women at “court, . . . tiltings, public shows and feasts, . . . plays and church sometimes” (4.1.54-44). In spite of their belief that they represent the ideals of masculinity, which include virility, the men of this play remain oddly uninterested in women.

However, while being the master manipulator, in the end Truewit discovers he is not in total control; of all the men in the play, he appears to me to be the most troublesome. In addition to remaining physically uninvolved with women, Truewit reveals other characteristics for which he takes women, Morose, the fools, and even Clerimont to task. He reveals that he is as judgmental and opinionated as the women he criticizes. He initiates the gossip about the college, offering unflattering assessments of what he sees as their masculine presumptions. He enthusiastically participates in the mocking of Morose, labeling the old man a “stiff piece of formality” whose affliction is
“ridiculous” (1.1.140, 135). He rails against Jack Daw for his empty chatter and scholarly pretensions and suggests that the man’s proximity to Epicoene impugns her reputation (1.2.70). Truewit is the mastermind behind all the play’s deceptions, save one. And at the end of the play, despite being taken in by Dauphine’s ruse, it is Truewit who chides all who have been fooled by Epicoene’s performance. Furthermore, Truewit delights in the same diversions and social intrigues for which he rebukes Clerimont. He demonstrates a stubborn determination in his willingness to engage in subterfuge not only in Dauphine’s best interests, but also for his own amusement. This undermines any criticism he makes about how others squander their time or talent. In the first act, after Dauphine joins them and reveals Morose’s plan to marry Epicoene and disinherit him, Truewit is the first to suggest a proactive course of action to prevent the marriage by either tricking the silent women to speak or by tormenting the uncle (1.2.44-48). Although Dauphine clearly indicates he gives no support or “suffrage” to this course of action, Truewit impulsively flies to Morose’s home and wreaks havoc. Finally, Truewit manipulates the Collegiates, Daw, and La Foole, as well as Morose, all to achieve success for Dauphine.

All characters in Epicoene seek to create and use the authority and privilege afforded by masculinity in order to construct their lives and look to those within their social circle for approval and recognition. Early in the play, Clerimont requests Truewit’s permission to continue his social excess. Morose seeks to exercise his power over his nephew’s finances through the power of marriage and legal primogeniture, then asks for secular and ecclesiastic authorities to divest him of the same marriage. The women scholars of the College seek to govern their social circle and themselves, and the fools of
the play, Daw and La Foole, pretend to several forms of authority—linguistic, culinary, sexual, and social. Truewit believes that intellect, wit, courage, overt sexuality, and social independence belong solely to men and thus are the cornerstones of authority. He sees himself as the perfect example of that masculinity and through it assumes control over much of the play. While there are a variety of ways in which characters perform gender, success is not limited to normative displays of masculine intellect, wit, courage, sexuality or independence. In fact, the characters themselves do not exhibit the black and white characteristics prescribed for or disputed by seventeenth-century culture. In addition to the ambiguous nature of the play’s title character, the characters all appear to assume or adapt characteristics of both genders. What we see in Epicoene is not simply an inversion of gender, nor a variety of ways in which individuals position themselves in opposition to or in alignment with the aspects of gender that provide privilege. Rather, what we see is, to some degree an elision of gender. None of the masculinities, even that of Truewit, are ideal. All retain markers of femininity, only mimic those of masculinity, or are ambiguous. All are epicene.
CHAPTER IV

“THE PLEASURE OF BEING SO”:

THE FOP AND MASCULINITY

Egad, thou art a comical old gentleman, and I’ll tell thee a secret. Understand then, sir, from me, that all young fellows hate the name of fop as women do the name of whore. But, egad, they both love the pleasure of being so. . . . ’tis not Sir John Wouldlook’s aversion to dress, but his want of a fertile genius that would let him look like a gentleman.

Colley Cibber, Love’s Last Shift; or The Fool in Fashion, 3.2.180-194

Love’s Last Shift; or The Fool in Fashion (1697) introduced Sir Novelty Fashion to London theater audiences. Both the play and the character, written and performed by Colley Cibber, were enormously successful, so much so that in the same year John Vanbrugh wrote a sequel, The Relapse; or Virtue in Danger (1697). Vanbrugh’s piece included a new incarnation of Sir Novelty, now the Lord Foppington, and his friend Cibber once again played the role. The character, while not the first, is certainly one of the most famous fops of the Restoration stage. In Cibber’s play, Sir William Wisewoud attempts to insult Sir Novelty by labeling him “an egregious fop,” who takes “such an extravagant care” in dress and fashion, and whose “understanding goes naked for’t” (3.1.175). Sir Novelty proudly claims his identity, in the above epigraph, and cleverly argues against or deftly ignores all subsequent insults.
levied at him. His witty retort demonstrates not only how little such insults affect him, but also how little he cares for the performance of normative masculinity. Sir Novelty’s response also suggests that although he remains a willing slave to fashion, he recognizes that intelligence and wit is the main ingredient of a gentleman. Like Truewit in Jonson’s *Epicoene*, Sir Novelty Fashion is the main vehicle of the play’s wit.

Contemporary audiences eagerly anticipated the fop’s appearance, and his wit, his flamboyant fashions, and audacious behavior became essential elements of the Restoration stage. Between 1690 and 1725 the fop, or a similar type, appears in no less than sixty-five plays. While his name changed his dress, his witty repartee, and extravagant and eccentric performance remained essentially the same. Obsessed with continental fashions and manners, on the surface the fop is “a gaudy nothing” and a “vain piece of frippery.” George Etherege describes him as a young man who “went to Paris a plain bashful English Blockhead, and is return’d a fine undertaking *French Fopp*.”

Sir John Crowne’s Sir Courtly Nice, though admired for his politeness, exhibits a level of hygienic obsession that borders on “aberrant psychology” (Burns 106). In the list of

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17 See Mark Dawson’s excellent chapters on fops in *Gentility and the Comic Theater of Late Stuart London*. Robert G. Heilman’s essay of 1982 also provides a complete discussion about characters referred to as coxcombs, fools, and fops, including those after 1700: Charles Johnson’s *The Gentleman-Culley* (1702), Colley Cibber’s *The Careless Husband* (1704), James Moore Smythe’s, *The Rival Modes* (1727), David Garrick’s *A Miss in Her Teens* (1747), Samuel Foote’s *An Englishman in Paris* (1753), and Hannah Cowley’s *The Belle’s Stratagem* (1780). The earliest appearance of the Frenchified English fop appears in John Howard’s *The English Monsieur* (1663).

18 Thomas Shadwell, *The Royal Sheppardess* (1669). Cleanthes speaks the first epithet (2.25) and Evadne the second (3.35). No line numbers given in this edition.

19 *The Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter*. (1676) 4.1.139. All subsequent references to this play are to the Norton Critical Edition, Second Ed. 1997, which contains no line numbers; the numbers following the act and scene are page numbers.
characters, Wycherley describes Monsieur De Parris as “A vain Coxcomb and rich City-Heir, newly returned from France, and mightily affected with the French Language and Fashions.” 20 Careless and Mellefont, from Congreve’s The Double Dealer, call the affected Brisk a “pert” but “good natured coxcomb” with “entertaining follies.” 21 Brisk appears “so Becravated, and Beperiwg’d,” and enamored of gilt-edged paper, that even his brother, visting from the country, has no difficulty identifying his younger brother as a fop. 22 Such descriptions—his obsession with fashion, his exaggerated wigs, his ostentatious writing paper, and the use of adjectives such as “vain” and “frippery” to characterize him—suggest a character possessed of a vapid personality, associates the fop with femininity, and imply a failure of masculinity.

On first glance, analyses of the fop as a failed masculinity are accurate. Etherege’s Sir Foppling Flutter is indeed rather tangential to the main plot: His role is that of a blocking character to Dorimant’s rake. In general, the fop provides a critique of an increasingly fashion-obsessed society and reflects the ongoing rivalry between the English and the French. Because he is flagrantly self-absorbed, extravagant, and pretentious, he becomes the focus of thinly veiled jokes and insulting epithets. While he acts the lover—his version—he rarely succeeds in his pursuit of women who he competes for against, usually, the male lead. However, the fop is more than a peri-wigged fool, a caricature, or a comic foil against which others contrast their own performances of

21 William Congreve. The Double Dealer. (1693). 1.3. No line numbers given in this edition, see page 17.
masculinity. He is much more complex than this. This chapter examines the fop’s challenge to seventeenth century ideals of normative masculinity in plays by Etherege, John Crowne, and Colley Cibber, and argues that he performs gender through the theatricality of effeminate excess, as well as through appropriation and adaptation of prescriptive masculinity. While exploring the nature of masculine power, identity, and transgression this chapter adopts the term “cross-gendered ease” as defined by Stephen Szilagyi. Szilagyi defines the term as a performance of gender that conflates “masculinity, aristocratic selfishness and . . . feminine self-governance” (143) in order to construct a viable social and gender identity. It is important to distinguish the fop’s performance of masculinity from that which we might see as a weak, soft, or effeminate—in the modern sense of the word—nature, and instead identify it as the ability to comfortably employ gender characteristics and adopt a gendered identity that combines elements of both masculinity and femininity.

Earlier critics tend to agree with negative assessments of the fop: his presentation is so rife with feminine gestures and affectations that his performance of masculinity appears to fail completely or seems asexual. He is not only at the periphery of gender, but is tangential to the play, and occurs as an amusing diversion within the central action of a play. In his 1970 essay on *The Man of Mode* (1676), Kenneth Muir argues that that the fop character, Sir Fopling Flutter, although “amusing,” remains “on the periphery of the plot” and appears simply to be used by the principal characters (32). Similarly, Moira Casey claims the fop character exists to serve as the “foil to the ultramasculine rake,” as a “comic obstacle to the final resolution,” or to “create certain
dramatic ‘difficulties’” (208, 211). She adds that the fop “represents the false wit, exaggerated fashions, and superficial aspirations of pretentious Restoration courtiers” (208) or what Robert B. Heilman calls “a kind of social absolutism” (388), one that assigns a negative value to one performance of modishness, and a positive authority to a normative performance of masculinity. Finally, Susan Staves categorizes the fop as an “asexual” coward who prefers “to spend [his] time with the ladies” (414).

The fop establishes a social and gender identity by using the same verbal skills employed the gentleman-rake, raillery, wit, good manners, manipulation, and even bravery, the authority afforded by financial and class independence, and charm. However, his goal is not gender normativity—to present himself as the ideal male, such as Jonson’s Truewit imagines; nor is it to present as an ideal French male, because he is content and proud of his English blood. Rather, he aspires to an autonomous identity that adapts prevailing gendered norms as his own and constructs a distinctive self. While the fop frequently seems vapidly self-absorbed, he also demonstrates a well-developed self-awareness. His theatrical effeminacy is not failed manhood, but a means to establish an unconventional yet complementary form of masculinity—it is a cross-gendered ease.

The fop self-consciously adjusts his performance of this masculinity to his own tastes. The keystone of the fop’s version of masculinity is one of extravagant performance: of manners, stylish dress (bows, ribbons, and lace), physical accoutrements (the snuffbox, the cane), complaisance, and wit. Thus, although he emulates masculinity as performed by the well-dressed gentleman—the wit, the manners, and social ease—the fop makes it his own. He is a self-made man. However, once he establishes this social
and gendered identity, because it is not an exact mimesis of the normative, the fop must defend it against external pressures that both question its authority and seek to displace it. Andrew Williams argues that the gentleman-wit or libertine, the social identity the fop most actively emulates, achieves visibility through “the social attention that comes from being the focal point of dramatic speech or action” (“Center” par. 1). For an identity to be sustained and successful, its attributes must be publicly recognized in social circumstances that contribute to its goals (Williams, “Soft” 96-97). In the comedy of manners, the fop must adequately respond to those who challenge his identity. Moreover, the fop successfully maintains and sustains his identity through the delight he experiences in being marked as unique and special. He not only must be visible in his social world, he insists upon it. Although William’s concentrates on the masculinity of the libertine-rake (the character against whom the fop is contrasted), I will extend his observations using the claims and definitions of both Harré and Connell.

As the title suggests, in Etherege’s The Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter (1696), Sir Fopling’s exaggerated dress and manners distinguish him from the authentic masculinity of Dorimant, the libertine-rake and implied man of mode. Although several plays utilize the dressing room as the initial setting for the introduction of both the fop and the female leads, Etherege opens his play with Dorimant, déshabillé, at his morning ablutions. For a fop, this setting provides the audience with an opportunity to witness the extravagant and studied nature of his attachment to fashion and pretense. Although Dorimant states that he rejects many of the trappings of fashion—the use of “orange-flower water” for example—and complains of his man’s ministrations, he readily admits
that he loves to “have [his] clothes hang just” so, bristles at the “wrinkles” in the fabric of his new shoes, and responds enthusiastically to Medley’s admiration of his “pretty suit” (1.1.97-98). Although he may not go to the lengths that we see in Sir Fopling, Dorimant, the real man, is as enamored with his own looks and physical presentation as the fop. Nevertheless, as they turn to discussing Sir Fopling, the Dorimant and Medley actively construct the fop as flawed for vanity, his wit, and suggest his failure as a lover, thus equating the fop’s obsession with appearance to a failed masculinity.

One sees this double standard of masculinity at play in Harriet’s assessment of Dorimant the would-be lover and Young Bellair the intended husband. Harriet identifies both young men as stylish and masculine. She observes that Young Bellair “wears his clothes fashionably and has a pretty, negligent way with him, very courtly . . . He bows, and talks, and smiles so agreeably as he thinks,” but also “much affected” (3.1.113). The audience cannot help but hear the note of disdain and displeasure in her voice, echoed in her later remarks about Dorimant. Although Dorimant presents as “agreeable and pleasant” and peppers his speech with Waller’s poetry, for Harriet they are merely affectations that displease her (3.3.124). However, neither the pretentious use of poetry nor a preoccupation with fashion prevents the consideration of either man as an acceptable suitor. Harriet, like other female characters in the play, accepts Dorimant’s and Young Bellair’s style as normative and masculine. In contrast, the play’s characters continually criticize Sir Fopling for similar, albeit somewhat exaggerated, behaviors including his clothing, his uninhibited dancing, and his effusive speech. Despite the abuse, the fop makes few adjustments to his presentation and, while Waller may be the
better poet, the recitation of his own poetry suggests that at least Sir Fopling has the
initiative to write his own verses, whereas Dorimant can only walk about reciting the
words of others. In the end, it is Dorimant and Young Bellair who must compromise their
behavior. Young Bellair feigns love to Harriet in order to appease Harriet’s guardian and
deflect his uncle’s attention from his passion for Emilia, and at play’s end Dorimant
agrees to “journey into the country” and “live there and never send one thought to
London” (5.2.160).

The fop does not fully adopt the characteristics associated with masculinity,
nor does he fully internalize those of femininity. Rather, he retains those that amuse or
serve him. For example, he demonstrates both the capacity for masculine courage and the
facility for feminine grace, but exaggerates their performance, which sets him apart from
other men and establishes his own extraordinary personal and social identity. He
accomplishes this through his dress, his gestures, and his speech, all of which are not
quite masculine and not quite feminine—they are cross-gendered, but they are also
autonomous. Williams argues that, “autonomous selfhood became the sole province of
the libertine” who built his identity around “a voracious sexual appetite, a permanent
state of skepticism, and a code of personal conduct” (“Soft Women” 96). The libertine
dominated “autonomous selfhood” through a loud, “unrepentant,” and very public display
of “pleasure and power” (95). Although the differently gendered (the feminine or the
weak male) “lack[ed] the . . . ingredients” necessary for autonomy (the social sanction or
capacity to be loud, public and unrepentant), Williams suggests that his selfhood
depended on the very presence of such individuals. Although this implies that this form
of masculinity is the social and gendered identity against which all others are measured, it also suggests a corresponding dependence on the social context constructed by the presence of those same others. Without the fop and his cross-gendered ease there is little to compare the libertine with save in relationship to the femininity of an authentic female presence—another normative performance of gender. It is the fop’s cross-gendered ease, his conflated masculine and feminine identity and autonomy, which inflates the masculinity of the rake, may diminish femininity, and disrupts the binary nature of gender. The fop performs his cross-gendered in the same unrepentant, blatant, and very public manner as the libertine. It follows that the fop’s delight in his own “spectacle” does not simply come from his excessive display but through establishing his “self-sufficiency” and autonomy (King 229). Sir Novelty’s proclamation that while “young fellows hate the name of fop” they “love the pleasure of being so” demonstrates not only his self-sufficiency and autonomy, but also his self-satisfaction in being the role that he chooses for and tailors to himself.

Wit is a crucial element of Restoration masculinity, both on and off the stage. Rakes, gentlemen, and poets entertained themselves in chocolate houses and drawing rooms with “free and affable” “conceits of wit and pleasant invention” (Peacham 231). Moria Casey asserts that the fop’s wit “usually falls short, particularly in comparison to the other gentleman” (210). However, Williams counters that the fop’s “theatric and affected behavior” results in a “one man metatheater” allowing him to “[monopolize] the social space” in which he finds himself (Williams, “Center” par. 8-9), a definition which easily describes Jonson’s Truewit. Rather than displaying a “false wit,” the fop is “most
adept at reinforcing his social present through conversational means,” relying upon “conversational raillery” or turning “himself into the topic of conversation or commentary” (par. 13).

We see the fop apply this strategy throughout the plays, but especially in act 2 scene 1 of Cibber’s *Love’s Last Shift* (1696). In this scene Sir Novelty Fashion succeeds at disrupting authentic masculinity by trading thinly veiled barbs with his rival Young Worthy as they vie for Narcissa’s attention.

YOUNG WORTHY. Pray madam, give me leave to beg a word in private with you. *(To Sir Novelty, who is taking snuff).* Sir, if you please—
FASHION. *(Offering his box)* Aye sir, with all my heart.
YOUNG WORTHY. Sir—
FASHION. Nay ‘tis right, I’ll assure you.
YOUNG WORTHY. Aye, sir. But now the lady would be alone.
FASHION. Sir!
YOUNG WORTHY. The lady would be alone, sir.
FASHION. I don’t hear her say such thing.
YOUNG WORTHY. Then I tell you so, and I would advise you to believe me.
FASHION. I shall not take your advice, sir. But if you really think the lady would be alone, why—you had best leave her.
YOUNG WORTHY. In short, sir, your company is very unreasonable at present.
FASHION. I can tell you sir, if you have no more wit than manners, the lady will be scurvily entertained. (252-270)

In this exchange we witness two important aspects of the fop’s personality. While remaining affable and civil, Sir Novelty Fashion resists Young Worthy’s insistence that he leave, simultaneously maintaining decorum by challenging it. His witty, polite, yet pointed verbal sparring demonstrates his “ability to use social and linguistic artifice for personal ends” in a socially appropriate and acceptable way—raillery between rivals
(Burns 17). In doing so, he reveals he lacks neither confidence nor courage. Secondly, Sir Novelty challenges Worthy’s dominance over both himself and Narcissa. As he enters this scene, Worthy interrupts the conversation between the fop and the young woman, and in doing so silences the female voice. However, by pretending to understand Young Worthy’s initial interrupter “Sir, if you please” as a request for snuff, Sir Novelty skillfully deflects the former’s attempt to assert his primacy.

In addition, this misunderstanding juxtaposes the request for snuff, an inanimate object, with the request for Narcissa’s undivided attention and sets up the accusation of Young Worthy’s rudeness. Sir Novelty in a sense aligns himself with Narcissa and gives her the time required to assert control over her own needs. Indeed, Narcissa swiftly upbraids both men and commands them to reveal their business with her (2.1.271). It provides Narcissa the opportunity to control the scene and establish the rules of the verbal contest: “[H]e that speaks the greater passion shall have the fairest return” (287-9) and determine the order in which each man will plead his case. This contest is more than mildly reminiscent of the control that Grace Welborn exerts over Quarlous and Winwife in *Bartholomew Fair*. Like Grace, Narcissa buys time in order to take each man’s measure. Although she allows Sir Novelty to proceed first, because she wants to hear herself “praised a little,” and Young Worthy sees through her game, in Narcissa’s eyes neither man will win, at least at this moment. Despite her frustration at Sir Novelty’s conceit, Young Worthy fairs no better. While he gives a pretty speech complimenting her “head . . . smile . . . blush [and fan],” (368-377) Narcissa mocks him mercilessly behind his back. However, winning Narcissa’s approval is not Sir Novelty’s goal; his objective is
to remain at center stage. He does so by declaring his unshakeable self-confidence that “to be beloved by one eminently particular person whom all the Town knows and talks of [himself] than to be adored by five hundred dull souls [Young Worthy] that have lived incognito” provides the “beloved” [Narcissa] preeminent glory (354-58). Although he angers Narcissa, he bests his rival.

However, despite playing his masculine role appropriately, Young Worthy does so disingenuously. He fails to eject his rival and allows a woman to manipulate him into “a little flattery” then mock him for his efforts. In contrast, Sir Novelty’s self-image and autonomy remain intact as he resists Narcissa’s demand for adoration, and Young Worthy’s bid for dominance, and redirects “the dramatic centrality” (Williams, “Center” par. 1) of both the socially proficient, ultramasculine rake and the appropriately feminine female lead to himself.

We see further examples of the fop’s ability to deflect and redirect, as well as his cross-gendered ease, in Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1696), where Sir Novelty returns as Lord Foppington.23 His affectations, in addition to his famous perruke, have grown along with his self-confidence, his talent for raillery, and his courage. After misreading Amanda’s verbal clues as flirtation, Foppington professes his love, despite the presence of her husband Loveless. Responding to Amanda’s offended cry of shock, Loveless draws his sword, at which Lord Foppington neither flees nor apologizes but engages

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23 Colley Cibber’s fop was perhaps the most famous of the period. Foppington, portrayed by Cibber himself, appears in no less than four plays, two by the actor playwright and one by Vanbrugh. Cibber’s final appearance as Foppington, in the newly made Earl of Late Airs, was in *The Rival Modes* (1726) by Moore Smythe. The elder Cibber, then 66, played opposite his 24-year-old son, Theophilus, who starred as the Earl’s son Lord Toupet.
Loveless in a fight, which of course he loses. Believing himself wounded, Foppington, the consummate gentleman, graciously, albeit melodramatically, apologizes and forgives his host (2.1.416-419). Once again, in a scene focused on Amanda’s interactions with her relapsing husband and her would-be lover, as well as with her husband’s latest romantic intrigue, it is Foppington who seizes center stage at its throughout.

Acceptance by a social set into its circle does not always come through the individual’s direct efforts but can be a result of comparison with others less acceptable. For example, John Crown compares his fop, Sir Courtly Nice,24 not only with Farewel the masculine lead, but also with Surly the boor and with Testimony the Puritan fanatic. Farewel satirizes Sir Courtly as “the general guitar o’ the town, inly’d with every thing women fancy … so civil a creature, and so respectful … so gentle … so pleased with his own person” (2.1.275-277). Although taken to task for his self-absorption, hyper-civility, and acceptance by the women whose company he seeks, Sir Courtly in fact shares these traits with Truewit from Epicoene and Quarlous from Bartholomew Fair. Furthermore, the criticism and treatment he receives at the hands of Surly and Testimony positions the fop more favorably, despite their attack on his masculinity. Testimony refers to him as a “sad object,” a “wanton frothy young man” who “comes arm’d with a strong bow and arrows . . . made of ribbons, laces, and other idel [sic] vanities” (4.1.314-315). In the presence of Lenora, Surly comments that Sir Courtly is “all but needlework . . . [fit] for a tapestry,” but unfit for a husband, and that “he deserves [no more] favors than to be decently hang’d with the rest of his brothers,” a slur that suggests the transgressive nature

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24 Sir Courtly Nice; or It Cannot Be. 1685. There are no line numbers in Logan’s 1874 edition; the numbers following act and scene designations are page numbers.
of Sir Courtly’s gendered or sexual proclivities (322). Because the play clearly paints the
boor and the fanatic in an unsavory light, their insults as well as their behaviors distance
them from the fop. In a social set dominated by the unrepentant libertine, who would
exclude him from the same social set, this distance facilitates Sir Courtly’s membership,
if not extra-ordinary, then in ordinary in a social set that would normally exclude him,
and allows him to demonstrate his cross-gendered ease with hyper-masculine energy.
While he does not directly respond to Surly’s slur on his masculinity, Sir Courtly easily
deflects it with his own witty rebuke that satirizes Surly’s claim as gentleman, defends
Lenora’s honor, and reminds the boor of his inferior social position to his “mistress.”
Challenged to a duel by Surly, Sir Courtly does not shy away, but rather calmly accepts,
despite his fear that “[i]f his filthy sword shou’d touch me, ‘twoud make me as sick as a
dog,” reflecting, not cowardice, but his phobic concern with hygiene (4.1.324). His
responses to these challenges demonstrate his courage, as well as his ability to maintain
and defend his social identity. Although we laugh at his neurosis and affectations, as well
as his eventual gulling, we cannot help but feel a certain admiration for his ability to
remain polite and calm under stress.

Lord Foppington’s penultimate appearance on stage comes in The Careless
Husband (1704). While he remains an affected “Coxcomb” and pursues Lady Betty
unsuccessfully, his version of masculinity earns the respect of other male characters.
Foppington is now part of a fraternity that includes other beaux and rakes. His focus on
fashion is on his horses, “Long-Tails” who are “Six of the Best Nags in Christendom”

25 There are no line numbers in Haberman’s 1923 edition; the numbers following act and
scene designations are page numbers.
and “known in every Road in England”—a required obsession for a gentleman (1.1.32). Although direct references to his obsession for clothing are missing, allusion and association establish that these affectations remain part of his character. For example, his first mention occurs in act 1 and connects him with a Lord Startup, described as a man “with a cane dangling at his Button, his Breast open, no Gloves, one Eye tuck’d under his Hat, and Toothpick” (22). This portrait describes both the libertine-rake and the fop. Both types fixate on their dress and appearance. Furthermore, the men and women in the play recognize Foppington as a lady’s man, despite his failed pursuit of Lady Betty. Sir Charles alludes to the fop’s extensive knowledge of women and credits him with having “a pretty just Esteem for most Ladies about Town.” Moreover, he recommends that Lord Morelove seek Foppington’s advice regarding his flirtation with Lady Betty. Sir Charles’s comments to Morelove indicate just how extensively Lord Foppington’s image has changed:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . the Women
now begin to laugh With him, not At him: for he
really sometimes rallies his own Humor with so much
Ease and Pleasantry, that a great many Women begin to
think he has no Follies at all, and those he has, have
been as much owing to his Youth, and great Estate,
as want of natural Wit. (1.1.25)

In this incarnation, Lord Foppington’s prowess and potential as a lover is effective enough to raise concerns about a woman’s reputation. Lady Easy remarks she has seen Foppington take “a great many… Freedoms” with Lady Betty, and she “should not think” her own “Reputation safe” with a “Man who talks often of his Amours” as does Lord Foppington (2.1.28-29). While much of what Foppington says about his
marriage, a woman’s reputation, her virtue and the “Game” of love are, to the modern reader, quite misogynistic, they are reflective of general attitudes concerning women. Although important in most discussions of gender, I choose not to address the misogynistic nature of such comments in this essay. Rather it is important to note that such comments, and the theatrical raillery that occurs between men, demonstrate Lord Foppington’s obsession for women and allows him an active role in the intrigue that will pair Lady Betty with Lord Morelove. Like Morelove, the designated libertine, Foppington’s obsession with liking women, marks him as effeminate.

While the obsession with liking women remains an integral part of effeminate behavior, both libertine and fop must remain in control and not be caught up by the seductive power of women. Sir Charles describes Foppington as a “man of Sense” who is “wisely vain enough to keep himself from being too much the Ladies Humble Servant in Love.” In contrast, Lady Betty’s view of “Men of Sense” is that they “make the best Fools in the World, their Sincerity and good Breeding throws ‘em intirely into ones Power, and give one such an agreeable Thirst of using ‘em ill, to Shew that Power—‘tis impossible not to quench it “ (2.1.27). However, it is Lord Morelove who suffers from Lady Betty’s power and not Foppington. Although he is unsuccessful in his bid for Lady Betty’s affections, Foppington’s actions do not imply that he would pursue to the point of sexual submission. Instead, Foppington appears to play the game of love for the pure sport of it, for the power and pleasure it gives him (Williams “Soft Women” 96). Furthermore, while Morelove stews and fumes, frets and worries as Lady Betty eludes him, Foppington astutely handles her shifting affections. In the final act, Foppington once
again demonstrates his gracious ability to rally after rejection and dismiss any affront to his character. As Morelove and Lady Betty finally come together, Foppington blesses their union:

LORD FOPPINGTON. O, Madam, don’t be under the Confusion of an Apology upon my Account; for in Cases of this Nature I am never Disappointed, but when I find a Lady of the same Mind two hours together--------Madam, I have lost a thousand Fine Women in my time; but never had the Ill Manners to be out of Humour with any one for refusing me since I was Born.

LADY BETTY. My Lord, that’s a very prudent Temper

LORD FOPPINGTON. Madam, to Convince you that I am in an universal Peace with Mankind, since you own I have so far Contributed to your Happiness give me leave to have the Honour of compleating it, by joining your Hand where you have already offer’d up your Inclination. (5.7. 90-91)

Although the fop often suffers ridicule and insult for his version of masculinity, if we judge him by his own standards, which include a “cross-gendered” ease with both men and women, he is anything but a failed man. His affable, effusive, and effeminate theatricality provide him with the theatrical devices he needs to claim and maintain his chosen identity as a fop. His goal is not to gain the attention of women, but to remain the center of attention of all by wresting the focus away from even the main romantic leads. As Sir Novelty Fashion and Sir Courtly Nice, the fop moves from the periphery to the center of the romantic-comic plots. His wit and verbal acumen reveal his tenacious and intelligent nature as he defends himself against those who would challenge him as both a rival and as a man. As Lord Foppington, he not only proves his ability to woo and marry, following the norms of his social set as well as his own standards, but he also secures his social and personal identity as a man of sense for whom others show
respect and to whom others turn for advice. The fop is not just a distorted version of the rake, but rather a self-aware, fully autonomous social identity, whose performance of cross-gendered ease establishes and exhibits a valid presentation of masculinity, while remaining comfortable in his preferred effeminacy.
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