THE DRAMATIC ART OF SUSANNA CENTLIVRE

THE DRAMATIC ART OF SUSANNA CENTLIVRE

by

FREDERICK PETER LOCK, M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

December 1974

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1975) McMASTER UNIVERSITY

(English) Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The Dramatic Art of Susanna Centlivre

AUTHOR: Frederick Peter Lock, B.A. (University of Cambridge)

M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor A. D. Hammond

NUMBER OF PAGES: x, 264

ABSTRACT

This is a comprehensive critical and theatrical study of the nineteen plays of Susanna Centlivre (1669-1723). After an initial chapter that examines the work of three women dramatists active in the years 1695-1700, the seven following chapters are each devoted to between one and four of Mrs. Centlivre's plays. The order of treatment is chronological, but most space is alloted to the three major plays, The Busie Body (1709), The Wonder (1714), and A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718). Literary concerns such as plot, structure, and character are considered, as well as theatrical qualities such as pace, timing, and tension. No uniformity of treatment is attempted, however, and such aspects of each play are discussed as seem most appropriate.

New primary material includes the manuscript epilogues for a private performance of The Gamester; the original receipt for Curll's payments to Mrs. Centlivre; the Advice from Parnassus; and the prompt-books of The Wonder. But more significant than this new material is the study's theatrical emphasis: its analysis of particular scenes to bring out their theatrical qualities, and the reconstruction of the staging of The Busie Body and Mar-Plot (1710).

The study's conclusion recognises the essentially

theatrical nature of Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic art, and reconstructs the "typical" Centlivre play from examples drawn from her most characteristic comedies. Overall, the study combines critical enquiry into the "art" of a dramatist's oeuvre with a historical investigation of its theatrical environment.

PREFACE

This study approaches Mrs. Centlivre's plays from three interrelated points of view: historical, critical, and theatrical. My thesis is implicit in my title: that as well as being a professional dramatist, Mrs. Centlivre had a "dramatic art".

Scholarly study of Mrs. Centlivre began in the early years of this century with several dissertations by German scholars on the sources and literary relationships of her plays. These were not followed by any work of synthesis or larger scope, and it was left to an American, John Wilson Bowyer, to attempt a comprehensive study of her life and works. His Harvard thesis was completed in 1928, although the book which finally emerged, The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre, was not published until 1952. Bowyer's book assembles almost all the relevant references and allusions, and it remains the essential starting-point for any study of Mrs. Centlivre. For all its thoroughness, however, Bowyer's work is disappointing from a critical point of view, and he hardly discusses the plays in theatrical terms at all. Bowyer too rarely moves beyond plot summary, and draws few inferences from the wealth of his assembled facts.

This situation has been partially remedied by three recent theses. Thalia Stathas has edited Mrs. Centlivre's three major plays, and her edition of one of them (A Bold Stroke for a Wife) has been published in the Regents' Restoration Drama Series. Henry ten Hoor's thesis is a study of seven of Mrs. Centlivre's plays, and Terrence Burke examines A Bold Stroke. Apart from incidental references in general studies, the only recent published criticism of Mrs. Centlivre is an article by Robert Strozier in Discourse (1964). Thus there still seems to be a place for a study that is at once critical and comprehensive.

The particular emphasis of this study is on Mrs. Centlivre's plays as works of the theatre. In my view, no previous critic has given this aspect of her work sufficient attention. I analyse particular scenes in order to bring out their theatrical quality, and I look at Mrs. Centlivre's plays in terms of pace and tension as well as plot and character. The methods that I apply, particularly in the close analysis of stage directions, to reconstruct the staging of The Busie Body and Mar-Plot, have been used for plays of the restoration and earlier, but not, so far as I am aware, for plays of this period. This is something that I hope to be able to take further in a subsequent study.

The primary material that is presented here for the first time includes the manuscript epilogues to The Gamester, discussed in chapter III; the original receipt for Curll's payments to Mrs. Centlivre, with her signature, mentioned in chapters VI and VIII; the Advice from Parnassus, discussed in chapter VIII; and the prompt-books of The Wonder, which are the subject of the appendix.

Specific scholarly debts are recorded below, but here I would like to mention Richard Southern's Changeable Scenery (1952), which stimulated my investigation of the staging of Mrs. Centlivre's plays, thus opening up a whole new line of enquiry.

All quotations preserve the spelling and punctuation of the original, with the following exceptions. Obvious misprints (turned letters, wrong fount) are silently corrected. The long s is not reproduced. In quoting material (such as dedications, prologues, stage directions) printed in italic with roman used for emphasis, I have transposed the whole into roman and underlined for emphasis. In quoting dialogue, I have expanded and regularised speech prefixes, placing them on separate lines; stage directions from the original are placed in parentheses, and my additions are enclosed in brackets.

Except where otherwise stated, all quotations

from Mrs. Centlivre's plays are from the first editions, to which page references refer. With other contemporary plays, I have similarly quoted from the first editions, except where there is a modern edition available. In order to reduce foot-notes to a minimum, short references are incorporated into the text wherever possible. Full details of editions used will be found in the bibliography. The following works are cited very frequently, and they are referred to throughout simply by author's name and page:

Bowyer	John Wilson Bowyer, The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre (Duke University Press, 1952).
Norton	J. E. Norton, "Some Uncollected Authors, XIV: Susanna Centlivre", Book Collector, VI (1957), 172-78, 280-85.
Van Lennep Avery Scouten Stone Hogan	The London Stage, 1660-1800, ed. William van Lennep, Emmett L. Avery, Arthur H. Scouten, George W. Stone, and Charles B. Hogan, 5 pts in 11 vols (Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1960-68). Since each part is paged continuously, Avery, p. 58, serves as a reference.

Most of the research for this study was carried out at the McMaster University Library and the University of Queensland Library. I am grateful to McMaster University for travel grants which enabled me to visit the New York Public Library, the British Library, the Bodleian Library, and the library of Christ Church, Oxford.

It is a pleasure to record more personal debts to my supervisor, Dr. Antony Hammond, for his advice, encouragement, and scholarly example; and to my wife for

entering into the spirit of Mrs. Centlivre and drawing the diagrams on p. 114.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

"THE VACANT THRONE"

> Crinda, and the Fair Astrea gone,
> Not one was found to fill the Vacant Throne:
> Aspiring Man had quite regain'd the Sway,
> Again had Taught us humbly to Obey;
> Till you (Natures third start in favour of our Kind)
> With stronger Arms, their Empire have disjoyn'd,
> And snatcht a Lawrel which they thought their Prize,
> Thus Conqu'ror, with your Wit, as with your Eyes.[1]

Neither Mary Manley, who wrote these lines, nor Catherine Trotter, to whom they were addressed, proved the real successor to Astrea's "Vacant Throne". But the interregnum between the death of Mrs. Behn in 1689 and the emergence of Mrs. Centlivre in 1700 makes a fitting prologue to a study of the latter's plays. Mary Manley, Catherine Trotter, and Mary Pix, the women who were active in the theatre during these years, achieved neither lasting fame nor notoriety. But a consideration of their careers helps set the scene for a study of Mrs. Centlivre, not because their plays provided her with inspiration, but because the circumstances in which they were produced (deduced from prologues and epilogues, prefaces and dedications, and contemporary allusions) offer revealing insights into the workings of the anti-feminine prejudice of which Mrs. Centlivre, in her early career, complains.

---

[1] Mrs. Manley, commendatory verses prefaced to Agnes de Castro (1696).

The actual plays of these women are not remarkable, either in themselves, or as being identifiably feminine or feminist.

Aphra Behn was the first woman to make an important contribution to English drama. Mrs. Behn was a frankly commercial playwright who wrote for the public taste and usually accepted its verdict on her work. If the public wanted bawdy, she supplied it. She did not seek, or need, special treatment on account of being a woman. That she wrote like her male contemporaries is confirmed by the plays that are disputed between them.[2] Occasionally, however, Mrs. Behn complained of anti-feminine prejudice. A notable example is the epilogue to Sir Patient Fancy (1678), in which she asks:

> What has poor Woman done, that she must be
> Debarr'd from Sense, and Sacred Poetry?
> . . . . . pray tell me then,
> Why Women should not write as well as Men.[3]

Not all of Mrs. Behn's contemporaries would have accepted this as a rhetorical question. The case for the opposition is put, if hardly argued, by Critick in the Comparison between the Two Stages (1702): "What a Pox have the Women to do with the Muses? I grant you the Poets call the Nine

---

[2]Mrs. Behn's authorship of The Debauchee and The Revenge has been disputed, the latter with Betterton.

[3]Works, ed. Montague Summers (1915), IV, 115-116.

Muses by the Names of Women, but why so? not because the Sex had anything to do with Poetry, but because in that Sex they're much fitter for prostitution".[4] This prejudice against women as writers lingered on through Mrs. Centlivre's career. The portrait of Phoebe Clinket in Three Hours after Marriage (1717) shows an authoress censured because "instead of puddings she makes pastorals".[5] Phoebe Clinket has been identified as a satirical portrait of Mrs. Centlivre, although this has been disputed.[6]

By showing that a woman could compete on terms of equality in what had been a man's world, Mrs. Behn did the feminist cause a great service. In her Essay in Defence of the Female Sex (1696), Mary Astell recognised this when she offered as models of feminine excellence "the noble examples of the deservedly celebrated Mrs. Philips, and the incomperable Mrs. Behn".[7] It may be

---

[4] Comparison, ed. S. B. Wells (1942), p. 17

[5] In Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Simon Trussler (1969), p. 100.

[6] George Sherburn, "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Three Hours after Marriage", Modern Philology, XXXIV (1926-27), 91-109, makes the identification, although it is disputed by Bowyer, pp. 194-206.

[7] Essay, p. 56. The authorship of the Essay is in doubt: see Florence M. Smith, Mary Astell (1916), pp. 173-182.

wrong to read into "deservedly Celebrated" a hint of moral approbation, but it was certainly unfortunate that Katherine Philips became the type of the poetess, and Aphra Behn the type of the woman dramatist. For the bawdiness of her plays, although not exceptional for the period, and the looseness of her personal life, made it a disreputable type. John Duncombe, while celebrating the female pen, excepted some of the best-known women writers in these words:

> The modest Muse a veil with pity throws
> O'er Vice's friends and Virtue's female foes;
> Abash'd she views the bold unblushing mien
> Of modern *Manley, Centlivre, and Behn;
>
> *The first of these wrote the scandalous memoirs call'd Atalantis, and the other two are notorious for the indecency of their plays.[8]

This is unfair, for neither Mrs. Behn nor Mrs. Centlivre exceeded their contemporaries in bawdiness. Certainly none of the latter's plays approach Three Hours after Marriage in this respect.

Mrs. Centlivre's reputation for personal and dramatic indecency was largely undeserved. It really began with the "biographies" published after her death. In what is really an obituary notice, Abel Boyer, who had known Mrs. Centlivre as early as 1700, speaks of "several gay Adventures (over which we shall draw a Veil)".[9] John

---

[8] The Feminiad (1754), pp. 14-15.

[9] The Political State of Great Britain, XXVI (1723), 671.

Mottley, who had also known Mrs. Centlivre personally, was less reticent. In his account we find her cohabiting with Anthony Hammond, "married, or something like it" to a Mr. Fox, who was himself "succeeded in her Affections" by a Mr. Carrol.[10] In the published letters between Mrs. Centlivre and Farquhar, there is mentioned a man called Ustick, and in her marriage licence she is described as "Carrol als Rawkins".[11] Of all these relationships, only the marriage to Joseph Centlivre in 1707 is certainly regular. But some at least of the "gay Adventures" are probably apocryphal. Mottley introduces his account of the Hammond episode with the disclaimer "if we may give Credit to some private Stories concerning her" (p. 185). True or not, Mottley's anecdotes passed into theatrical history and helped tarnish the reputation of women dramatists. Not that all the women who wrote plays had dubious reputations: only the most successful.

Mrs. Behn had no immediate successors. It was not until 1695 that another play by a woman was produced in

---

[10] A List of All the English Dramatic Authors, appended to Scanderbeg (1747), pp. 135-138.

[11] Bowyer, pp. 92-93. Bowyer's credulous attitude to the early biographies should be corrected by the sane attitude of James Sutherland, "The Progress of Error: Mrs. Centlivre and the Biographers", Review of English Studies, XVII (1942), 167-182.

London. This was She Ventures and He Wins, a comedy performed at Lincon's Inn Fields about September 1695 (Van Lennep, p. 452). The anonymous authoress, who signs herself "Ariadne", apologises in her preface for "an infinite Number of Faults" which she candidly admits she is "not able to mend". Ariadne's is no "bold unblushing mien". She continues with the modest disclaimer that: "I believe the best Apology I can make for my Self and Play, is, that 'tis the Error of a weak Woman's Pen, one altogether unlearn'd, ignorant of any, but her Mother-Tongue, and very far from being a perfect Mistress of that too." This assumption that the lack of a classical education was a real handicap for an authoress was not shared by all the women of the time. Mary Astell makes this shrewd observation: "I have often thought that the not teaching Women Latin and Greek, was an advantage to them, if it were rightly consider'd, and might be improv'd to a great heigth." (Essay, p. 57). She argues that the time saved on the classics could usefully be spent on the study of English language and literature. This attitude to the lumber of classical learning is well ahead of its time.

"Ariadne" was not long alone. Agnes de Castro, a tragedy, was produced at Drury Lane about December 1695, and published the following month as "Written by a Young Lady" (Van Lennep, p. 455). Unlike Ariadne, this "Young Lady" later dropped her anonymity, and we know that Agnes

was by Catherine Trotter. The tone of the play's prologue and epilogue is close to Ariadne's. The prologue pleads:

> She's Dead, if Try'd by strict Poetick Laws;
> But Men of Honour can't refuse a Woman's Cause.

But a quite different note was struck in the verses "To the Author" which were prefixed to the printed text of the play, and signed (significantly, since the play itself was anonymous) by Mrs. Manley. These were quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

> Orinda, and the Fair Astrea gone,
> Not one was found to fill the Vacant Throne:

In these verses Mrs. Manley breathes the defiant spirit of Mrs. Behn, not the modest apologetics of Ariadne and Catherine Trotter. Nor was Mrs. Manley content long to be a spectator of the battle: she promised, in the same verses, that "Fired by the bold Example" of Agnes, she would join it.

Before Mrs. Manley could translate this promise into a play, Mrs. Behn's The Younger Brother, revised by Gildon, was produced (in February 1696) at Drury Lane (Van Lennep, p. 459). In the dedication to the printed edition, Gildon complains of the "unjust Sentence this play met with before very partial Judges". Contrasting this with the favourable reception generally accorded Mrs. Behn's earlier plays, Gildon concludes "that I may reasonably impute its miscarriage to some Faction that was made against it, which indeed was very Evident on the

First day", and even more so on the third.[12] It is not clear from Gildon's remarks whether he, or Mrs. Behn, was the object of this opposition. Mrs. Manley's provocative verses had been published in Agnes de Castro the month before The Younger Brother was produced, and they may have engendered a spirit of opposition to plays by women.

A clearer case is Mrs. Manley's own play, The Lost Lover, produced at Drury Lane about March 1696 (Van Lennep, pp. 459-460). In the prologue she expresses a hope that the critics will "scorn to Arm against a Worthless Foe", but the tone of the preface, written after the play had been damned, is much closer to that of her earlier verses to Mrs. Trotter. It begins conventionally enough: only "the flattery of my Friends" persuaded her to allow the play to be performed, so she was not surprised by its "little success". She soon starts a bill of complaints, however: "The better half was cut . . . I am now convinc'd Writing for the Stage is no way proper for a Woman, to whom all Advantages but meer Nature, are refused." Most important is her charge that "the bare Name of being a Woman's Play damn'd it beyond its own want of Merit." Mrs. Manley's powerful sense of injured "want of Merit" was impotent against the town, but she vented her rage on the Drury Lane

---

[12]Mrs. Behn's Works, IV, 316-317.

management. She had a second play already in rehearsal there, but she withdrew it and took it to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where it was performed in April or early May 1696. This was The Royal Mischief: later the same year Drury Lane took its revenge by burlesquing the play and its authoress in The Female Wits (see below, pp. 11-13).

The Royal Mischief met with greater success than The Lost Lover. In the Comparison between the Two Stages, Sullen grudgingly admits that it "made a shift to live half a dozen Days, and then expir'd" (ed. Wells, p. 20). Six days, however, was a respectable run at this time, and the Comparison's taunt that The Royal Mischief reached its sixth night with difficulty is perhaps no more than its usual curmudgeonliness. Reaction to the play was mixed, as is clear from Mrs. Manley's preface to the printed play, published early in June. These are some of her complaints:

> I shou'd not have given my self and the Town the trouble of a Preface if the aspersions of my Enemies had not made it necessary . . . The principal Objection made against this Tragedy is the warmth of it, as they are pleas'd to call it . . . as a Woman I thought it Policy to begin with the softest [passion] and which is easiest to our Sex . . . I shou'd think it but an indifferent Commendation to have it said she writes like a Woman . . .

Mrs. Manley hoped that candid readers would agree that only "prejudice against our Sex" could have been the cause of the opposition. The warmth-- Lucyle Hook speaks of its "hot surging sex"[13]-- contrasts strongly with the frigid

---

[13]Introduction to The Female Wits (1967), p. viii.

chastity of Agnes de Castro.

Apart from its combative preface, The Royal Mischief was printed with no less than three sets of commendatory verses: by Mrs. Trotter, Mrs. Pix (a newcomer to the dramatic scene), and "an unknown Hand". Returning the favour that Mrs. Manley had done for Agnes de Castro, Mrs. Trotter used the same battle imagery:

> For us you've vanquisht, though the toyl was yours,
> You were our Champion, and the Glory ours.

Mrs. Pix, shortly to enter the poetic lists herself, took a softer line, describing Mrs. Manley as:

> Like Sappho Charming, like Afra Eloquent,
> Like Chast Orinda, sweetly Innocent . . .

The less truculent attitude of these verses is also characteristic of the preface, prologue, and epilogue to Mrs. Pix's own Ibrahim, produced at Drury Lane in May 1696 (Van Lennep, p. 462). This was London's fourth play by a woman in as many months. In her preface, Mrs. Pix voices the fear that "those that will be so unkind to Criticize upon what falls from a Womans Pen, may soon find more faults than I am ever able to answer." This is what Ariadne had said in the preface to She Ventures and He Wins. Mrs. Pix's prologue appeals to the ladies to "protect one, harmless, modest play" and her epilogue disarmingly admits:

> The Author on her weakness, not her strength relies,
> And from your Justice to your Mercy flies.

These defensive apologetics confirm the evidence of The Female Wits that Mrs. Pix was a less tempestuous

personality than Mrs. Manley, and the mental lightweight of the trio of poetesses. A second play by Mrs. Pix, this time a farce, The Spanish Wives, was produced at Dorset Garden about August 1696 (Van Lennep, p. 464), making the season of 1695-96 an annus mirabilis for the women dramatists, with seven plays presented at the London theatres.

But the women were not to have it all their own way. An anonymous burlesque, The Female Wits: or, The Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal, was produced at Drury Lane about September 1696 (Van Lennep, p. 467). This play, which follows the pattern of The Rehearsal, compresses into dramatic form the events of the previous spring that led to Mrs. Manley's withdrawal of her tragedy from Drury Lane. Marsilia (Mrs. Manley) is joined at her lodgings by Mrs. Wellfed (Mrs. Pix) and Calista (Mrs. Trotter). After an exchange of strained compliments that barely conceals their mutual jealousy, they all repair to Drury Lane to attend a rehearsal of Marsilia's new play. The rehearsal (which Marsilia constantly interrupts) exposes not only the absurdity and cheap theatricality of the play itself, but also the unlimited arrogance of its authoress. The Female Wits ends with Marsilia storming out, threatening never again to darken the doors of Drury Lane. The main satirical target of the play is Mrs. Manley. The other two "wits" are treated lightly. Mrs. Wellfed's bulk and bibulousness, and Calista's vaunted classical erudition, are ridiculed, but they are given less obnoxious personalities than Mrs.

Manley.

The Female Wits enjoyed a run of six nights (we are told in the preface), but it was not revived and not published until 1704. Unlike its obvious inspiration, The Rehearsal, it did not become a stock piece, and there are several good reasons for this. It is decidedly inferior to The Rehearsal, and its chief target, The Royal Mischief, was soon forgotten. Marsilia, unlike Bayes, could not become the type of the absurd poet, for in The Female Wits she is ridiculed as much as an arrogant woman as for writing bad plays. Playhouse politics and personalities also play a large part in The Female Wits. It is altogether too much of an occasional piece for it to have been updated and so outlive its original topicality.

In fact, it is surprising that after failing to get into print in 1696, the play should eventually have been published in 1704, or at all. The unsigned preface describes the play as the work of a dead friend, who "writ for his own Diversion", and ascribes the delay in publication to this friend's reluctance to make his work public. This is difficult to accept: the prime motivation of the author of The Female Wits was to expose Mrs. Manley to public ridicule. Two possible reasons for publication in 1704 can be suggested: that it was prompted by party reasons, in order to help discredit Mrs. Manley, by then an active political propagandist, or that it acquired a posthumous topicality through renewed hostility to women as dramatists.

In her dedication to The Platonick Lady (1707), Mrs. Centlivre gives two examples of her own experience of such hostility in 1703 and 1705.

The Female Wits shows considerable knowledge of back-stage affairs at Drury Lane: whoever was the actual author, its production represented the collective outrage of the actors at Mrs. Manley's treatment of them. Since it is obviously a biased source, its account of the mutual jealousies of the poetesses must be treated with caution. In The Adventures of Rivella (1714), her fictionalized (and scandalmongering) autobiography, Mrs. Manley smeared "Calista" as "most of Prude in her outward Professions, and least of it in her inward Practice" (p. 66). Thomas Birch, in the life of Mrs. Trotter (by then Cockburn) prefixed to her posthumous Works (1751), explained the coolness between the two women, and Mrs. Manley's sneer in Rivella, thus: "the only provocation to it was the withdrawing herself from the slight acquaintance, which she once had with Mrs. Manley, on account of the licentiousness both of her writings and conduct" (I, xlvii-xlviii). It is obvious from Agnes de Castro and The Royal Mischief that the two women differed about what was proper to tragedy.

Wider aspects of the question of women's role in society than the propriety of female dramatic authorship were much discussed in the 1690s. In his Essay on Projects (1697), Defoe proposed an academy for women. Defoe's plan was less pietistic than Mary Astell's, for his ideal of

was more practical than hers. For Defoe, the advantages of educating women, and therefore fitting them for less menial employments, were ecomonic: less talent would be wasted. Mary Astell had been primarily concerned to foster education for moral purposes. Obvious differences of social and economic and social class separate the two writers, but their assumption that women could lead more active mental lives was shared. In view of the currency of these ideas, it is disappointing that none of the women dramatists used their plays to present the new type of educated woman that they themselves aspired to be. Not until Mrs. Centlivre's The Basset-Table (1705) was the education of women used as a theme, and then it was only as a subordinate one.

The presentation of The Female Wits at Drury Lane led, predictably, to the estrangement of the play's victims from that theatre: between June 1697 and March 1700 all seven of the new plays by women were brought out at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Mrs. Manley, indeed, wrote no new plays for ten years after The Female Wits: but it would be rash to suggest that she had been laughed off the stage. She had, after all, a living to make, and her two plays had not been notably successful. But if The Female Wits did not silence its victims-- particularly not Mrs. Pix-- the flood tide of plays by women ebbed somewhat after its production: there was no repetition of the furious activity of 1695-96.

A new comedy by Mrs. Pix, The Innocent Mistress, was produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields about June 1697 (Van Lennep, p. 481). In the prologue (by Motteux) there is an interesting allusion to the women's reputation for smut: a spectator is imagined as exclaiming "No bawdy, this can't be a Woman's Play". But this omission was apparently not to be imputed to Mrs. Pix: the prologue assures us that a good deal had been cut out in production. Motteux also wrote the epilogue, which is conciliatory rather than defiant:

> you'll scorn to judge of Woman's wit;
> Tho' in Wit's Court the worst of Judges sit,
> Sure none dare try such puny Causes yet.

A serious attempt to clean up the image of women as dramatists, a task thus begun facetiously by Motteux, can be seen in the prologue to another play, The Unnatural Mother. This anonymous play was produced in September or October 1697 (Van Lennep, p. 486); the prologue warns that:

> A Woman now comes to reform the Stage,
> Who once has stood the Brunt of this unthinking Age;

Mrs. Trotter soon followed the lead of the "Young Lady" and "moralized her song". In the dedication to her next play, The Fatal Friendship, produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields about May 1698, she reiterated the old complaint that "when a Woman appears in the World under any distinguishing Character, she must expect to be the mark of ill Nature, but most one who seems desirous to recommend her Self by what the other Sex think their peculiar

Prerogative". She struck a new note, however, in claiming that her play's "End is the most noble, to discourage Vice, and recommend a firm and unshaken Virtue". The influence of Collier is evident here.

His Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage had been published in April 1698, and the introduction began with the assertion that "The business of Plays is to recomend [sic] Virtue and discountenance Vice". Mrs. Trotter's echo of this formula was clearly intended to ally her with the reform movement, and Collier's influence can be seen in the other prefatory matter published with The Fatal Friendship. There are four sets of commendatory verses, three of them anonymous, and Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Pix are notably absent. The writer of the third set of verses assures Mrs. Trotter that she has excelled both Orinda and Astrea, and that she has done so with "more just applause" because of her moral strain. The fourth set, by John Hughes,[14] is in a vein of greater hyperbole: Mrs. Trotter has outshone Camilla, who lives only in Virgil's lines, by immortalizing herself through her own writings:

> But you your Sexes Champion are come forth
> To fight their Quarrel, and assert their Worth.
> Our Salique Law of Wit you have destroy'd,
> Establish'd Female Claim, and Triumph'd o'er our Pride.

Both writers praise Mrs. Trotter as a moral author, and advise her not to descend to comedy.

---

[14]They are identified as his in Mrs. Cockburn's Works (1751), I, viii.

Mrs. Pix did not formally join the "reform" movement yet, although in The Deceiver Deceived and Queen Catherine she continued the smutless strain of her Innocent Mistress. But another quarrel was on her hands. In the dedication to The Deceiver Deceived, she charges that a claque was made against the play: "I look upon those that endeavoured to discountenance this play as Enemys to me". The opposition to the play takes on a more sinister significance as we read in the prologue that, before the play was acted, Mrs. Pix had shown the play "To some, who, like true Wits, stol't half away". The dedication contains no more than broad but dark hints: her "Foe" has "Printed so great a falsehood, it deserves no Answer". Her "Foe" was George Powell, the actor (who appears in propria persona in The Female Wits, where he is certainly shown as no friend to the female pen). His play The Imposture Defeated (which had been produced at Drury Lane about September 1697) was the one supposed to have been stolen from Mrs. Pix's manuscript (her play was finally brought out at Lincoln's Inn Fields about November 1697). In the preface to The Imposture Defeated Powell gives a rather different account of events: he denies the charge of plagiarism, and claims that Mrs. Pix asked him to get The Deceiver Deceived acted at Drury Lane. He agreed to do this, but then for unexplained reasons Mrs. Pix "very mannerly carry'd it to the other House". There seems to

be some justice in Mrs. Pix's charge. In The Deceiver Deceived, Melito Bondi counterfeits blindness in order to avoid the expensive burden of being President of Dalmatia. In The Imposture Defeated, Mr. Bond (whose name is spelled "Bonde" in the dramatis personae) similarily pretends he is blind, in order to avoid nomination as governor of Dalmatia. Mrs. Centlivre was to have a similar experience with Cibber over Love at a Venture (see below, pp. 78-79).

The next two seasons (1698-99 and 1699-1700) saw a further decline in the activities of the women dramatists. Only Mrs. Pix kept the flag flying. The prologue to The False Friend (Lincoln's Inn Fields, about May 1699; Van Lennep, p. 511) announced that she had joined the reformers:

> Amongst Reformers of this Vitious Age,
> Who think it Duty to Refine the Stage:
> A Woman, to Contribute, does Intend,
> In Hopes a Moral Play your Lives will Mend.

Mrs. Pix must have hoped that her audience would not remember the prologue to The Innocent Mistress.

Some of Mrs. Behn's plays had been presented without alluding to the sex of the author, but her successors had more often asked for special treatment on the score of being a woman. A change of tactic is evident in the attempt to conceal Mrs. Pix's authorship of The Beau Defeated (Lincoln's Inn Fields, about March 1700; Van Lennep, p. 526). Every opportunity is taken to suggest male authorship. The unsigned dedication (to the Duchess of

Bolton) speaks of "my Charmed Eyes being lately bless'd with the sight of you" and much more gallantry of the same kind. A similar deception marks the prologue:

> But Hold-- there's something I was begg'd to say,
> In favour of our modest Authors Play.
> He hop'd you'd like . . .

This trick was not immediately repeated, but it was used again several times in the years 1703-07, when six of Mrs. Centlivre's plays appeared anonymously.

In the spring of 1700, five years after Mrs. Manley, in her prefactory verses to Agnes de Castro, had spoken of Astrea's "Vacant Throne", a worthy successor to Mrs. Behn had still to be found. In October 1700 the first play of Susanna Carrol (later Centlivre), The Perjur'd Husband, was produced at Drury Lane. The play itself is an indifferent tragedy, but its comic scenes were a portent of greater things to come. With The Gamester (1705) and The Busie Bodie (1709) she scored the greatest popular successes by a woman since Mrs. Behn.

Mrs. Centlivre had her fair share of failures, not all of them deserved, but she persevered while the other contenders dropped out of the race. Mrs Pix wrote her last play in 1706 and died in 1709, real success having eluded her. Mrs Manley wrote only two plays after suffering from The Female Wits, turning her attention to politics and prose: Mrs. Trotter married a clergyman and turned to other intellectual pursuits. After 1706, Mrs. Centlivre was the

only active woman dramatist: although none of her later plays were as successful in her own time as The Busie Body, The Wonder (1714) and A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718) proved to have staying power. Together with The Busie Body they remained stock pieces into the nineteenth century, long after Mrs. Behn's plays had been relegated to the closet.

The sudden upsurge in female dramatic activity, and the satire on this activity in The Female Wits, make an amusing episode in the history of English drama, and an interesting prologue to a study of Mrs. Centlivre. But a consideration of the actual plays of the "female wits" leads one to conclude that what Sherburn said of Mrs. Behn applies to them also: "In character Mrs. Behn was definitely emancipated; and her compliance with the taste of the time, together with the prime fact that her plays came from a woman's pen, gave her a reputation for shocking indecencies as a dramatist. She simply tried to write like the men, whom she in no way surpassed."[15] In "compliance with the taste of the time", the women wrote first bawdy and then "reforming" plays: but, like the "Spark" who threw down The Gamester when told it was by a woman (see below, p. 84), we need to be told what we could never have guessed.

If Mrs. Centlivre learned one thing from the "wits"

---

[15]"The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century", in A.C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (1948), p. 770.

it was surely that dramatic authorship was possible without any formal education: that reading and seeing plays was a sufficient preparation for writing them. She certainly did not choose her genres on female precedents, for at the beginning of her career we find her rejecting the "reformed" influence. Like other dramatists, Mrs. Centlivre was at first unsure of herself, and experimented with various kinds of play.

If there is a tradition of "female wit" in the drama of this period, it is in the "Spanish" comedy of intrigue, a form practiced by Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Pix, and Mrs. Centlivre. Commenting on The Busie Body in The Tatler, Steele suggested that the "subtlety of spirit" shown in plotting an intrigue was "peculiar to females of wit". But it is surely more likely to have been a question of temperamental affinity than any peculiarly feminine talent. In the case of Mrs. Centlivre at least, I think the ease of working within a well-defined formula was a contributing factor. Bateson speaks of her dramatic construction as "almost algebraic . . . We can imagine Mrs. Centlivre working it out like a sum on the blackboard".[16] I suggest a number of specific instances of this in the chapters that follow. One can, however, trace a "line of intrigue" from The Rover (1677) through (say) The Adventures in

---

[16] F. W. Bateson, English Comic Drama, 1700-1750 (1929), p. 72.

Madrid (1706) to The Busie Body (1709) and The Wonder (1714). What distinguishes Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Pix, and Mrs. Centlivre from Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Trotter is that they were professional women of the theatre, not women of letters who occasionally wrote plays. There is no reason why Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Trotter should not have acquired professional expertise, had they gone on writing plays: but they turned to other pursuits.

II

APPRENTICESHIP, 1700-03

I Should not trouble my Reader with a Preface, if Mr Collier had taught Manners to Lasks, Sense to Beaux, and Good Nature to Criticks, as well as Morality to the Stage; the first are sure to envy what they can't equal, and condemn what they don't understand; the Beaux usually take a greater liberty with our sex than they wou'd with their own, because there's no fear of drawing a Duel upon their hands; the latter are a sort of rude splenatick Men, that seldom commend any thing but what they have had a hand in. These Snarling Sparks were pleas'd to carp at one or two Expressions, which were spoken in an Aside by one of the Inferiour Characters in the Drama; and without considering the Reputation of the persons in whose mouths the language is put, condemn it straight for loose and obscure:

These remarks, from the preface to Mrs. Centlivre's first play, The Perjur'd Husband: or, The Adventures of Venice, have nothing in common with the apologetic diffidence with which Ariadne and Catherine Trotter introduced themselves to the literary public. Instead they strike a note reminiscent of Mrs. Behn at her most truculent:

The little Obligation I have to some of the witty Sparks and Poets of the Town, has put me on a Vindication of this Comedy from those Censures that Malice, and ill Nature have thrown upon it, tho in vain: The Poets I heartily excuse, since there is a sort of Self-Interest in their Malice . . . and yet I see nothing unnatural nor obscene: 'tis proper for the Characters.[1]

The tone of impatient certainty of conviction is characteristic of Mrs. Centlivre. Later in her career, the

---

[1]Preface to The Lucky Chance (1686); Works, III, 185-186.

note of amused contempt found in the preface to The Perjur'd Husband gives way to a certain prickliness, a consciousness of having received less than her due. This is particularly true of the satiric dedication to The Platonick Lady (1707), and the preface to The Gotham Election (1715). For if Mrs. Centlivre eventually proved a worthy successor to Mrs. Behn, it was only after a slow and sometimes painful struggle. Her first plays were no more successful than those of the "Female Wits".

We do not know when Mrs. Centlivre arrived in London, but by May 1700 her first play was being passed around in manuscript.[2] It was produced at Drury Lane early the next season. The date of the première is not known, but it was published on 22 October.[3] According to Mrs. Centlivre's preface, it "went off with general Applause; and 'tis the opinion of some of our best Judges, that it only wanted the Addition of good Actors, and a full Town, to have brought me a sixth night".

The Perjur'd Husband is a very dull tragedy. Only the comic scenes of the independent subplot come alive. Myra Reynolds has suggested that "Virtuous Ladies were at

---

[2]Letter XXXVIII, Mr. B--r to Astraea, in Letters of Wit, &c (1701), reprinted in Stonehill's Farquhar, II, 258-259. Although undated, the letter refers to "Briscoe's Book" as recently out: it was published about 10 May 1700.

[3]"This Day Published", The Post Man, 19-22 October 1700 (Norton, p. 173).

liberty to write tragedies because tragedies were supposed to be moral and elevating".[4] Bowyer (pp. 38-39) advances a similar argument. Mrs. Trotter had certainly written "moral and elevating" tragedies, but The Perjur'd Husband is closer to the hot atmosphere of Mrs. Manley's The Royal Mischief. The tone of the part of the preface quoted above, with its slighting reference to Collier, does not suggest that Mrs. Centlivre was influenced by such a consideration. It is more likely that ambition, and the neo-classical ranking of genres, prompted her to begin with a tragedy.

Certainly the tragic main plot has little enough to recommend it. It deals with Bassino who (in the passionate atmosphere of Venice at Carnival time) has forsaken his wife Placentia in favour of Aurelia, although he had previously loved Placentia. Aurelia in turn once returned the love of her betrothed Alonzo, but now reciprocates Bassino's passion. None of the lovers has much personality, and they argue the conflicting claims of love and honour in conventional set-piece speeches. The conflict is more verbal than dramatic. The characters also seem to exist in a social vacuum: although they are clearly nobles, their fate is not made to carry any political implications. On the other hand, their tragedy is far from "domestic". This social disembodiment is the

---

[4] The Learned Lady in England (1920), p. 137.

more critical for the very specific social milieu in which the subplot is located.

Like the main plot, the subplot contains two linked intrigues: but they are carried on in prose by more believable characters. Pizalto is successfully cuckolded by Ludovico, a visiting Frenchman, while his own intrigue with his wife's maid, Lucy, is frustrated. Ludovico, although a derivative character in the Dorimant mode, is the best in the play. Quite cynical about his amours-- he has some difficulty scheduling them all (p. 10) -- Ludovico captivates Lady Pizalta by his very indifference. His rakishness is temporarily shaken after his disguise is uncovered in rather uncomfortable circumstances, and he wavers in favour of marriage:

> I'm now resolv'd to leave this Wenching-Trade.
> For no Man's safe upon a Hackney Jade:
> Th' Allay of danger makes the Pleasure Pain,
> A Virtuous Wife will always be the same. (p. 32)

The last line, of course, hits on exactly what the typical restoration hero (Celadon or Rhodophil) found wrong with a "Virtuous Wife". Ludovico's is the cynical conversion of the tired rake, not the moral enlightenment of the "sentimental" hero. His resolution to marry is not carried out.

The most recent critical article on Mrs. Centlivre's plays gives a good deal of attention to The Perjur'd Husband.[5]

---

[5] Robert Strozier, "A Short View of Some of Mrs. Centlivre's Celebrat'd Plays", Discourse, VII (1964), 62-80.

Strozier's main points of criticism are that the subplot is not connected to the main plot; that it is too prominent; and that Mrs. Centlivre uses too many asides. Each of these points can be answered in theatrical terms, and answering them shows the basic soundness, even at this early point in her career, of Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic art.

The question of the separation of plots may be taken first. Strozier speaks of her "practice of plot separation in its most aesthetically objectionable form" (p. 64). In The Perjur'd Husband, both plots take place in Venice at the same time, and in two scenes (I.i and V.i.) characters from both plots are on the stage at the same time, without speaking to each other. Apart from this, there is no connection between the two plots. Subplots of any kind, of course, offended against the rule of unity of action, and were therefore anathema from a strictly neo-classical point of view. The major objection of such critics to tragi-comedy-- and equally to comic scenes in a tragedy, as here-- was that the comic and the tragic tended to counteract each other, dissipating the attention and involvement of the spectators. This point of view is voiced by Lisideius in Dryden's Of Dramatic Poesy:

> many scenes of our tragi-comedies carry on a design that is nothing of kin to the main plot; and . . . we see two distinct webs in a play, like those in ill wrought stuffs; and two actions, that is, two plays, carried on together, to the confounding of the audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to

another; and by that means espouse the interest of neither.[6]

Through Neander, Dryden defends the English practice, using an interesting metaphor:

> [our plays] besides the main design, have under-plots or by-concernments of less considerable persons and intrigues, which are carried on with the motion of the main plot; just as they say the orb of the fixed stars, and those of the planets, though they have motions of their own, are whirled about by the motion of the primum mobile, in which they are contained. (I, 59)

Dryden's image is exactly appropriate to The Perjur'd Husband: although there is no causal link between them, there is a strong thematic connection which acts like the primum mobile, outside both but moving both. This theme is infidelity: in the main plot it is treated in almost heroic style, while the subplot explores similar emotions at a lower level. Both Bassino and Ludovico are after the same thing-- sexual variety without responsibility-- and Ludovico acts as an ironic comment on Bassino's high-flown posturings about death and furies.

To turn to the relative importance of the two plots, Strozier calls "distracting . . . the fact that the so-called comic subplot has eight and a half scenes while the main plot has only five and a half" (p. 65). Since the numbering of scenes is based on changes of locale, this merely means that the subplot is broken up into more locations. In fact, only about fourteen of the forty pages of the printed text

---

[6] Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays, ed. George Watson (1962), I, 45.

are occupied by the subplot: and even this overstates its importance, since the pace would naturally be quicker than that of the tragic main plot. In Act III, for example, scene i, in Aurelia's lodgings, occupies about four pages in the printed text (pp. 18-22). It is an emotional scene in measured, even leisurely, blank verse. Scenes ii-iv occupy less than three pages (pp. 22-24), although since they are in prose probably contain rather more words. The scene changes from Lady Pizalta'a lodgings (ii) to the Piazza (iii) and back to Pizalto's lodgings. The pace of the action, the to-and-froing, is brisk; the intrigues are bustling. Thus in the third act as a whole, the two plots are about equal. But in Acts I and V the main plot predominates: thus overall, the subplot is clearly subordinated.

Lastly, there is Mrs. Centlivre's use of asides. Strozier calls "the incessant use of the aside" perhaps the "most aesthetically annoying feature of the play" (p. 66). The aside is certainly an essential part of Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic art, but her use of it is less idiosyncratic than Strozier supposes. It is a common feature of the drama of her time. In comedy, Mrs. Centlivre uses asides to make jokes and point ironies, and to reveal a character's true motivation. In the tragic scenes of <u>The Perjur'd Husband</u> she uses it also to emphasize the mental gulf between characters apparently close to each other. A good example of this is Bassino's aside on p. 8. He embraces Aurelia,

but the mental conflict between her claims and those of his wife Placentia are expressed in an aside-- really a brief soliloquy without the stage being cleared. The audience's acceptance of this technique is entirely a matter of convention.

Strozier's criticisms have been rebutted in detail in order to show how far even Mrs. Centlivre's first play can be defended critically. Strozier assumes that Mrs. Centlivre's plays must be bad, and that she had in consequence no "art", because her plays do not fulfill his (quite unhistorical) ideas of how a play should work. This is particularly true of his attitude to asides. For a sympathetic understanding of Mrs. Centlivre, an awareness of the conditions and conventions of the contemporary theatre is essential, for she was a professional dramatist working within them. The Perjur'd Husband is not a great play, but neither is it contemptible. Mrs. Centlivre certainly learned from it enough to develop her art in directions congenial to her talent.

2

Mrs. Centlivre's second play, The Beau's Duel: or, A Soldier for the Ladies, was published on 8 July 1702.[7] It had been produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields, probably in

---

[7]"To-morrow will be Published", The Post Boy, 4-7 July (Norton, p. 174).

June, but neither the date of the première nor the length of the run is known. It was revived in the autumn "With the Addition of a New Scene, and a new Prologue and Epilogue, with a Whimsical Song Sung by Mr. Pack".[8] A second edition, claiming to be "corrected", was published in 1715, but it follows the text of the first.

The Beau's Duel is a very distinct advance, both in characterization and construction, on The Perjur'd Husband. Leaving her buskins in Venice, Mrs. Centlivre set her new comedy in contemporary London. War had been declared on 4 May, and the play radiates the first flush of anti-French military enthusiasm. The prologue promised:

> Let but your Arms Abroad Successful prove,
> The Fair at home shall Crown your Toyles with Love.

The play contains some topical material that could have been added at a late stage of composition: for example, the anti-Jacobite references (pp. 41, 45, 54), and the recruiting scene (pp. 40-42), which describes some of the discomforts of camp life, and the frightening possibilities of physical mutilation. These horrors terrify the foolish Ogle, who pretends to have a scruple against fighting the French, because of the "extraordinary Marks of Civility" (p. 41) which they had shown him when he was in France.

The military heroes, Colonel Manly and Captain Bellmein, are made of sterner stuff. But there is evidence

---

[8] Daily Courant, 21 October 1702 (Bowyer, p. 43).

to suggest that making both men soldiers was a late change of plan on Mrs. Centlivre's part. Manly, steady and plain speaking but not otherwise indebted to Wycherley's hero, was obviously conceived as a military man from the start. His speech prefixes take the form "Coll." or "Col. Man.", but never "Man." But Bellmein, a lighter and gayer character, may originally have been a civilian. His speech prefixes (used consistently within a scene) are "Capt. Bell.", "Capt.", but also "Bell." This is unlikely to be due to the compositor, for the abbreviation used as a speech-prefix is consistent with the form of Bellmein's name used in his entry. Thus "Enter Bellmein" is followed by "Bell." (pp. 19, 40); "Enter Capt. Bellmein" by "Cap." (p. 2) or "Cap. Bell." (p. 12).

The contrast between the two men is part of a larger pattern of characterization in the play, a pattern similar to that found in Steele's The Funeral (Drury Lane, December 1701). In The Beau's Duel there are two pairs of lovers who have come to an understanding before the play opens, so that there is no "love chase". There is a serious couple (Manly and Clarinda) and a "gayer" couple (Emilia and Bellmein). The contrasts between them are well established in the first act, in scenes between Manly and Bellmein (pp. 2-5) and between Clarinda and Emilia (pp. 9-11). In place of a love chase, the play centres on the removal of an external obstacle to the lovers' happiness: the opposition of Careful, who is Clarinda's father and Emilia's guardian.

Thus the dramatic conflict is not between the lovers, but between them and Careful, and the play develops as a series of intrigues against him.

Pointing the contrast between beau and soldier, and acting as foils to the military heroes, are two fops, Sir William Mode and Ogle. Sir William, frenchified and affecting the "trick of singularity", is drawn after Lord Foppington, as his oaths suggest: "blister me", "burn me", "impair my vigour" are a sample. Ogle satirises the other end of the town: a former apprentice who has come into money, his "humour" is to imagine every woman is in love with him. Both fops are cowards, and Mrs. Centlivre emphasises this by exposing their cowardice on two occasions. In Act II, Sir William and Ogle are tricked into challenging each other, although both are, to say the least, reluctant fighters. Apart from the obvious comedy of the scene (one thinks of well-known uses of the same device in Shakespeare, Jonson, and Sheridan), the non-duel is an on-stage antitype of the off-stage war. There is a second would-be duel in Act III: Sir William and Ogle retire to Hyde Park, having decided on a sham fight to preserve their reputations. But Clarinda and Emilia (disguised as men) attack, disarm, and beat them (p. 30). Mrs. Centlivre implies that the trouncing of the francophile fops is what is in store for France herself.

Somewhere between the heroes and the fops in the scheme of the play are three characters presented with qualified sympathy: Careful, Toper, and Mrs. Plotwell.

Careful is a stock stage-father who prefers his daughter to marry a moneyed fop rather than a brave but penniless soldier. Careful is tricked into a mock-marriage to Mrs. Plotwell, who had assumed the character of a demure and frugal Quaker. After the ceremony she reveals herself a strumpet and a shrew, and Careful is glad enough to be rid of her at the price of restoring Clarinda and Manly to favour.

Genest pointed out that this part of the play is taken from Jasper Mayne's The City Match (1639).[9] Many of Mrs. Plotwell's speeches are taken verbatim from Mayne, but in The Beau's Duel Mayne's central themes (antagonisms between father and son, and between city and court) have no place. In Mrs. Centlivre, the mock-marriage is free of the citizen-gulling satire that it carries in Mayne. Her rejection of this theme shows that even as early as this in her career, Mrs. Centlivre was unwilling to write a centrally anti-mercantile play. John Loftis draws a contrast between Mrs. Centlivre's early plays, which do contain examples of the older merchant stereotypes (Sir Toby Doubtful in Love's Contrivance, 1703), and her later ones, which are more sympathetic to the moneyed interest.[10] But such an antithesis is really too

---

[9] Some Account of the English Stage (1832), II, 262.

[10] Comedy and Society (1959), pp. 65, 86.

simple. The following speech, by Ogle, shows Mrs. Centlivre capable of subtler satire: "this [letter] is from a Merchants Wife, a City Animal, that pretends to a nearer Tast than those of her Levell, and wou'd fain have a Child with the Air of a Gentleman, but I beg'd her Pardon, I left her to the Brutes of her own Corporation, for I will have nothing to do with the Body Politick." (p.16). Apart from the additional irony that Ogle is himself a former apprentice, it is clear that Mrs. Centlivre's satire cuts both ways. Her attitude both to the city wives and the courtly seducers is one of "fools on both sides".

Another important change that Mrs. Centlivre made in adapting the part of Mrs. Plotwell from Mayne was the removal of Young Plotwell, to whom, in The City Match, she is happily married. Instead, Mrs. Centlivre made her a former mistress of Bellmein (and of others too) who, after coming into money, sets up for virtue, and finds "Reputation is never lost but in an empty pocket" (p. 20). To revenge herself, she resolves to persecute fops. Although a lively and convincing character in herself, Mrs. Plotwell sometimes seems out of place in the world of the play, especially when she is campaigning on the side of virtue. There are two occasions when she is rather awkwardly forced into the role of spokeswoman. Once it is in order to help Bellmein: libertines are less acceptable now than they were in the comedy of the restoration, and Mrs. Plotwell proves that

Bellmein was never a very abandoned one, by telling us that "the awful Lustre of Virtue has always met with due respect" from him (p. 19). It is well for Bellmein that it has: otherwise, under the new comic dispensation, he would probably not have been allowed to wed Emilia. Instead, Mrs. Plotwell or celibacy would have been his fate.[11] The second occasion is at the very end of the play, when Mrs. Plotwell gives an encomium on "Virtue thou shining Jewel of my Sex" (p. 55). Since Mrs. Plotwell has hardly been sans reproche, this seems a calculated ambivalence, an equivocation: an unexceptionable "sentiment" that, from Mrs. Plotwell, need not be taken too seriously.

The last of these "middle" characters to be considered is Toper, a bibulous libertine who plays a subordinate part in the gulling of Sir William, Ogle, and Careful. Toper's part in the printed text shows clear evidence of second thoughts on Mrs. Centlivre's part. At the end of Act II, three speeches which must be Toper's are assigned to a "Roarwell", and Roarwell's name is punned on in the verse tag ("For though we Roar . . .", p. 25, sig. $E1^{R}$). Similarly, at the beginning of Act III, Careful speaks of "Roarwell", evidently referring to Toper. I have not found any other instances of this presumable survival from an earlier draft, but $D4^{V}$, which is continuous with

---

[11]This trend is outlined by J. H. Smith, The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy (1948), pp. 199-200.

$E1^R$ in the action of the play, has "Top." throughout, and the name does not occur in the remainder of signature E. There is, however, an instance of irregular spacing in line 5 on p. 40 ($F4^V$) that could be the result of a press correction of Roarwell to Toper:

this, he'll be glad . . . (line 4)
to him , Toper is . . . (line 5)

This bibliographical evidence confirms what one might have suspected from the blustering part that Toper plays in the first duel scene, that (as Roarwell) he was originally to have been a bully. Such a change in characterization, shifting the emphasis from bully to drunkard, would have been in keeping with Mrs. Centlivre's enthusiasm for the war. A bully in the play would have blurred the contrast between soldier and fop by showing a less appealing side of the military character. By making Toper a drunkard, Mrs. Centlivre left the contrast between soldier and fop unimpaired.

These subsidiary characters in The Beau's Duel have been given fuller treatment than the lovers, partly in order to stress the interest and variety of the play's cast, but also because they are more memorable. If not always original, Mrs. Centlivre's "humour" characters are usually vigorous. Sir William's dialogue with himself (p. 11), even though it is derivative, would probably be among one's most vivid memories of a performance of the play.

If The Beau's Duel is an advance on The Perjur'd Husband in characterization, it also shows considerable

improvement in construction. In The Beau's Duel there is no rigid division between plot and subplot. Instead, the play contains three linked actions: the courtship of Clarinda and Manly; the frustration of the various designs of Careful, Sir William, and Ogle concerning the disposal of Clarinda; and the courtship of Bellmein and Emilia. All three actions are linked by joint plotting. Careful's house is the central locale: each of the actions is a siege, physical or figurative, successful or repulsed, of this house. A good example is the first scene of Act IV. This is a very typical Centlivre scene, and one which occurs, with variations, in several of her plays. There are more skilful examples in The Busie Body and in The Wonder, but all the essential ingredients are already present in this, her second play.

The act begins with a brief exchange between Clarinda, Emilia, and Mrs. Plotwell (p. 36). Because of a previous confusion of identity, Emilia is expecting the arrival of Bellmein, whom she has mistaken for Colonel Manly, and therefore supposes him to be playing a double game with her and Clarinda. A maid brings the news that "he" has arrived. Actually, as the audience knows from an earlier scene (p. 31), it really will be Colonel Manly: for in order to revenge a parallel case of mistaken identity that appeared to be perfidy, he has plotted with Bellmein to take his friend's place. Thus two plots are heading for a collision. Mrs. Plotwell leaves, Emilia hides, Clarinda

withdraws: the stage is momentarily empty (p. 37). Colonel Manly enters, and Clarinda joins him. This is a dramatic moment involving much more than the dialogue. Each expected to meet the other, but half hoped against it: neither expected to be expected. They exchange abuse without producing any enlightenment. Bellmein, who has followed Manly in and been listening, peeps out just at the moment that Manly indignantly storms off. The instant he is gone, Clarinda begins to catch a hint of the confused identities: but it is too late.

At this point Emilia discovers Bellmein hiding and drags him on stage: recognition of the mutual mistaken identity comes at once (p. 38). However, before the tension has a chance to drop too far, Careful is heard coming up the stairs. Bellmein takes his place in the long line of Centlivre heroes (beginning with Ludovico in The Perjur'd Husband, and ending only with Ned Freeman in The Artifice) discovered awkwardly placed at a compromising moment. In this case, Clarinda and Emilia roll him up in a mat. As Careful enters, he trips over it, and impetuously calls for a servant to "throw it into the Horse Pond" (p. 38). The servant's clumsy attempts to lift the mat allow Bellmein to escape without being seen by Careful, although not without making some noise. Clarinda gives the servant a guinea to say it was the dog, and Careful is pacified. The danger is over, and the tension slackens: the dialogue turns to Careful's plan to marry Mrs. Plotwell, and to force Clarinda

to marry Sir William Mode. Thus as soon as one crisis is over, the seeds of the next are sown.

The scene just described occupies about three pages in the printed text (pp. 36-39). It is thus an active scene for its length. Its good points are the confrontation between Clarinda and Manly, and the well-timed unexpected arrival of Careful. The latter part of the scene is less successful: the business with the mat is clumsy, and crudely farcical in comparison with the earlier part. It should be noticed, however, that Careful's sudden command to throw out the mat is not as absurd as appears from the bald summary: it is well motivated, as the result of his equally sudden dislike of superfluous luxuries (part of the Quaker influence Mrs. Plotwell exerts). The rapidity with which his order is executed, and the ease with which he is duped, emphasise how far he is master of the house without knowing what is going on in it: he is therefore a potent source of awkward blunders. Such a spectrum as we have here, from Careful who is most in the dark, through each gradation of enlightenment to the audience itself, is the typical situation in Mrs. Centlivre's plays. We are let into most of the secrets, and kept in anticipation more often than we are surprised.

3

The Heiress: or, The Salamanca Doctor Outplotted

was first performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 31 December 1702 (Avery, p. 30). No other performance is recorded. This need not imply that the play was damned at once, for Avery notes (p. 25) that at this period Lincoln's Inn Fields advertised in the Daily Courant only irregularly. Under a new title, The Stolen Heiress, the play was published (anonymously) in January 1703.[12] The change of title was a late thought, for the head-title in the printed text is "The Heiress".

The Stolen Heiress is a less original play than Mrs. Centlivre's earlier two. This is admitted on the play's title-page, which is embellished with this suggestive tag: "Nihil dictum quod non ante dictum." Genest pointed out that the play is extensively indebted to Thomas May's The Heire.[13] Although Mrs. Centlivre does not completely succeed in her attempt to turn a Caroline romantic comedy into an intrigue play, her omissions and alterations show considerable sensitivity to dramatic construction, and are worth looking at in some detail.

Mrs. Centlivre tightens the structure of her play by making the two fathers, Larich (May's Franklin) and Gravello (Polimetes), brothers. This links the two actions more closely, and the two daughters (Lucasia and Lavinia in

---

[12]"Now Published" in The Post Boy, 16-18 January 1703 (Norton, p. 174).

[13]Some Account, II, 263-264.

Mrs. Centlivre) can be each other's confidante. The balance of the play is also improved by Mrs. Centlivre's cutting the King's passion for Leucothoe (she also reduces him to a governor). In The Heire, the King's passion, developed rather late in the play, diverts attention from the central relationships. In providing the two girls with just two suitors each, Mrs. Centlivre follows the normal post-restoration practice.[14]

The Stolen Heiress is a play of intrigue and disguise. The avaricious Gravello gives out falsely that his son is dead, hoping that his daughter (now supposed his heiress) will be made the more attractive to rich suitors desirous of becoming richer. By an unexplained chance, his son (Eugenio) returns to Palermo, and hearing the news of his own death, assumes an alias and counterplots against his father to save his sister from such a mercenary match. The subplot also turns on the use of disguise to outwit a parent. Larich is anxious to have a scholar for a son-in-law: Francisco, his daughter's unscholarly choice, disguises himself as one.

One of the changes that Mrs. Centlivre made to her source is a particularly good example of her dramatic

---

[14] The Heire was acted in 1620 and published in 1622. I have used the British Library copy of the 1633 edition, which is not paginated and is therefore cited by signature. May's "Heire" is a woman: the OED does not record "heiress" before 1659.

technique. In The Heire, Luce appears "gravida" (pregnant), and Franklin upbraids Francisco with dishonouring her ($B4^{R}$-$C1^{V}$). This happens in Act I, so that throughout the play the audience is allowed to suppose Luce pregnant. It is not until Act V that we discover the imposture: Francisco flings the deceiving cushion at Franklin ($H2^{R-V}$), and Luce's honour is cleared. In Mrs. Centlivre's play, Lavinia, on the spur of the moment and only as a last desperate attempt to delay the hated match with Sancho, pretends to be "no Virgin" (p. 49). This happens late in the play, and an aside lets the audience into the trick. Not for a moment are we allowed to think she is really pregnant. The aside is typical of Mrs. Centlivre's technique in the management of an intrigue. When her characters are to appear in disguise, they usually tell us so, and they also warn us of their plots and stratagems. Mrs. Centlivre's frequent use of asides follows from this. The aside is a characteristic device of the comedy of intrigue-- a good example in Mrs. Behn is The Rover, III,i (ed. Link, pp. 56-57)-- and Mrs. Centlivre is especially anxious to take her audience into her confidence.

The removal of the supposed pregnancy is a particularly interesting change, for apart from illustrating Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic technique, it is also a sign of the times and the growing delicacy of the public taste. In the preface to The Twin Rivals (1702), Farquhar answers the

criticism that the illicitly pregnant Clelia should have appeared in the play, and not been merely spoken of. Farquhar says that he "had rather they should find this Fault, than I forfeit my Regard to the Fair, by showing a Lady of Figure under a misfortune."[15]

Mrs. Centlivre also speeded up the action of The Stolen Heiress by omitting a number of May's "set-pieces". Two of these are important satiric scenes, in which May ridiculed the Catholic practice of selling absolution ($G3^{R}$), and the quibbling of lawyers ($G3^{V}-4^{R}$). Not that Mrs. Centlivre was averse to expressing such sentiments in her plays: but she preferred to put them in small doses, and so avoid action-slowing blocks of satire.

Apart from the satiric ones, three other scenes which Mrs. Centlivre excised from May show not only her dislike of the "showstopper", but also her movement away from romantic comedy towards the comedy of intrigue. All three are scenes in which May was obviously drawing for inspiration on Shakespearean models. They are the "love at first sight" scene, in which Philocles sees and loves Leucothoe ($C2^{R}-4^{V}$); the blundering watch making the right arrest ($G4^{R}-H1^{V}$); and the King's offer to Leucothoe that if she will sleep with him, he will pardon Philocles ($G1^{R}-2^{R}$).

---

[15] Complete Works, ed. Stonehill, I, 286.

These are reminiscent of scenes in Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado about Nothing, and Measure for Measure respectively. Mrs. Centlivre omitted the first of these in order to concentrate on intrigue rather than romance: so she begins with the young people already in love. The second she omitted in favour of a more complicated stratagem to reveal Pirro's plot. The third (as noticed above, p. 42) was left out for structural reasons. In the first and third cases, Mrs. Centlivre was typical of her time: the second is a more individual and characteristic touch.

Some of Mrs. Centlivre's additions show her early interest in "humour" characters in the tradition of Jonson and Shadwell. In The Heire, Franklin was a standard tyrannical father. Mrs. Centlivre made him a genuine "humour" character: Larich is possessed by the idea that his daughter must marry a scholar, however foolish. In May, Shallow was an ordinary foolish young man: Mrs. Centlivre makes Sancho a silly pedant to fit Larich's humour. The result is that the tone of the subplot is notably broader than in May, providing for greater variety than in The Beau's Duel, without the complete divide between the serious and the comic in The Perjur'd Husband. The division between prose and verse is also better managed than in The Perjur'd Husband. The Heire is entirely in verse, but Mrs. Centlivre converted part into prose, and most of her additions are in prose. The division

is flexible and not rigidly enforced. For example, Lucasia and Palante (Leucothoe and Philocles in May), the more emotionally conceived pair of lovers, speak generally in verse, but can drop into prose when required.

So far The Stolen Heiress has been placed in terms of its source and Mrs. Centlivre's earlier plays. Another valuable perspective is provided by a comparison with Farquhar's The Twin Rivals, produced at Drury Lane on 14 December 1702, about a fortnight before The Stolen Heiress opened at Lincoln's Inn Fields.[16] Farquhar's play was not based on an earlier work, but apart from this the comparison is a fair one: both plays show the familiar pattern of two women pursued by four men.

Perhaps the most telling difference between the two plays lies in the relative importance in each of plot and character. The plot of The Twin Rivals is clearly contrived to bring out certain moral differences between characters. An example is the scene between the elder Wou'dbe and the goldsmith Fairbank.[17] This scene serves to show Fairbank as the type of the virtuous and generous man of trade. We are invited to contrast Fairbank with Balderdash, who in an earlier scene (pp. 296-298) with the younger Wou'dbee is

---

[16]Avery records no other performance of The Twin Rivals before 1716: as with The Stolen Heiress, this need not imply the play's sudden expiry, but neither can it be counted a sucess.

[17]Complete Works, I, 321-323. Subsequent page references are to this edition.

shown as the typical avaricious and hypocritical tradesman. Throughout the play, such scenes are contrived to bring out moral contrasts: the play is something of a "moral gymnasium". If Farquhar's characters seem more real than Mrs. Centlivre's, it is because they spend so much time showing us what they are rather than doing anything. (Farquhar's later plays, of course, veer away from this "sentimental" influence which spoils The Twin Rivals.)

In The Stolen Heiress (and this is true of Mrs. Centlivre's plays generally), plot is more important than character. Hence it is often the eccentrics who are the most memorable characters in her plays. The central figures are often only lightly sketched in terms of character: they plot and contrive to gain their ends, but their actions do not arise out of their characters. Her lovers do what any other lovers in a comedy would do to get out of the same mess, to win the same mistress, to outwit the same obstructive father. The plot is full of tricks, stratagems, devices, but it is not moved by the clash of character or by the interplay of personality. A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718) is a happy exception in which character and contrivance are closely linked. The Centlivre hero has a difficult and complicated task to perform, but it is not usually a moral test. The "sentimental" hero, such as the elder Wou'dbee in The Twin Rivals, has to pass a moral test, a test of strength of character rather than resource or

ingenuity.

The Twin Rivals also has the more solid setting. This is, again, because the action is often suspended to create it. There are excellent comic scenes that contribute nothing to the play's action, everything to its atmosphere. Examples are the Clearaccounts planning their cheats (pp. 307-308), or any of Mrs. Mandrake's narrative speeches, which create a whole social register of iniquity. Thus Farquhar defines his characters against the background of a tawdry, corrupt, scandal-ridden society. There is little of such social background in The Stolen Heiress. Mrs. Centlivre usually avoids "local colour" in plays set abroad: this is as true of The Wonder (1714) as it is of The Stolen Heiress. This avoidance is surely a conscious artistic decision to create a vague and indefinite setting: her ability to draw a realistic picture of urban life is shown in the gaming scenes in The Gamester and The Basset-Table, and the scene at Jonathan's in A Bold Stroke for a Wife.

What emerges from this comparison is that, if both plays have their faults, The Twin Rivals has a richness and a substance that Mrs. Centlivre's lacks. But if The Twin Rivals is the more rewarding literary experience-- Mrs. Centlivre at her best could not rival Farquhar as a verbal artist-- the faults of The Stolen Heiress would be less exposed on stage. For the play's failure on the stage suggests less that it was unstageworthy than that it did

not hit the taste of the time. The best evidence of this is that Mrs. Centlivre's next play, Love's Contrivance, was a successful attempt to give the town what it wanted. Having failed in her bid to graft intrigue interest onto romantic comedy, she turned to farce and French models. Love's Contrivance (1703), her first popular success, marks the end of the period of her apprenticeship.

4

Love's Contrivance: or, Le Médecin malgré lui was first produced at Drury Lane on 4 June 1703 (Avery, p.37). The initial run of three nights was hardly exceptional, but the play was afterwards revived on a number of occasions, the last in 1726. It might have enjoyed a longer life if Fielding had not written his Mock-Doctor. Love's Contrivance was the first of Mrs. Centlivre's plays to enjoy more than a single revival.

The play was published by Lintot on 14 June, in curious circumstances.[18] The dedication was signed "R. M.", and two days later the Daily Courant carried a notice denying that these were the author's true initials, and promising shortly to reveal "the true name" (Bowyer, p. 51). The coy "the" rather than his or her kept the sex of the author a mystery. No later advertisement announcing "the

---

[18]"This Day Published", Daily Courant, 14 June 1704 (Norton, p. 174).

true name" has been traced, but in the preface to The Platonic Lady (1707) Mrs. Centlivre acknowledged authorship of the play.

In this later preface she complained that because of the ruse of the two false letters, which she ascribes to the publisher, the play "thus passing for a Man's" enjoyed great success. It may be thought ungallant to doubt the lady's word, but Mrs. Centlivre must at least have connived at the deception. Otherwise she could simply have announced that she was the author. The earlier anonymity of The Stolen Heiress; the anonymity of her next play, The Gamester; the publication of The Basset-Table as "by the author of The Gamester": all these point to a careful attempt to conceal her authorship over a long period. When she chose to discard this anonymity, naturally she would slight the stratagems by which it was achieved, and try to present herself as the victim of publisher's avarice and public hostility to women dramatists.

In his Literary Anecdotes, John Nichols inserted some of Lintot's accounts.[19] The two entries that relate to Mrs. Centlivre are as follows:

1703 May 14 Paid Mrs Knight for Love's Contrivance £10
1709 May 14 The Busy Body £10

The arrangement of the entries is Nichols's and the date for Love's Contrivance must be wrong, unless Lintot paid for it before it was acted (on 4 June), which seems quite

---

[19] Literary Anecdotes, VIII (1814), 294.

unlikely. On the strength of an allusion in The Players Turn'd Academicks (1703), Bowyer assumes that Mrs. Centlivre gave Mrs. Knight the copyright (p. 58). But Mrs. Knight may simply have transacted the business in order to preserve Mrs. Centlivre's anonymity. If this was the case, Lintot would have to be acquitted of duplicity in the use of the letters "R. M."

Before turning from these mysteries to the play itself, the preface, which is one of Mrs. Centlivre's important critical statements, is worth some attention. Besides her praise of the actors, especially Wilks and Johnson, the preface deals with two main critical questions: the different objects of critical esteem and public taste, and the impossibility of pleasing both; and the problems faced by the adaptor of Molière in making his work appeal not to the French but to the English taste.

Mrs. Centlivre sees the attempt to "please the Town" as a "Lottery" in which the best authors sometimes fail. She pays respect-- or at least lip-service-- to the unities: indeed she thinks them "the greatest Beauties of a Dramatick Poem". Much as she would like to follow them, this is not the way to public esteem. The public wants "Humour lightly tost up with Wit, and drest with Modesty and Air"-- in short, something like A Trip to the Jubilee. She now shifts her ground. Treating the unities with less respect, she finds that neglecting them "gives the Poet a

larger scope of Fancy" and allows him to please the public at the same time. What emerges from this clumsy critical sleight-of-hand is that Mrs. Centlivre opposes both the neo-classical rules and the idea of the theatre as a "school of morality". There is however some concession to the Collier camp in the inclusion of "Modesty" as an oil for the comic salad. In the play itself, Bellmie is indignant at being thought to keep a mistress (p. 22): in the earlier Beau's Duel Bellmein's cast mistress Mrs. Plotwell was actually a character in the play.

Turning away from general critical theory, Mrs. Centlivre admits that "some scenes" are "partly taken" from Molière, but she asserts that they have "not suffer'd in the Translation". Some things, she says, will set the French laughing but will not make the English smile; and in some places where she found "the Stile too poor" she has "endeavour'd to give it a Turn". Translating this out of her terms, what it means is that she has broadened and coarsened what she borrowed from Molière. What remains unclear is exactly what she understood by "Stile" that Molière could be found deficient in.

This lengthy treatment of the preface may seem a "long preamble to a tale", but the tale will be a short one, for Love's Contrivance is a disappointing play. The subtitle only partly indicates Mrs. Centlivre's debt to Molière: she also borrowed from Le Mariage forcé and

(slightly) from Sganarelle. Since these debts have been treated in some detail by Hohrmann and Bowyer they will be passed over lightly here.[20] The changes Mrs. Centlivre makes in the borrowed material are almost all debilitating. Having none of Molière's anti-medical animus, she makes Martin's imposture on Selfwill simply a trick to outwit an obstructive parent. Martin himself never believes in his supposed skill: he has none of the grand fatuousness of Sganarelle when he is persuaded that he is a great doctor. He is not capable of the impudence required to persuade someone that modern medical science has changed the position of the heart.

The comic pattern of Love's Contrivance, for all that it owes to Molière, is actually closer to The Beau's Duel, although there are no close parallels of wording or incident. In terms of the relationships between the characters, the comic grouping, this is a case where it is almost as though Mrs. Centlivre had worked out the same formula with different names. Selfwill (like the earlier Careful) has the care of a daughter Lucinda (Clarinda) and a neice Belliza (Emilia). His preferred choice for his daughter is Sir Toby Doubtful (Sir William Mode). His daughter, however, prefers Bellmie (Manly), and his neice becomes involved with the friend of her cousin's gallant,

---

[20]Friedrich Hohrmann, "Das Verhältnis Susanna Centlivres", Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Litteratur Geschichte, XIV (1900-01), 401-429; Bowyer, pp. 60-62.

Octavio (Bellmein). Thus the main business of each play is almost the same: bringing together the favoured lovers, and frustrating the paternal candidate.

The plays differ, of course, in how this is done, and in the farcical interludes. In The Beau's Duel the broad comedy was provided by the mock-duels: in Love's Contrivance it is supplied by Martin and his wife, and Bellmie's disguises as an astrologer. Martin's wife-beating and the two scenes in which Bellmie imposes on Sir Toby as a savant-- perhaps one would have been enough-- show a return to the looser construction of The Beau's Duel. This is disappointing after the careful tightening of May's play for The Stolen Heiress. Looking at the scenes in Act V between the disguised Bellmie and Sir Toby, and noting that these parts were played by Wilks and Johnson, the two actors singled out for praise in the preface, we may suspect that they were written, or expanded, as vehicles for the actors. Verbally they are very flat: there are too few jokes, and they are repeated too often.

A notable difference between Love's Contrivance and The Beau's Duel is that while Sir William Mode was an affected fop, Sir Toby Doubtful is "an old City Knight". Sir Toby conforms well enough to the stereotype of the merchant fit only to be cuckolded, but Loftis[21] is right

---

[21] Comedy and Society, p. 66.

in minimizing his role as an anti-city figure. Sir Toby's occupation is important in only one scene in the play. In Act IV (pp. 46-49) there is a comic variant of the familiar "proviso scene", in which Lucinda tries to cool Sir Toby's ardour for her by making a series of typically "fashionable" demands about their future life together that would be likely to upset a cit. She must have a house near St. James's, a new laced livery, a French chariot, and always six horses to pull it. All this horrifies Sir Toby, as it was intended to.

His particular aversion is the French coach: "egad I would not have a Nail about my coach that's French, for the Wealth of the East-India Company. French Chariot! say ye, Zouns, Madam, do ye take me for a Jacobite? ha!" (p. 48). Lucinda replies that a man may follow the French fashions without being a Jacobite, a proposition Sir Toby denies. There is an interesting similarity here to the scene in The Beau's Duel (p. 41) in which Ogle refuses to fight the French, although denying Jacobite sympathies. He claims to have received too many civilities from the French on his last visit to France. Indirectly through Ogle, Mrs. Centlivre exposed the absurdity of fighting the French while imitating them. Sir Toby expresses the same sentiment directly.

This "proviso scene", perhaps the play's best, is also interesting for its use of asides. All three characters,

Lucinda, Belliza, and Sir Toby, are playing to the audience as well as to each other. After each of Lucinda's demands, or comments on the fashionable life she hopes to lead, Sir Toby makes a wry comment in an aside. He has no less than six asides in less than three pages of text. Belliza has two asides and Lucinda one: these serve to remind us that they are not in earnest and that we are watching a play-within-a-play. The scene lends itself very well to being acted by actors standing close to the front of the stage and speaking largely to the audience. Mrs. Centlivre shows considerable skill in the management of asides in this highly-stylized scene.

Praise for some notable technical success should not, however, obscure the play's thinness. To speak of its "theme" as "the resourcefulness of true love in achieving its romantic objectives in spite of obstacles"[22] is to confuse theme with subject. The play does not have a theme for it contains no general ideas. An opportunistic compilation, Pope might justly have labelled it "the frippery of crucify'd Molière". Mrs. Centlivre made good theatre at the expense of dramatic construction.

Reviewing this period of "apprenticeship", it is clear that, if The Perjur'd Husband was a false start, The Beau's Duel, The Stolen Heiress, and Love's Contrivance have enough in common for us to be able to pick out certain

---

[22]Henry ten Hoor, "A Re-examination of Susanna Centlivre as a Comic Dramatist", Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Michigan, 1963, p. 21.

characters, situations, and techniques which, as she was to use them over and over again, are the building blocks of the typical Centlivre comedy. There are two pairs of lovers, who have usually come to some understanding before the play opens. The course of their love is interrupted by misunderstandings, intercepted letters, rival's plots, and the like. Usually the father or guardian of the heroine will favour a less eligible (from the girl's point of view) suitor. These suitors may be eccentric, "humour" characters. If not, other "humour" figures will be introduced. Disguise and deception are the characters' stock-in-trade. There will be some incidental criticism of manners and society, and especially anti-French and anti-Jacobite sentiments, but these will be expressed incidentally, not form part of the central structure of the play. There are occasional scenes where wit and repartee are dominant, but more often comedy is derived from situation.

Love's Contrivance, by its popular success and the critical self-confidence of its preface, marks the end of the first stage in Mrs. Centlivre's career. But her desire to experiment did not end with the discovery of how to satisfy the public. Her next play, The Gamester (1705), marks a complete break both with the kind of comedy just outlined as typical of her, and with the critical opinions expressed in the preface to Love's Contrivance. Following

rather belatedly the examples of Mrs. Trotter and Mrs. Pix (see pp. 15-18 above), Mrs. Centlivre turned her hand to a moral play.

III

"AUT PRODESSE VOLUNT . . .", 1705-06

> The Design of this Piece were to divert, without that Vicious Strain which usually attends the Comick Muse, and according to the first intent of Plays, recommend Morality, and I hope I have in some measure, perform'd it; I dare affirm there is nothing Immodest, nor immoral in it; part of it I own my self oblig'd to the French for, particularly the Character of the Gamester; but he is intirely ruin'd in the French: whereas I, in Complaisance to the many fine Gentlemen that Play in England, have reclaim'd him, after I have discover'd the ill Consequence [sic] of Gaming, that very often happen to those who are too passionately fond of it;

This passage, from the dedication to The Gamester (1705) forms a complete contrast to the anti-Collier sentiments which Mrs. Centlivre expressed in the preface to The Perjur'd Husband (quoted at the beginning of chapter II above), and to the remarks in the preface to Love's Contrivance. The Gamester was first performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields, probably in January 1705.[1] A glance at some of the important theatrical events of the previous year shows that, in writing a "moral" play, Mrs. Centlivre was changing with the times, either from personal conviction or from the hope of popular success.

Steele's The Lying Lover was brought out at Drury Lane on 2 December 1703, and had a run of six nights. In January 1705 Queen Anne issued two proclamations intended

---

[1] Although the date of the première is not known, a performance on 22 February 1705, coinciding with the publication of the play, was advertised as the twelfth (Bowyer, p. 59).

to reform the theatres, and in particular to tighten up the systemn of licensing new plays.[2] The success of The Careless Husband, first produced at Drury Lane on 7 December 1704, is indicative both of popular taste and of Cibber's response to it. With official and popular sentiment thus running in favour of "moral" plays, it is not surprising to find Mrs. Centlivre trying her hand at one. Her "moralizing" of Regnard's Le Joueur is indeed analogous to Steele's treatment of Corneille's Le Menteur in The Lying Lover.

Much of The Gamester is closely based on Le Joueur (1696).[3] Mrs Centlivre's most radical alteration is her "sentimental" ending. In Regnard, Valère loses Angélique to Dorante: still devoted to gaming, the play ends with him still hoping for better luck in the future. In The Gamester, Valere finally abjures gaming, and wins Angelica. In order to prepare for this ending, Mrs. Centlivre makes Valere more attractive and Dorante less so. In Regnard's II,xiv, Valère, having just received from Angélique her portrait (in II, xii) pawns it to Mme La Ressource, despite his promise never to part with it. In the corresponding scene in The Gamester (pp. 12-14), Valere does not lose the picture to Mrs. Security. Instead,

---

[2]Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1660-1800, II, 281-282.

[3]Bowyer, pp. 59-62.

he loses it at play in Act IV, but then only as a "last stake" and with reluctance. Mrs. Centlivre makes Dorante more interested in Angelica's fortune than in her person.

Another important change is Mrs. Centlivre's strengthening of the subplot to provide the usual two pairs of lovers in the play as a whole. Lady Wealthy is treated more seriously than La Comtesse, and is given a respectable lover (Lovewell, who has no counterpart in Regnard) who reforms and marries her.

Despite the last-act reformation of both Valere and Lady Wealthy, scholars have disagreed about whether The Gamester is a "sentimental" play. This disageement reflects the larger critical dispute as to what constitutes a "sentimental" play. In The Drama of Sensibility (1915), Ernest Bernbaum, who locates the mainspring of the "sentimental" in ethical benevolism, accepts The Gamester as "sentimental" (pp. 98-100). Bernbaum accepts the sincerity of Valere's contrition, as indeed one must if the play is to make sense. For the conversion to be convincing, we must believe in the fundamental goodness of his character (and therefore of human nature) and in his readiness to respond to Angelica's exemplary forgiveness. Bernbaum is, therefore, surely right in associating the play with other dramas of benevolism.

Arthur Sherbo, however, in English Sentimental Drama (1957), refuses to accept The Gamester as

"sentimental" (pp. 113-115). Sherbo points to the "large element of the purely comic" (p. 113), and to apparently anti-sentimental elements, such as Lady Wealthy's parody of Valere (p. 16). This last is indeed disturbing, as I discuss below (p. 67). But the prominent comic parts of the play are also characteristic of Steele and Cibber. Sherbo isolates some of the artistic weaknesses in the play, but this hardly affects our view of what was clearly her purpose as expressed in her dedication: to ally herself with Steele and the "reform" movement.[4] This is what Steele said in the preface to The Lying Lover: "publick Representations should have nothing in 'em but what is agreeable to the Manners, Laws, Religion and Policy of the Place or Nation in which they are exhibited."[5] In method and purpose, The Gamester is the same kind of play as The Lying Lover and The Careless Husband. Unfortunately, the moral or didactic play did not suit Mrs. Centlivre. For all its popular success, (it was regularly performed until 1756), The Gamester is, to me at least, the least appealing of her plays. In trying to accommodate plot and character to the didactic mode, Mrs. Centlivre had to move outside her best and most characteristic vein.

---

[4]For cogent objections to Sherbo's procedure, see John Loftis's review of English Sentimental Drama in Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (1959), 447-450.

[5]Plays, ed. Kenny, p. 115. In the same preface, Steele refers (pp. 115-116) to the recent royal proclamations.

The most unsatisfactory aspect of the play is the character and conversion of Valere. Mrs. Centlivre's usual practice was to create ordinary but admirable heroes, men of sound common sense (Manly), with perhaps a sprinkling of faults (Bellmein). As foils to these heroes, she drew eccentric characters, whose peculiarities and "humours" were exposed to ridicule. The contrast between hero and foil is clearest in A Bold Stroke for a Wife, in which Fainwell tricks and parodies each of Ann Lovely's guardians in turn. In Valere, Mrs. Centlivre attempted to combine the two types of character. We are asked to condemn his "ruling passion" for gaming, and yet to take him seriously as a suitable husband for Angelica. Mrs. Centlivre is more successful in exposing Valere's vice and the indignities to which it subjects him (a good example is the scene with Mrs. Security, pp. 12-14) than in making him a sympathetic figure. In Regnard, Valère was not rewarded with Angélique, and there was no need to "convert" him, or evoke sympathy for him.

Other characters in Mrs. Centlivre's plays can speak in a strain like this without appearing absurd: "here on this Beauteous Hand I swear, whose touch runs thrilling thro' my Heart-- and by those lovely Eyes that dart their fire into my Soul, never to disoblige you more" (p. 24). But from Valere, such sentiments seem absurd. The incongruity between his protestations in front of Angelica, and his behaviour elsewhere, is too marked to be other than comic.

In a serious play, one can accept a conflict of emotions in a character's erratic behaviour. But this is less easy with Valere, because he vacillates between attractive virtue (Angelica) and unattractive vice (gaming). Valere also breaks his word too often to retain any credibility.

Another respect in which The Gamester is an untypical Centlivre play is in the plot, which turns not on a device but on an emotional change. As with the character of Valere, this was an unsuccessful experiment for Mrs. Centlivre. There are two main difficulties. The first is that Mrs. Centlivre included much comic business of her usual kind (which is in fact the most enjoyable part of the play), so that there is an incongruity between the management of the subsidiary intrigue and the highly charged emotional tone of the scenes between Valere and Angelica. The second problem is that the emotional changes are inadequately motivated and insufficiently prepared for.

The final scene of the play illustrates both these problems. The situation is that whilst Lovewell has, by a conspicuous piece of generosity, preserved the honour of Lady Wealthy, Valere has just lost at cards Angelica's picture (which he had sworn never to part with, except to Angelica herself). Actually, the "gamester" that Valere lost it to was Angelica in disguise. Mrs. Centlivre had three things to accomplish in the scene: to reconcile Lady

Wealthy to marriage with Lovewell; to heal the breach between Valere and Angelica; and to expose the sham Marquis (a pretender to Lady Wealthy). Mrs. Centlivre began by tidying up the subplot. Lovewell enters to Lady Wealthy, bringing news of his successful endeavours on her behalf (pp. 59-60). Lady Wealthy admits, in an aside, that "This generosity shocks me--" (p. 60). Here we see the force of moral example begin to operate. At first she is on the defensive against Lovewell, but in about a page of dialogue Lovewell persuades her to marriage. This is managed delicately: Lady Wealthy's "conversion" stems from a combination of caprice and good sense, her character throughout the play. She and Lovewell go out to seek the chaplain (p. 61).

Angelica enters, lamenting that she should have less luck in love than her sister. Mrs. Favourite (Angelica's maid) brings in Dorante, Valere's rival, and shortly after Valere and Hector (his man) enter. This is obviously going to be the final confrontation. Angelica asks for the picture she had given Valere. Valere is prepared to brazen it out, and invents a train of excuses, until Angelica herself produces it. The tension had been increasing for about a page of dialogue, since Angelica's request for the picture. Mrs. Centlivre punctures this tension with an aside from Hector: "Ruin'd past redemption-- Oh, oh, oh,-- that such a compleat Lie should turn to no Account." (p. 63). Such comic asides (and they continue through the remainder of

the scene) are usually, in Mrs. Centlivre's hands, effective comic punctuation. In this scene, their effect is less happy: Mrs. Centlivre is striving to establish a new, more serious moral tone, and Hector constantly reminds us of the world of the earlier part of the play.

At the production of the picture, Valere is abashed and, making a virtue of necessity, offers no further excuses. Now Sir Thomas Valere, his father, enters (p. 65). Hearing of Valere's latest disgrace, Sir Thomas summarily disinherits him: "Mr. Demur, I desire you to make my Will this Minute,-- and put the ungracious Rogue down a Shilling.-- Sirrah, I charge you never to come in Sight of me, or my Habitatio more;-- nor, do you hear, dare to own me for your Father.-- Go, Troop Sirrah, I shall hear of your going up Holbourn-Hill in a little time.--" (p. 66). This severe speech is followed immediately by two contrasting asides:

HECTOR
So, there's all my Wages lost.--

ANGELICA
Ha! this Usage shocks me. (p. 66)

This is surely too pat a contrast between the selfish and the unselfish. Angelica's aside, like Lady Wealthy's (see above, p. 65), "shocks" and signals the beginning of a change of heart. But in Angelica's case, it is an example of harshness that moves her to generosity, not a question of generosity reciprocated.

Valere makes another contrite speech, and in another aside we hear the process of Angelica's softening: "My Heart beats as if the Strings were breaking". A further speech from Valere, and Angelica gives way entirely: "Shall I see him ruin'd-- no-- that wou'd be barbarous beyond Example-- Valere come back, shou'd I forgive you all-- Wou'd my Generosity oblige you to a sober Life.-- (p. 67). Valere, naturally, says that it would, and Sir Thomas too is caught up in the mood of forgiveness: "How Lucky a Turn is this! Madam your Example is too good not to be follow'd.-- Valere, I forgive thee . . ." (p. 67). This is the emotional climax of the play: in the remaining couple of pages of dialogue the tension relaxes as Lady Wealthy and Lovewell enter, now happily married, and the sham Marquis is exposed as the former footman, Robin Skip.

Thus the last scene of The Gamester is motivated by a chain of moral examples. This accords well with the play's intent, which is to move and reform its audience by example. But a crucial missing link in the chain is the absence of any guarantee of Valere's sincerity. It is just not credible, after what we have seen of him in the first four acts. Near the beginning of Act II (p. 16), Lady Wealthy parodies one of Valere's repentant speeches. She does it so devastatingly well that it is impossible to take the same language seriously when Valere uses it in apparent earnest.

Obviously the play's popularity shows that it found

audiences willing to suspend disbelief in Valere, just as Angelica does in the play. But there is interesting evidence that at least one contemporary had mixed feelings about the play's morality, in an epilogue, apparently written for an amateur performance of some scenes from the play, about 1710. This is one of a series of three epilogues in a volume of "Verses. Some made Some Translated from ye Latin Anno Domini MDCCX", now in the Bodleian Library.[6] The epilogues are described as "written for some persons who acted a small part of the Gamester" (fol. 13^{V}). One of the three is written for the sham Marquis, and one for "any one" is a general apology for the faults of the inexperienced troupe. But the most interesting one of the three is written for Dorante, and it offers, in effect, a cynical reading of the action of the play:

> The Flirt forsooth rather than age she'd wed
> Has took a perjured gaming Rake to bed
> One who had often vow'd he'd game no more
> Yet broke his Oaths as often as he swore
> And tho' he did so many times deceive
> The cred'lous Fool wou'd each new Oath believe (fol. 11^{R})

The decision to perform the play (or a part of it) and then to satirize it in such an epilogue suggests a mixed reaction: a desire to credit the play's moral, and to suspend disbelief in its favour, and at the same time a desire to neutralize scepticism by incorporating it into the dramatic

---

[6]Bodleian Library, MS.Rawl. poet. 197.

framework. Obviously it would be wrong to build too much on a single piece of evidence, but the attitude of the amateur group does afford a valuable insight into the play's contemporary reception.

2

Perhaps encouraged by the success of The Gamester, Mrs. Centlivre wrote a second "moral" play centred on the evils of gaming. The Basset-Table was produced at Drury Lane on 20 November 1705, but ran for only four nights (Avery, pp. 107-108). In the dedication to the printed text, Mrs. Centlivre says that it pleased the "nicest" part of the town.[7] She goes on to give an account of the purpose of her play, and it is interesting to compare this with the earlier one prefaced to The Gamester (quoted above, p. 59). This is what she says in the dedication to The Basset-Table:

> Poetry, in its first Institution, was principally design'd to Correct, and rectify Manners. Thence it was that the Roman and Athenian Stages were accounted Schools of Divinity and Morality; where the Tragick Writers of those Days inspired their Audiences with Noble and Heroick Sentiments, and the Comick laugh'd and diverted them out of their Vices; and by rediculing [sic] Folly, Intemperence, and Debauchery, gave them an Indignation for those Irregularities, and made them pursue the opposite Virtues.

The emphasis here is on social and not personal morality: "Manners" are to be corrected, by laughing and diverting the audience from their vices. The shift in emphasis is

---

[7]It was advertised in the Daily Courant on 21 November (Norton, p. 175).

slight, but indicative of an important difference between the two plays.

In The Gamester, attention was concentrated on the personal consequences to Valere of his gaming. In The Basset-Table, gambling is treated primarily as a social vice. This difference in emphasis is brought out by a comparison of the opening scenes of the two plays. The Gamester opened with Hector, alone, waiting for Valere to return from play. Valere returns, alone. Thus right from the start gaming is associated with social isolation. Throughout the play, gaming cuts Valere off from his natural associates (especially his father and his mistress), forcing him into the dubious company of Mrs. Security and her like. The Basset-Table opens with a public scene, the melee in Lady Reveller's hall as their game breaks up for the night, or rather the morning. Several footmen are sleepily waiting for their ladies. Here gaming is presented as anti-social in a different way from The Gamester: it brings people together, but for the wrong reasons, and it turns night into day and day into night.

Another crucial difference is that in The Basset-Table, the gamesters are reformed by demonstration of the evil consequences of gaming, not by the operation of personal remorse, as Valere is. In The Basset-Table, the vice is more widely spread, among three characters, whereas in The Gamester Valere bore the whole weight of the

anti-gaming theme. In The Basset-Table, the gambling itch operates in different ways. Lady Reveller's gaming lowers her moral standing, and exposes her virtue to attack. Sir James Courtly gambles for diversion and intrigue: he has to be educated to a greater seriousness. At a lower social level, Mrs. Sago's passion for play causes the ruin of her husband, as she lives beyond their means. The fact that there are three gamesters in the play has another important advantage. The main gaming scene in Act IV of The Basset-Table (pp. 50-54) is superior to the corresponding scene in The Gamester (pp. 50-56) because all of the card-players are important characters in the play. Thus each move is watched with interest, as we know the undercurrents of emotion that are at work (especially the intrigue between Sir James and Mrs. Sago). In The Gamester, only the part of the scene that involved Angelica was of such interest.

There is also more variety of plot and business in The Basset-Table, including the (for Mrs. Centlivre) unusual feature of two love-chases. The concerns of the main plot are to reform Lady Reveller's love of gaming, and to unite her to Lord Worthy. Both are effected by means of disguise: Sir James pretends to assault Lady Reveller, setting up a situation in which Lord Worthy can come to her rescue. Important anti-gaming sentiments are expressed indirectly through Sir James's account of Lady Reveller's behaviour:

LADY REVELLER
Oh! hold-- Kill me rather than destroy my Honour -- what Devil has Debauch'd your Temper? Or how has my Carriage drawn this Curse upon me? What have I done to give you Cause to think you ever shou'd succeed this hated way. (weeps.)

SIR JAMES
Why this Question, Madam? Can a Lady that loves Play so passionately as you do -- that takes as much Pains to draw Men in to lose their Money, as a Town Miss to their Destruction -- that Caresses all Sorts of People for your Interest, that divides your time between your Toylet and the Basset-Table; (can you, I say, boast of innate Virtue?-- Fie, fie, I am sure you must have guess'd for what I Play'd so Deep -- . . . (pp. 55-56)

Here the moral sentiments are both disguised and doubled in force by being alleged as reasons for seduction. Lord Worthy, as arranged, comes opportunely to save Lady Reveller, and she is cured of her follies.

The second plot is managed less adroitly. Sir James himself has to be cured of lightness and easy morality by Lady Lucy. The groundwork for his "conversion" is laid near the beginning of Act III, in a very moral conversation between the two. Lady Lucy points out the evils of gaming, and Sir James is half convinced: but when Lady Lucy leaves him, the attractions of basset reassert themselves (pp. 47-50). In the end, the justness of Lady Lucy's sentiments brings him onto the right side: his "conversion", entirely by force of moral example, is therefore more "sentimental" than Lady Reveller's. Because Sir James is from the beginning portrayed as a man of sense, amusing himself with folly, his conversion does

not jar in the way that Valere's does.

There is no love-chase in the third plot. Valeria and Ensign Lovely have been in love since before the play began, but her father, Sir Richard Plainman, wants her to marry a seaman, and has selected a Captain Hearty for the purpose. Sir Richard is a more rational version of Larich, the father in The Stolen Heiress who wanted his daughter to marry a scholar. Valeria is a "philosophical girl", much interested in both speculative and experimental science. This is not to Hearty's taste, so that he gladly resigns his pretentions to Lovely, and helps him win Valeria by disguising himself as a seaman and blustering well enough to deceive Sir Richard. This part of the play is in some ways the most interesting. Sir Richard acts as spokesman for Mrs. Centlivre's anti-French and anti-popish sentiments. This redeems him from being a mere tyrant, and grounds his "humour" in the rational desire to trounce the French. Captain Hearty's nautical slang and metaphors is the first time Mrs. Centlivre makes extensive use of such an argot, even parodying it when Lovely disguises himself as Captain Match. She makes most extensive use of the same device in A Bold Stroke for a Wife, where Fainwell has to repeat Lovely's trick in five different characters in order to win Ann Lovely.

It is Valeria, however, who has become the play's best-known character. She has been seen as a satirical

portrait of the "new woman", and even as a caricature of Mary Astell: "By 1709, the time of Swift's Madonella in the Tatler, when Mary Astell had become well known, Mrs. Centlivre used her in The Basset Table, as a specific instance of the learned lady. The French influence is prominent in this play in that Valeria's pseudo-learning consists in experimental science."[8] I find no evidence that the portrait is intended to be satiric, or supposed to recall Mary Astell. Lady Reveller suggests to Valeria that she might like to form an Academy for women, and Valeria agrees that she would (p. 19): but this is the only similarity between her and Mary Astell. There is nothing in the latter's educational writings to suggest an interest in experimental science: her emphasis is on philosophy in the modern sense. Valeria's interests are in dissecting animals and in speculative science, and I see nothing "pseudo" about her science. Her empirical procedure and sceptical attitude seem to be in the true spirit of the Royal Society. Nor is Valeria a woman in whom science has driven out softer thoughts of love. She frankly admits to Lovely that she loves him, and she resolutely refuses to marry the man her father has chosen for her.

The Basset-Table is a more searching treatment of the "woman question" than any of the plays written by Mrs. Behn and her successors. In this play Mrs. Centlivre

---

[8]Florence N. Smith, Mary Astell (1916), p. 29.

provides, in Lady Reveller, a study of a woman of sense giddy because unimproved by education; in Lady Lucy, a woman of reflection and morality; and in Valeria a woman interested in areas of knowledge commonly thought a man's preserve. Lady Reveller is imitated at a lower social level by Mrs. Sago, a city wife whose passion for gaming leads her to live beyond her means. Since Mrs. Sago is a slavish follower of Lady Reveller, the two women furnish excellent illustrations of Mary Astell's point that "Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of Vice, and Imitation, and Custom rear it up."[9]

The "woman question" is closely linked with the play's treatment of the social evils of gaming. For Sir James, who goes to play with his eyes opened by his education, the pastime is an innocent diversion. He has enough money to lose, calculating before the game exactly how much he will let the ladies win (p. 49), and he is not likely to bring ruin on himself. The women, less self-controlled, are more vulnerable. Lady Reveller, although she has money enough, exposes herself, as we have seen (p. 72 above); while Mrs. Sago actually brings her husband into dire financial straits by her unbridled passion for play. Lady Lucy and Valeria see nothing to attract them in such frivolous pursuits. Thus if the play

---

[9] A Serious Proposal to the Ladies (1695), p. 32.

has a theme beyond the evils of gaming, and a moral purpose beyond the one Mrs. Centlivre sets out explicitly, it is the need for the female mind to be trained, and so avoid the wrong judgments that Lady Reveller and Mrs. Sago make.

Henry ten Hoor seems to me to be mistaken when he claims that the play's theme is "the evil that results from self-indulgence and unwillingness to conform to the restrictions imposed by an ordered society".[10] "Society" in the play is neither ordered nor responsible. On the contrary, it is society that allows women to lead a life of frivolity without preparing them for anything better. It is the social nonconformists in the play, Lady Lucy and Valeria, who engage our sympathy. The Basset-Table is a call for a new society in which women will play a more serious role than the "Merry little coquetish Tits" that divert Sir James (p. 49).

3

Neither performance nor publication of Love at a Venture can be dated precisely. There has been a suggestion that it was offered to Drury Lane, but refused by Cibber: the earliest evidence for this, however, is a pamphlet of 1740, quoted below (p. 78). According to the title-page of the printed edition, the play had been "acted by his Grace, the Duke of Grafton's Servants, at the New Theatre in

---

[10] "A Re-examination of Susanna Centlivre", p. 65.

Bath".[11] No actors' names are given in this edition, but the epilogue is assigned to Miss Jacobella Power, and the prologue implies that the (anonymous) authoress was in, or at least associated with, the company. It is known that Grafton's company, managed by John Power, was active in Bristol in the summer of 1706.[12] Mottley records that it was while acting in this company at Windsor that Mrs. Carroll attracted the notice of Joseph Centlivre.[13]

The theatre in Bath had been built in 1705, but little is known of its operations.[14] Love at a Venture is actually the earliest play known to have been acted there. One imagines a summer audience at Bath to have been hardly less sophisticated than the winter audiences of the metropolis. Defoe, writing in 1725, acidly remarks how this need not have been to the theatre's advantage: "In the afternoon there is generally a play, tho' the decorations are mean, and the performances accordingly; but it answers, for the company here (not the actors)

---

[11] It was published by John Chantry, and the title-page is dated 1706.

[12] Sybil Rosenfeld, Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660-1765 (1939), pp. 45, 170.

[13] A List of all the Dramatic Authors (1747), p. 188.

[14] Rosenfeld, pp. 168-172.

make the play, to say no more."[15] One remarkable feature of the play, which suggests that the printed text, at least, was adapted for provincial performance, is the small number of locations and scene changes that are required. Acts II, III, and V, are unbroken scenes, and Acts I and IV require only one change each. Only three different locations are called for. (The typical requirements for a London-staged Centlivre play are discussed in chapter IV below; see pp. 107-108). There is no record of the play's having been performed in London.

Since Love at a Venture is at least the equal of any of Mrs. Centlivre's earlier plays, one is puzzled by the story of Cibber's rejection of it. The idea comes from one of the anti-Cibber pamphlets that followed the publication of the Apology. Cibber's refusal is there pithily expressed: "Why, Madam, said he, this would be putting upon the Audience indeed; they will never bear it; 'tis extravagant, it is outraging Nature, it is silly, and it is not ridiculous."[16] Mottley simply says that she "offered it to Drury-lane Theatre, where it was rejected, but she afterwards carried it to Bath" (p. 188).

Cibber certainly thought well enough of the play (as the author of The Laureat well knew) to steal from it

---

[15] A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain (Everyman edition), II, 35.

[16] The Laureat: or, The Right Side of Colley Cibber (1740), p. 112.

for his own The Double Gallant, which was produced at the Haymarket on 1 November 1707. In his Apology, Cibber tells us that this play was "made up of what little was tolerable, in two, or three others, that had no Success, and were laid aside as so much Poetical Lumber".[17] The Laureat charges that Cibber plagiarised from Mrs. Centlivre's manuscript (p. 112), but he could have used the printed text.

In Love at a Venture, Mrs. Centlivre turned away from the didactic drama of The Gamester and The Basset-Table.[18] Love at a Venture is a return to earlier models and modes. The main plot is based on Thomas Corneille's Le Galand doublé (1690), but in adapting it to English taste Mrs. Centlivre also drew on English restoration comedy.[19] In particular, it is reminiscent of restoration comedy in being a portrait of a rake (Bellair) settling down to a steady life, not suddenly converted to it. Bellair (he is Belair in the dramatis personae, but Bellair

---

[17] Apology (1740), ed. Fone, pp. 182-83. Cibber also used Burnaby's The Reform'd Wife (1700) and The Ladies Visiting-Day (1701).

[18] There are, however, "moral" scenes in Mar-Plot (1710) and in The Artifice (1722).

[19] The play's literary relationships are concisely set out in F. W. Bateson, "The Double Gallant of Colley Cibber", Review of English Studies, I (1925), 343-346.

throughout the text), like Dorimant, feels initially a compulsion to make love to every woman he meets. When the mistress is away, he woos the maid. But with Camilla (like Dorimant with Harriet), Bellair comes to recognise a qualitative difference between this passion and his earlier affairs. Mrs Centlivre contrasts Bellair with Sir William Freelove, who (despite the name) is constant in his love for Beliza and thus corresponds roughly with Young Belair in The Man of Mode. This kind of contrast between the young men is a familiar pattern in Mrs. Centlivre's plays, from as far back as The Beau's Duel, and it reappears again in her next play, The Platonick Lady (1706).

Although she took the main plot-- the hero's appearing to two women in different characters, and keeping up the pretence of being two people-- from Thomas Corneille, Mrs. Centlivre made the hero more compulsively rakish and less sententious. She also added the subplot of Sir William, and the "humour" characters Sir Paul Cautious and Wou'dbe. Altogether, Love at a Venture is a play of action where Le Galand Doublé had been a play of words. Obviously, a good deal of verbal loosening was inevitable in translating couplets into prose. Mrs. Centlivre did not aim to reproduce Corneille's pointed repartee, or his epigrammatic couplets. An instance of her greater concentration on action can be seen in her omission of the discussions between the women and their

confidantes, little "love debates".[20]

In general, Mrs. Centlivre moves on faster than Corneille after the comic point has been made. A good example of Mrs. Centlivre's use of Corneille is a speech by Robin (Bellair's servant), which is translated from two speeches, in different scenes, by Guzman, the corresponding character in Corneille:

> Bon, mais puisqu' à la fois deux ont l'heur de vous
> Et que la confrérie est un mal nécessaire, [plaire,
> Prenez-les toutes deux en qualité d' époux,
> L'une pour vos amis, l'autre sera pour vous. (I,i)
>
> Monsieur, si par hasard elle était fort pressé,
> Et qu' à vous en défaire on vous vît êmpeché,
> Pour vous faire plaisir je prendrais le marché. (I,vi)

Why, Sir, if the worst come to the worst-- that they will both have you-- why en'e marry them both, keep one for your self, and t'other to entertain your Friends-- or, if you please, Sir,-- to do you a service, I don't care if I take one of 'em off your hands. (p. 26)

An example of one of Corneille's "battles of wit", a long sequence of verbal sparring, that was considerably shortened by Mrs. Centlivre, is Bellair's flirtation with Patch (pp. 9-12; see Corneille, I,ii).

As usual, Mrs. Centlivre also provides comedy of a broader sort with subordinate "humour" characters. One of these is Wou'dbe, a second-hand fop who copies his clothes from Sir William, and proposes to set up an "office for poetry" that will purvey second-hand poetical materials (p. 7). Unfortunately, Wou'dbe is not well

---

[20] A notable example is Corneille's II,ii, between Isabelle and Béatrix.

integrated into the action of the play, and some of his long set-piece speeches are tedious-- especially his account of his plan for instant erudition (pp. 8-9). More successful is Sir Paul Cautious, a hypochondriacal old man with a young wife. He does have some function in the action: Bellair flirts with his wife, Sir Paul preventing the assignations in the nick of time.

Sir Paul also contributes to the play's treatment of the "youth and crabbed age" problem. His tyrannical attitude to his wife parallels Sir Thomas Bellair's to Bellair, and Positive's to Camilla. In this play, Mrs. Centlivre's attitude to adultery is notably less sympathetic than in the subplot of The Perjur'd Husband, where Lady Pizalta was allowed to cuckold her husband and get away with it. In Love at a Venture, Lady Cautious's assignations are frustrated. When her brother (Sir William) discovers the intrigue, she is contrite and promises to reform: "What sure Disgrace attends Unlawful Love; had I really fall'n, I now shou'd die with shame . . . methinks I hate my self, for having, but in wish, consented, and grow in love with Virtue.--" (p. 54). There is a slight "sentimental" influence here that is absent from Bellair's settling down. It is worth noticing that Mrs. Centlivre neither allows Lady Cautious to amuse herself on the side, nor to escape, as Farquhar allows Mrs. Sullen to do in The Beaux' Stratagem. Instead, the miseries of her enforced

marriage serve to reinforce the idea of the need for love in marriage. In the main plot, the conflict between parent and child is dissolved rather than solved when it is discovered that each is the other parent's choice, and that love had anticipated parental arrangement.

In The Double Gallant, Cibber took Mrs. Centlivre's alterations to Le Galand Doublé a stage further. He added a third plot (Careless and Lady Dainty, borrowed from Burnaby) and much more comic business. Two examples of such "show-stopping" scenes are Sir Solomon's reception of the three eccentric suitors, in Act I (their "humours" are indicated by their names: Captain Strut, Sir Squabble Splithair, and Saunter), and in Act III, Lady Dainty's love of exotic bric-à-brac. This last (again, improved from Burnaby) is a department in which Cibber excells Mrs. Centlivre. Cibber (who had more experience of high-life) is sufficiently fascinated by what he is ostensibly satirising to give fashionable amusements and fads an attractive vitality. So too his fops are superior to Mrs. Centlivre's.

By introducing Careless, Cibber further diluted the dominance of the main figure. Where Corneille's Fernand had the field to himself, Mrs. Centlivre provided Bellair with a foil in Sir William. Cibber's Atall (who corresponds to Bellair) is scarcely a larger part than Clerimont or Careless, although it is the best of the three

(Cibber played Atall himself).[21]

4

The Platonick Lady was produced at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket on 25 November 1706, and ran for four nights (Avery, pp. 132-133). When the play was published, it was prefaced by an unusual dedication, not to a particular patron, but in general terms to "all the Generous Encouragers of Female Ingenuity".[22] In this dedication, Mrs Centlivre pleads against the "Carping Malice of the Vulgar World; who think it a proof of their Sense, to dislike every thing that is writ by Women". She instances two examples from her own experiences. One is an anecdote she was told by the publisher of The Gamester: "a Spark that had seen my Gamester three or four times, and lik'd it extremely: Having bought one of the Books, ask'd who the Author was; and being told, a Woman, threw down the Book, and put up his Money, saying he had spent too much after it already, and was sure if the Town had known that, it wou'd never have run ten days." The other

---

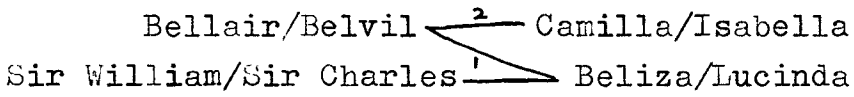
[21] In " The Double Gallant in Eighteenth-Century Comedy", William J. Appleton relates Atall to the restoration seducer, and suggests that he "recalls" Fainwell in A Bold Stroke for a Wife (English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. J. H. Middendorf, 1971, p.148). Appleton ignores the vital and immediate link with Mrs. Centlivre's Bellair.

[22] The play was advertised as "This Day Published" in the Daily Courant, 9 December 1706 (Norton, p. 175).

is the false initials "R. M." that were used to sign the dedication to Love's Contrivance (see above, pp. 49-51). As an example of ferale excellence, Mrs. Centlivre mentions Queen Anne, and hopes that this will answer her critics, those who might "spitefully cavil at the following Scenes, purely because a Woman writ 'em".

The Platonick Lady marks the end of Mrs. Centlivre's struggle for recognition: it was her last play to appear without her name on the title-page.[23] By the time she wrote The Busie Body, her marriage had given her a more assured social position, and with Steele's aid The Busie Body triumphed over the "Carping Malice". But the major credit must go to The Busie Body's being a better play.

As the following diagram will indicate, The Platonick Lady is a re-working of the pattern of Love at a Venture:



In both plays, the necessary correcting of the initial imbalance is effected by force of circumstance, not by moral regeneration.

---

[23] An apparent exception is A Wife Well Manag'd (1715), but this was intended to appear with The Gotham Election in a composite volume.

Instead of the "double gallant", Mrs. Centlivre assigns the disguise theme to Isabella, whose plan to capture Bevil involves her appearing as Dolly, Lady Elizabeth Lovemore, and Donna Clara, as well as, finally, herself. Corresponding to the apish Wou'dbe in Love at a Venture, there is Mrs. Dowdy, a rustic widow come to town to learn its manners.

The weakness of The Platonick Lady is that it is a medley of themes, modes, and motifs, without the unity of tone and singleness of dramatic purpose that enabled Mrs. Centlivre-- in The Busie Body, for example-- to combine diverse elements such as intrigue and "humour". In Love at a Venture it was only really Wou'dbe that was imperfectly integrated. In The Platonick Lady there is a tendency for the romantic, sentimental, and satiric elements actually to work counter to each other. This can best be seen by examining each in turn.

Perhaps it is the romantic, or rather "platonic" element in the play that is least satisfactory. In Cavalier Drama (1936), Alfred Harbage traces the rise of the "platonic mode" to the ideals of the precieuses that arrived in England with Henrietta Maria. He quotes this account from a letter of 1634: "it is a Love abstracted from all corporeal gross impressions and sensual Apetite, but consists in Contemplations and Ideas of the Mind, not in any carnal Fruition" (p. 36). D'Avenant's The Platonick Lovers (1635) is an early treatment of the theme, ending with the

conversion of the platonics to marriage. In The Platonick Lady, it is Lucinda who has imbibed such notions. She admits Bevil to friendship, but not carnal love. The "platonics" are only important in the conversation between Lucinda and Bevil in the Park (Act II, pp. 16-20). Elsewhere in the play, Lucinda is indistinguishable from other women of the "coquette-prude" type.[24]

There is, however, a general resemblance between the play and what Harbage outlines as the "Cavalier mode" (Cavalier Drama, especially pp. 31-36). Five themes in particular link The Platonick Lady to the cavalier drama: not that I am here suggesting a question of the "source" of the play, but rather indicating its type. There is the woman following her lover; the use of incognitos and disguise; the "rival friend" dilemma; the "child recovered" theme; and the "crews of pirates who prey upon and capture the chief characters" (Harbage, p. 31). There are no pirates in The Platonick Lady, but the incident recounted by Bevil (pp. 11-12) of his helping to save Lucinda and her father from robbers serves a parallel function. Of course, these themes can all be found widely distributed in different literary modes: but their incidence together in this play does serve to point its difference in atmosphere from Love at a Venture, a play with which it has otherwise much in common.

---

[24]For a discussion of this type, see Ben R. Schneider, "The Coquette-Prude as an Actress's Line in Restoration Comedy during the Time of Mrs. Oldfield", Theatre Notebook, XXII (1967-68), 143-156.

Like the "platonic" theme, the "sentimental" motif in the play is started and then almost forgotten. Isabella and Bevil had fallen in love in France, but (through no fault of their own) been separated. Isabella determines to recover Bevil if she can, but rather than show herself directly, she wishes to test him first by presenting herself incognita. This promises a development along the lines of Love's Last Shift, but Mrs. Centlivre's interest in disguise soon takes over this part of the plot. The question of testing Bevil is forgotten: only at the very end of the play, on discovering that Lucinda is actually his sister, does Bevil turn to Isabella-- and she is happy enough to be received as his second choice. As usual in Mrs. Centlivre's plays, it is force of circumstance, rather than abstract moral considerations, that determines the hero's "conversion".

The social satire of the play is centred on Sharper, a coward living on his wits, and Mrs. Dowdy, a rustic widow who has come to town in search of fashion and a husband. There is also a match-maker, Mrs. Brazen. This part of the play is only connected to the main plots by Bevil's need to recover certain legal documents from Mrs. Dowdy: in order to accomplish this, he pretends to be interested in marrying her. Although largely self-contained, this plot is brought to a conclusion: Sharper (pretending to be Sir John Sharper) marries Mrs. Dowdy for her fortune. But this fortune, her

only attraction, is lost when it is revealed as legally Bevil's. The broad but static comedy of Mrs. Dowdy and her clumsy modishness is an effective contrast to the faster-moving intrigue part of the play. Her scenes at the beginning of Act III and IV allow the dramatic tension to be lowered for a while. It is the platonic and sentimental elements that are out of place: Lucinda and Isabella are treated too seriously in the first two acts, and there is a real inconsistency of emotional tone between these and the later parts of the play.

In the next chapter, the staging of The Busie Body is considered in some detail. In particular, I draw attention to a complicated scene in Act IV that requires five doors. Here I would like to put forward a piece of evidence that suggests that the theatre in the Haymarket was less well equipped than Drury Lane. Not once in the course of The Platonick Lady is a shutter with a practicable opening in it required, although several are needed in The Busie Body. There is a point in Act IV when a street scene with a door in it would have been useful-- just as that used to represent the outside of Sir Jealous Traffick's house in The Busie Body. The scene is "the outside of Lucinda's House"(p. 37). Isabella, disguised as Dolly, wants to get in. She has bribed Shread, Lucinda's tailor, to introduce her. Shread knocks at the door, and a footman appears. All three "Exeunt" (p. 38) Then there is this stage-direction:

"Re-enter Isabella and Shread as into the House" (p. 38). Clearly they have gone off and come back on from the same side: meanwhile the shutter showing the exterior would have been drawn back revealing the interior of Lucinda's house. The inference is that there was no practicable door in the shutter.

Farquhar's The Beaux' Stratagem was another of the new plays produced at the Haymarket in the season of 1706-07.[25] This play, like The Platonick Lady, does not require a door in any of the shutters, although there is at least one point in the play when the dramatist would surely have used one had it been available. This is in Act V, where there is this stage direction: "Enter Cherry, runs across the Stage, and knocks at Aimwell's Chamber-door. Enter Aimwell in his Night-Cap and Gown." [26] Earlier in the same scene, both sides of the stage have been used: for the entries (from outside) of Sir Charles Freeman, and (from within) of Boniface and Sullen. Surely a centre door, if one had been available, would have been used to represent Aimwell's Chamber.

---

[25]It was first performed on 8 March 1707. The other new plays of the season were Mrs. Manley's Almyna (16 December 1706) and Cibber's The Comical Lovers (4 February 1707). Neither play requires a shutter with an opening.

[26]Complete Works, ed. Stonehill, II, 176.

IV

THE BUSIE BODY (1709)

In April 1707, Mrs. Carrol married Joseph Centlivre, and assumed the name by which we know her to-day.[1] It is pleasant to think of her taking the advice of her own Belvil in The Platonick Lady, acted just six months before: "pray let the Parson make an End of our Platonicks" (p. 67). More than two years elapsed before Mrs. Centlivre had a new play performed. The Busie Body was produced at Drury Lane on 12 May 1709, and became her most popular play during her lifetime. Steele praised it in The Tatler: "The plot and incidents of the play are laid with that subtlety of spirit which is peculiar to females of wit, and is very seldom well performed by those of the other sex, in whom craft in love is an act of invention, and not, as with women, the effect of nature and instinct."[2] This is an odd compliment, praising the woman's nature and the writer's art.

The Busie Body is the only one of Mrs. Centlivre's plays for which an account of the first night has come

---

[1]Unlike her earlier liaisons, in this case the license survives, and is quoted by Bowyer, pp. 92-93.

[2]The Tatler, No. 19 (24 May 1709); ed. Aitken, I, 163.

down to us, in the List appended to Scanderbeg (1747). Although this is late, it may not be derivative. John Mottley, who is usually credited with authorship of the List, could have seen the first performance himself. He was born in 1692, and attended the Archbishop Tenison school in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. In 1708 he obtained a place in the excise office. Since he later turned to dramatic authorship himself, after he had lost his place, it is plausible to imagine him, as a young man-about-town, attending the playhouse regularly.[3] This is his account:

This Play, when it was first offered to the Players, was received very cooly, and it was with great Difficulty that the Author could prevail upon them to think of acting it, which was not till very late in the Season. At the Rehearsal of it, Mr. Wilks had so mean an Opinion of his Part, [of Sir George Airy] that one Morning in a Passion he threw it off the Stage into the Pit, and swore that no body would bear to hear such Stuff; which shews how excellently the Actors commonly judge before hand. The poor frighted Poetess begg'd him with Tears to take it up again, which he did mutteringly; and about the latter End of April the Play was acted, for the first Time. There had been scarce any thing mentioned of it in the Town before it came out, and those who had heard of it, were told it was a silly thing wrote by a Woman, that the Players had no Opinion of it, and on the first Day there was a very poor House, scarce Charges. Under these Circumstances it cannot be supposed the Play appeared to much Advantage, the Audience only came there for want of another Place to go to, but without any Expectation of being much diverted; they were yawning at the Beginning of it, but were agreeably surprized, more and more every Act, till at last the House rung with as much Applause as was possible to be

---

[3]The details of Mottley's career are taken from the DNB. Mottley's own entry in the List is evidently autobiographical, and the article on Mrs. Centlivre, the statement that she collaborated with "Mr. Mottley" in A Bold Stroke for a Wife, can hardly have come from anyone else.

given by so thin an Audience. The next day there was a better House, and the third crouded for the Benefit of the Author, and so it continued till the thirteenth.[4]

Mottley's account is worth examining in some detail, not only for its immediate interest for The Busie Body, but also as a test of the reliability of theatrical gossip.

It seems clear that in judging Mottley's account of Mrs. Centlivre, one must separate his stories of her early life (see above, p. 5), which we are not expected to believe, from his accounts of her plays, which are supposed to be historical. Since Mottley is inaccurate about dates, getting her plays in the wrong order and assigning them to wrong years, too much should not be made of his placing the première of The Busie Body in late April and giving it a run of thirteen nights. Only seven performances are recorded in the first season (Avery, pp. 192-194). But Mottley's account of the circumstances that preceded the première can be supported from three sources. The first is Steele's statement in The Tatler for 14 May that "this play is written by a lady. In old times, we used to sit upon a play here after it was acted . . . "[5] This seems intended to counteract exactly the gossip about the play that Mottley mentions. The lack of alternative entertainment can be confirmed from The London Stage. In

---

[4] A List of All the English Dramatic Poets (1747), pp. 185-186.

[5] The Tatler, No. 15 (14 May 1709); ed. Aitken, I, 135

the season of 1708-09, only Drury Lane presented plays. The Queen's offered only operas, and was dark on 12 May, the date of the permière of The Busie Body (Avery, p. 192).

In the Female Tatler there is an alternative version of the story about Wilks and his part:

> the Treatment Authors meet with from the Play'rs, is too gross for a Woman to bear, since at the getting up of so successful a Comedy as the Busy Body, Sir Harry Wild-Air in great dudgeon flung his Part into the Pitt for damn'd Stuff, before the Lady's Face that wrote it.[6]

Of course, this is exactly the kind of story that gets repeated and improved. In the Biographia Dramatica, Wilks's wit is sharpened: "not only her play would be damned, but she herself be damned for writing it".[7] The story is also transferred to A Bold Stroke for a Wife. Some suspicion is cast on the story, even in its original version, by the fact that it is told as an anecdote against the poor judgment of the actors. Both the Female Tatler and Lottley reveal bias against the actors.

Wilks (and his opposite number, Mills) had played in earlier plays by Mrs. Centlivre. In Love's Contrivance (1703), Wilks played Bellmie, and Mills Octavio. In The Basset-Table (1705), Wilks took Lord Worthy, and Mills the part of Sir James Courtley. In The Busie Body, Mills as Charles played opposite Wilks as Sir George Airy. Each of

---

[6]The Female Tatler, No. 41 (7-10 October 1709).

[7]Biographia Dramatica (1812), I, 99.

the three pairs is based on a similar contrast between the two characters. One of the men is a "rover", an inconstant who finally settles down to one woman (Octavio, Sir James Courtley, Sir George Airy). The other is a more settled character, already committed to the love of his choice (Bellmie, Lord Worthy, Charles). This is a common pattern in the period, and occurs in other of Mrs. Centlivre's plays also. What is different about The Busie Body is that the two lovers, although nominally still at the centre of the play, are actually eclipsed by the "humour" character Marplot. It is easy to imagine that Marplot's importance displeased Wilks.

But if Mrs. Centlivre disobliged Wilks, she pleased the public. The Busie Body immediately became a stock piece, and retained a regular place in the repertory well into the nineteenth century. But in all this time, the play never received much critical praise. The comments that Bowyer collects (pp. 108-116) are full of condescension and grudging praise. This is understandable, for the very factors that made it a success on stage make it a difficult play to write about. It contains few "sentiments" or ideas. Its characters do not possess much psychological depth, nor does the play contain any real conflict of character. None of this would matter on the stage. There, the development of the intrigue and the rapid succession of

scenes and incidents would carry the play forward without much pause for reflection.

A good illustration of this is the "dumb" scene in Act II (pp. 19-24). Sir George pays Sir Francis Gripe a hundred guineas for an interview with his ward Miranda.[8] During the interview Miranda remains dumb, and Sir George has to resort to a series of comic stratagems, such as answering himself on her behalf, in order to advance his suit. This is a variation of a comic situation Mrs. Centlivre could have found in the Decameron or The Devil Is an Ass (it occurs in the fifth story of the third day, and in I, vi, respectively). The scene in The Busie Body is closer to The Devil Is an Ass. Sir Francis's constant interruptions closely parallel Fitzdottrell's intrusions during Wittipol's interview with his wife. In Boccaccio, the husband does not interrupt the interview. Although there are no verbal borrowings from Jonson, it seems an unlikely coincidence that both dramatists should have hit on the same device independently.[9]

But the question of sources is less important than Mrs. Centlivre's complication of the incident. In both

---

[8]The terms of the bargain are confused: in Act I, an interview of ten minutes is stipulated (p. 10), in Act II an hour is allowed (pp. 19, 21, 23).

[9]My conclusion is anticipated by Weidler, cited by Bowyer, p. 92.

Boccaccio and Jonson, the wife's silence during the interview is imposed by the husband, and in both authors the comic and moral points are the same. Vergellesi and Fitzdottrell are both shown as morally purblind in pimping for their wives. They both think (wrongly) that they can trick the would-be lovers by enjoining the wife's silence. Jonson, in particular, exposes Fitzdottrell's folly through the latter's long speech of self-justification (ed. Herford and Simpson, VI, 178). In fact, the whole scene becomes a searching critique of marital responsibility.

In The Busie Body, Mrs. Centlivre made Miranda the ward rather than the wife of Sir Francis Gripe, although Sir Francis does want to marry her. A more important change is that the idea of keeping silent through the interview is Miranda's own suggestion. This change was dictated by Mrs. Centlivre's introduction of an "incognita" motif into the play. Miranda has to be dumb, for if she spoke Sir George would recognise her as the masked lady he had recently spoken with in the park. But if it was prompted by necessity, Mrs. Centlivre derived two advantages from the change. Firstly, it contributes to Miranda's pretended acquiescence in Sir Francis's intention to marry her: it allays his suspicions, and makes him think she is on his side. Secondly, the stratagem complicates her relationship with Sir George: it keeps him guessing about her attitude

to him.

Another important point is that in The Busie Body the conversation takes place outside the hearing of Sir Francis, whereas Wittipol had no objection to being heard by Fitzdottrell. Where The Devil Is an Ass had shown an open antagonism between the two men, with the wife a pawn between them, in The Busie Body it is Miranda who is the most important character in the scene, keeping both Sir Francis and Sir George partly in the dark. In The Busie Body, the exposure of the avaricious guardian is of only secondary importance: the primary functions of the scene are as a piece of comic business (the words used are less important, as can be seen by comparing any of Wittipol's speeches with Sir George's), and as a complication of the plot.

The "dumb" scene is the only one in the play which Wilks, as Sir George, would dominate: he might well have thought the rest of the play "damn'd Stuff". Thus altogether there is a good deal of supporting evidence, both external and internal from the play itself, that can be used to back up Nottley's account. In the course of marshalling such evidence, some useful points about the play itself have been made. Attention can now be focused on the play itself.

2

In the prologue he wrote for The Artifice (1722), William Bond pleaded on Mrs. Centlivre's behalf:

> Ask not, in such a General Dearth, much Wit,
> If she your Taste in Plot, and Humour hit:
> Plot, Humour, Business, form the Comick Feast,
> Wit's but a higher-relish'd Sawce, at best;

The Busie Body is one of Mrs. Centlivre's most characteristic plays, and the formula "plot, humour, business" is a useful one in approaching it. The plot of the play concerns the working out of two problems, each of approximately equal importance. In the "Spanish" plot, Charles Gripe has to trick Sir Jealous Traffick out of his daughter Isabinda. Sir Jealous's years in Spain have given him an affection for the Spanish mode of treating women, and he wants to marry his daughter to a Spanish merchant, whose arrival is expected. In the "senex" plot, Sir George Airy wants to marry Miranda. Her guardian is Charles's father, Sir Francis Gripe, who wants to marry his ward himself. Sir Francis controls the fortunes of both Charles and Miranda, thus providing a link between the two plots.

The problem of the double outwitting of the "Spanish" father and the amorous guardian is similar to the plots of Mrs. Centlivre's earlier plays. But The Busie Body is a new departure for Mrs. Centlivre in the prominence given to a character outside the lovers'

foursome, the meddlesome "humour" character, Marplot. Most of the complications in the plot, and most of the comic business, is brought about by Marplot, who is connected to the main web of relationships in the play by being Charles's friend, and Sir Francis Gripe's ward.

Two restoration prototypes have been suggested for Marplot: Sir Martin Mar-all, and Intrigo in Sir Francis Fane's Love in the Dark (1675). But all that these characters have in common is their blundering. Intrigo is primarily interested in ferreting out secrets of state (see the scene on pp. 4-6), and is closer to Sir Politick Would-be than to Sir Martin or Marplot. Sir Martin talks when he should be quiet, and refuses to listen to any advice: these are the main sources of his blunders. He lacks the frank, active, and disinterested inquisitiveness that distinguishes Marplot: "Lord, Lord, how little Curiosity some People have! Now my chief Pleasure lies in knowing every Body's Business." (p. 28).

Marplot is also a more sympathetic character than either Sir Martin or Intrigo. Mrs. Centlivre prevents Marplot's becoming merely stupid (like Sir Martin) or absurd (like Intrigo) by giving him a lively, exuberant curiosity; an attractive naivety; and an engaging lack of foresight. Although prompted by an enlightened self-interest (he wants to know their business), Marplot is always ready

in the service of his friends-- unfortunately for them. But if Marplot is a sympathetic character, it is not for his benevolism. Bowyer is surely being inappropriately moralistic when he observes, speaking of The Busie Body, that Mrs. Centlivre's "better plays . . . reflect a different attitude to life than do the comedies of humours or the comedies of manners" (p. 102). I do not think that The Busie Body reflects any attitude to life at all. Marplot is not conceived in moral, but theatrical terms. The play's world is part of what Lamb called a "speculative scene of things, which has no reference whatever to the world that is".[10] To say this is to admit a very serious criticism of Mrs. Centlivre as a dramatist, but it is an admission that must be made. Mrs. Centlivre's talent was to amuse, not to instruct. I find her moral scenes (notably in The Gamester and Mar-Plot) the least satisfactory parts of the plays. Mrs. Centlivre's art is at its best in the autonomous world of the comedy of intrigue: she is a good, but not a great dramatist.

Marplot is too busy to think, and his business keeps us from thinking about him as a real person, as an inhabitant of "the world that is". But if The

---

[10]"On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", Essays of Elia (World's Classics edition), p. 208.

Busie Body is not remarkable as a play of character, the plot of the play is extremely well constructed. This can be seen particularly in the distribution of the major comic set-pieces. The play is slow to start, Act I being largely taken up with exposition, introducing us to all the major characters except Isabinda and her father. But the last four acts are each centred on a major piece of "business".

The major comic scene in Act II is the "dumb" scene that has already been discussed (pp. 96-98). This scene takes the "senex" plot well ahead of the "Spanish" plot, so in order to redress the balance Mrs. Centlivre devoted the second half of Act II and the first half of Act III to the "Spanish" plot. The second half of Act II is really introductory, showing us Isabinda and the "Spanish" humour of her father. Slow-moving in action, it provides a change of pace from the "dumb" scene. Act II ends with a brief bridge scene which brings together Sir George and Charles to discuss the progress of their respective affairs: this scene helps prevent the play's falling apart into two entirely separate plots. It is not until Act III that Marplot really comes into his own. His intrusions-- first outside Sir Jealous Traffick's house, and then at Sir Francis Gripe's-- give this act two comic peaks. This act being thus "busier" than Act II, the play's momentum is increased. But a pause is provided at the end

of Act III, as it was at the end of Act II, by another bridge scene bringing Charles and Sir George together, this time in a tavern.

Act IV is an intensification of what had happened in Act III. There is again an irruption into the carefully secluded "Spanish" world of Sir Jealous, but this time it is by Charles himself. Charles keeps an appointment with Isabinda, but Sir Jealous (put on his guard by his encounter with Marplot in Act II) is there waiting. Likewise, in the second half of the act, Sir George is visiting Miranda. Sir Francis inopportunely returns-- and again, because of Marplot. Sir George is hidden behind the chimney-board, but Marplot's unlucky curiosity finds him out. This is the "monkey" scene, one of the play's comic highlights.

The whole scene develops from the accident that Sir Francis enters "peeling an Orange" (p. 54). He wants to throw the peel into the fireplace. Since this would discover Sir George, Miranda asks him to give her the peel. He refuses, because she has the "Green Pip" already. As he "Goes towards the Chimney", the tension mounts: but now Miranda tells him she has a monkey concealed behind the chimney-board! The situation seems to be saved, and Sir Francis gives the peel to Scentwell to throw away. But Marplot wants to see the monkey: the tension again mounts, as Miranda and Sir Francis struggle to keep him away from

the chimney (p. 55). All seems to be well, and Sir Francis and Miranda get ready to go. But Marplot contrives to remain behind a moment, and lifts up the chimney-board. Seeing Sir George, he cries out "Thieves, Thieves, Murder!", which is obviously going to bring Sir Francis back. But Marplot manages to save the situation: as Sir George runs out the other door, he "throws down some China", and invents a story that the escaped monkey did it. Thus the situation is finally saved. The tension drops as Sir George comes back, and news is brought that Sir Francis is finally gone (p. 56).

Obviously rapid pace and sharp timing are essential to a scene like this. Mrs. Centlivre carefully manages several peaks of tension, each greater than the last. The technique is similar to that used in the "hood" scene in The Wonder, discussed below (pp. 160-161). But here it is more complicated, because there is both Marplot and Sir Francis to manage.

By the end of Act IV, we have surely had enough of concealments and inopportune entries. For Act V Mrs. Centlivre changes the comedy to one of disguise. Charles disguises himself as a Spaniard, and impersonates the intended son-in-law that Sir Jealous expects. But as usual the trick is exploded by Marplot's ill-conceived attempt to do Charles a service. This time, however, Charles has got Isabinda to the parson, and it is too late.

In terms of construction, and the timing of the main pieces of comic business, the play is a triumph. The intrigue is not too complicated, and it is unified by Marplot's blunders. Nor are these blunders merely comic devices: the action is precipitated by them. When she tried to repeat the success of The Busie Body, in Mar-Plot (1710), Mrs. Centlivre lost sight of the essential simplicity of design that is so satisfying about The Busie Body.

3

The play's dramatic structure, as outlined above, is based on a theatrical infrastructure of scene changes. A scene-by-scene examination of these changes hardly aids a literary appreciation of the play, but it brings us much closer to the play as a thing of the theatre. An attempt to reconstruct the staging of the play also throws light, at one or two crucial points, on contemporary stage conventions.

Unfortunately, for lack of evidence, study of the staging of Mrs. Centlivre's plays must be tentative and partly conjectural. Too little is known of the back-stage and scenic arrangements in the London theatres of the early eighteenth century. The well-known Wren drawing is interpreted by Edward Langhans as showing four wings and a group of three shutters at the back of the stage.[11]

---

[11] "Wren's Restoration Playhouse", Theatre Notebook, XVIII (1963-64), 91-100.

In the most recent construction of Wren's Drury Lane, Richard Leacroft leaves the crucial stage-area blank, for want of evidence.[12]

Such a lack of external evidence forces us to rely on what can be deduced from stage directions. In Changeable Scenery (1952), Richard Southern deduced from the stage-directions of Mrs. Behn's Sir Patient Fancy a plausible arrangement of wings and shutters.[13] Southern concludes that the staging of Sir Patient Fancy would require: "three separate intervals between groups of flat scenes, thus implying four sets of grooves, that is to say, a separate set of flat-scene grooves at each wing position--not a clump together at the back, but a dispersed arrangement, each unit containing two grooves, at four different depths on the stage. (ch 8., pp. 152-153) This arrangement is taken as the basis of the following discussion of the staging of Mrs. Centlivre's plays.

There is ample evidence that as Mrs. Centlivre wrote her plays, she gave some thought to how they would be staged. She generally gives full stage directions, indicating changes of scene, where scenes are to be

---

[12] The Development of the English Playhouse (1973), p. 95.

[13] Sir Patient Fancy was produced at Dorset Garden in 1678, although Southern (pp. 146-153) uses the collected edition of Mrs. Behn's plays published in 1702. There are no "long" scenes in Mrs. Centlivre's early plays.

"discovered", what furniture will be required, and distinguishing carefully between different locations. That such indications are usual but not invariable suggests that the printed editions are not based on prompt-copy, but on a manuscript in which Mrs. Centlivre had thought out some, but not all, of the problems of staging.

Of the nine plays so far discussed in this study, all can be staged within the maximum of eight locations permitted by Southern's scheme.[14] Conversely, only one can be staged with fewer than six locations. This is Love at a Venture (1706), which has only seven scenes and needs only three locations. There is a good explanation of this exception: it was produced not in London at all, but by a touring company at Bath and possibly at other provincial centres (see pp. 77-78, above). It is not likely that provincial theatres had the scenic resources of those in London.

Of the remaining plays, five (The Perjur'd Husband, The Beau's Duel, Love's Contrivance, The Platonick Lady, and The Busie Body) require eight locations. The Stolen Heiress needs only seven, and The Gamester only six. Southern's hypothetical arrangement will therefore cover all these plays: as we shall see in chapter V (pp. 135-139

[14] The Basset-Table takes place in several rooms in Lady Reveller's House, but the indications are not precise enough for one to work out exactly how many locations are needed.

below), it will not do for Mar-Plot (1710). The Busie Body has been selected for detailed study, rather than any of the earlier plays, firstly for the greater intrinsic interest of the play itself, and secondly for the interesting but superable problems that occur in Acts III and IV. It also provides most evidence quantitatively, for it requires the greatest number of scene changes.[15]

The following is the sequence of scenes, as abstracted from the stage-directions:

ACT I. SCENE The Park (p. 1)

ACT the Second [SCENE Sir Francis Gripe's] (p. 14)

[ii] SCENE Changes to Sir Jealous Traffick's House (p. 24)

[iii] SCENE Charles's Lodging (p. 27)

ACT the Third [SCENE the Street outside Sir Jealous Traffick's House] (p. 29)

[ii] SCENE Draws [Sir Jealous Traffick's] (p. 30)

[iii] SCENE Changes to the Street (p. 32)

[iv] SCENE Sir Francis Gripe's House (p. 34)

[v] SCENE Changes to a Tavern; discovers . . . (p. 39)

ACT the Fourth SCENE the Out-side of Sir Jealous Traffick's House (p. 43)

[ii] Isabinda's Chamber (p. 45)

---

[15]There are sixteen scenes in The Beau's Duel. The Busie Body has eighteen or more, depending on how many one adds to the printed text.

[iii] SCENE a Garden Gate open (p. 51)

[iv] SCENE the House [of Sir Francis Gripe] (p. 51)

ACT the Fifth [SCENE the House of Sir Francis Gripe] (p. 58)

[ii] [SCENE changes to Sir Jealous Traffick's] (p. 61)

[iii] SCENE Changes to the Street before Sir Jealous's Door (p. 66)

[iv] SCENE Changes to the Inside the House (p. 67).

The change for V,ii is not marked in the text, but is certainly to be inferred from the stage direction "Enter Sir Jealous meeting a Servant" (p. 61). The scene clearly takes place in his house. This omission may be a printer's error. The preceeding scene ends at the bottom of p. 60, which is a line or two short. A stage direction could have been removed from the bottom of the page, and carelessly lost. Alternatively, since the changes of location are set in a larger type-size, this particular one could have been overlooked. This is speculative: but I wish to emphasize the difference between this omission, which is certainly a slip, and some "omissions" I shall discuss below, and which may rather reflect peculiarities of staging.

Act I, a single scene, presents no problems. One convention that is, however, worth noticing is the "peeping aside"-- that is, a remark made to be heard by the audience alone, spoken by a character actually hidden from view, except when "peeping". This convention is also discussed below (p. 170) in the context of <u>The Wonder</u>

(1714). In the "Garrick" revision of the text of The Wonder, as printed by Bell in 1776, all the "peeping asides" are marked for omission. This is not so here. In the edition of The Busie Body published by Bell in 1776, all Miranda's asides in this scene (Bell, pp. 14-15) are retained. This is not an oversight, for one of Patch's (non-peeping) asides is marked for omission on p. 16. The explanation may be that such asides were still acceptable in an outside location. If plauibility be admitted as a criterion, then it would obviously be more plausible for Miranda to peep in this scene (where she could hide behind a wing) than for Felix to do so in The Wonder, where he is behind a closed door.

Act II is also straightforward. There are two changes of location, neither of them involving discoveries. Neither at the beginning of Act II nor of Act III is a location specified, but it is easily inferred from the text.

The third act begins in the street outside Sir Jealous Traffick's. This first scene is very brief (pp. 29-30). It is illustrated in the frontispiece to the play in the New English Theatre (1776), featuring Woodward as Harplot. In this engraving, Charles is shown entering Traffick's House through a door in the scene.[16] There was probably a practicable opening in the shutter in the first production: at the beginning of Act IV, the scene is again

---

[16]The engraving is reproduced in Bowyer, facing p. 110, but Bowyer does not discuss it in the text.

outside Sir Jealous's, and Patch is "peeping out of Door." (p. 43).

The second scene is discovered: "SCENE Draws. Charles, Isabinda, and Patch" (p. 30). This is evidently a room in Sir Jealous's house, but not Isabinda's own chamber, as Patch later tells her to "Run to your Chamber, Madam" (p. 31). The reason for locating the scene in a room other than Isabinda's will become clearer later on. The scene now changes back to the street (p. 32). Obviously the street shutter is drawn back over the interior scene. There is a brief encounter between Sir Jealous and Harplot. Sir Jealous exits into the house, leaving Harplot momentarily alone. Then "Charles drops down upon him from the Balcone." -- obviously one of the proscenium balconies, not a balcony in the shutter.

At this point, a change of location seems to have been omitted. Harplot and Charles leave, but the only stage direction is "Enter Sir Jealous and Servants". Patch's remark "do you think I wou'd let a Man come within these Doors" (p. 33) suggests an interior location, as does the entry of Patch and Isabinda, who is not allowed out. Thus we have two alternatives: an omitted scene change, or a slightly unnatural gathering outside Sir Jealous's house. The second possibility is strengthened by a parallel situation in Act IV, which will be discussed below (pp. 113, 115).

Wherever the later part of III,iii was located, the scene now (p. 34) changes to Sir Francis Gripe's house. From there the: "SCENE Changes to a Tavern; discovers Sir George and Charles with Wine before them, and Whisper waiting." (p. 39). This is the first scene to require furniture. Thus at the end of Act III, we have used six locations, but all we can say of the arrangement of the shutters is that they must allow the discovery of the interior of Traffick's from the street scene, and the discovery of the tavern from Gripe's house.

The fourth act is the most difficult. We begin (p. 43) outside Sir Jealous's. After Patch has left, the stage is momentarily clear before Sir Jealous's entry. Patch has heard Sir Jealous "coming down Stairs", so he must be presumed to enter from, rather than into, the house. On the other hand, he must find a letter that Patch drops, apparently outside the house. The problem would be solved if the scene were drawn as Sir Jealous entered, revealing the interior scene of his house. Certainly the conversation with his servant and the butler (p. 44) would be awkward in the street.

The scene now draws (p. 45) to discover Isabinda's chamber. This room is furnished with a table for supper, chairs, and a spinnet. I think we can also deduce a door in the scene, supposed to lead into Isabinda's closet.

The wording of the entries and exits is careful:

(2) Enter Servants with Supper

(3) Charles pulls open the Closet Door

(3) [Charles] Exit into the Closet

(3) Isabinda throws her self down before the Closet-door as in a Sound.

(3) [Sir Jealous] Goes into the Closet

(3) Re-enter Sir Jealous out of the Closet

(4) [Sir Jealous] Pushes Isabinda in at the other Door, and locks it

(2) Exit [Sir Jealous], pulling her [Patch] out

(1) Re-enter [ambo] at the lower Door

(1) [Sir Jealous] Slaps the Door after her

(5) Enter Charles

The door I have indicated as (2) leads to the rest of the house, and out of it; (3) leads into the closet; and (4) leads to another part of the house, but not out of it. Obviously it is more effective if Charles's entry and Isabinda's swooning take place in the centre, rather than the side of the stage.

The Wren drawing shows two procenium doors on each side. "The door", "the other door", and "the lower door" (1) can thus be located as in figure 1, on p. 114. What is interesting is that after Sir Jealous has slammed the lower door on Patch, we are to suppose the scene now the street, for Charles enters. He can best enter at what would be

fig. 1

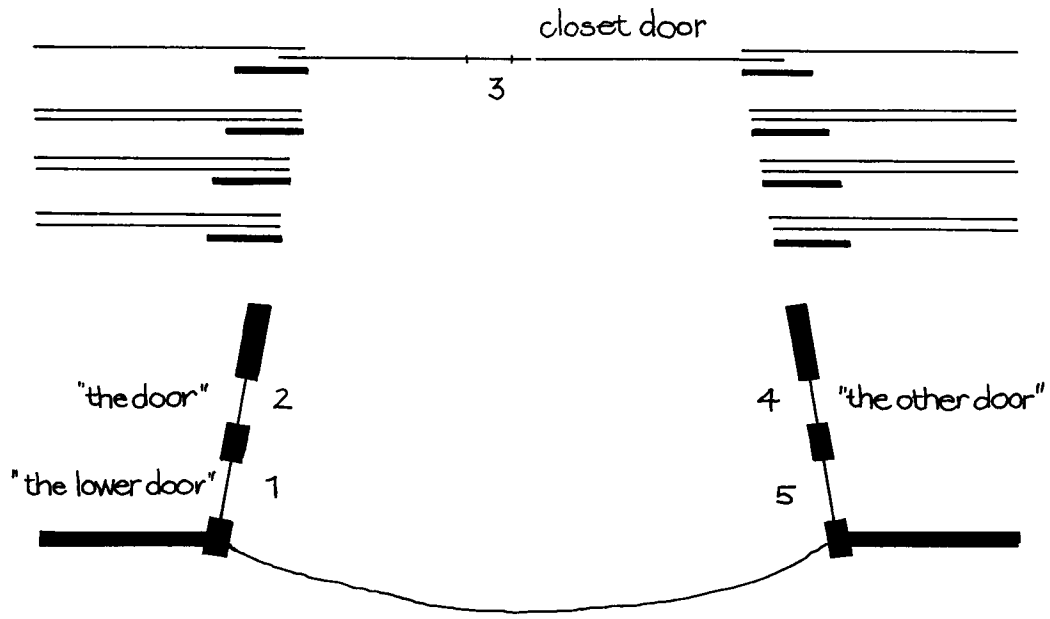
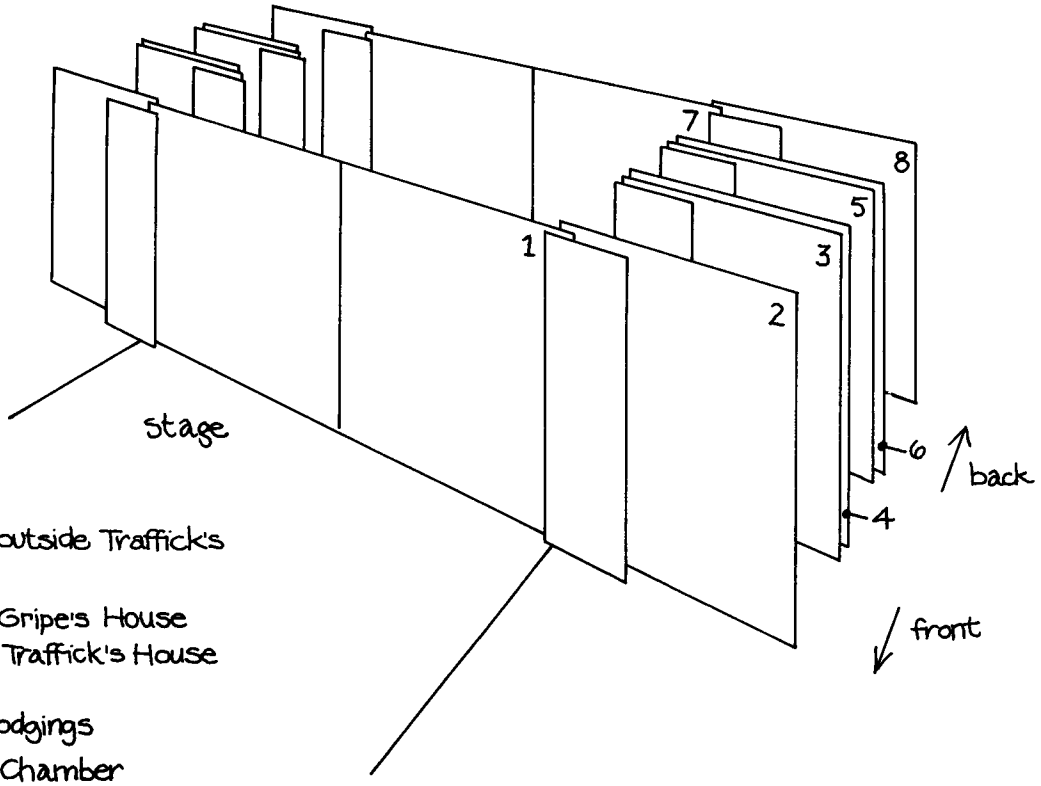


fig. 2



1 The street outside Traffick's
2 The Garden
3 Sir Francis Gripe's House
4 Sir Jealous Traffick's House
5 The Park
6 Charles's Lodgings
7 Isabinda's Chamber
8 The Tavern

called the "other" lower door (5). What one would like to know is whether the street shutter was drawn across, as it could be during the brief time Patch and Sir Jealous are out of sight. There is no indication in the text, but then neither was there at the end of III,iii (see above, p. 111) where it seemed to be required. The interesting alternative is that the audience would accept re-entry at the lower doors as equivalent to a change of scene, even though the original shutter was still in place. Southern proposes a convention very like this in his discussion of the staging of The Adventures of Five Hours.[17]

The scene now changes to "a Garden Gate open, Scentwell waiting within" (p. 51). This brief scene is noteworthy only as it shows how commonly the shutters had practicable openings in them, for Scentwell enters out of the gate. The scene changes to the house, and here again we need an opening, this time a chimney, for Sir George is "put behind the Chimney-Board" (p. 53). This is the "monkey" scene already discussed in terms of its pattern of tensions (pp. 102-104). Perhaps it is worth noticing here that the idea of hiding behind a chimney-board could find a place in more "realistic" modes of literature: in Sense and Sensibility we find that Lucy Steele "never made any bones of hiding in a closet, or behind a chimney-board, on

---

[17] Southern, pp. 126-136. The closest parallel to the situation in The Busie Body is in Act V (p. 133).

purpose to hear what we said."[18] Chimneys play a greater part in Lar-Plot, where two are used (see p. 139 below). Here its job is exactly analogous to the closet in the sequence in Sir Jealous Traffick's house. It provides a visual focus for dramatic anticipation. In the earlier scene, we knew Charles would enter via the closet: here we know Sir George will be exposed.

Larplot "Lifts up the Board, and discovers Sir George" (p. 55). His noisy reaction brings back Sir Francis. The following sequence gets Sir George off:

> LARPLOT
> Undone, undone! At that Door there. But hold, hold, break that China, and I'll bring you off.
> (He runs off at the Corner, and throws down some China.) (p. 55)

Here we want to know what is meant by "at the Corner". Marplot points to a door, but it does not seem to be a real one. A likely answer is provided near the beginning of Act V. There is no location specified in the text (p. 58), but it clearly takes place in Gripe's house again-- that is, the shutter with a chimney in it, not a practicable door. Miranda is talking to herself as unexpectedly "Enter Sir Francis behind" (p. 59). Here "behind", like the earlier "at the Corner", suggests an entry between the scenes, not through one of the doors in the procenium.

The next scene change, to Sir Jealous Traffick's

---

[18] Book III, chapter ii; ed. Chapman, p. 274.

(p. 61) has already been discussed (above, p. 109). The location is not specified, but it is clearly the interior. At the close of the scene, we move to the street outside. Marplot is loitering (pp. 66-67). One of Sir Jealous's servants comes "to him, out of the House" (p. 67), and Flatplot goes in with him. The scene changes to the inside of the house, but it is not a discovery: there is an entry for Marplot. In view of Southern's discussion of the "manet" convention, it is interesting to note that the scene did not draw while Marplot was on stage, but that he left and re-entered (cf. Southern, pp. 139-142).

Only one further stage direction need be noticed. This is "Enter Sir George with a drawn Sword between the Scenes" (p. 68). This entry suggests that there was no practicable door in the shutter representing the interior of Sir Jealous's house, just as there was not in the Gripe interior. There an entry from "within" was suggested by an entry from between the scenes. This lack of a door partly explains the location of III,ii in this room rather than Isabinda's chamber (see above, p. 111). The lack of an obvious door would contribute to the tension as the imminent return of Sir Jealous is announced.

More than one arrangement of the play's eight locations is possible. The order I suggest (see figure 2, p. 114) takes account of which scenes need to be discovered, and also of which need stage depth, either for furniture

(as Isabinda's chamber, and the tavern) or to make withdrawal possible (as in the case of the park). In the diagram, the stage is shown as it would be arranged for the beginning of Act IV.

If Mrs. Centlivre's plays have now been relegated to the library, in her own time they belonged to the theatre rather than the closet. It is hoped that this study of The Busie Body in terms of its theatrical dimension has at least partially corrected the misleading emphasis that an exclusively literary and critical account would have given.

V

TRIAL AND ERROR, 1709-12

Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic career pivots on *The Wonder* (1714), the middle play in the group of three-- the others are *The Busie Body* (1709) and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718)-- that can now be seen as her best, although they were not the most successful in her own time. After *The Wonder*, there is an assurance in experiment that we do not find in the plays that preceded it. This assurance is reflected in her choice of genres: she used comedy, farce, and tragedy as they best suited her purpose. In the period from *The Busie Body* to *The Wonder* (or rather 1709-12, during which the four plays discussed in this chapter were produced) she was still uncertain about the kind of comedies she wanted to write.

But if these were years of trial and error, the trial should be stressed equally with the error. *The Man's Bewitched* is a clumsy comedy with obtrusive farcical scenes, but *A Bickerstaff's Burying* is amusing as a curtain-raiser. *Mar-Plot* and *The Perplex'd Lovers* are both experiments in the kind of play that Mrs. Centlivre wrote best, the comedy of intrigue. Although neither is as completely successful as *The Wonder*, the experience of

writing them must have contributed to that play's success. The Wonder combines some of the best elements from the earlier plays: the intrigue of The Perplex'd Lovers, with the "Spanish" setting of Liar-Plot, but without the extremes of farce and "sentimental" ending that mar the latter.

The relationship between farce and comedy had troubled Mrs. Centlivre earlier in her career, in the preface to Love's Contrivance (1703):

> I design'd but three Acts; for that reason I chose such as suited best with Farce, which indeed are all of that sort you'll find in it [her source, Molière]; for what I added to 'em [the main love plot], I believe my Reader will allow to be a different Stile, at least some very good Judges thought so, and in spight of me divided it into five Acts, believing it might pass amongst the comedies of these Times.

The Man's Bewitched: or, The Devil to Do about Her is the same kind of play as Love's Contrivance: tacked onto the main plots are broad farcical scenes only slightly connected with the action of the play. The Man's Bewitched was produced at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket on 12 December 1709 (Avery, p. 205). It failed to reach a sixth night, not, according to Mrs. Centlivre's preface, because it failed to please the audience, but because of the appearance in the Female Tatler of an article in which Mrs. Centlivre was made to voice highly critical opinions of the theatre management. Because this quarrel is extensively treated by Bowyer, with liberal quotation from the Female Tatler,(pp. 117-127), I intend here to concentrate on The

Man's Bewitched itself.[1]

A useful starting point is the part of the Female Tatler for 12-14 December that offers a critique of the play itself:

> they thought it a Genteel, Easy and Diverting Comedy: That it had a better Plot, and as many Turns in it as her Celebrated Busy-Body; and tho' the two first Acts were not so roar'd at as the rest, yet they were well wrought Scenes, tending to Business: The Squire out did himself throughout the whole Action; nor is Mrs. Saunders [who played Dorothy, Belinda's maid] tho' ranked below Belinda, to be the less applauded for her Natural Trembling and Faultering in her Speech, when she apprehended Sir Jeffery to be a Ghost. The Ladies highly commended the Author, as what cou'd they expect less from one of their own Sex, for the care she had taken not to Offend the nicest Ear, with the least Double Entendre . . .

The main points here are the emphasis on plot and business, rather than character or language (the latter only negatively touched on), and the liberal praise of the farcical parts of the play, especially the Squire (Num, played by Dogget) and Mrs. Saunders as Dorothy.

It is difficult to agree that the plot is better than The Busie Body. In that play, there were two actions, linked by Harplot's vital role in both. In The Man's Bewitched, there are three plots, but with no common link. Two pairs of lovers (Constant and Belinda, Faithful and Laura) have to outwit their parents or guardians in order to marry; a third pair (Lovely and Maria) are involved in a "love chase", since Maria needs to be persuaded to marry

---

[1] There is a recent study of the Female Tatler, by R. B. White (Th.D., Univ. of North Carolina, 1966), but it sheds no new light on the problem of authorship.

Lovely. This third plot is really too static to be called a "love chase": Maria capitulates when the play is obviously about to end. The scenes with Lovely and Maria seem mere pauses in the action: the compiler of The Witchcraft of Love (see below, p. 124) was right to omit them.

The comic business, instead of arising out of the action (as it does with Harplot in The Busie Body), is forced into happening. This is especially true of the two main "farcical" scenes in the play, Laura's madness in Act IV, and the "ghost" scene in Act V. It is these that one imagines were "roar'd" at. Both are wretched pieces of fooling. Laura's madness is a stratagem to get her away from Sir David, her guardian. This is typical:

> [sings] Give me Liberty and Love,
> Give me Love and Liberty--
> Come, why don't you sing. (To Sir David.) (She beats time all this while, with her hand upon his head, and with her foot upon his toes.) (p. 48)

This goes on for six pages (pp. 48-53)-- longer, perhaps, than one could have tolerated Ophelia herself.

The "ghost" scene in Act V had been the subject of pre-production disagreement, as Mrs. Centlivre tells us in her preface:

> I willingly submitted to Mr. Cibber's Superior Judgment in shortening the Scene of the Ghost in the last Act, and believed him perfectly in the Right, because too much Repetition is tiresome. Indeed, when Mr. Estcourt slic'd most of it out, I cou'd not help interposing my Desires

to the contrary, which the most readily comply'd with; and I had the Satisfaction to see I was not deceiv'd in my Opinion, of its pleasing.

Cibber, who played Manage, had no part in the "ghost" scene (he had a large part in the "mad" scene), and Estcourt only a small part at the end. If the scene was indeed longer than it is in the text we have, one certainly would agree with Cibber, and even Estcourt. As it is, the scene (pp. 58-62) is about as long as the "mad" scene, and as little to the real point of the play. Sir Jeffery, who has been reported dead, returns, and is taken for a ghost. This is a specimen of Mrs. Saunder's part, so much admired in the Female Tatler:

> I, I, I, I, I, o, o, o, o, Roger-- Ha, ha, have a care, ca, care-- Don't yo, yo, you come near him-- Nor let him to, to, to, touch you, even with his Little Finger-- . . . . . ay, bo, bo, bo, but we, we, we know yo, you, you, a, a, a, a, are not so, Sir-- (p. 59)

The effectiveness of this "ghost" scene in pleasing at least the less discriminating is attested to by the two adaptations of The Man's Bewitched that were made after Mrs. Centlivre's death.

Both of these are worth looking at. The first to appear was The Witchcraft of Love: or, Stratagem on Stratagem, which was published (with a separate title-page dated 1741) in The Strolers Pacquet Open'd. Containing Seven Jovial Drolls or Farces (London, 1742). This

collection also contains a shortened version of A Bold Stroke for a Wife. There is no record of any of the drolls having been performed, but this need not imply that they were never produced. A recent study has identified the compiler and abridger as the actor Sir William Bullock, Sr.[2] Bullock, or whoever was responsible for the Pacquet did a skilful job on both of Mrs. Centlivre's plays. In the case of The Man's Bewitched, he omitted the third (Lovely and Maria) plot, and reduced the play to two acts and eight scenes. Mrs. Centlivre's first three acts are drastically shortened, but the major comic business of the last two-- the madness and the ghost-- is retained. The action is speeded up by the omission of "bridge" scenes-- such as IV,i (pp. 41-43).

The second adaptation of the play was The Ghost (Dublin, 1767). This retains only the Constant-Belinda plot. The first act is in two scenes, corresponding roughly to scenes i and iv of Act I of The Witchcraft of Love; the second act corresponds to Mrs. Centlivre's Act V, with the omission of the parts relating to the subplots. The Ghost was also reprinted at Cork. The edition is undated, but the cast listed was mostly drawn from the

---

[2] H. R. Falk, "An Annotated Edition of Three Drolls from The Strolers Pacquet Open'd (1742)", Ph.D., Univ. of Southern California, 1970. The Witchcraft of Love is not one of the three that Falk edits, although he refers to it in his introduction. He does edit The Guardians Over-reached, the adaptation of A Bold Stroke for a Wife.

Dublin Smock-Alley company, which visited Cork in the summer of 1769.[3] What these versions show is how easily the farcical business of the play could be abstracted and presented independently.

The Man's Bewitched is set in Peterborough. Bowyer regarded this provincial setting (unusual in the comedy of the time, with the notable exceptions of Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer and The Beaux' Stratagem) as "merely a thin veneer with which she covers her borrowing from the French" (p. 128). This does less than justice to the play's lively sense of provincial life. Mrs. Centlivre indeed borrowed much of the play, from Hauteroche's Le Deüil and Regnard's Les Folies amoureuses (Bowyer, pp. 130-131), but Num and Roger are English enough. Num was singled out for praise by the Female Tatler, but Roger seems to be the better of the two, especially in his confrontation with Sir Jeffery in Act V (pp. 54-56). This brief scene is more dramatic than the stagey "ghost" scene that follows. Sir Jeffery expects deference: Roger wonders who the impertinent stranger is. The clash of character brings out well how quickly Sir Jeffery (having been reported dead) has been forgotten. The trouble is that neither Roger nor

---

[3] Robert Hitchcock, An Historical View of the Irish Stage, II (1794), 149-150. The Cork reprint gives an indication of provincial taste.

Num is very well integrated into the play. This is especially true of Num's role as a suitor to Belinda: Num's rustic awkwardness is displayed, and is amusing, but it is never a real threat to Constant. Mrs. Centlivre treats provincial life more successfully in The Gotham Election (1715), where it is central to the play, not just a background as it is in The Man's Bewitched.

2

The farcical scenes in The Man's Bewitched were static: their comedy arose from a single supposition (Laura's madness, the appearance of a ghost) which was not developed at all. Mrs. Centlivre recognised the fault when she admitted that "too much Repetition is tiresome". Not only were the scenes static themselves, they clogged the action of the whole play. Mrs. Centlivre was more successful in writing a farce unencumbered by a play. A Bickerstaff's Burying: or, Work for the Upholders was produced at Drury Lane on 27 March 1710 (Avery, p. 217).[4] It is a farce in one act and four scenes. The central idea for the comic

---

[4]The original title of the play on the stage was A Bickerstaff's Burial (Avery, p. 217). There was an unusually long gap between performance and publication: the farce was advertised as "This Day Published" in the Post Boy for 25-26 December 1710 (Norton, p. 176). The title-page erroneously ascribes the play's performance to the Haymarket instead of Drury Lane.

situation was taken from Sinbad's fourth voyage in Nights 80-82 of the Arabian Nights.[5] But all Mrs. Centlivre borrowed was the custom of burying one spouse alive when the other dies: she did not use the figure of Sinbad.

The play is set in the island of Casgar. In the first scene, Lady Mezro (formerly of Covent Garden, but now the wife of the Emir of Casgar) finds some shipwrecked English sailors. The sailors are entranced with the island until they learn of the Casgarian "custom".[6] This is the farce's first reversal, and it is effected dramatically: Lady Mezro is told that her husband is dying. Actually he is not, but only pretending in order to revive her flagging affections for him. The second scene begins with Lady Mezro waiting on the Emir. The second reversal occurs when (as a stratagem to escape) Lady Mezro faints, and pretends to be dead: the tables are turned, and the Emir tries desperately to revive her. Lady Mezro is carried out (to freedom) in a coffin. In the third scene a Casgarian woman tries to bribe one of the English sailors to stay with her: he refuses, but a second sailor persuades the woman to come on board with him. This scene of the Siren sirened reinforces the

---

[5] Arabian Nights Entertainments, III (2nd ed., 1712), 41-52. The first four volumes had been available in English since 1706, but Mrs. Centlivre could have read them in French.

[6] After Bickerstaff had lost his topicality, the farce was revived as The Custom of the Country, at Drury Lane on 5 May 1715 (Avery, p. 354) and on several subsequent occasions.

patriotic theme in the play: the greater attractiveness of English manhood than Casgarian gold. In the fourth scene the Emir is about to be encoffined when the discovery of his wife's escape mercifully releases him from that fate.

Here then is a well-constructed farce of situation, each scene developing from the one before and built around a neat reversal. There is none of the clowning of The Man's Bewitched. Instead, the sudden reversal of roles between the Emir and Lady Mezro gives real scope for farcical acting without buffoonery.

The farce is "Work for the Upholders" because of the increase in the funeral trade that the "custom" provides: it is a "Bickerstaff's" burying because it owes to Issac Bickerstaff the idea of burying the uselessly alive. Carrying on the joke against Partridge, Steele gave "all men fair warning to mend their manners, for I shall from time to time print bills of mortality; and I beg the pardon of all such who shall be named therein, if they who are good for nothing shall find themselves in the number of the deceased".[7] In the dedication to "The Magnificent Company of Upholders", Mrs. Centlivre combines satire on the undertakers with satire on "all those young Wives who had sold themselves for Money, and been inter'd with Misery, from the first day of their Marriage". But the farce itself

---

[7] The Tatler, No. 1 (12 April 1709); ed. Aitken, I, 21.

is entirely focused on mercenary marriage: the idea of the willingness of a young wife to see her rich husband die is reversed.

An interesting point of staging may be mentioned. The farce is the only one of Mrs. Centlivre's plays to use a perspective scene, presumably located behind the flats, the "long scene" that Southern discovered in Sir Patient Fancy (Changeable Scenery, pp. 151-152). Before the action begins, there is this direction: "A working Sea seen at a Distance, with the Appearance of a Ship bulging against a Rock: Mermaids rise and sing: Thunder and lightning: Then the Scene shuts." This machine could have been especially constructed for the farce, but this seems improbable. More likely it was borrowed from The Tempest, a play which had been performed at Drury Lane on 20 and 23 January 1710 (Avery, pp. 209-210) and which was a regular item in the repertory. The frontispiece to The Tempest in Rowe's edition of Shakespeare (published in 1709) suggests a contemporary stage spectacular. It shows a storm-tossed ship approaching some rocks; flying spirits surround the ship.[8] Something like this was probably used for A Bickerstaff's Burying.

---

[8]The engraving is reproduced as frontispiece to The Tempest in the California edition of Dryden's Works, X (1970).

3

Mar-Plot: or, The Second Part of the Busie-Body, an attempt to capitalize on The Busie Body's success, was produced at Drury Lane on 30 December 1710 (Avery, p. 239).[9] It was more lavishly mounted than the earlier play, for it was advertised as having "new Dresses and several new Scenes; particularly an intire Sett of a pleasant Wood, painted by Mr Boul, after the Italian Manner" (Avery, p. 239). This advertisement is particularly interesting for its mention of the scene painter's name. This was the first time that Drury Lane had mentioned a scene painter by name in their advertisements, and Boul is actually the first scene painter who can definitely be associated with the theatre. Unfortunately, little is known of him or his work. He has been identified with Jean Philippe Boule, a Frenchman who spent some time in Italy before coming to England.[10] This would certainly account for his painting "after the Italian Manner".

There is, however, no "Wood" in Mar-Plot. There are only two outside scenes: one is the street outside the

---

[9]It was advertised "This Day Published" in the Daily Courant, 10 January 1711 (Morton, p. 176). Sig. G is misnumbered pp. 49-56 instead of pp. 41-48. Sig. H is correctly numbered, beginning at p. 49. Some page numbers are thus duplicated, and in references these are cited as "52 bis" etc.

[10]Sybil Rosenfeld and Edward Croft-Murray, "A Checklist of Scene Painters", Theatre Notebook, XIX (1964-65), 12, XX (1965-66), 70, 114.

Terriera house, so that Boul's "pleasant Wood" must have represented the Terriera de Passa. This was one of the principal public squares in Lisbon (the modern Praça do Comércio). If it was painted as a Portuguese Hyde Park, the scene in Act III where Marplot is about to knock on a house door (p. 26) must have seemed incongruous.

Boul's scene was probably commissioned not in compliment to Mrs. Centlivre, but in response to competition from the opera at the Queen's. A production of Pyrrhus and Demetrius had opened there on 6 December, and for the fourth performance, on 16 December, it was advertised "With the Addition of a New Cascade Scene after the Italian Manner" (Avery, p. 238). The repetition of the phrase "after the Italian Manner" in the advertisements for Mar-Plot a fortnight later can hardly be coincidence. In the context of the opera advertisement, the mention of Boul's name becomes a piece of copywriter's one-upmanship. Evidently Italian pastorals were à la mode that season. The cascade scene in Pyrrhus and Demetrius is thought to have supplied Addison with his satirical "Project of bringing the New-River into the House, to be employed in Jetteaus and Water-works."[11] Boul was still in London late in 1711, for he impressed Steele sufficiently for the latter to insert a puff for an auction he was organising.

---

[11] The Spectator No. 9 (6 March 1711); ed. Bond, I, 24.

Steele's praise of Boul's modesty is contrasted with the typical Italian style in the satirical advertisement which concludes the paper: "There is arrived from Italy a Painter who acknowledges himself the greatest Person of the Age in that Art, and is as willing to be as renowned in this Island as he declares he is in foreign Parts. The Doctor paints the Poor for nothing."[12]

Lar-Plot enjoyed a run of six nights, but did not follow The Busie Body into the standard repertory. The reasons for this comparative failure are not hard to find. Sequels tend to be failures: the case of Love's Last Shift, The Relapse, and The Careless Husband is exceptional. Larplot is not the equal of Lord Foppington as a comic creation. In Lar-Plot he gets up to the same tricks as in The Busie Body, but they are less well motivated. In the earlier play, he had been connected to the main action by being Sir Francis Gripe's ward: here in Lisbon, he has no visible business except to get in everyone's way. As a result, his contrivances come to seem contrived and mechanical.

The background against which Larplot operates is also less appealing in the later play. In The Busie Body, we had two pairs of lovers working towards marriage and outwitting their unpleasant elders. In Lar-Plot, there are

---

[12] The Spectator No. 226 (19 November 1711); ed. Bond, II, 383.

two triangular relationships. Charles, come to Lisbon on business, forgets Isabinda and intrigues with Dona Ferriera. Isabinda follows him incognita, in hope of reclaiming him. Colonel Ravelin, a gay dog, is intriguing with (unknown to him) two sisters, Marton and Joneton. In this more sordid atmosphere of intrigue, Marplot too becomes a less attractive character.

Mar-Plot does not offer any real criticism of The Busie Body in the way that The Relapse does of Love's Last Shift. In The Busie Body, Charles was the "constant" lover, so there is a complete break between his character in that play and in Mar-Plot. It was the settling-down of Sir George Airy in The Busie Body that needed to be tested: Sir George, not Charles, should have been sent to Lisbon. But a more basic reason for the sequel's failure is the "sentimental" ending that is tacked on. This is discussed below in the context of the staging of the play (pp. 139-141).

The idea of a play set in Portugal was certainly sound, even if it was a mistake to use it as a sequel to The Busie Body. The intrigue atmosphere is helped by the "Spanish" custom of cloistering women (imitated by Sir Jealous Traffick in The Busie Body), and by the readiness of Iberian tempers to flare. As with the Venetian setting of The Perjur'd Husband, the Portugese locale provided Mrs.

Centlivre with the opportunity for indirect comment on English society. England, by contrast with Portugal, is seen as the home of Liberty-- personal, political, and religious. Mrs. Centlivre's anti-catholic satire found expression in two scenes: in Act II, where Don Perriera's zeal to convert Marplot allows him to escape (pp. 20-21), and in Act V, where the two priests are easily bribed to take a more lenient view of adultery, and the priestly confessional is ridiculed (pp. 52-53).

Mar-Plot also contains, in Don Perierra, Mrs. Centlivre's most sympathetic treatment to date of a merchant. Don Perriera has married a noble wife, and his brother-in-law (Don Lopez) is a constant plague to him. Perriera, although a merchant and jealous, is seen to be more concerned for his wife personally than Lopez, who is concerned for his sister only as a reflection of his own honour (p. 20). Perriera is a figure of fun in the play, but not because he is a merchant.

Although, after The Busie Body, Mar-Plot is a disappointing play to read, it serves as a good example of contemporary stage practice. Stage directions such as "Scene shuts, then draws and discovers Don Perriera Lissening [sic]" (p. 54 bis) show the printed text's attention to the problems of stage presentation. With its "new Scenes", Mar-Plot was clearly something of a stage spectacular.

The Busie Body, and all of Mrs. Centlivre's earlier plays, required eight or fewer locations, and there was no difficulty accomodating them within the eight shutter layout described by Southern. But Mar-Plot requires at least nine locations, even after we have reduced to two the ambiguously identified rooms in the Ferriera house, and there is an additional scene for which the location is not specified. Mar-Plot is not, of course, unique in this respect. Lee J. Martin, in a study of restoration stage practice, found that in Sedley's The Mulberry-Garden no less than thirteen locations were specified.[13] Martin was able to accomodate this play to the eight-shutter system. He grouped the settings into rooms, chambers, and outdoor scenes, and found that: "If . . . the settings are grouped together by types, and if some settings of similar type are used for the same setting, even though the directions specify a different locale for each, the number of sets can be reduced to seven." (pp. 7-8). The eighth groove could be used for the garden, where arbours that can be walked through are required. For various reasons, however, such a solution is not satisfactory for Mar-Plot.

The sequence of scenes (which are not numbered)

---

[13]"From Fore-Stage to Procenium: A Study of Restoration Staging Techniques", Theatre Survey, IV (1963), 3-28.

in the play is as follows:

I, i The Terriera de Passa

I,ii A Chamber in Don Perriera's House

I,iii Colonel Ravelin's lodgings (discovered)

II,i Dona Perriera's Lodgings

II,ii [Dona Perriera's Closet] (discovered)

III,i The Terriera de Passa

III,ii Mademoisel Joneton's Lodgings (discovered)

III,iii The Terriera de Passa

IV,i Charles's Lodgings

IV,ii The Street [outside the Perriera House]

IV,iii Marton's Apartment (discovered)

IV,iv The Inside of Dona Perriera's House (discovered)

IV,v The Terriera de Passa

V,i [an interior scene]

V,ii Don Perriera's House (discovered)

V,iii [another room in the same] (discovered)

V,iv [same as V,ii] (discovered)

V,v [same as V,iii] (discovered)

V,vi Isabinda's Apartment (discovered)

Despite the various names used, it is clear that we only need two rooms in the Perriera house. In Acts II and V, the scene moves from one to the other: in the other three acts, either could be used, according to convenience.

At first sight, it would appear that some locations

could be combined in the way suggested by Martin for The Mulberry-Garden: such as Charles's and Colonel Ravelin's, or Marton's and Joneton's. Each of these is only used once. But there are cogent objections to such an expedient. Mrs. Centlivre would have known that particular attention was going to be paid to the scenes for the play, and it is unlikely that having managed to accomodate herself to such resources as were available in her earlier plays, she could not do so in such propitious circumstances. In fact, a sense of place is an important part of the play. Charles's lodgings must be distinct from Colonel Ravelin's because news is brought to the Colonel at Charles's that his trap-door is ready. Colonel Ravelin's lodgings are marked by a prominent fire-place, Charles's by a window. Again, Marton's must be distinct from Joneton's because Colonel Ravelin (not knowing they are sisters) is intriguing with both. Rooms lead to each other: from Colonel Ravelin's, the trap-door takes one to Marton's, and the chimney to Dona Perriera's apartment. All these locations must surely be kept distinct.

The problem can be solved by placing the last scene of the play, Isabinda's apartment, in the space behind the shutters (where the mechanical shipwreck of A Bickerstaff's Burying was located, and where Southern placed the "long scene" in Sir Patient Fancy). Having done

this, and bearing in mind the necessary sequence of discovery scenes, the remaining eight locations can be arranged as follows:

back ↑

- Inner room in Don Perriera's
- Colonel Ravelin's Lodgings

- Outer room in Don Perriera's
- Harton's Lodgings

- The street outside Perriera's
- Joneton's Lodgings

front ↓

- Charles's Lodgings
- The Terriera de Passa

This arrangement also offers a satisfactory solution to the problem of V,i. This is obviously an interior, for it begins "Enter Isabinda in a Perriwig and Night-gown, and two Priests, a Sword lying upon the Table" (p. 51 bis). It cannot take place in Isabinda's apartment, for that scene is located right at the back: it must be discovered at the end of the sequence. Either Charles's lodgings or Joneton's lodgings could be used for the purpose. Since our attention would be riveted on the table and the sword lying on it, the shutter would simply serve as a convenient background. This also explains why the location was not specified in the text: it would have been absurd to have drawn attention to the fact that it was set

in Charles's or Joneton's. From this, and the careful stage directions, it seems that some trouble seems to have been taken with the preparation of the copy for the printed text.

As with The Busie Body (and in contrast to The Platonick Lady) several of the shutters have practicable openings. Two fireplaces are needed, one in Colonel Ravelin's and one in Dona Perriera's. The street scene has a door in it (p. 50). There may be a window in the scene used for Charles's lodgings (p. 39). The variety of entrances and exits is astonishing. Characters (and especially Marplot) come in and go out not only via the proscenium doors, but through the trap-door (p. 13), "down the Chimney" (p. 16), "between the Scenes" (p. 50), and from "the Balcony" (p. 52). Although there is less broad farcical business than in The Lan's Bewitched, the rapid movement and keen sense of timing in Mar-Plot is closer to the better kind of farce-- the kind based on the comedy of the mis-timed entrance rather than on sheer buffoonery.

The most interesting sequence to examine in the play is Act V. It begins with the scene of Isabinda and the priests discussed above (p. 138). The remaining scene-changes are as follows:

SCENE, Don Perriera's House. Don Perriera, solus. (p. 53 [bis])

Scene Draws and discovers Isabinda and Charles (p. 53 [bis])

Scene shuts, then draws and discovers Don Perriera Lissening. (p. 54 bis)

> The scene draws and discovers Dona Perriera on her Knees to Isabinda. (p. 55)
>
> The SCENE draws and discovers Charles solus, in Isabinda's Apartment looking about him. (p. 58)

This liberal use of discovery scenes in the last act has a very definite purpose. Harplot has almost no part in this act, being only introduced (together with most of the rest of the cast) in the last scene. The act is more serious than the previous four: it has the serious moral purpose of reforming both Charles and Dona Perriera. The initial scene with the priests discredits the catholic idea of repentence: instead, Isabinda's sermonising to Charles and Dona Perriera sets in motion the working of a personal remorse. The sequence of discovery scenes helps create a calmer, more static atmosphere for this to take place. After the furious activity, down chimneys and through trap-doors, of the first four acts, a series of scenes in which the actors are discovered provides both a change of pace an and a new key.

The third of the discoveries seems particularly significant: "Scene shuts, then draws and discovers Don Perriera Lissening." (p. 54). The scene could simply have shut, and Don Perriera could have walked on and put his ear to the keyhole: but by discovering him, Mrs. Centlivre gives the action of listening emblematic force. It becomes typical of his mistrustful, jealous behaviour as a husband.

So it is with the discovery of Isabinda and Don Perriera kneeling to her (p. 55). It has something of the effect of a tableau in an allegorical painting: error kneeling before mercy. The greater seriousness of the last act, although effective in its own terms, is out of keeping with the earlier part of the play. As in the similar case of Steele's The Lying Lover (1703), this incongruity may have contributed to the play's failure to secure a place in the repertory.

4

The Perplex'd Lovers closed this period of Mrs. Centlivre's career on a more outspokenly political note than we have heard so far. As early as The Beau's Duel she had represented the English role in the continental wars in an ideal light, and satirised English imitation of French manners. Originally, this had been a patriotic rather than a partisan matter. As the war became more unpopular (especially after the allied defeat at Almanzor, 1707), Mrs. Centlivre's support of it identified her more closely with the Whigs. Whiggish convictions are clearly implied by the anti-catholic satire, and the sympathetic treatment of Don Perriera, in Mar-Plot. The Perplex'd Lovers itself is not a Whiggish play: it was the circumstances of its production that embroiled Mrs. Centlivre in political controversy.

The problem was a flattering reference to Prince Eugene in the play's epilogue:

> Such as that Stranger who has grac'd our Land,
> Of equal Fame for Council, and Command.
> A Prince, whose Wisdom, Valour, and Success,
> The gazing World with Acclamations bless;
> By no great Captain in past Times outdone,
> And in the present equall'd but by ONE.

The "ONE" was obviously Marlborough. Mrs. Centlivre tells us in the preface that she could not get the epilogue licensed in time for the first night (at Drury Lane, on 19 January 1712; Avery, p. 267).[14] The lack of a proper epilogue evidently displeased the audience. The next day she did manage to get the epilogue licensed, but by then a rumour of its being "a notorious Whiggish" epilogue resulted in Mrs. Oldfield being advised not to speak it. Her indignation that praise of Marlborough could be construed as "Whiggish" leads to this ingenuous disclaimer: "I know not what they call Whigs, or how they distinguish between them and Tories: But if the Desire to see my Country secur'd from the Romish Yoke, and flourish by a Firm, Lasting, Honourable Peace, to the Glory of the best of Queens, who deservedly holds the Ballance of all Europe, be a Whig, then I am one, else not." From this one concludes she was one.

Part of the preface was literary rather than

---

[14] It was advertised "Lately Published" in the Spectator, 22 February 1712 (Norton, p. 176).

political:

I shall not pretend to vindicate the following Scenes, about which I took very little Pains, most of the Plot being from a Spanish play, and assuring my self Success from Mr. Cyber's approbation, whose Opinion was, that the Business wou'd support the Play; tho' Mr. Wilks seem'd to doubt it, and said, there was a great deal of Business, but not laughing Business; tho' indeed I cou'd not have dress'd this Plot with much more Humour, there being four acts in the Dark, which tho' a Spanish Audience may readily conceive, the Night being their proper time of intriguing; yet here, where Liberty makes Noon-day as easie, it perplexes the Thought of an Audience too much; therefore I shall take Care to avoid such Absurdities for the future; and if I live I will endeavour to make my Friends amends in the next.

No particular play has been identified as the source of The Perplex'd Lovers, but the "Plot" is certainly a "Spanish" one. It turns on a whole series of mistaken identities in the dark, and on a hot-tempered readiness (especially on the part of Belvil) to draw at the least provocation. Equally Spanish is the way ease of access to Camilla has to be made more difficult: the plot, as Mrs. Centlivre recognised, is hardly naturalized to its London setting.

The comic pattern of the play is the familiar one. Belvil loves Camilla, who returns his love without yet being ready to admit that she does; she is the "gayer" heroine. Colonel Bastion loves Constantia (Belvil's sister), who does own that she returns his love. Colonel Bastion has two rivals: Lord Richlove, the choice of Constantia's father, and Sir Philip Gaylove, an absent friend of Belvil,

to whom Belvil has promised his sister (this is a "Spanish" element). There is also a pair of contrasting valets, Timothy and Le Front.

The source of the main comic misunderstandings is that Bastion can only visit Constantia through the apartment (in the next building) of her friend Camilla. He is therefore liable to be compromisingly surprised by Belvil in Camilla's rooms. This happens twice in the play, in Act I (pp. 5-6) and Act II (pp. 18-19). By various stratagems the Colonel is brought off and appearances patched up, but Belvil places Constantia under closer watch. This gives rise to the main comic business of Act V, Colonel Bastion's being introduced bundled up in a pedlar's pack (pp. 44-46), and Lord Richlove's disguising himself as a Grecian (pp. 50-52).

It is, in fact, the repetition of the same comic tricks that spoil the play. Constantia runs into Lord Richlove's arms, thinking (in the dark) that he is Colonel Bastion (p. 10). Bastion is listening, and thinks she genuinely intended this welcoming reception of Lord Richlove, thus creating a misunderstanding to be cleared up. But once in a play is enough for such a device. Mrs. Centlivre bases the whole of Act IV (a single, unbroken scene set at night in the street outside Constantia's) on a series of such misunderstandings. Constantia takes Belvil

for Bastion, and so on, through a whole train of "Business, but not laughing Business". The act is the stuff of which farce is made, but it is too slow-moving to be successful farce: in particular, it is interrupted and slowed down by a serious exchange (in verse) between Belvil and Camilla (p. 35).

But if The Perplex'd Lovers can hardly be counted a success in dramatic technique, if Mrs. Centlivre had not yet solved the problem of dovetailling farcical business into a comedy of intrigue, the play takes on, in retrospect, the function of a "trial run" for The Wonder. As I suggest below, in chapter VI (pp. 147-149), The Wonder is an improved re-working of The Perplex'd Lovers. If Act IV of The Wonder is compared to the same act in the earlier play, the improvement will be seen at once. Both acts are based on a single device (mistakes in the dark in The Perplex'd Lovers, the unseasonable entry of a character in The Wonder), but in The Wonder the device is developed rather than just repeated. I analyse Act IV of The Wonder in some detail below (pp. 158-164): here it need only be noticed that the succession of unexpected arrivals builds up the tension to a climax. In The Perplex'd Lovers, the tension is dissipated between every mistake (especially by the verse exchange between Belvil and Camilla, p. 35).

VI

THE WONDER (1714)

Next Week will be publish'd Elzevir Pocket Editions of the two following Books, adorn'd with curious Sculptures, viz, §*§ I. The new Comedy, call'd, The WONDER: A Woman keeps a SECRET. As it is now acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane; Pr. 1s. A small Number will be done on superfine Paper, neatly cover'd and gilt; Price 1s 6d. written by the Author of the Gamester. II. The Works of the Earls of Rochester . . . Both printed for E. Curll . . .[1]

Curll has been much abused, and with some justice. But to examine these, and other of Curll's "Elzevir" editions is to understand how a modern admirer can speak of "the undoubted taste and typographical attractiveness that on the whole typified Curll's work as a printer and publisher . . . charming, original and fundamentally beautiful examples of all that was best in early eighteenth century inexpensive book production".[2] Certainly the two most elegant early editions of Mrs. Centlivre's plays are those published by Curll, The Wonder and The Cruel Gift. Not only are they "adorn'd with curious Sculptures", but they are characterized by a lavish use of type-ornaments, at the beginning and end of each act. Curll paid Mrs. Centlivre twenty guineas for The Wonder, twice what Lintot

---

[1] Post-Boy, 1-4 May 1714.

[2] A. L. Hill, Two Augustan Booksellers (1958), p. 37.

had paid for The Busie Body.[3] Later her connection with Curll would earn her the unflattering attention of Pope, but in the short term she had good reason, financial and typographical, to be pleased with her new publisher.

Mrs. Centlivre's increasingly outspoken Whig convictions have already been discussed in relation to The Perplex'd Lovers. When The Wonder was published late in May 1714,[4] the succession question was a good deal more urgent, and she nailed her colours even more firmly to the Whig mast, by dedicating the play to the Duke of Cambridge (later George II). The political implications of this choice will be further explored in chapter VII, in the context of The Gotham Election (see pp. 177 - 181). The Duke, by then Prince of Wales, commanded a performance of The Wonder on 16 December 1714, and, according to Nottley, "made the Author an handsome Present" (List, p. 190).

In the preface to The Perplex'd Lovers Mrs. Centlivre had apologised for the excesses of her Spanish intrigue plot, promising that she would "take care to avoid such Absurdities for the future, and if I live I will endeavour to make my Friends amends in the next". With

---

[3] Curll's original receipt, in a volume of "Original Letters collected by William Upcott . . . Distinguished Women.", is now in the Library of Christ Church, Oxford, deposited there by the present owners, the Evelyn Trustees. This receipt contains the only specimen of Mrs. Centlivre's signature known to me. The spelling is Susanna CentLivre.

[4] "Just Published" in the Post-Boy, 27-29 May.

The Wonder she redeemed this pledge. The closet-business and paternal vigilance are more plausibly motivated in The Wonder, set in Lisbon, than in the London milieu of The Perplex'd Lovers. The plot of The Wonder is also more tightly constructed, with only two strands instead of three, and the various misunderstandings are neatly precipitated in a way that involves both main plot and subplot together.

Because The Wonder is an almost pure comedy of intrigue, numerous parallels with earlier plays (including The Perplex'd Lovers) can be cited (see Bowyer, pp. 172-176). The most important of these is Ravenscroft's The Wrangling Lovers (1677). Even here it is only in Act IV that Mrs. Centlivre is seriously indebted. The reluctant parting and reconcilliation of Felix and Violante (pp. 51-53) recalls a scene of jealousy between Diego and Octavia in The Wrangling Lovers (Act II, pp. 17-20), and Octavia's difficulty in concealing both Diego and Gusman from her father (Act V, pp. 65-69) is improved by Mrs. Centlivre in her Act IV when Violante has to conceal three people-- Isabella, Colonel Britton, and Felix-- from her father and from each other. A significant change that Mrs. Centlivre makes in the disposition of characters is that she suppresses Don Ruis (Diego's rival) in favour of Frederick, a virtuous merchant, who is not only useful to the plot but also serves as a mouthpiece for Whig sentiments.

The Wonder was first performed, at Drury Lane, on 27 April 1714, and ran for six nights. The Perplex'd Lovers had also been brought out at Drury Lane (in February 1712) and something of the common ground between the two plays is suggested by the list of actors who took closely similar parts in both plays. Wilks played the jealous lovers, Colonel Bastion and Don Felix; Pack played Wilk's slippery servants, Timothy and Lissardo; Mrs. Bantlow and Mrs. Oldfield took the principal woman's parts-- Mrs. Oldfield playing the "player" (in Smith's sense) parts, Camilla and Violante.

As a contrast to Mrs. Centlivre's earlier less happy relationships with the actors (notably Wilks, as discussed above, pp. 94-95), it is interesting to find her single him and Mrs. Oldfield out for praise in the preface to The Wonder:

> I freely acknowledge my self oblig'd to the Actors in general, and to Mr. Wilks, and Mrs. Oldfield in particular . . . their inimitable Action cou'd only support a Play at such a Season, and among so many Benefits. Let this encourage our English Bards to write, furnish but the artful Player with Materials, and his Skill will lay the Foundation for your Fame.

This suggests that Mrs. Centlivre wrote the parts of Felix and Violante with Wilks and Mrs. Oldfield in mind. Certainly her words were to prove prophetic, for The Wonder held the stage long after plays of greater literary merit had been permanently relegated to the closet. Mrs. Centlivre did not

live to see this success, however: after the performance commanded by the Prince of Wales in December 1714, The Wonder was not seen again in her lifetime.

A number of other eighteenth-century plays enjoyed a similar "posthumous success": Farquhar's The Twin Rivals (1702; not revived until 1716, but regularly performed from then), Rowe's Fair Penitent (1703, then not till 1715, but regularly thereafter), Mrs. Centlivre's own A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718, regular revivals from 1728). But The Wonder is the most extreme example I have noticed, both in terms of the long hibernation (nearly twenty years separate the first production and Giffard's revival in 1733) and the length of the second lease of life (The Wonder was performed in New York in 1897).

The Wonder, like the earlier Bar-Plot (1710), is set in Lisbon. In both plays Mrs. Centlivre uses the Portuguese setting for indirect comment on English society. Early in the first scene of The Wonder a slight pretext serves to introduce this puff direct: "My Lord, the English are by Nature, what the ancient Romans were by Discipline, couragious, bold, hardy, and in love with Liberty. Liberty is the Idol of the English, under whose banner all Nation Lists, give but the Word for Liberty, and straight more armed Legions wou'd appear, than France, and Philip keeps in constant Pay." (p. 2). And also more claps at the

play-house, one suspects. Mrs. Centlivre's patriotism does not, however, blind her to the unacceptable face of "Liberty": there is a barb in Isabella's reflection "What pleasant Lives Women lead in England, where Duty wears no Fetter but Inclination" (p. 8). Such explicit contrasts are rare. More commonly Mrs. Centlivre relies on her audience's appreciation of the difference between English liberty, that allows greater commerce between the sexes, and the parental tyranny (seen as a type of political absolutism) characteristic of Spain and Portugal.

Mrs. Centlivre's criticism of Portuguese society in the play does not end with its treatment of women. She also attacks its lack of social mobility, and here her Whiggishness is evident. Typical of Portugal's caste-ridden sterility is the attitude that excludes a virtuous merchant like Frederick (the most sensible man in the play) from the possibility of intermarriage with the nobility. As Frederick himself recognises, "a Merchant and a Grandee of Spain, are inconsistent Names" (p. 4).[5] The portrait of Frederick takes a stage further the sympathetic treatment of the mercantile ethic that made its first appearance in Mrs. Centlivre's plays in Mar-Plot, where she directed our sympathies towards Don Ferriera rather than his aristocratic brother-in-law (see p. 134 above). But Don Ferriera, apart

---

[5] John Loftis, Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding (1959), p. 87, makes this point.

from being a merchant, was also an old man marrying a young wife, and as such still an object of ridicule, if not contempt. Although not without his generous impulses, particularly his concern to save Marplot's soul (p. 20), even here Mrs. Centlivre's ridicule of Popish superstition qualified the generosity with a strong dash of the absurd. In The Wonder, Mrs. Centlivre not only sympathises with Frederick, she exempts him from ridicule. If the result is a slight priggishness, this is the fault of the plot, that excludes Frederick from the love business and gives him no opportunity to be more than a faithful friend to Felix. The praise of the English love of liberty quoted above (p. 150) is Frederick's: Mrs. Centlivre uses admiration of the English character as a sure touchstone for the virtuous foreigner.

The tyranny of parent over child in the social microcosm of the family is a prominent theme in The Wonder. Both Don Lopez and Don Pedro treat their children as their personal property, to be disposed of as they see fit. In order to avoid reducing "Duty" to mere "Inclination", Mrs. Centlivre gives Violante and Isabella the moral advantage in disputing their fathers' will. Don Lopez wishes to marry Isabella to Don Guzman, a "sneaking, snivling, drivling, avaricious Fool" (p. 8) whose only merit is his wealth. Don Pedro wants to immure Violante in a nunnery in order

to be able to appropriate her fortune to his own use. By these selfish and mercenary designs (which show nobility borrowing the worst qualities of mercantilism), the fathers forfeit their title to respect and their right to be obeyed:

DON LOPEZ
Remember 'tis your Duty to Obey.

ISABELLA
I never disobey'd before, and wish I had not Reason now; but Nature has got the better of my Duty, and makes me loath the harsh Commands you lay. (p. 10)

This appeal beyond "Duty" to "Nature" and "Reason" is analogous to the Whig theory of a contract between king and subjects, who are to be governed not absolutely, or for the king's pleasure, but for their own good.

If she is critical of the older generation, Mrs. Centlivre also avoids idealizing the young lovers. Least of a paragon is Colonel Britton, a hearty Scotsman whose rakishness is reformed by the prospect of Isabella and her fortune. In keeping with the tone of the Colonel's cynical comments about marriage-- "I shall never be able to swallow the Matrimonial Pill, if it be not well Gilded." (p. 7)-- his acceptance of Isabella (pp. 49-50) is quite unsentimental, a grab at the main chance, not a moral regeneration. In this respect the Colonel is like Bellair in Love at a Venture (1706), a rake settling down to a steady life, not morally converted to it, as Atall is in Cibber's Double Gallant (1707). One of the basic differences

between Mrs. Centlivre and Cibber is her avoidance of the conversion by example that Cibber is generally fond of. To Atall one might add Don Duart in Love Makes a Man (1700), and Maria in The Non-Juror (1717), who exclaims "Lord! how one may live and learn!" after Charles's example has convinced her that "Truth and Sincerity have a Thousand Charms beyond . . . indulging one's Vanity" (p. 49). As we shall see below (pp. 166-167, 169-170), one of the significant changes made in later productions was the toning down of the Colonel's cynicism to make him a more acceptable romantic hero.

The jealousy and emotional impetuousness of Don Felix, the other lover, offers a strong contrast with the calculating coolness of Colonel Britton. There is a similar, though less marked, contrast between the ladies. Varying the pattern from The Perplex'd Lovers, in which the lovers were paired by similarity, in The Wonder Mrs. Centlivre couples the psychological opposites: the introverted Felix and the vivacious Violante, the thrusting Colonel and the retiring Isabella. In this play matrimonial happiness is projected in terms of a union of opposites, an equilibrium produced by checks and balances.

Isabella's retiring disposition (by refusing to deal directly with the Colonel, she gives Violante her "secret" and precipitates some compromising situations)

naturally increases the prominence of Violante's part. Not only does she have to contend with her father and Don Felix, she has to act as protector and go-between for Isabella. Her strength of character is tested through the repeated temptation to betray Isabella to her brother (Don Felix) in order to vindicate her own conduct. Isabella's concealment in Violante's rooms is the "secret" of the play's subtitle. That Violante does rise above these temptations shows woman capable of the renaissance ideal of (male) friendship. Violante puts her friend before her lover. Thus she is proved a truer "friend" than Felix, who is ready to suspect both his friend and his lover on the slightest evidence.

The mercenary considerations that prompt Don Lopez and Don Pedro to dispose of their daughters for their own advantage are mirrored, at a lower social level, in the behaviour of the servants. The disinterested conduct of the lovers thus takes on the appearance of an island of virtue in a sea of iniquity. Lissardo (Felix's man) intrigues with both Inis and Flora (maids to Isabella and Violante): significantly, this double-dealing is not paralleled by any rivalry among the lovers, which makes Lissardo's conduct seem the more reprehensible. The gift of a diamond ring from Violante, as a reward for his services, gives Lissardo ideas above his station, comically subverting his affection for Flora-- just as the prospect of a wealthy son-in-law

blinds Don Lopez to his daughter's real interest. Flora, a close relation of Florella of The Perplex'd Lovers, is a stock mercenary maid, willing to undertake any service that promises a good tip.

2

Character obviously counts for less than plot in a comedy of intrigue, yet the mere recital of a plot can convey little of the theatrical experience of a play. Act I of The Wonder is largely taken up with exposition; Act II to Act V, Scene ii with the complications of the intrigue; and the dénouement is rapidly affected in V,iii.[6] Throughout the central core of the action, a series of well-timed coincidences are skilfully regulated to increase and relax the dramatic tension. Mrs. Centlivre commonly begins with an innocent, but equivocal situation. Some awkward meeting or discovery threatens to take place; an attempt is made to avert it, or minimise its consequences; it happens; disaster is (narrowly) averted; and a short breathing space is allowed to intervene before the next crisis is precipitated. Analysis of the whole play in these terms would be unwieldy, but a sample will suffice. Act IV, which consists of a single unbroken scene, has been

---

[6]Although the scenes are unnumbered in the first and most later editions, I have used a system of scene numbers based on the changes of locale indicated in the 1714 edition.

selected as an excellent example of Mrs. Centlivre's skill in plotting an intrigue.

The epicentre of the intrigue in The Wonder is Violante's apartment in her father's house. This is where the most crucial scenes take place. Here Violante meets Felix (secretly), conceals Isabella, receives Colonel Britton (secretly) on Isabella's behalf, has to deal with her father's unwelcome intrusions. Everyone must be kept from meeting anyone else. In Act IV, everything that could go wrong, does. Felix, the Colonel, Don Pedro, each comes to Violante's apartment at the most unseasonable moment. Mrs. Centlivre's theatrical art is to bring them as close as possible to discovering about each other, without actually doing so.

It is possible that the "curious Sculpture" that Curll commissioned as a frontispiece for the first edition of The Wonder represents the actual scene used at Drury Lane. Certainly the rear door, and the two chairs, are required, and are all that is required, for the scene in Violante's apartment that the frontispiece illustrates. The actual incident illustrated is from Act V (p. 72), but the general character of the set is just as helpful in visualising the presentation of Act IV. Violante's apartment is not so private that her father may not come in at an awkward moment (as he has done in the picture).

The room's lack of intimacy, its prominent doors, its uncomfortable-looking chairs: all these are suited to the breathless, stand-up style of action that characterises the play. It is a room of comings and goings, not a room in which it is easy to sit down, or to relax.

The action of Act IV, although continuous, falls naturally into six episodes:

1. A discussion between Isabella and Violante (pp. 46-48).
   Flora announces that Colonel Britton is coming!
   Isabella hides (p. 48).
2. Colonel Britton arrives, and speaks with Violante (pp. 49-51).
   Flora announces that Felix is coming!
   The Colonel hides (p. 51).
3. Felix comes in, and talks with Violante (pp. 51-53).
   Flora announces that Don Pedro is coming!

This is a moment of crisis, the first climax of the act: with the Colonel behind one door, and Isabella behind another, and Don Pedro advancing on the third.

Felix, unable to hide, is disguised as Flora's mother. The crisis is prolonged (pp. 53-54) as Don Pedro asks a series of awkward questions.

4. After Felix has made his escape, there is a decided slackening of tension. After a conversation between Don Pedro and Violante, they go out together (pp. 54-56).
5. Now that the coast is clear, Flora lets the Colonel out

(p. 56). Violante and Don Pedro return together, so that Flora has no opportunity to tell Violante that the Colonel has left. Violante says good-bye to her father, who leaves. Before Flora can return with the news that the Colonel is safely off, Violante turns to where the Colonel was hiding. Now comes the second climax: Felix re-enters, unobserved by Violante, and listens while she calls to the Colonel (p. 57). Felix discovers himself, to Violante's confusion. There is a brief respite while Felix searches for the Colonel. We know that he has escaped, but how will Violante explain herself? The solution is that Flora returns before Felix, giving Violante the news that the Colonel has escaped. When Felix returns, Violante is able to pass the episode off as a trick to test his jealousy (pp. 57-58). Felix is pacified.

6. After Felix is gone, Isabella comes out of hiding (p. 58). There is a brief conversation between her and Violante.

Thus it is a rapid series of entrances and exits, more than any conflicts of character, that give the act its momentum. Hazlitt describes it well as "a quick succession of causeless alarms, subtle excuses, and the most hair-breath 'scapes."[7] The second half of the act, from Flora's announcement that Don Pedro is coming (p. 53)

---

[7] Lectures on the English Comic Writers (1819); Works, VI, 156.

may be considered in more detail. Flora tells us that Don Pedro has locked the garden gate, thus cutting off Felix's escape route, and is making for Violante's apartment. Felix at once runs to the door behind which the Colonel is hiding, and "pushes it open a little"-- seeing the Colonel but concealing the fact that he has done so. Violante persuades him that he cannot safely hide there, and the resourceful Flora "Runs in and fetches out a Riding-Hood". Felix is disguised, however improbably, and Don Pedro enters.

This is the high point in the intrigue. All the characters have been brought together, in varying degrees of ignorance of the others. Don Pedro is most in the dark, but having nothing to hide can act without caution. Violante and Flora, most in the know, are circumscribed in what they can do by what they have to hide. They are thus like spectators of a tightrope act in which a fall would be fatal to themselves, not to the walker. Only the audience has a compete grasp of the situation, having seen Felix's glimpse of the Colonel. As we have seen so often in Mrs. Centlivre's earlier plays, the excitement of the audience is based on anticipation rather than suspense. There is nothing more to be revealed, but at some time some of the characters so carefully kept apart seem bound to collide.

Don Pedro asks why the garden-door was left open, but he is at once diverted from this unwelcome line of

enquiry by the sight of Flora's supposed mother. Clearly Violante and Flora want to get Felix out of the way as soon as possible, but the crisis is prolonged almost to breaking point by a series of questions which Don Pedro asks. Since it would be disasterous for Felix to have to speak, in each case Flora has to answer for him (p. 53). This incident is a micro-version of the act as a whole: each new question from Don Pedro, like each new arrival, throws an increased strain of the wits of Flora and Violante; and in each case ruin is averted, but only just.

The crisis over with Felix's escape, the tension immediately drops as Don Pedro tells Violante (what we all already know) about Isabella's disappearance. There is a nice dramatic irony in Pedro's aside: "Well, I'm glad my Daughter has no Inclination to Mankind, that my House is plagu'd with no Suitors." (p. 55), since he knows nothing of Felix or the Colonel, who are certainly plaguing his house. The relaxed atmosphere continues with a brief conversation about the proposal to place Violante in a nunnery. Violante pretends to agree, while Flora protests, to Pedro's amusement. None of the three speakers means what they say. The following speeches, containing many asides, illustrate how Mrs. Centlivre uses the aside to isolate the characters from each other:

DON PEDRO [to Violante]
Well Child, remember what I said to thee, next Week.--

VIOLANTE (aside)
Ay, and what am I to do this too.--
[to Don Pedro] I am all Obedience, Sir, I care not how soon I change my Condition.

FLORA (aside)
But little does he think what Change she means.

DON PEDRO
Well said Violante.--[aside:] I am glad to find her so willing to leave the World . . .

Don Pedro's aside continues for another ten lines, as he explains his stratagem to defraud Violante of her fortune by preventing her marriage. Presumably Violante and Flora whisper to each other, or perhaps check to see that the Colonel is not becoming restive, during this long aside.

Such asides are not in keeping with modern conventions, and as we shall see below (pp. 170, 172), their use was drastically reduced in the later eighteenth century, and even more in the nineteenth. But they were acceptable enough to Mrs. Centlivre and her contemporaries, and here they serve effectively to suggest the gap between public statement and private intention.[8] A distinction should be made between this use of the aside-- to reveal a character's true motives, or to point an irony-- and the "sentiment", or direct statement to the audience used to make the author's didactic point. The second use is

---

[8]Strozier's criticisms of Mrs. Centlivre's use of asides in his Discourse article (1964) are discussed above, pp. 29-30.

uncommon in Mrs. Centlivre's plays, the first very frequent.

As soon as Don Pedro and Violante have left, albeit briefly, Flora lets the Colonel out of hiding and escorts him offstage. The stage is briefly empty before Don Pedro and Violante re-enter. They say good-bye, and Don Pedro leaves. At this point Felix (evidently not having left the house after his encounter with Don Pedro, in order to verify his suspicious glimpse of the Colonel), unobserved by Violante, himself re-enters. Felix hears Violante call out to the (absent) Colonel. Again, the effect on the audience is one of anticipation rather than suspense: we know that Felix will not find the Colonel, but we wonder how Violante will explain herself. While Felix is searching for the unknown man, Flora returns to assure Violante of the Colonel's escape. When Felix re-enters, not having found anyone, she is able to pass the incident off as designed to try his jealousy.

Felix and Violante are thus reconciled, and Felix leaves. Now Isabella, having heard all, enters, thanks Violante, and praises her friendship. This brief scene seems an anticlimactic ending for an act of bustle, and as we shall see below (p. 168), was frequently omitted in later stage versions of the play. But the scene does tie the act together: it began with Isabella and Violante, and

ends with them. Isabella had been almost forgotten during the act, and her re-appearance reminds us that the whole action was necessitated by her secret. On the other hand, the ending with the parting of Felix and Violante is certainly more dramatic: especially in versions which minimized the role of Isabella, the cut was a natural one.

3

The Wonder was not revived in Mrs. Centlivre's lifetime, nor for some years after, but it returned to the stage at Goodman's Fields on 14 November 1733. Giffard and his wife took the parts of Don Felix and Violante. This revival was considerably more successful than the original production: the play was performed twenty-one times that season (Scouten, pp. 337-339). This might have been the high-water mark of the play's popularity had not Garrick taken the part of Felix at Drury Lane on 6 November 1756 and made it one of his most successful roles. He performed it on twenty-two occasions that first season (Stone, pp. 558-601), and thereafter The Wonder remained a stock-piece well into the nineteenth century. Garrick's affection for the part is shown by his choice of Don Felix for his farewell performance on 10 June 1776. Garrick and later interpreters of the part are reviewed, with contemporary comments, by Bowyer (pp. 177-190).

Printed texts of The Wonder before and including the Works of 1761 follow the first edition except for accidentals. Murphy tells us that Garrick altered the play,[9] but apart from the addition of a "Masquerade Scene" at the end, we do not know exactly how. In 1776, however, John Bell published the first edition of the play to present an "acting" text, "As performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane. Regulated from the prompt-Book, By Permission of the Managers, by Mr. Hopkins, Prompter." Bell printed the full text of the play, but placed passages which were omitted in the stage version within inverted commas, and passages so added, in italic. There seems no reason to doubt the general accuracy of Bell's text in reflecting contemporary performances. A copy actually marked for use as a prompt-book, now in the New York Public Library, adopts almost all of Bell's alterations, and makes very few additional ones.[10] Garrick is listed as Don Felix in the Drury Lane cast printed in Bell's edition, and it seems reasonable to accept Bell's text as being as close as we can get to what London theatregoers saw on the stage in the later Garrick period.

The alterations made in Bell's edition of 1776

---

[9]Arthur Murphy, Life of David Garrick (1801), I, 313.

[10]This prompt-book is discussed below, p. 241.

are of four main kinds. Many bawdy and topical references are supressed. The parts of Felix and Violante are tailored to make them more "romantic". Some of the minor characters are shown in a more favourable light by the omission of many speeches that express cynical or mercenary attitudes, particularly towards marriage. Other changes are made for theatrical reasons: asides are reduced in number, some dialogue is pruned, staging is simplified. The only important addition (apart from the "Masquerade Scene") is a farcical scene of low humour.

Notable bawdy passages that are marked for omission are Don Lopez's remarks on pimping and women's inclinations (p. 7);[11] Colonel Britton's disparaging references to marriage (pp. 9-10); and Gibby's remarks about preferment by pimping (p. 41). This general "cleaning-up" operation, while suppressing the openly bawdy, yet permitted the addition of a decidedly equivocal remark (p. 46).[12]

A number of references that draw attention to the play's Portuguese locale are omitted: the discussion of Frederick's lack of noble birth and its social implications (p. 5); Colonel Britton's apostrophe-- " Oh, Portugal, thou dear garden of pleasure . . . " (p. 27)-- which combines

---

[11]Page references in the remainder of this chapter will be to Bell's 1776 edition of The Wonder, unless otherwise specified.

[12]Perhaps this is what Hazlitt meant by a "double entendre . . . so light and careless, as only to occasion a succession of agreeable alarms to the ears of delicacy." (Works, V, 332).

the topographical with the bawdy, and his reference to the recent (1707) Union (p. 44). By reducing Mrs. Centlivre's contrasts between England and Portugal, these changes help make the play more "universal". Many more such references were cut in American performances (see below, pp. 243-251).

Changes in character portrayal are less easily demonstrated. Style of acting can obviously do a great deal without altering the lines at all. A few suggestive differences can be made out in the 1776 text, however. A number of omissions in Act II (p. 24) make Violante appear less flustered at the Colonel's unseasonable arrival. Similarily, at a later meeting with Felix (p. 35) she takes fewer pains to justify herself; later again (p. 52) she does not tell a lie in order to get Felix away.[13] These changes, particularly if combined with a more reticent behaviour generally (in terms of action as well as words) would make Violante a more decorous, and therefore a more acceptable "romantic" heroine.

This tendency towards the "romantic", to a greater appeal to the sensibility than Mrs. Centlivre intended, is particularly evident in the revised ending of Act IV. In the original version, Violante and Felix part thus:

---

[13]This is one of the few places where Bell does not indicate that a change has been made. The original version is on p. 58 of the 1714 edition.

VIOLANTE
But prithy leave me now, for I expect some Ladies to Visit me.

FELIX
If you command it.-- Fly swift ye Hours, and bring to-Morrow on.-- You desire I would leave you, Violante.

VIOLANTE
I do at present.

FELIX
So much you reign the Sovereign of my Soul,
That I obey without the least Controul. (Exit)
(1714 ed., p. 58)

Then follows a short scene between Violante and Isabella, rather anticlimactic, but perhaps deliberately so (as discussed above, pp. 163-164). In Bell, the scene between Violante and Isabella is omitted, and the act ends with the parting between Felix and Violante expanded as follows:

VIOLANTE
But pr'ythee leave me now, lest some accident should bring my father.

FELIX
To-morrow then--
Fly swift, ye hours, and bring to-morrow on--
But must I leave you now, my Violante?

VIOLANTE
You must, my Felix. We soon shall meet to part no more.

FELIX
Oh, rapturous sounds! Charming woman!
Thy words and looks have fill'd my heart
With joy, and left no room for jealousy.
Do thou like me each doubt and fear remove,
And all to come be confidence and love. (Exit) (p. 52)

In the 1714 version, I imagine an impatience in Violante to get rid of Felix, something slightly comic in Felix's reluctance to leave: perhaps a half-exit, followed by a

re-entry as he asks Violante if she wants him to go. The 1776 version is decidedly more sombre in tone, and this is brought about by slight changes: the more serious reason for Felix going; the change from "desire" to "must"; the omission of the potentially comic "I do at present"; the sententious verses that do not carry the least hint of comedy. If Garrick was responsible for these changes, they certainly show, in Murphy's phrase, his "usual judgement".[14]

Other changes help make Felix a more sympathetic character. The shortening of his final speech in III,iii (pp. 37-38) shows less indecision and more romantic ardour. Another important omission is a very self-righteous remark from one of his speeches to Violante (p. 46). These changes do not reveal much: but in conjunction with those made to Violante's part, they can be seen in terms of making the lovers more attractive, less "humourous".

The third kind of alteration is much clearer in intention. Numerous confessions of mercenary and cynical motives are marked for omission. The most remarkable case is Flora: her avarice is muted, and she becomes a faithful, if pert, servant (note omissions on pp. 19, 20, 25-26). A parallel case is that of the Alguzile (constable), whose concern to get his reward at any price (pp. 33, 34) was to be left out. Other examples are Colonel Britton's unromantic

---

[14] Life of Garrick, I, 313.

reaction to the news about Isabella (p. 45), and Don Pedro's long aside (p. 50) in which he reveals his plan to cheat Violante of her fortune, as well as his Shylock-like speech "Adsheart, I shall be trick'd of my daughter, and money too, that's worst of all." (p. 68).

The remaining changes to be considered are those dictated by theatrical considerations. The most important of these is the complete suppression of the "peeping aside", where a character looks out from where he is hiding and makes some comment without breaking his concealment from the other characters on stage. Two scenes are involved: III,iii, where Don Lopez brings the Alguzile to search Frederick's house, and Felix, hidden, has five asides (pp. 31-34); and V,ii, where Isabella, hidden in Violante's apartment has two asides (pp. 59-63). This is an interesting example of a convention, quite "unrealistic" in itself, which was perfectly acceptable at one period (five times in two pages of dialogue), but which later lost favour altogether.

Other small changes simplify the staging. Don Pedro's awkward re-entry in Act IV (p. 51)[15] is omitted, with the result that Felix's next entry is better timed. The end of Act IV was also revised, as noted above (pp. 167-168), to exclude Isabella and focus more strongly on

---

[15]Here again Bell does not mark this as a change; the original text is on p. 57 of the 1714 edition.

the principal lovers. A more important indication of staging practice is indicated by the announcement, in the playbills for 8 November 1756 (Garrick's second time of acting Don Felix, and a command performance: Stone, p. 563) and for many later performances, of a "Masquerade Scene". This was an elaborate dance which evidently needed the whole depth of the stage, since it had to be omitted when machinery for a pantomime was needed (e.g. Stone, p. 575). The intention of the dance was probably to counteract the over-rapid ending of the play, in which the marriages take place off-stage and there is only the briefest of conclusion scenes.

The most important addition in Bell's text does not, however, fit into any of the categories discussed above. In V,ii, Don Pedro finally does discover Felix in his house. Violante pretends that Felix had rushed into the house, in pursuit of a woman, intoxicated: Felix takes the hint, pretends to be drunk, and manages, after some difficulty, to get away from Don Pedro (1714 ed., pp. 73-74). In Bell's text, this wretched piece of foolery is very considerably expanded from a few lines to more than a page (pp. 64-65). The revised scene seems to me to be too farcical, and rather out of character for Felix: but Hazlitt found it effective in the theatre:

The scene near the end, in which Don Felix, pretending to

> be drunk, forces his way out of Don Manuel's [actually Don Pedro's] house, who wants to keep him a prisoner, by producing his marriage-contract in the shape of a pocket-pistol, with the terrors and confusion into which the old gentleman is thrown by this sort of argumentum ad hominem, is one of the richest treats the stage affords, and calls forth incessant peals of laughter and applause.[16]

Hazlitt's comments also suggest that Don Pedro was played as much more of a dotard than Mrs. Centlivre intended. The frontispiece of the first edition shows this scene: it was obviously not dominated by Felix.

Perhaps the key to all the various changes made in Bell's text is the large number of asides (not only the "peeping" ones) that are marked for omission, indicating a major shift away from Mrs. Centlivre's audience-as-privileged-spectator, sharing by means of frequent asides the characters' insights, to the audience-as-empathiser, involved instead through sympathy and identification, and not directly admitted to the confidence of the characters.

---

[16] Works, VI, 156.

VII

POLITICAL PLAYS, 1714-16

More than two years elapsed between the production of *The Wonder* in April 1714 and the performance of *The Cruel Gift* in December 1716, but this gap in Mrs. Centlivre's career is more apparent than real. As we shall see, all three of her "political " plays were probably written in the second half of 1714, although performance of *The Cruel Gift* was delayed for two years, *The Gotham Election* was never acted, and *A Wife Well Manag'd* was only produced after Mrs. Centlivre's death.[1]

The three plays discussed in this chapter belong together not only chronologically but thematically. Of course, in terms of genre, they could hardly be further apart. But however different their mode of presentation, the farces and the tragedy share a common core of ideas. Whether set in England, Portugal, or Italy, each of the plays illustrates one or more of Mrs. Centlivre's Whig principles.

The Gotham Election and *A Wife Well Manag'd* were published separately and in a composite volume, in each

---

[1]At the Haymarket, on 2 May 1724 (Avery, p. 763)

case with a title-page dated 1715. No advertisements have been located to date the publication precisely, but is can be assumed that the original intention was to publish them together, for in the dedication Mrs. Centlivre asked James Craggs to "afford your Protection to these two petites Pieces". In the separate issues, this dedication is prefixed to The Gotham Election, although the volume was originally paged continuously beginning with A Wife Well Manag'd (Norton, pp. 176-177). I have not been able to locate a copy of the original issue, but in the British Library there is a copy of The Gotham Election with what must have been the original title-page (Shelf mark 1489.k.18). Since it is not in Norton's bibliography, it may be useful to transcribe it here:

THE | HUMOURS | OF ELECTIONS. | And a | CURE for | Cuckoldom: | OR THE | WIFE Well Manag'd. | TWO FARCES. || By the Author of the GAMESTER. ||| LONDON: | Printed for | J. ROBERTS, near the Oxford- | Arms in Warwick-Lane. MDCCXV. | (Price One Shilling.)

The running-title, however, is "The Gotham Election", not The Humours of Elections (the play was reprinted under the latter title in 1737).

Despite the lack of advertisements, the composition, if not publication, of the farces can be confidently assigned to the last months of 1714. In the preface, Mrs.

Centlivre tells us that the Master of the Revels refused a licence. This must have occured before the grant of a patent to Steele in January 1715, for after this grant Drury Lane ceased to submit plays for license.[2] We know they were intended for Drury Lane, because A Wife Well Manag'd has a list of the actors who had been cast for the parts. Also in the preface, Mrs. Centlivre says that her intention was to "show their Royal Highnesses the Manner of our Elections". The Hanoverian royal party arrived in London on 1 October: a performance of The Gotham Election would have had maximum topicality in November or December, just before the dissolution of Parliament on 5 January.

After the dedication of The Wonder to the future George II, it is hardly surprising that the reality of the Hanoverian succession, to which she had then looked forward, should have given Mrs. Centlivre the impetus to express her political convictions more forcefully and more directly. In her Epistle to Mrs. Wallup and her Poem. Humbly Presented to His Most Sacred Majesty (both dated 1715) indeed, she did so too directly for them to have any literary value. But in her farces she brought her Whiggish convictions into the service, and more importantly under the control, of her art.

A Wife Well Manag'd is the shorter and slighter

---

[2]John Loftis, The Politics of Drama in Augustan England (1963), pp. 63-64.

of the two, and may be considered first. It is a simple exposure of the hypocrisy of a catholic priest, Father Bernado. This, according to Mrs. Centlivre, is why it was banned: "For the other, it was said there would be Offence taken at the exposing a Popish Priest. Good God! To what sort of People are we chang'd! Are those worthy Gentlemen (the Emissaries of our most avow'd and irreconcilable Enemy) to be treated with so much Tenderness? Is not their very Profession Treason in any Subject of Great Britain?" Lady Pisalto is smitten with Father Bernado, and sends him a message via her comic Irish servant Teague (a Lisbon lady with an Irish servant is evidently part of the license permitted a farce). Teague's bumbling allows the letter to fall into Don Pisalto's hands. Pisalto impersonates the priest and keeps the assignation. Instead of the warm embraces she expects, Lady Pisalto gets a rope's end. Pisalto also contrives to punish Bernado: sending the priest to his wife, she beats him in revenge. These two reversals make a neat farce, frustrating our expectations that the husband will be duped by the wife and the priest.

Teague's part in the farce is minimal: like the Scottish Gibby in The Wonder, he exists mainly to display Mrs. Centlivre's skill in portraying regional dialects. He might have sounded funny on stage, but he is flat on the printed page. It also seems incongruous to mix verbal

farce, which is essentially static, with dynamic farce of situation. There is a good deal of this verbal farce in A Bold Stroke for a Wife, but there it is part of the plot. In A Wife Well Manag'd, Teague is really independent of the farce's action.

The Gotham Election is a longer and more ambitious work. Gotham had been used as the "name of a village, proverbial for the folly of its inhabitants" as early as 1460 (OED). In January 1703, Richard Steele had been at work on a play to be called the "Election of Gotham". No more is known of this play than that a legal wrangle ensued between Steele and Rich, to whom he had allegedly sold it.[3] Since Mrs. Centlivre knew Steele, it is possible that she owed the title of the play to him. He may even have suggested the idea to her, although this is entirely speculative.

The farce is a neat combination of political satire and a romantic subplot that can also be interpreted allegorically. The atmosphere of Gotham and its election fever is captured in the first two scenes. The three candidates are Mr. Tickup (Tory), who is standing in order to gain immunity from arrest for debt (p. 27), and Sir John Worthy and Sir Roger Trusty (evidently Whigs, although this is never explicitly stated). It seems odd

---

[3]George A. Aitken, The Life of Richard Steele (1889), I, 86. For the legal dispute see I, 117-122.

that there should be two Whigs and only one Tory, but this was not uncommon. Tickup is presented as a carpet-bagger from London (p. 27), and the two Whigs are obviously local gentry. Gotham would have returned two members (Mrs. Centlivre seems to forget this when she has the "Chosen Member" chaired, p. 72), and Tickup's failure to find a running-mate suggests his isolation, just as the pair of country squires suggests the Whigs as the natural victors. Winchester saw exactly this kind of contest in 1715: George Bridges and Lord William Powlet (Whigs) stood against John Popham (Tory).[4]

Tickup is supported by the Mayor of Gotham (a Jacobite and a Papist, p. 26), and by Lady Worthy, who is a "High-Flyer" (p. 28). all this emerges in the first scene (pp. 25-31), largely in conversation between Scoredouble (an innkeeper) and Friendly who has come to Gotham ostensibly as the agent of Sir Roger Trusty, but really to gain the hand of the mayor's daughter. The atmosphere of petty provincial knavery developed in this scene may be compared with the opening scene of The Beaux' Stratagem.

The second scene (pp. 32-45) is a gathering of the Jacobites: Lady Worthy, Mr. Tickup, Goody Gabble and

---

[4]W. A. Speck, Tory and Whig: the Struggle in the Constituencies 1701-15 (1970), pp. 125-126. Speck's book provides a useful background for the play (although he does not mention it), and The Gotham Election is an amusing illustration of his thesis-- that parties were important in fighting elections at this period.

Goody Shallow. Their sympathise are indicated by small touches: Tickup calls for "French Red" (p. 38), and the room they meet in is called the "Flower-de-Luce" (p. 39). The jobbery and bribery of the party are exposed in the series of extavagant demands that Mallet makes (pp. 42-45) as the price of his vote. To satisfy him, the whole government would have to be turned over to his family, but Tickup agrees to it all. This scene also contains some notable wordplay, an unusual feature in Mrs. Centlivre. A baker is promised the office of Master of the Rolls, and there is a further pun on "Patent" place and pattins, and on cog as noun and verb (p. 45). This last would also have had political overtones, for clogs or wooden shoes symbolised the poverty that was associated with France.

The third scene is a brief one (pp. 47-50). Friendly, disguised as a French emissary from the Pretender, talks to the Mayor, and develops his stratagem for getting the Mayor's daughter. The humour of this scene is primarily its parody of French manners and language: its importance in the plot is its exposure of the Mayor's Jacobitism.

The fourth is a street scene, showing a cobbler at work. Tickup tries to get his vote, and ruins his clothes in an attempt to show he is not proud: his humiliation is complete when the cobbler tells him he

would not vote for a man without dignity (pp. 50-55). This is one of the best scenes in the play, for the political point is made through stage action. The second half of the scene, in contrast, is a serious political debate between Sir Roger Trusty and Alderman Credulous (pp. 55-62). The following speeches epitomise the issues:

ALDERMAN CREDULOUS
Passive obedience is as absolutely necessary in our Wives and Children, as in Subjects to the Monarch; . . .

SIR ROGER
Yes, whilst Husbands, Fathers and Monarchs exact nothing from us, contrary to our Religion and Laws . . . (p. 56)

The same question was argued, in personal terms, between Isabella and her father in The Wonder (see above, p. 153). In The Gotham Election, the Mayor's tyrannical treatment of his daughter (especially in scene iii) is presented as the natural outcome of his political theory.

Attention returns to Tickup in the fifth scene (pp. 62-68). This time it is a gathering for the christening of Mallet's grandson, and Tickup is again trying to curry favour. This scene is notable for its sympathetic treatment of the Quaker, Scruple: politically, of course, he is on the right side. Scruple is surely a warning not to take Prim in A Bold Stroke for a Wife as a direct expression of Mrs. Centlivre's attitude to Quakers.

The last scene is again in the street, and brings both plots to a parallel and satisfactory conclusion.

Amid much slogan-chanting and brawling, the successful candidate (not named, but he is not Tickup, so he must be Sir John or Sir Roger, both Whigs) is chaired. At the same time, Lucy, the Mayor's daughter, puts herself in Friendly's hands. The speech with which she does this converts the subplot into a political allegory:

> This Day I am of Age, and I chuse you for my Guardian,-- and if you can bring me unquestionable Proofs of your being an honest Man;-- that you have always been a Lover of your Country;-- a true Assertor of her Laws and Privileges; and that you'd spend every Shilling of my Portion, in Defence of Liberty and Property, against Perkin and the Pope, I'll sign, seal, and deliver myself into your Hands the next Hour. (pp. 69-70)

Here Lucy (England) choosing her own guardian (constitutional monarch) instead of her father (absolute monarch) surely has primarily a political rather than personal significance.

Having condemned the farcical elements of Love's Contrivance (1703) and The Man's Bewitched (1709), it is doing Mrs. Centlivre and her art no more than justice to recognise A Bickerstaff's Burying, A Wife Well Manag'd, and The Gotham Election as a trio of excellent farces. Leo Hughes asks whether "the essence of farce is its dependence upon mere laughter, as opposed to comedy and its treatment of moral problems",[5] and outlines the distinguishing characteristics of early eighteenth-century farce in terms of stock characters, frequent use of disguise,and impersonation, thin plot, self-contained episodes, and

---

[5]A Century of English Farce (1956), p. 21.

especially its "emphasis on the grossly physical".[6] Hughes uses the metaphor of "the thread and the separate beads" (p. 24) to suggest the importance in farce of the comic incident rather than the plot.

Mrs. Centlivre's comedies are close to farce in many of these respects, and "moral problems" are not often their central concerns. What distinguishes her farces more than any of the other traits Hughes suggests is their "emphasis on the grossly physical". They present a more cynical account of love and marriage, without the contrast of an "ideal" view that we get in the comedies. Thus characters like Lady Pisalto, or Lady Mezro, could find a place in a Centlivre comedy: but it would be a subordinate place.

In her comedies, Mrs. Centlivre generally works out the plot carefully, providing necessary "bridge" scenes, and alternating static and action-packed scenes to provide variety of pace. The smaller compass of the farces does not allow this: they have a succession of incidents rather than a plot, and implausible rapidity of action is an advantage rather than otherwise. This is particularly true of The Gotham Election, where there is no real development of the action; rather it moves by the juxtaposition of

---

[6]Hughes, p. 49. Hughes discusses the confused contemporary nomenclature (pp. 3-20) before offering his own account of the basic "Structure and Devices" (ch. 2, pp. 21-59).

scenes. Similarily, almost no attenpt is made to individualise characters. A good illustration of this is Pisalto and Lady Pisalto in A Wife Well Manag'd, a stock cuckold and a stock wanton wife. Mrs. Centlivre used the same pair in The Perjur'd Husband, but there Pizalto and Lady Pizalta have much more individuality. This is built up in a succession of scenes, and they have time to develop: in A Wife Well Manag'd the pair seem to exist only in relation to the present action.

Perhaps the key to Mrs. Centlivre's greater success in farce proper is the discipline imposed by the form's shorter compass. One often feels about the farcical scenes in the comedies that they go on too long, or that the same devices are repeated too often. In Act V of Love's Contrivance, Bellmie is twice disguised as a philosopher: perhaps once would have been enough. In The Man's Bewitched, the "mad" scene and the "ghost" scene are too long. In The Perplex'd Lovers, there are too many mistakes made in the dark. In the farces she has no time for this, and she passes on rapidly to the next comic point.

2

In turning back to tragedy in her next play, The Cruel Gift, Mrs. Centlivre did not, as we shall see, abandon politics entirely. The Cruel Gift was produced at Drury Lane on 17 December 1716, and ran for six nights

(Avery, p. 427).[7] According to the prologue, it was then "two Winters old", which would suggest a date of composition in the second half of 1714, exactly the period during which Mrs. Centlivre wrote her "political" farces, as I suggested above (pp. 174-175).

The tragedy is based on the story of Tancred and Ghismonda, the first story of the fourth day in the Decameron, and one that Dryden retold in his Fables. Bowyer points out that Mrs. Centlivre followed Dryden in making Leonora the wife rather than mistress of Lorenzo (p. 212). But The Cruel Gift is so radically altered from both Boccaccio and Dryden that it is hardly profitable to compare the three.

The most important alteration is that Mrs. Centlivre gave the story a happy ending. Lorenzo is not murdered, and Leonora does not poison herself: instead, Lorenzo is discovered to be the son of the Duke of Milan, and the King thereupon accepts him as a suitable husband for Leonora. This happy ending is, dramatically, a real surprise. The events of the play, its consistently serious tone (compared with the partially comic The Perjur'd Husband), hardly prepare us for the news that Lorenzo is still alive. The two other of Mrs. Centlivre's plays which have rather unexpected endings (The Perjur'd Husband and The Gamester)

---

[7]It was advertised "This Day Published" in the Daily Courant, 3 January 1717 (Norton, p. 177).

are also (for her) experiments in genre. The endings are awkward because Mrs. Centlivre's characteristic device is anticipation rather than surprise. Since we have been let into all the earlier plots in the play, we feel cheated when the tables are suddenly turned, and Mrs. Centlivre reveals that she has kept a card up her sleeve.

The Cruel Gift has no comic subplot, and is entirely in verse. The combination works well: the play contains Mrs. Centlivre's best verse, and is her most successfully sustained attempt at a serious drama. Occasional verse passages in her earlier plays suffered from their comic context (especially in The Perplex'd Lovers, p. 35), and the serious parts of such plays (e.g. the last acts of The Gamester and Mar-Plot) were notably less successful than the comic parts.

Besides the happy ending, Mrs. Centlivre's most important reworkings of the story as she found it were her addition of the subplot, and her emphasis on political as well as personal themes. Her additional plot made the pattern of characters in the play exactly symmetrical:

King		Duke of Milan	(father)	[Alcanor]		Antenor
|		|			|
Leonora	=	Lorenzo	(child)	Antimora	=	Learchus
		|				|
		Cardono	(friend)			Agonistus

Alcanor is dead when the play begins: Cardono and Agonistus are friends and confidents of the principals. The two pairs

of lovers are torn between love and filial duty: Leonora between Lorenzo and her father, Antimora between Learchus and Lorenzo, her supposed brother. The play is closest to heroic tragedy in the scene (pp. 36-38) where Antimora places her duty to her brother above her love for Learchus.

More interesting than the standard "love and duty" conflicts is Mrs. Centlivre's development of the political theme of liberty or absolutism. There is just a hint of this in Boccaccio: "A humane ruler, and a naturally merciful man was Tancred, Prince of Salerno, and he would have enjoyed that reputation to this day, had he not stained his hands with the blood of two lovers in his old age."[8] But Boccaccio does not turn this personal failing into a public danger. Dryden describes Tancred as having "turn'd a Tyrant in his latter Days", but did not develop the tale in a political direction.[9]

Mrs. Centlivre made the King's personal tyranny to his daughter part of a larger pattern of royal absolutism. In the first scene, a contrast is drawn between the King's capricious withdrawal of favours from Learchus and Learchus's unexceptionable Whig sentiments:

> But he who would enslave his native Land,
> Give up the reverend Rights of Law and Justice,
> To the detested Lust of boundless Tyranny,
> Pollute our Altars, change our holy Worship,
> Deserves the Curses both of Heaven and Earth . . . (p. 3)

---

[8] The Decameron, tr. Frances Winwar, pp. 226-227.

[9] Poems and Fables, ed. Kinsley, p. 621.

At this point in the play, Learchus combines these sentiments with a very unwhiggish absolute submission to the King's will. But during the course of the play, his loyalty is strained as he is ordered to carry out a manifestly unjust command (the execution of Lorenzo). At first he hesitates to disobey, but if he finally saves Lorenzo more out of love for Antimora than from motives of political justice, it does show him accepting a limited-monarchy ideal.

The King is never explicitly made to recant his absolutist principles, but he seems to be shocked out of them by the events of Act V. At the high-point of his tyranny, just after Leonora has (as he supposes) been sent the heart of her dead lover, he reacts to a popular uprising on Lorenzo's behalf in this way:

> 'Tis well; I've sent Antenor to the City,
> To quell the Riots there; and that once past,
> I shall again possess my Crown in Peace.
> Those Drones, pretending to have Stings, appear,
> And in full Body wou'd arraign my Justice.
> In vain the Foxes wear the Lyon's Skin,
> Without the Lyon's Strength-- (p. 58)

Actually the King has qualified himself as both fox and lion (in true Machiavellian style) by his use of both force and intrigue against Lorenzo. But the principal "Fox" in the play is the wily Antenor. Killed by the mob, he is the play's scapegoat, his death the garantee of political regeneration. The play ends with the King restoring

Learchus to favour, warning him to avoid his father's example:

> But oh! be warn'd by his unhappy Fate,
> What Dangers on the doubling Statesman wait!
> Had he preferr'd his King's and Country's Good,
> This publick Vengeance had not Sought his Blood;
> But while the secret Paths of Guilt he treads,
> Where Lust of Power, Revenge, or Envy leads,
> While to Ambition's lawless Height he flies,
> Hated he lives, and unlamented dies. (p. 65)

The theme of a monarch betrayed by false ministers (it is at Antenor's instigation that the King pursues a rigorous course of revenge against Lorenzo) occurs frequently in Mrs. Centlivre's political poems in these years, especially when expressing her attitude to the Tory government of the last years of Anne's reign (1710-1714). Her "Poem on the Recovery of the Lady Henrietta Hollis from the Small Pox", assigned by Bowyer to 1710 or 1711 (pp. 142-143), describes the Whig Newcastle as:

> A Patriot firm, whose Truth unbias'd stands,
> And proves a Bulwork [sic] to the British Lands:
> Like him, Oh Albion, were thy princes Just,
> As fixt, and Loyal to discharge their Trust;
> How wou'd thy Fleet Tryumphant Scour the Main,
> And Europe tremble at Great ANNAS Name.[10]

In her Poem. Presented to His Most Sacred Majesty (1715), she speaks of:

> A wicked Race of Men, for private Ends,
> Had rais'd her baffled Foes, and sunk her Friends,
> Dispers'd her Strength, and Royal ANN betray'd,
> Whilst in the Sunshine of her Smiles they play'd;

---

[10]British Library, Harleian MS 7649(2), fol. 9[R].

In "Upon the Bells ringing at St. Martin's in the Fields, on St. George's Day 1716", she specifically refers to "that Traytor, Harley".[11] It would be wrong to suggest that the character of Antenor was specifically levelled at Harley, or at any Tory minister in particular: but in the political context of 1714 to 1716, especially Mrs. Centlivre's poems of the period, I think the character should be recognised as having some contemporary political relevance. Similarly, the scene at the beginning of Act II (pp. 16-18) in which the ambassadors from Tuscany and their peace mission are summarily rejected, gives expression to Mrs. Centlivre's hawkish attitude to the peace with France.

Although one would hardly call The Cruel Gift one of the "Tragedies celebrating the limitation of royal power, of constitutional monarchy as conceived by Locke", the secondary position of the political strain in the play meant that the play avoided the "exaggerated earnestness, over-emphatic statement, and over-simplified argument" that Loftis finds characteristic of the centrally political tragedy of the period.[12] As in her comedies, Mrs. Centlivre preferred the incidental political comment to

---

[11] These two poems are quoted by Bowyer, pp. 156, 168.

[12] Politics of Drama, pp. 155, 161.

the larger-scale treatment of political issues. Only The Gotham Election is primarily a political play: but in A Wife Well Manag'd and The Cruel Gift the political themes are prominent enough for one to think of 1715-1716 as the most politically engaged phase of Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic career.

VIII

LAST PLAYS, 1718-1722

The contrast between Mrs. Centlivre's last two plays offers a final instance of the variety and vitality of her dramatic art. In A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1718) she wrote a well-disciplined comedy of intrigue and disguise that ranks with her best. In The Artifice (1722), a more loosely-constructed play, she sought to combine a comedy of intrigue with a plot of moral reformation. Although it is not a success, and in itself it is a disappointing end to her career, The Artifice illustrates continued readiness to experiment with different kinds of comedy. Mrs. Centlivre's career was not an uninterrupted progress from apprenticeship to master-work. Her best plays were written at intervals, amid a succession of indifferent pieces.

A Bold Stroke for a Wife was produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 3 February 1718, and had an initial run of six nights (Avery, pp. 481-482).[1] The play then experienced the same fate as The Wonder: it was forgotten, and achieved a posthumous popularity only after the lapse of some years.

---

[1]It was advertised "This Day Published" in the Daily Courant, 28 February 1718 (Norton, p. 177).

A Bold Stroke for a Wife did not have to wait as long as The Wonder for this new lease of life. It was revived at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 23 April 1728, for the benefit of Milward and Mrs. Berriman (Avery, p. 971). Copies of the tickets printed for this benefit survive (one is in the John Johnson Collection at Oxford), illustrated by an engraving after Hogarth. Unfortunately Hogarth drew a scene not from A Bold Stroke, but from The Beggar's Opera, the smash hit of the season.

A Bold Stroke for a Wife is the only one of Mrs. Centlivre's plays available in a modern edition, and if it does not quite rank (in my estimation at least) with The Busie Body, it is certainly one of her best plays.[2] Its success derives from a well-structured variety of comic scenes. The play is both unified and diverse. It is the only one of Mrs. Centlivre's full-length plays that observes unity of action. There is only one pair of lovers in the play (Colonel Fainwell and Ann Lovely), and the whole action is occupied with his attempt to outwit her guardians and marry her. Colonel Fainwell is a man of sense, and Ann is too sensible to be a coquette,

---

[2]All quotations from A Bold Stroke are from the edition by Thalia Stathas in the "Regents' Restoration Drama Series" (1969). The introduction to this edition is more useful than Bowyer's discussion of the play (pp. 212-218).

or on the other hand to be willing to marry without money. This is how she replies to her maid's suggestion that she elope with Fainwell:

> No, no, girl, there are certain ingredients to be mingled with matrimony, without which I may as well change for the worse as for the better. When the woman has fortune enough to make the man happy, if he has either honor or good manners, he'll make her easy. Love makes but a slovenly figure in that house where poverty keeps the door. (p. 18)

Thus there is no "love chase" in the play: but in order to win Ann's indispensible fortune, Fainwell has to obtain the consent of all four of her guardians to their marriage.

The difficulty, and the source of the play's comic action, is that Ann's father chose an unlikely quartet of guardians: a beau, a virtuoso, a stock-jobber, and a Quaker. Each has resolved that Ann shall marry only one of his like. In order to please them all, Fainwell has to assume different disguises in turn (the virtuoso is not tricked the first time, so Fainwell has to assume five disguises in all). Thus the play is an excellent showpiece for an actor whose talent is variety of impersonation. In selecting the four guardians, Mrs. Centlivre showed a tactful balance and political impartiality in choosing types from the social spectrum. Resisting what must have been a temptation to pick Tory targets, she distributed her satire evenly, so that if she offended half the audience individually, she would delight the whole collectively.

In Sir Philip Modelove, a superannuated beau and a libertine, and Obadiah Prim, a canting Quaker, Mrs. Centlivre satirised both extremes of the moral scale. In fact, the extremes are seen to come close to meeting. We first see Sir Philip (p. 20) sitting with a masked woman in Hyde Park: his frank flirtatiousness is more attractive than Prim's sexual hypocrisy. When Prim objects to Ann's décolletage, she reminds him "you had no aversion to naked bosoms when you begged [Mary, his servant] to show you a little, little, little bit of her delicious bubby" (p. 31). Neither Prim nor Sir Philip is specifically associated with a political party, but Prim obviously belongs to the Whig end of the spectrum, and Sir Philip to the Tory end. In both characters, affectation is the primary target of Mrs. Centlivre's satire: Prim's hypocrisy, and Sir Philip's affected imitation of French habits and dress (this theme is a familiar one in Mrs. Centlivre's plays: it appears as early as Sir William Mode in The Beau's Duel).

The third guardian, Periwinkle, described in the dramatis personae as "a kind of silly virtuoso", is really a collector of the rubbish of antiquity. He claims to wear a coat that was"formerly worn by that ingenious and very learned person John Tradescant" (p. 39). Periwinkle shares with Fossile in Three Hours after Marriage (1717) a weakness for absurd relics of antiquity, but he lacks

Fossile's scientific (or pseudo-scientific) interests. Mrs. Centlivre could have taken a hint for Periwinkle from Fossile. The joke about the mummy and the crocodile (p. 40) certainly seems to be a reference to Three Hours. In selecting curiosities, Mrs. Centlivre was notably less inventive than the authors of Three Hours. There is nothing in A Bold Stroke to match this:

FOSSILE
Ah, Dr. Nautilus, how have I languish'd for your feather of the bird Porphyrion!

NAUTILUS
But your dart of the Mantichora!

FOSSILE
Your haft of the antediluvian trowel, unquestionably the tool of one of the Babel masons!

NAUTILUS
What's that to your fragment of Seth's pillar?[3]

Mrs. Centlivre's satire is less dramatic, because instead of being incorporated into a brisk dialogue of one-downmanship (as in the exchange quoted above), it is presented by Fainwell largely in catalogue form. He simply lists, for Periwinkle's interest, some of his curiosities: "an Egyptian's idol . . . Two tusks of an hippopotamus, two pair of Chinese nutcrackers, and one Egyptian mummy . . . a muff made from the feathers of those geese that saved the Roman Capitol" (pp. 40, 42).

---

[3] Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Simon Trussler (1969), p. 130.

Mrs. Centlivre's invented curiosities are hardly exaggerated from the contemporary reality. Periwinkle refers to Tradescant, a catalogue of whose collection was published in 1656 as Musaeum Tradescantiarum: or, A Collection of Rarities. The contents of this collection are just such as Fainwell claimed to possess: an "Indian Idol made of Feathers . . . A piece of Stone of Saint John Baptists Tombe . . . An Orange gathered from a Tree that grew over Zebulon's Tombe . . . Blood that rained in the Isle of Wight . . . Edward the Confessors knit gloves . . . [a] Turkish tooth-brush" and much more of the same kind (Musaeum, pp. 42-53). Even if Mrs. Centlivre had not seen this collection (which was then in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford), she could have seen others of the sort. Little exaggeration was needed for her satiric purposes: but one regrets that she was not as imaginatively inventive as the authors of Three Hours after Marriage.

The fourth guardian, Tradelove, a stock-jobber, is also part of the contemporary London scene. At first sight it is surprising to find Mrs. Centlivre satirising the city, especially after her sympathetic treatment of the merchant Frederick in The Wonder. But Loftis points out that contemporary "dramatists, especially the Whigs, distinguish between merchants and stockjobbers, portraying

the one sympathetically and the other satirically."[4] Contemporary attacks on stock-jobbers are certainly not hard to find. Two titles may be quoted: The Villainy of Stock-Jobbers Detected, and the Causes of the Late Run upon the Bank and Bankers Discovered and Considered (an anonymous pamphlet published in 1701), and The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley: or, A System of Stock-Jobbing. Proving that Scandalous Trade, as It Is Now Carry'd on, to Be Knavish in Its Private Practice, and Treason in Its Public (anonymously published in 1719, but attributed to Defoe).

Tradelove and Periwinkle, like Prim and Modelove, can be considered as a pair. Both try to make something out of nothing. Periwinkle can be duped into thinking ordinary objects are precious rarities. Tradelove uses rumour and speculation to make a profit out of trading stock he only nominally owns. Periwinkle's love of the past places him with the Tories, while Tradelove is obviously a Whig. Thus Ann Lovely's four guardians are not just a random collection of "humours" or stock types: they are a carefully selected and balanced group.

The construction of the play, which has already been praised in passing (above, p. 192), can now be examined in more detail. Mrs. Centlivre structured the

---

[4] Comedy and Society (1959), p. 95.

play so as to avoid too mechanical a progression, as could have been the case if, after an initial act of exposition, each succeeding act had been concerned with the outwitting of one of the four guardians. Act I is indeed an act of exposition: in the first scene, the situation is presented from Fainwell's point of view, and in the second from Anne's. None of the guardians are introduced in this act, nor are Ann and Fainwell brought together.

Act II is also in two scenes. In the first, Fainwell easily outwits the old beau by acting the fop himself. The second scene is the play's first minor climax, for it brings all four guardians together at Prim's. It also introduces (in the play) Fainwell to Ann. Sir Philip presents him as a suitable husband, but he is of course rejected by the other guardians. Introducing all the guardians at this point was a shrewd move: the scene acts both as a "raree show", a gathering of the incongruous, and as a foretaste of what is to come. It also serves to punctuate Fainwell's campaign, providing a scene of group comedy between the attacks on the individual guardians.

The third act is a single scene, and is entirely concerned with an unsuccessful attempt by Fainwell to get the consent of Periwinkle. Fainwell here plays the virtuoso. The rarities he speaks of move from the possible to the impossible girdle of invisibility. This

is managed so as to draw Periwinkle further and further into the world of illusion that Fainwell creates. It is only spoiled by the clumsy incident of Fainwell's disappearance and reappearance through the trap-door, a demonstration of the girdle of invisibility (pp. 44-46). However skilfully the mechanics of the trap-door were managed, it is impossible not to regret this farcical intrusion into a scene of verbal comedy. The static nature of this act contrasts with the rapid movement of the preceeding one. Fainwell's trick is exposed by the untimely entry of a drawer, who addresses him by his own name. This sudden puncturing of the illusion corrects the too great ease with which Sir Philip was duped, and it also contrasts with the way Fainwell's earlier alias was carried over into the scene at Prim's. The guardians are not capable of penetrating Fainwell's disguises: only an external accident can do that. It is appropriately theatrical that the illusion is broken into by an intrusion of (within the fiction) "real" life, the drawer. The incident foreshadows the arrival of the "real" Simon Pure in Act V.

In contrast to the straightforward movement of Act III, a gradual increase in dramatic interest suddenly punctured, Act IV is a bustling act with four different scenes in four different locations, and carries on two of

Fainwell's intrigues at once. The first two scenes, at Jonathan's coffee-house and at a tavern, introduce Fainwell (via his friend Freeman) to Tradelove as a Dutch merchant, a possible dupe. Freeman gives Tradelove a piece of false "news", and Tradelove concludes several deals on the basis of anticipating movements in stock prices that will occur once the news becomes general. One of the most important of these is with Fainwell. When it turns out that the news is not confirmed, Tradelove is glad to have the deal with Fainwell cancelled in return for his consent to Fainwell's marrying Ann. Thus Tradelove is tricked with his own device, rumourmongering. In the third scene (and therefore before Tradelove has been disposed of), Fainwell visits Periwinkle, this time disguised as the steward of Periwinkle's uncle, whom Fainwell reports as dead. The use of false "news" in this scene binds the two actions of the act together. In the excitement of inheriting a fortune, Periwinkle is tricked into signing a consent for Fainwell to marry Ann (he thinks it is a lease). Tradelove and Periwinkle are both duped through their avarice: Sir Philip and (as we shall see) Prim, through their vanity.

The fifth act, like the third, is a single scene. But whereas Act III built up to a single dramatic high point, Act V has three climaxes of steadily increasing tension. In the early part of the act, all four of the

guardians are assembled, but the promise of resolution that this gathering seems to offer is deliberately frustrated as the guardians disperse. This is the first low point in the act. The tension begins to rise again as Fainwell enters, disguised as a Simon Pure, a Quaker whom Prim is expecting (p. 81). Fainwell deceives Prim, and the intrigue prospers until the entry of the real Simon Pure (p. 86), the second climax of the act. Fainwell succeeds in brazening out the imposture, and by the time the real Simon Pure can bring proof of his identity, Prim has signed the crucial document, and Fainwell and Ann are safe. The guardians are once again assembled for a final exhibition of their eccentricities, and Fainwell reveals himself in his true character of a soldier: "I have had the honor to serve his majesty and headed a regiment of the bravest fellows that ever pushed bayonet in the throat of a Frenchman; and whenever my country wants my aid, this sword and arm are at her service." (p. 98).

In this play the "humour" element that in earlier Centlivre comedies was amusing but irrelevant or even distracting is effectively integrated into the main plot, and A Bold Stroke is a good example of the value of (upon occasion) observing unity of action. Because Fainwell appears in so many characters, the want of a second pair of lovers is not felt to result in lack of

variety.

In the dedication to A Bold Stroke for a Wife, Mrs. Centlivre claimed that "the plot is entirely new and the incidents wholly owing to my own invention, not borrowed from our own or translated from the works of any foreign poet" (p. 5). Mottley, on the other hand, tells us in his List that "In this Play she was assisted by Mr. Mottley, who wrote one or two entire Scenes of it." (p. 191). This statement is untestable, as Stathas admits (p. xvi). But if Mottley's claim is true-- and he could have no real temptation to falsehood-- and given his association with the city through his place in the excise office at the time A Bold Stroke was written, I think he is most likely to have contributed the scenes in Act IV which involve Tradelove. The "assistance" of which Mottley speaks could have been with the Dutch phrases Fainwell uses, or with the operations of the stock-jobbers, or both.

Whatever her debt to Mottley, Mrs. Centlivre's claim of complete originality is suspect for another reason. Several parallels to incidents in earlier plays have been noticed by scholars (Stathas, pp. xvi-xvii). Two additions can be made to those discussed by Stathas. Cowley's The Guardian could have suggested not only Fainwell's vision, as Stathas suggests (p. xvi), but also the incident of the two Simon Pures. Since Mrs. Centlivre

is more likely to have known Cowley's play in the later version, as Cutter of Coleman Street (which was acted, as The Guardian: or, The Cutter of Coleman Street, at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 5 October 1702, and at Drury Lane on 1 August 1712 [Avery, pp. 26, 280]), I shall refer to that version of the play. In V,ii of Cutter, Worm and Puny disguise themselves as Jolly's long-lost brother and the brother's servant. In V,viii and ix, a second long-lost brother and his servant arrive. As it turns out (V,x), this second pair is not "real" either, but Jolly's servants William and Ralph, disguised in order to test the first pair. Worm and Puny are discomforted, and try to sneak away. They do not brazen the cheat out, as Fainwell does in A Bold Stroke. Although this is not a very close parallel to what happens in Mrs. Centlivre's play, the fact of the two analogous incidents (the dream vision and the double arrival), which occur in the same scene in A Bold Stroke, increases the likelihood that Mrs. Centlivre knew and perhaps took hints from Cutter of Coleman Street.

Cibber's She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not (Drury Lane, 26 Novemeber 1702) contains a closer parallel to Mrs. Centlivre's incident of the two Simon Pures. In Cibber's Act II, Hypolita impersonates Don Philip (p. 25), and when the real Don Philip arrives at Don Manuel's house (in Act IV), Hypolita outfaces him and forces him to retire

in confusion (pp. 41-44). Don Philip returns, but is outfaced a second time (pp. 51-54), and the imposture is only revealed when it suits Hypolita to do so. If Mrs. Centlivre took a hint from Cibber's play, she hardly took more. In Cibber, the deception is spread over several scenes, whereas Mrs. Centlivre concentrates it into one. She also naturalized it into her play, where Fainwell's disguise as Pure is the culmination of a series of impersonations, each more audacious than the last (his first two disguises are as types, the second two as "real" people, the last one who is actually likely to appear in person). Hypolita, in Cibber, had stolen Don Philip's papers, and outfaced him with the help of these and her accomplices. Mrs. Centlivre gives the deception a verbal quality: it is not by sheer impudence, but by imitating the Quaker jargon so well, that Fainwell carries it off. Pure exclaims: "Avaunt, Satan; approach me not! I defy thee and all thy works." (p. 87). In as aside, Ann fears that Pure will "outcant" Fainwell: but the Colonel, with his talk of the "leathern convenience" (a Quaker circumlocution for a coach, p. 88), can give as good, or better, than he gets.

These parallels with earlier plays hardly detract from Mrs. Centlivre's achievement in A Bold Stroke, any more than the fact that the guardians are all stock types reduces their effectiveness in the play. A Bold Stroke

is a play of action rather than of character: it is the moves in the game, not the pieces, that are important. Mrs. Centlivre claimed that the "plot" and the "incidents" were new, not the characters. If this claim is hardly true of the Simon Pure episode, Mrs. Centlivre certainly improved the hint she took from Cibber and Cowley.

2

The theatrical vitality of A Bold Stroke for a Wife can be illustrated by the changes that were made to the play during its long theatrical life. A Bold Stroke needed less retouching than The Wonder for audiences of the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth. From a moral point of view, it is a less exceptionable play than The Wonder. As a result, the alterations that are found in Bell's edition (1776), and in Mrs. Inchbald's British Theatre (1808) are less interesting than those made in the "Garrick" text of The Wonder (see above, pp. 164-172). They reveal merely the hand of a competent abridger, and there are none of the subtle touches to the characterization that made Felix and Violante more "romantic". But before looking at Bell and Mrs. Inchbald, an earlier (and more drastic) revision of the play is worth examination.

The Strolers Pacquet Open'd (1742) contains, as well as the version of The Man's Bewitched discussed above

(pp. 123-124), an adaptation of A Bold Stroke, called The Guardians Over-reached in Their Own Humour. Mrs. Centlivre's play was exactly suited to the purpose of the compiler of the Pacquet. Its interest in caricature and "humours" is proclaimed on the title-page: "Representing the Comicall Humours of Designing Usurers, Sly Pettifoggers, Cunning Sharpers, Cowardly Bullies, Wild Rakes, Finical Fops, Shrewd Clowns, Testy Masters, Arch Footmen, Forward Widows, Stale Maids, and Melting Lasses". The Guardians is the most ambitious of the seven drolls in the Pacquet: it is the longest, and has the largest cast, the greatest number of scenes, and the most demanding requirements for staging.[5] The other drolls in the collection (including The Witchcraft of Love, based on The Man's Bewitched) are all simplified from their parent plays by the omission of one or more of the original plots. The Guardians compresses the whole of the action of A Bold Stroke into its briefer compass. The result could have been a clumsy jumble, but it is in fact an extremely skillful adaptation.

The main concern of the adaptor was to speed up the action of the play. He omitted "bridge" passages, and also

---

[5]H. R. Falk, "An Annotated Edition of Three Drolls", Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Southern California, 1970, p. 89. Passages from The Guardians are cited from the Pacquet, not from Falk.

much dialogue that contributed to the atmosphere rather than the action of the play. For example, Mrs. Centlivre's II,ii is omitted, and a brief narrative of it is incorporated into Scene 3, on p. 133 (The Guardians is divided into eight unnumbered scenes: they are here designated by arabic numerals to distinguish them from the scenes of A Bold Stroke). The scenes involving Tradelove are drastically shortened: Scene 4 is considerably reduced from Mrs. Centlivre's IV,i, and her IV,iv (the scene with Tradelove in the tavern, Stathas, pp. 71-75) is reduced to a page in The Guardians (p. 149).

The result of the general abbreviation of the play is that the "humour" characters have less time in which to reveal their folly. In keeping with the broader, more farcical comedy of the droll, one imagines greater reliance on caricature of costume and gesture, and less on Mrs. Centlivre's verbal parodies of the guardians' styles. One thinks of an extravagantly dressed Modelove, and a highly stylised Prim. Where the droll changes Mrs. Centlivre's words, it is generally for the worse. In A Bold Stroke, for example, Fainwell tells Modelove that "A person of your figure would be a vast addition to a Coronet." (p. 22). In the droll this is changed to "A Person of your noble Air and Figure would give lustre to a Coronet." Here I cannot agree with Falk that the droll represents an "improvement

of the phrasing" (p. 221). A rather subtle verbal joke-- that Sir Philip would be no more than a dead-weight "addition" to his coronet-- is replaced by a commonplace compliment without the cutting thrust at Sir Philip. Cibber makes a similar point in Love's Last Shift, when Hilaria tells Sir Novelty "you, Sir, are an Ornament to your Cloaths."[6]

It was inevitable, of course, that some part of the full-length play would have to be sacrificed. Here the adaptor showed considerable sensitivity to the way A Bold Stroke works. Instead of reducing the number of guardians, and so diluting the main comic interest of the play (which is in Fainwell's impersonations), he kept all four guardians and reduced the role of Ann. Scene 8 (corresponding to Act V) is the first appearance in The Guardians of Ann and the Prims. The earlier scenes at Prim's (I,ii and II,ii) are omitted entirely, with the loss of Ann's struggle with the Prims over her dress, and the revelation of Prim's sexual hypocrisy (quoted above, p. 194). But given the requirements of the droll, there is good dramatic sense here. The earlier Prim scenes punctuate Fainwell's quest: omitting them maintains greater momentum in the action of the droll, and it also makes

---

[6]Love's Last Shift, II,i; in Three Sentimental Comedies, ed. Maureen Sullivan (1973), p. 26.

Ann's appearance more dramatic. Fainwell has to cut his way through to her, and we follow his quest throughout, instead of moving backwards and forwards between him and Ann. For Mrs. Centlivre's purposes, in a full-length play, the early scenes between Ann and the Prims provided welcome variety and change of pace: luxuries which the briefer compass of the droll could not afford.

Bell's edition of A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1776) is described on the title-page as "Distinguishing also the Variations of the Theatre, As Performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. Regulated from the Prompt-Book, By Permission of the Managers, By Mr. Hopkins, Prompter." The omissions marked in Bell (by the same system of inverted commas as was used in The Wonder, p. 165 above) are of the same kind as The Guardians made, although they are less drastic. The intention is still to speed up the action, and to this end a number of satiric scenes and speeches that do not contribute to the action are shortened or omitted. Examples are the satire on clothes and Frenchmen (I,i,142-172); the satire on amusements and Heidegger (II,i,82-116); some mildly satiric talk about marriage (II,i, 124-138); and much of the description of the curiosities (III, 82-138).[7]

---

[7]Line references are to Stathas's edition of A Bold Stroke, since the passages are too short for page references.

In Mrs. Inchbald's edition, in her British Theatre (1808), the process begun in Bell's text is taken a stage further. Following The Guardians (there is no direct influence of course, but rather a coincidence of theatrical experience), Mrs. Inchbald's text omits the whole of I,ii. In addition to Bell's cuts, further satiric passages are pruned: I,i,54-68, for example, the satire on innkeepers and half-pay officers. But a particular concern in Mrs. Inchbald's edition is the excision of the play's mild indecencies (this had not been a feature of Bell's text). In II,ii, for example, the story of Tobias and Tabitha (ll. 14-44), the references to naked breasts (ll. 48-61, 68-70), and to Prim's petting the maid (ll. 93-96) are all omitted. Thus an audience in the time of Mrs. Inchbald would have seen a shorter, more rapidly-moving play than Mrs. Centlivre's, but one largely purged of its satire and its spice: a comedy emasculated into a farce. For the effect of speeding up the play was to divert attention away from the play's social criticism towards its purely farcical elements. To some extent, this was bound to happen in the course of time, as Mrs. Centlivre's caricatures would appear increasingly remote from contemporary reality.

3

Mrs. Centlivre's last play, The Artifice, was produced at Drury Lane on 2 October 1722, and ran for only three nights (Avery, p. 688). Unlike A Bold Stroke for a Wife, it did not enjoy a subsequent revival. Reasons for this play's failure are not hard to find. Its rough handling of the non-jurors evidently aroused some opposition, for a contemporary pamphlet (admittedly one with a heavy bias in the favour of the non-jurors) speaks of a "few who had Sense and Spirit enough to hiss it from the Stage with Scorn and Indignation."[8] This pamphlet and its critique of The Artifice will be discussed below (pp. 222-228). Other reasons for the play's failure can be found in The Artifice itself. With 106 pages of text in the first edition (excluding prologue and epilogue), it is Mrs. Centlivre's longest play, and she tried to cram too much into it. Its four plots have neither unity of action nor unity of tone. The play moves from the farcical to the near-tragic, from the salacious to the sentimental, from the crudest buffoonery to scenes of highly-wrought emotionalism. But above all, it moves slowly.

The play's incongruities of tone and atmosphere stand out from an examination of its four plots. Nominally

---

[9][Advice from Parnassus] (1722), p. 35.

the main plot is Sir John Freeman's fight to win Olivia despite the opposition of her father, Sir Philip Money-love. Sir Philip had formerly approved of Sir John, but withdrew his consent after Sir John was disinherited. This plot is similar to the Manly-Clarinda-Careful plot of The Beau's Duel. It is a serious love affair between a man and a woman of sense: there is neither coquettry on her part, nor infidelity on his. The second and third plots are concerned with Ned Freeman, Sir John's younger brother, who has inherited the family estate. Ned had been betrothed to a Dutch girl, but having abandoned her on receiving the inheritance, he now wishes to marry Olivia. Louisa, the Dutch girl, has come to England in an effort to reclaim and reform him. Quite separately, Ned is intriguing with Mrs. Watchit, the young wife of an old husband. In the fourth plot, Fainwell (disguised at different times as Jeffrey, a servant, and Mr. Worthy, a country squire) is intriguing to marry the wealthy Widow Headless, attracted by her money as much as by her person.

Confusion and even contradiction of morality are evident here. In the struggle for Olivia, our sympathies are directed towards Sir John rather than his brother Ned. But in his intrigue with Mrs. Watchit, Ned becomes an engaging and attractive spark, and our sympathies are with him rather than the jealous husband Watchit. In the

affair with Louisa, Ned appears a monster of inhumanity. Thus our attitude to Ned is seriously divided. There is a similar moral discrepancy between Mrs. Centlivre's attitude to Sir Philip's mercenary ideas about marriage, which we are asked to condemn, and her sympathetic treatment of the same philosophy in Fainwell's wooing of Widow Headless. The play lacks a common moral standard by which to judge Ned's abandonment of Louisa, and his attempted cuckolding of Watchit,and a common moral perspective in which to place the various attitudes to love and marriage. This would be noticeable on the stage, because of the wide variation in emotional tone between the play's different strands.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between The Artifice and Love's Last Shift, in which Cibber faced a similar problem in managing the play's various elements, and solved it more successfully than Mrs. Centlivre does. It will be useful to set out the main parallels of character and plot:

Sir William Wisewould	Sir Philip Money-love
Loveless-Amanda	Ned Freeman-Louisa
Elder Worthy-Hilaria	Sir John Freeman-Olivia
Young Worthy-Narcissa	Fainwell-Widow Headless

I do not think there is any question of direct "influence" here: but the two dramatists faced similar problems in the two plays. A striking difference between The Artifice and

Love's Last Shift is that there is no character in The Artifice corresponding to Sir Novelty Fashion in Cibber's play. Sir Novelty functions both as a norm and an autonomous entity. In one sense, the other characters can be measured against him, but in another he is sui generis. Because he is not seriously involved with any of the other characters, Sir Novelty can embody an amoral code of conduct without spoiling the play's moral basis. In The Artifice, Ned Freeman's intrigue with Mrs. Watchit provides the same kind of comedy of the man-about-town, but Ned is not sufficiently insulated from the moral part of the play, and his intriguing works against the play's morality.

It is true that in Love's Last Shift there is a serious incongruity between the "sacrifice" on which the Loveless-Amanda plot turns, and the "artifice" which is used to trick Sir William. Maureen Sullivan suggests that the "main plot combines the doctrinal assumptions and stark characterization of the morality play-- vice against virtue-- with the improbable intrigue of romance. The combination balances uneasily with the smooth, easy wit and the perfectly plausible trick . . . of the subplot."[9] But Cibber's reformation of Loveless is at least presented

---

[9]Introduction to her edition of Cibber's Three Sentimental Comedies (1973), p. xix. Quotations from Love's Last Shift are from this edition, to which page references are given.

in unmistakably moral terms. He is moved by the example of Amanda's conduct: "Oh! thou hast rouz'd me from my deep Lethargy of Vice! . . . Thus let me kneel and pay my Thanks to her, whose conqu'ring Virtue has at last subdu'd me." (p. 73). This is part of a larger pattern of moral examples in the play, notably the double generosity of Young Worthy and Sir William (p. 81), and it is how the play itself is supposed to operate on the audience. We saw a very similar chain of moral examples in Mrs. Centlivre's own Gamester (see above, pp. 66-67).

The trouble in The Artifice is that in adapting a similar fable of moral regeneration to form part of an intrigue play, Mrs. Centlivre weakened the moral motivations disastrously. When Freeman is confronted by Louisa (p. 65), his only attempt to make amends is his offer to get her a position as someone's mistress (p. 67). When he is given a glass of wine, which he drinks before being told that it is poisoned, his immediate reaction to the news is to draw his sword on the maid who gave him the glass (p. 68). Only as the poison begins to operate does repentance come into his head, and as it does the scene moves into verse, and Ned promises to marry Louisa at once, before they die (p. 70). At the same time, he decides to return his estate to his brother. He duly carries out both these pledges, but his new-found rectitude cannot survive the knowledge that the poisoning

was a trick: again, his first reaction is to draw his sword, this time on his brother (p. 96). He is only reconciled to the marriage with Louisa when she tells him that "My Father left me his only Heir, and Mistress of Forty Thousand Pounds." (p. 102). Through Ned, the morality of the cuckolding-plot carries over into the serious part of the play, making it difficult to accept the latter's values.

Cibber's Young Worthy, although described in the dramatis personae as of a "looser Temper" than his brother (p. 7), is fundamentally good-natured. This is brought out in the first act, through his concealing Amanda's survival from Loveless (p. 11), and his generosity to Snap (p. 12). Young Worthy tricks Sir William, not Narcissa herself. But in The Artifice, it is Widow Headless that Fainwell tricks: he marries her under a false character and an assumed name. Legally, this would have invalidated the marriage,[10] and it certainly compromises the play's morality.

Considered apart from its relation to the rest of the play, Ned's intrigue with Mrs. Watchit is one of the best things in The Artifice. If unsatisfactory as a

---

[10]Comedy frequently ignored such legal niceties: see Gellert S. Alleman, The Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy (1942).

"sentimental" hero, he is comically effective as a man of intrigue. This more attractive side (theatrically if not morally) to his character can be illustrated from one of the play's best scenes (pp. 20-30). This scene is a good example of the classic Centlivre sequence: a young man discovered in a woman's apartment by her father or husband. The layout of the house is of some consequence in this scene, as indeed the number of available doors is usually crucial in comedy of this kind. The Watchit house connects with Ned's lodgings on the floor above Mrs. Watchit's room: the connecting door on her floor is nailed up. Thus Ned has to enter and leave by the stairs. Access to these is obviously via one of the proscenium doors, and the door on the other side leads to Mrs. Watchit's bedroom. The flat used for this scene probably had a door in it: otherwise there would be no need to introduce an explanation of why it cannot be used. This is a good example of Mrs. Centlivre accomodating the use of a "stock" flat into her play.

Ned enters (p. 20), and after some brief preliminaries is about to carry Mrs. Watchit into the bedroom, when Lucy screams to give warning of Watchit's untimely return (p. 22). In The Beau's Duel, Bellmein in a similar situation was rolled up in a mat; in The Busie Body, Sir George hid behind the chimney screen; in The Wonder, Felix was disguised as a woman. In The Artifice,

Ned hides behind a convenient screen while Mrs. Watchit tries to engross her husband's attention long enough to allow Ned to make his exit. The tension increases as Ned advances, but is forced to retreat again as Watchit's attention wanders (p. 25).

Ned advances again, and this time Watchit sees him. This is the moment on which the whole scene pivots, for Ned pretends he has just come in, and takes the iniative:

> (As Watchit is raising her up, she throws her Arms about his Neck to prevent his seeing Ned.)
>
> WATCHIT (Struggling)
> What, will you smother me? [sees Ned] How now! Who have we here?
>
> NED
> So! he has me! [aside]-- I admire you leave your Doors open, Sir, and not a Servant in the Way to take a Message.
>
> WATCHIT
> Had you any to send up, Sir? I don't like a Man that comes up to my Nose; then tells me, I admire you leave your Doors open.-- (pp. 25-26)

Here Ned's impudence allows him to assume the aggressor's role: he tells Watchit that he has come to arrest him for "Incontinency", pretending to be a "Proctor in the Bishop's Court" (p. 27). This charge allows Mrs. Watchit to assume an air of injured innocence, and she and Lucy join in the attack on Watchit. After a page or two of this, Watchit threatens to call a constable. Ned decides that the time has come to make a retreat, so he pretends to have mistaken the house, and that the warrant is for one Sir Nicholas.

The main faults of this scene are that it does not

advance the main actions of the play at all, and that it is too long. Especially if compared with the "hood" scene in The Wonder (see above, pp. 158-161), which took less than two pages of dialogue, the "screen" scene in The Artifice is too slow. The movement is rapid enough up to Watchit's entry: but after that there is too much dialogue separating the main comic points, the discovery of Ned and Ned's exit. In particular, the accusation against Watchit is drawn out at too great length.

The "screen" scene, typical of the comedy of intrigue, represents the middle level of the play's action. At one extreme are the serious scenes between Louisa and Ned, which have already been noticed. At the opposite extreme is the farcical comedy, principally in the Widow Headless plot, based on Fainwell's imitation of the dialect of Gloucestershire, and crude buffoonery like the "clogs" scene. There can be no doubt about the theatrical effectiveness of the "clogs" scene. When the play was reprinted with a frontispiece in 1735, the scene chosen was the entry of the clogs. The farce Barnaby Brittle (Covent Garden, 1781) borrowed two scenes from The Artifice: the "screen" scene, and the "clogs" scene (Bowyer, pp. 242-243). As we have seen in the cases of The Man's Bewitched and A Bold Stroke for a Wife, it is always the most effective theatrical scenes that are pillaged by

later compilers of farce.

What happens in the "clogs" scene is that Widow Headless tells Jeffrey (Fainwell in disguise) to bring nothing in to her without a plate (p. 40). Later she sends him out for her dog: he comes back without it, saying he could not make it lie still on a plate (p. 41). The Widow relaxes the plate rule in respect of living things: her clogs are sent for, and they arrive on a plate (p. 42). Here one feels that the comic effect is reduced rather than intensified by the repetition of the joke: surely once would have been enough. There is no increase in tension between the dog and the clogs, because there is no expectation that the joke will be repeated. Hence it differs from Freeman's second emergence from behind the screen, where there is an increase in tension, because we know he will have to make a second attempt.

4

If it does not rank with Mrs. Centlivre's best plays, however, The Artifice is of considerable interest from another point of view. It provoked, in the Advice from Parnassus, the longest contemporary criticism of any of her plays, while several newspaper items relating to the play allow us to follow its composition, production, and demise in some detail.

The Artifice was apparently written more than two years before it was produced, for the Weekly Packet for 13-20 February 1720 contains an announcement that "Mrs. Centlivre has a Comedy at the same Theatre [Drury Lane], call'd the Artifice, which will shortly be acted." Avery cites this notice (p. 569), but creates a ghost by calling the play The Sacrifice. Production was delayed, however, and we next hear of the play in the St. James's Journal for 20 September 1722, in which it is reported that "several Gentlemen of good Taste and Judgment, who have read it, say the Plot is finely work'd up, the Characters well drawn, and that there is an excellent Vein of Humour runs through the whole". The play was puffed at greater length, but with scarcely more particulars, in the Freeholder's Journal for 26 September. The Artifice was finally brought out at Drury Lane on 2 October. On 4 October, the third night, the St. James's Journal carried this item: "We hear that his Majesty intends to see the New Play call'd the ARTIFICE, on the sixth Night, for the Benefit of the Author". Unfortunately, the play's third night proved its last.

The Artifice was advertised "To Morrow will be Publish'd" in the Daily Journal for 26 October, and as "This Day Published" in the Post Boy for 25-27 October (Norton, p. 178). These were bare statements of publication, but a more interesting advertisement, purporting to carry

an announcement from Mrs. Centlivre herself, appeared in the Daily Journal for 7 November:

> Just Publish'd,
> The ARTIFICE. A Comedy.
> As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. Written by Mrs. Centlivre. Printed for T. Payne . . . and E. Curll . . . Price 1s. 6d. ☞ A New-Writer, who I am certain (from the peevishness of his Libel call's Advices from Parnassus) must be some Non-Juring Parson; having set himself up for a Dramatical Critick, roundly asserts in the Arrogant-stile of his Brother Collier. That . . . [quotes from Advice from Parnassus, p. 33]. From all which gross, as well as false Imputations, I doubt not but to stand acquitted in the Judgment of every Reader, who will impartially peruse the Play itself. This being the only Request made to the Publick, by
> SUSAN CENTLIVRE.

But a letter to the St. James's Journal (which had obligingly carried a puff for The Artifice), signed "Susanna CentLivre", and printed in the issue for 22 November 1722, denied any knowledge of the advertisement in the Daily Journal, and also any knowledge of the Advice from Parnassus itself, although she claimed to have made the "strictest Enquiry" for it. As Bowyer points out (p. 241), Mrs. Centlivre always spelled her first name "Susanna". This, and the fact that the only specimen of her signature known to me (see above, p. 147) is in the form "Susanna CentLivre", I am inclined to believe Mrs. Centlivre not responsible for the Daily Journal advertisement.

The advertisement has, however, all the hall-marks of an attempt by Curll to arouse interest in a slow-selling play: its main point is "what ever you do, Buy." Curll is

known to have perpetrated many tricks of this kind-- many examples are cited in Ralph Straus's The Unspeakable Curll (1927)-- and it is even tempting to accuse Curll of being responsible for the pamphlet itself. Bowyer, however, quotes a letter from "Publicola" in the Freeholder's Journal for 17 October 1722, in which the author claims to have seen a "Specimen of a monthly Pamphlet, call'd Advices from PARNASSUS" (Bowyer, p. 241). This cannot be the issue that attacked Mrs. Centlivre, so the Advice must have been intended as a serial publication. As "Publicola" noticed, the Advice borrowed the device of the Court of Apollo from the satiric strategy of Trajano Boccalini's Ragguagli di Parnaso (1612).

Bowyer was unable to locate a copy of the pamphlet itself, but in the British Library there is an imperfect copy of what appears to be one issue of the serial. The title-page and all before p. 13 are lacking, but the running-title is "Advice from Parnassus" (Shelf mark C.48.g.13[1]). It contains a lengthy attack on The Artifice, so that it cannot be the issue seen by Publicola before 17 October. I have not been able to locate either a copy of the earlier issue, or a perfect copy of the later one. A discovery of either of these would throw some light on who was responsible for the Advice.

Whether or not its author was the "Non-Juring

Parson" suggested in the advertisement in the Daily Journal, the Advice from Parnassus is chiefly a defence of non-juring and the sincerity of its professors. These are described as "like the rest of Mankind in every thing, Hypocrisy it self except. For their Sincerity, (or there is no such thing as Sincerity in the World,) they suffer to this Day; and therefore their Sufferings are a part of Heroick Virtue, and above the Insults of Comedy." (Advice, p. 32). The issue of the Advice in the British Library is divided into three sessions of the Court of Apollo. The first and second of these are directly concerned with the problems about the non-jurors. Only Session III is even nominally literary in its subject-matter, and even in this session there is a strong political element. It is this part of the Advice (pp. 21-38) that contains the attack on The Artifice (pp. 31-35). The framework of the third session is as follows. Apollo is holding his court, and Boccalini, his secretary, reads a number of petitions, which Apollo either grants or rejects (pp. 21-23). Next Boccalini reads a "Representation . . . of the State of Learning in England" (p. 24). This expatiates at some length (pp. 24-30) on the decline of all the arts since the time of Charles II. After the "Representation" has been read, the nine Muses enter in a distressed condition, having just come from England. Each is to make her own

complaint to Apollo, although actually only seven are heard, Melpomene and Terpsichore being omitted. The complaints of the Muses occupy nine pages (pp. 30-38: pp. 37-38 are wrongly numbered 25-26). Much the longest is Thalia's (pp. 31-35): in fact, the device of the Muses seems intended primarily to provide a framework for the attack on The Artifice.

From a literary point of view, the attack on The Artifice (which is actually put into the mouth not of Thalia but of Boccalini) is disappointing. This is not so strange, when we consider that the Advice was never intended as an organ of literary criticism. The author's strategy is similar to Collier's attack on The Relapse in his Short View (pp. 228-232). Collier was primarily interested in what he regarded as the play's immorality, but he was ready to press purely literary considerations (such as the the three unities) into service when they helped him discredit the play. So in the Advice from Parnassus, the author's chief concern (Mrs. Centlivre's treatment of the non-jurors) is disguised as part of a literary critique of the play.

Boccalini begins with an assertion of the didactic purpose of drama, and deduces three rules from it: that there "must be nothing Monstrous or Improbable in the Characters"; that the "Subjects themselves must in their

Nature be capable of Ridicule"; and that a "strict Decorum must be kept as to good Manners" (p. 31). According to Boccalini, Mrs. Centlivre was guilty of breaking all three of these rules. He finds the most offensive passage in the play to be Sir John Freeman's account of one of his escapades: "one Day, in my Cups, I chanced to stumble into a Non-juring-Meeting, with half a Dozen honest officers at my Back, drove out the Congregation, ty'd the Parson Neck and Heels, lock'd the Door, and took the Key in my Pocket." (p. 5). One is inclined to agree with Boccalini that this and other references to the non-jurors and the catholics (notably pp. 57-58) could well have been spared. Finding them amusing depends on religious bigotry, and one is sorry to see Mrs. Centlivre guilty of that. In convicting Mrs. Centlivre of breaking his second rule, Boccalini is on his surest ground.

His third rule, concerning decorum, raises the whole problem of whether showing vice on the stage tends to ridicule it, or hold it up for imitation. Boccalini objects to the intrigue between Ned and Mrs. Freeman as tending to inflame the passions of the audience (Advice, p. 32). Mrs. Centlivre could have defended the play on the grounds that the cuckolding was not actually consummated, and that both Ned and Mrs. Watchit are finally cured of their irregular impulses. Boccalini surely takes

the play too seriously when he concludes that the "whole Scope of the Play is to encourage Adultery; to ridicule the Clergy; and to set Women, above the arbitrary Power of their Husbands" (p. 33). Certainly Mrs. Centlivre's clerical satire is not so prominent as Boccalini would have us believe.

Boccalini seems equally insensitive to the nature of the play when he offers this crumb of praise: "Mr. Fainwel's putting on Livery to cover his amorous Designs is the only thing in the first Act that is tolerable: For it shews that human Nature puts on a servile Disguise, when it condescends to the Baseness of Intriguing. This tends to reform the Age: But, alas! when she flings in one Bucket of Water, she sets four Corners of the House on fire." (p. 33). Such an allegorical interpretation is quite foreign to the play.

Boccalini's weakest arguments are indeed the most literary, those based on his first rule concerning probability. Boccalini misses (or affects to miss) the whole point of an intrigue play like The Artifice, that probability is not supposed to be a criterion. Thus Boccalini is right when he says that Ned Freeman's impersonation of the proctor is improbable (p. 33): but in the play, this only makes the success of the stratagem the funnier.

Even if it is disappointing as dramatic criticism, and its non-juring bias makes it unrepresentative, the meagreness of any kind of contemporary comment on Mrs. Centlivre's plays makes Advice from Parnassus an interesting document.

IX

CONCLUSION

One of the recurrent concerns of this study has been to place Mrs. Centlivre's plays firmly in the context of the contemporary theatre. Strozier's strictures on The Perjur'd Husband were answered (pp. 29-30 above) in terms of the theatre, and throughout, by analysis of scenes and reconstructions of staging, the theatrical nature of Mrs. Centlivre's "dramatic art" has been emphasized. Recent study of eighteenth-century drama has been increasingly theatrical in orientation. Publication of such basic reference works as the London Stage calendar of performances, and now its attendant Biographical Dictionary are symptomatic of this trend. The most important conclusion to be drawn from this study of a single playwright is the need to think of eighteenth-century drama in terms of the contemporary theatre. Perhaps the most interesting parts of this study are the reconstructions of the staging of The Busie Body and other plays, for it is only by imagining them in the theatre that the words on Mrs. Centlivre's pages can come alive.

A secondary conclusion, but one which needs to be stated at greater length, is that there is a "typical"

Centlivre play in which her art found its best and most characteristic expression. Although she drew for her source-material on several dramatic traditions, English and French, and attempted a variety of dramatic kinds, her best plays are the comedies of intrigue, especially The Busie Body and The Wonder.

The plot of the typical Centlivre play leads towards the marriage of two or more rarely (as in The Man's Bewitched and The Artifice) three pairs of lovers. Marriage is always the end, although extra-marital mild flirtations may be first indulged: provided that (after The Perjur'd Husband) no cuckolding actually takes place, and no woman of virtue is dishonoured.

Typically, Mrs. Centlivre draws a contrast between her lovers, making one pair more serious, and one pair of a looser temper. She may pair the serious lovers with each other (as in The Busie Body, where Charles and Isabinda are the serious pair, and Sir George and Miranda the gayer pair), or she may mix the pairs (as she does in The Wonder, where Felix is serious and Violante gay). One of the two men is likely to be a "rover", initially unwilling to settle down to marriage, but converted to it during the course of the play (Colonel Britton in The Wonder).

If there is a "love chase" in the play, it will

probably be undertaken by the rover, who may not even have met his destined bride at the beginning of the play (Colonel Britton), or he may have met her but not yet have come to any understanding (Sir George Airy). But at least one pair of the lovers, probably the more serious pair, will have come to an understanding before the play opens (Colonel Bastion and Constantia in The Perplex'd Lovers, Felix and Violante in The Wonder). Sometimes both pairs of lovers are already agreed, and there is no love chase at all (as in The Beau's Duel, and in A Bold Stroke for a Wife, where there is, exceptionally, only one pair of lovers).

Since the love chase is a subordinate rather than a dominant aspect of the plays, it follows that other obstacles must intervene to postpone, and threaten to prevent, the marriages. The most usual of these is parental opposition: either because of lack of money (Manly in The Beau's Duel, Sir John Freeman in The Artifice), because the woman has been promised elsewhere (Constantia in The Perplex'd Lovers), or because of some whim (Gravello's desire for a scholarly son-in-law in The Stolen Heiress, the choice of four incompatible guardians in A Bold Stroke). Other obstacles to be overcome include temporary misunderstandings between the lovers themselves (the compromising situations that arise in The Wonder), and the machinations of rivals (Lord Richlove in The Perplex'd

Lovers). Letters may be intercepted (as by Sir Jealous Traffick in The Busie Body), or confidences may be betrayed (as by Florella in The Perplex'd Lovers).

Although the plots of Mrs. Centlivre's plays are based on love actions, her lovers are often not the most memorable characters in the plays. In retrospect, one's memories of them tend to merge into each other. More distinctive are the gallery of eccentrics, conceived either socially or morally as foils to the lovers, and often more individually differentiated. Pride of place here must go to Marplot, who is Mrs. Centlivre's finest comic creation. Marplot is unique, but Mrs. Centlivre also achieved lesser successes with a number of types, notably fops, maids, and valets. Her fops (from Sir William Mode in The Beau's Duel to Sir Philip Modelove in A Bold Stroke for a Wife) tend to be imitators of French fashions, and therefore vehicles for Mrs. Centlivre's anti-French sentiments. Perhaps because they do not carry any satiric burden, her mercenary chambermaids (Florella in The Perplex'd Lovers and Flora in The Wonder) and cynical valets (Hector in The Gamester, Robin in Love at a Venture, Timothy in The Perplex'd Lovers, Lissardo in The Wonder) are among her most amusing characters. I think the parts played by Pack would be among the most memorable features of Mrs. Centlivre's plays: of the parts mentioned in this

paragraph, he created Hector, Robin, Marplot, Timothy, and Lissardo.

The common style of Mrs. Centlivre's dramatic prose is colloquial and unmetaphorical. Sufficient examples of her ordinary dialogue have already been quoted to give an adequate idea of what it is like. She departs from this norm for two chief purposes. Where scenes of unusual emotional force are presented, or where powerful feelings are to be expressed, Mrs. Centlivre employs a loose kind of blank verse. Notable examples are in The Stolen Heiress, The Gamester, The Perplex'd Lovers, and The Artifice. Such verse scenes seem incongruous, but they are in keeping with contemporary practice (one thinks of The Relapse, I,i). In verse scenes Mrs. Centlivre's style is more metaphorical, as in this example from The Artifice:

> My Soul revives at thy returning Vertue,
> Only to bear the Rack of deep Despair.--
> Now, now, I do repent the desp'rate Deed,
> And wish my Freeman's Life a longer Date.
> I shou'd have trod the Paths of Death alone!
> But 'twill not be!-- A few short Minutes hence
> We both shall be no more! (p. 70)

The weakness of the verse-- the triteness of the images, the crude alliteration, the artificially elevated diction ("a longer Date")-- stands out, and I think that on stage it would sound thin and lifeless in comparison with Mrs. Centlivre's workmanlike prose.

Mrs. Centlivre's other common departure from the

norm of her dramatic prose is her frequent use of argot or dialect, usually to point the eccentricity of a "humour" character. The fact that such characters tend to speak a dialect of their own contributes to making them more memorable than the central characters of the plays. There is considerable variety of effects of this kind. Mrs. Centlivre assumes that English spoken with a foreign accent will be intrinsically funny, whether it be French (Le Front in The Perplex'd Lovers), or Dutch (Fainwell in A Bold Stroke, Flora in The Artifice). The same applies to Irish (Teague in A Wife Well Manag'd) and Scotch (Gibby in The Wonder), and to English provincial accents (several characters in The Man's Bewitched and The Gotham Election, Isabella in The Platonick Lady and Fainwell in The Artifice).

Quaker habits of speech are ridiculed through the Prims in A Bold Stroke, although in The Gotham Election Scruple is presented as a plain-spoken but not canting Quaker. The affected speech of Sir William Mode in The Beau's Duel (his oaths are amusingly inventive) and of Wou'dbe in Love at a Venture is likewise an argot rather than a dialect. Mention should also be made of the lively sailor's jargon and nautical metaphors of Captain Hearty in The Basset-Table. All these examples are evidence of Mrs. Centlivre's facility at verbal caricature: had she been able to combine this with wittier and more memorable

dialogue between her principal characters, she would have been a dramatist of a higher rank.

If there is a philosophy behind Mrs. Centlivre's plays, it is that marriage must be based on love, not on mercenary considerations, and that it must be freely entered into on both sides. In the dedication to A Bickerstaff's Burying she points out the folly of young women marrying old but wealthy husbands, and she illustrates the situation not only in that farce, but in Love at a Venture (Sir Paul and Lady Cautious) and The Artifice (Mr. and Mrs. Watchit). In other plays, rich but old suitors are sensibly rejected (Sir Toby Doubtful in Love's Contrivance, Sir Francis Gripe in The Busie Body). But such a "philosophy" is too much part of comedy for one to take it as particularly Mrs. Centlivre's own.

More indicative of Mrs. Centlivre's own views and opinions are the incidental sentiments in her plays that express her political convictions, which are known from her dedications and poems. These are anti-French, anti-Tory, anti-Catholic, and anti-Jacobite. Her political ideas are naturally most prominent in The Gotham Election, but they find some expression in most of her plays. The positive side of Mrs. Centlivre's convictions is her concern for personal liberty, whether within the state or within the microcosm of the family.

Mrs. Centlivre's plays were conceived in terms of the conventions of the theatres she knew. In The Busie Body, for example, she made full use of the eight flats and five doors that were available at Drury Lane. Locations are frequently important in her plays, and in Mar-Plot, for instance, we need to keep the various apartments distinct, so that we will not confuse Marton's with Joneton's, or Charles's with Colonel Ravelin's. But when writing for a theatre whose resources were fewer, Mrs. Centlivre could contract her requirements: Love at a Venture needs only three locations.

It would be interesting to see how well a play like The Busie Body would work on an open stage like Chichester, or Stratford, Ontario. Some of Mrs. Centlivre's very brief scenes might have to be cut or re-located. Perhaps the different locales could be suggested by one or two pieces of furniture which could easily be carried on and off. In The Artifice the different locations are fairly well defined by the characters who appear in them. But in The Busie Body we need to know when Sir George is meeting Miranda on neutral ground (the Park) and when in Sir Francis Gripe's, and therefore in hostile territory.

In this study I have tried to avoid placing too great an emphasis on the evaluation of Mrs. Centlivre's plays in absolute terms. It is no easy task to estimate

her precise rank as a dramatist, and it is difficult for a writer on a minor author to avoid the twin pitfalls of making exaggerated claims for his subject, or constantly apologising for it. None of Mrs. Centlivre's plays can be ranked with the major achievements of restoration comedy, although one might put The Busie Body in a collection of a dozen representative comedies of the eighteenth century. Increased interest in the theatre and drama of the period is likely to result in increasing attention being paid to Mrs. Centlivre's work. Together with Cibber's, her plays provide an interesting body of evidence of what the ordinary professional dramatist of the period provided as standard fare for the theatrical public. The plays of a more gifted writer like Farquhar are more rewarding, but less representative. This study was undertaken out of an interest in the theatre of the period, not from an initial impulse to write about Mrs. Centlivre in particular. If it does not call for any radical re-evaluation of Mrs. Centlivre's importance, it will hopefully be of interest as a critical and theatrical study of a representative author.

APPENDIX

THE WONDER, 1776-1897

Although it did not become a stock-piece in her own lifetime, The Wonder proved ultimately to have the most staying-power of any of Mrs. Centlivre's plays. The play that enjoyed this posthumous success was not, of course, exactly the same as the play that Mrs. Centlivre wrote. The alterations to the play made by Garrick, which were printed in Bell's edition of 1776 (discussed above, pp. 164-172), were individually small but collectively significant. The plot of the play was left almost as Mrs. Centlivre wrote it, but the characters of Felix and Violante were made more "romantic", Colonel Britton's cynicism was toned down, and most of the topical allusions were omitted. The large number of asides that were cut also suggests a changed relationship between actors and audience, a loss of the intimacy that results from direct statements to the audience and a more complete theatrical illusion.

Garrick's retirement in 1776 did not mean the end of The Wonder as a stage play, as it would have done had the play served as no more than a vehicle for his acting. Instead, The Wonder held the stage for more than another

century. This later stage history, of the play even further altered from Mrs. Centlivre's original, belongs more properly to a study of the nineteenth-century theatre itself than to a study of Mrs. Centlivre. But staying-power is a good test of the dramatist's art, and the later history of The Wonder makes a suitable epilogue to a study of Mrs. Centlivre.

This appendix is based on a number of actual prompt-books of The Wonder, the majority of them used in American theatres between 1846 and 1868, which are now preserved in the New York Public Library. These prompt-books afford interesting evidence of how the play was adapted to suit audiences entirely remote in time and place from Mrs. Centlivre's London. There is a general chronological progression that can be observed as the play was more and more drastically cut, but with this exception there is a good deal of agreement between all the prompt books as to the kind of changes made.

The American managers made The Wonder at once a more "romantic" play, and a more "realistic" one. Building on Garrick's alterations, they made the play more "romantic" in the characterization of Felix and Violante, and concentrated even more than Garrick on that pair at the expense of the subplot and the low comedy of Gibby and Lissardo. Their shorter play was more unified in tone, and

that tone was more predominantly "romantic". But at the same time, the managers made the play more "realistic" in presentation by omitting most of Mrs. Centlivre's asides.[1] In this respect, too, they were building on the Garrick alterations. Poe, reviewing Fashion, a new play of 1845, regarded it as being rather old-fashioned, and he singled out "the even more preposterous 'asides'" for special mention, asking "Will our play-wrights never learn, through the dictates of common sense, that an audience under no circumstances can or will be brought to conceive that what is sonorous in their own ears at a distance of fifty feet from the speaker cannot be heard by an actor at the distance of one or two?"[2] It is from this point of view that the managers made The Wonder a more "realistic" play.

---

[1] In this appendix, the text of The Wonder in Bell's edition (1776) is used. Passages and scenes marked for omission in the various prompt-books are cited from Bell's text, except where matter (usually a MS. addition or comment) is actually quoted from one of the prompt-books, when page numbers refer to the actual edition used. Because nine of the ten prompt-books (all those now kept at the Lincoln Centre) have the same class mark (NCOF), and several are the same edition, they are here numbered (1) to (10). In the bibliography they are identified by their accession numbers.

[2] Broadway Journal, 29 March 1845; quoted in Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A. (1959), p. 137.

The earliest and most conservative of these prompt-books (1) is actually a copy of Bell's 1776 edition. It contains no indication of where or when it was used . A great deal of detailed stage business, sides of entry and exit and so on, is marked, and almost all of Bell's omissions and alterations are adopted. In addition, many more asides are pruned: a good example is p. 48, where all four of the asides are deleted. Don Lopez's soliloquy (III,i) is shortened as in Bell, and is additionally re-located in the street, thus saving a scene-change after only a few lines. The most important change in this prompt-book that is not already in Bell's text is to the ending. On p. 70, all of Bell's omissions are adopted, and a few lines are added with the note that "when you End with a Dance the following Scene is necessary":

(a Flourish of Musick in the Orchestra)

FELIX
Hark what Musick's that? who can have done us the favour to have sent them?

FREDERICK
I have done my self the pleasure to bring them Felix-- I have collected together some of our own & the Colonels Country to Join in the Celebration of this happy Festival.

FELIX
Lissardo call them in. This is a Compliment indeed Frederick. and now Violante &c [continues with Felix's last speech as in Bell]

The closeness of this prompt-book to the Bell version, and also the spelling "Musick", suggest a date sometime before 1800.

A copy of Oxberry's edition (London, 1818), unfortunately with no indication of when or where used, can be conjecturally assigned to the 1820s (2). It represents a stage of shortening intermediate between (1) and the later American versions. Significant omissions in I,i are Frederick's speech on the English love of liberty, and Colonel Britton's "luscious" reflections on women and marriage (pp. 6, 9). Act III is considerably shortened by the omission of the brief scenes i and ii, the part of iii that involves Don Lopez and the Alguzile (pp. 31-34), and Gibby's encounter with the English soldier in iv (p. 39). In this prompt-book the play is also re-arranged into three acts, with the breaks coming at the end of Mrs. Centlivre's Acts II and IV. An interesting example of small-scale cleaning up is the omission of Flora's taunt to Inis: "What has he given thee nine months earnest for a living title? ha, ha." (p. 29). The ending of the play is also streamlined, cutting out Flora's rejection of Lissardo and Inis's acceptance of Gibby (pp. 69-70). But there is no suggestion of a concluding dance, as in (1), and the effect is to make the play's ending even more abrupt and perfunctory than Mrs. Centlivre made it.

The first of the prompt-books that can be dated precisely (3) is a copy of Wells and Lilly's Boston

reprint of Oxberry's edition. A note at the head of the text reads: "Marked as played by Mr. J. Wallack. by Geo. W. Lewis. Prompter. Walnut Street Theatre. Phila, 1846." In his History of the Philadelphia Theatre (1935), Arthur Wilson records performances of The Wonder at Walnut Street on 22 and 29 September 1846 (pp. 343-344). The need for a shortened version of the play is illustrated by the fact that on the first occasion it was part of a double-bill with The Merchant of Venice. This prompt-book reduces the play to three acts, cutting rather more heavily than (2). For example, I,i is further abbreviated, and the scene in III,iv between Isabella and Colonel Britton (pp. 38-39) is omitted entirely. A particularly interesting variant is this prompt-book's ending of Act II (Act I in its version). Violante's last speech and her couplet are omitted (p. 26), so that the act ends with Felix's melodramatic "Thou most ungrateful of thy sex, farewel." Since this is an obvious exit-line, leaving Violante in possession of the stage, one imagines her responding with a gesture more eloquent than the omitted words. A trifling but indicative change in this prompt-book is the toning down of Gibby's "deel burst my bladder" (p. 56) to "deel tak' me".

Another prompt-book of the same year as the preceeding is a copy of Longworth's New York edition of 1812 (4), which is described at the end of the text as

"Correctly Marked (as performed at Charleston Theatre, Dec$^{r}_{m}$ 4th 1846--) by John Gaisford, Prompter". The date must refer to inscription rather than performance, for in The Ante-Bellum Charleston Theatre (1946), Stanley Hoole records a performance of The Wonder on 3 December, and a performance of Hamlet on the next day (p. 205). Wallack, who had played Felix in Philadelphia in September (as in 3 above), took the part again in Charleston. It is interesting to see that the two prompt-books do not agree, even in Felix's part. A number of small cuts in Felix's part that were made in Philadelphia were restored at Charleston. The most important of these are in Act V (Act III in the prompt-book's version). Three of Felix's asides ("My heart swells . . ."; "S'death, this expectation . . ."; and "Very fine . . ."; pp. 54-55) are restored in V,i in the Charleston version. In view of Poe's remark about asides, quoted above (p. 241), it is possible that a more sophisticated Philadelphia audience were treated to subtler, non-verbal expressions of Felix's agony, while Wallack had to give the Charleston audience more clues. In V,ii a cold, ironic speech ("I shall not long interrupt your contemplation . . .") and one soft, melting speech ("You know what I would have, Violante. Oh, my heart! . . ."; both speeches are on p. 62) are both restored: again, these speeches underline Felix's changing moods rather

heavily. If Wallack was responsible for these changes, as he surely was, he had considerable sensitivity to his different audiences.

The most important other difference between Philadelphia and Charleston was that at Charleston the whole of Mrs. Centlivre's Act I was omitted. There the play began with the scene (II,i) in which Violante reads Felix's letter. This change was a logical enough development, although I found it adopted in only one of the later prompt-books. The characters introduced in Act I-- Frederick, Don Lopez, Lissardo, Colonel Britton, Gibby, Isabella, Inis-- by this time were playing a less important role than in the original version of the play. Act I had thus become a long preamble to a tale. But it retained some advantages: it contains some useful exposition (especially I,i), and anyone arriving ten minutes late, or finishing a conversation before settling down to listen to the play, would miss only such bread-and-butter stuff.

Four of the prompt-books now in the New York Public Library (5, 6, 8, 9) are marked in the hand of J. B. Wright, a prompter and stage-manager whose work has received some scholarly attention.[3] The Wonder gave Wright

---

[3]Sara Kile, "John B. Wright's Staging at the National Theatre, Boston, 1836 to 1853", M.A. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1959.

little opportunity to indulge his taste, described by Kile, for trap-doors and apparitions. The first two of his prompt-books to be considered are both copies of Wells and Lilly's Boston edition of 1822. One (5) is signed by Wright on the title-page, and a note in his hand on the interleaf facing p. 107 dates it "Boston 1852". The other (6) is inscribed "J. B. Wright from W. Lewis Boston 1852". Wright evidently had little use for Mrs. Centlivre's Act I, although he was reluctant to discard it altogether. In (5) it is reduced to about two pages of the printed text, beginning with Colonel Britton's entry (p. 8), omitting the Colonel's cynical discussion of women (p. 9) and also omitting the whole of I,ii. The brief scene between Frederick and the Colonel, all that is left of Act I, would just give the audience time to settle down.

The prompt-book that Wright received from Lewis (6) is not easy to follow. Act I is cut in much the same way as the 1846 Philadelphia version (3), but there is also a note "Begin" at the beginning of Act II, which is renumbered "1st" in the same hand. There is further confusion as to what was intended in Act III. The Alguzile scene (pp. 31-34) is marked for omission, yet on an interleaf facing p. 54 (the passage is on p. 34 in Bell) a note has been made retiming the exit of the Alguzile before Don Lopez's speech, not after it as in Bell. If

"W. Lewis" can be identified with the "Geo W. Lewis" of the Philadelphia prompt-book, then the more draconian cuts in (6) could be ascribed to Wright, using Lewis's copy as a working rough not intended for use in an actual performance.

Another prompt-book somewhat confused by the effects of multiple ownership is a copy of Longworth's 1812 edition (7). It is signed "G. Wroxell", and a note in the same hand dates the performance for which it was used: 3 June 1853, for Paulin's benefit at Arch Street, Philadelphia. Arthur Wilson, however, in his History of the Philadelphia Theatre, records a performance of The Wonder at Arch Street only on 2 June (p. 485). The same discrepancy of a day that was noticed in the Charleston prompt-book (above, p. 244) suggests that some prompters habitually dated their books after performance, or were simply careless of the correct date.

This prompt-book (7) is also signed by "Ernie Wilmot" and "Claude C. Hamilton". The original marker of the book used ink, and a reviser later made alterations in pencil. Two instances where the second thoughts involve restorations rather than further cuts are worth attention. The whole of III,iv (II,ii in this version) is marked in ink for omission. Further marks that seem at first unnecessary indicate the cutting of the scene before

Lissardo's entry (p. 41), and the shortening as in Bell of Gibby's long speech (p.41). The scene is additionally confused by "in" being added a number of times in pencil. Three stages can be discerned: abbreviation of the scene, omriting it considered but finally rejected, and further attention to the cuts needed. There is a similar example in Act V: scene iii is, in ink, very drastically curtailed, but several pencil "in" marks indicate a change of mind.

Two further prompt-books formerly owned by J. B. Wright add little to what we have already gleaned from his 1852 copies (5, 6). What the later two (8, 9) do show is that although the acting text of the play had in many respects become standardized, in some scenes considerable variation was still possible. Spencer's "Boston Theatre", for example, a series of acting editions of stock plays, included The Wonder in a version "arranged by J. B. Wright". It is not surprising to find a copy of this edition (8) which was actually used by Wright himself (it is signed by him on the title-page, and dated "Boston 1858") containing very few verbal omissions from the printed text: in fact, there are none at all in the parts of the original Acts I and II that are retained.

What is slightly surprising is to find another copy of the same edition (actually French's New York reprint from the same plates), also used by Wright, but

dated "New Orleans 1868" (9), which differs considerably from his Boston text of ten years earlier. In Boston, the whole of III,iv (pp. 38-41) was omitted. In New Orleans, part of this scene was retained, although the sections involving Isabella and Colonel Britton, and Gibby and the English soldier, were omitted. Conversely, the New Orleans version cut the whole of V,iii (pp. 66-68) before the entry of Don Lopez (p. 68). In Boston, this scene was acted as in Bell, with the additional omission of Lissardo's part in it. In the later part of the scene, all that was played at New Orleans, Lissardo was retained. Lissardo took a more important part at New Orleans, where the play began with his entry (p. 7). At Boston, it began with Colonel Britton's entry (p. 8). Like the difference we saw earlier between the Philadelphia and Charleston prompt-books, the differences between these two versions by Wright probably reflect what was thought to be the different tastes of the Boston and New Orleans audiences.

The last prompt-book to be considered (10) is a copy of the four-act version of the play privately printed for Augustin Daly as produced at his theatre in New York. The title-page is dated 1893, but the only performance of The Wonder recorded by Odell during the years 1891-94 is one at Brooklyn in 1891 (Annals of the New York Stage, XV, 207). When The Wonder was produced at Daly's Theatre on

23 March 1897, it was advertised as the "first time in many years".[4] Daly's version differs from the earlier prompt-books chiefly in its division into four acts. Daly combined Mrs. Centlivre's Acts I and II into one, but his Act II consists only of the original III,iii (III,i and ii are omitted). Thus each of his first two acts ends with a quarrel scene between Felix and Violante. Daly omitted the earlier part of III,iv, amalgamating the later part (beginning with the entry of Don Lopez, p. 68) with the original Act IV to form his Act III. Mrs. Centlivre's Act V (the act least revised during the whole of this stage history) became Daly's Act IV. Thus his last two acts end with reconciliation scenes. This is a neat restructuring of the play, especially appropriate in a version which concentrated attention on Felix and Violante much more than Mrs. Centlivre had done. Between the printing of Daly's edition in 1893 and its production in 1897, he evidently had a number of second thoughts, for the prompt-book contains a number of omissions marked in pencil. Since Daly's four-act version is rather longer than Wright's, these pencilled cuts were probably made when Daly found his printed text too long for actual performance.

Daly's text of The Wonder was also privately printed as part of a composite volume of Two Old Comedies (1893). Its companion-piece was Mrs. Cowley's The Belle's

---

[4] T. Allston Brown, A History of the New York Stage (1903), II, 582.

Stratagem (1780). Both plays were revised by Daly as vehicles for Ada Rehan, who played Violante in The Wonder and Letitia Hardy in The Belle's Stratagem. It is a tribute to Mrs. Centlivre that Daly cut her play less heavily than Mrs. Cowley's. He cut Mrs. Cowley's subplot of Sir George and Lady Touchwood completely, in the process wreaking havoc with Mrs. Cowley's pattern of contrasts. On the other hand, Daly reduced, but by no means eliminated, Mrs. Centlivre's subplot. In fact Daly omitted less than Wright had done, notably retaining a large part of I,ii. In both plays the function of the subplot is to contrast a passive heroine (Isabella, Lady Touchwood) with the more active heroine of the main plot. Two reasons can be advanced for Daly retaining the one and cutting the other: Mrs. Cowley's subplot contains a large proportion of satire on contemporary amusements, which would appear rather dated in 1893; and Mrs. Centlivre's Colonel Britton is a more robust character than Mrs. Cowley's worthy but dull Sir George.

The last word can be left to the New York Dramatic Mirror. Reviewing Daly's production of The Wonder, it was candid enough to admit that "comedy writing is one art which has not progressed in 200 years" (3 April 1897, p. 14).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Primary Sources

1. Manuscripts

Bodleian Library. MS. Rawlinson poet. 197. "Verses. Some made Some Translated from y^e Latin Anno Domini MDCCX".

British Library. MS. Harleian 7649(2). "A Poem on the Recovery of the Lady Henrietta Hollis from the Small Pox".

Christ Church, Oxford. "Original Letters Collected by William Upcott . . . Distinguished Women. Vol. I."

2. Prompt-books, containing manuscript notes

The Wonder. London: Bell, 1776. New York Public Library, class mark NCP, accession number 708750. (1).

--------. London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1818. NCOF, 163383 (2).

--------. Boston: Wells & Lilly, 1822. NCOF, 342864 (3).

--------. New York: Longworth, 1812. NCOF, 342455 (4).

--------. Boston: Wells & Lilly, 1822. NCOF, 342724 (5).

--------. Boston: Wells & Lilly, 1822. NCOF, 342795 (6).

--------. [New York: Longworth, 1812]. NCOF, 341891 (7). Lacks title-page.

--------. Boston: Spencer, [1857]. NCOF, 163465 (8).

--------. New York: French, n.d. NCOF, 163466 (9).

--------. [New York:] privately printed for Mr. Daly, 1893. NCOF, 686457 (10).

3. Printed Sources

[Advice from Parnassus].[London, 1722]. British Library, C.48.g.13(1): wants all before p. 13.

Arabian Nights Entertainments. 6 vols. London, 1712-15. [I-II, 4th ed., 1713; III-IV, 2nd. ed., 1712; V-VI, 3rd. ed., 1715]

[Astell, Mary]. An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex. London, 1696.

[--------]. A Serious Proposal to the Ladies. London, 1695.

Austen, Jane. Sense and Sensibility. Ed. R. W. Chapman. 3rd. ed., Oxford: O. U. P., 1933.

Behn, Aphra. The Rover. Ed. Frederick M. Link. London: Arnold, 1967. (Regents' Restoration Drama Series).

--------. Works. Ed. Montague Summers. 5 vols. New York: Blom, 1967. [first published in 1915].

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. Trans. Frances Winwar. New York: Random House, 1955. (Modern Library).

Boyer, Abel, ed. The Political State of Great Britain. XXVI. London, 1723.

Burnaby, William. Dramatic Works. Ed. F. E. Budd. London: Scholartis Press, 1931.

Centlivre, Susanna. The Artifice. London, 1722.

--------. The Artifice. London, 1735.

[--------]. The Basset-Table. London, 1706.

--------. The Beau's Duel: or, A Soldier for the Ladies. London, 1702.

--------. The Beau's Duel: or, A Soldier for the Ladies. 2nd ed., corrected. London, 1715.

--------. A Bickerstaff's Burying: or, Work for the Upholders. London, [1710].

Centlivre, Susanna. A Bold Stroke for a Wife. Ed. Thalia Stathas. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1968. (Regents' Restoration Drama Series).

--------. A Bold Stroke for a Wife. London: J. Bell, 1776.

--------. The Busie Body. Introduction by Jess Byrd. Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1949. (facsimile reprint of first edition, London, 1709).

--------. The Busy Body. London: J. Bell, 1776.

--------. "A Critical Edition of Three Plays by Susanna Centlivre". Edited by Thalia Stathas. Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford Univ., 1965.

--------. The Cruel Gift. London, 1716.

--------. Dramatic Works. 3 vols. London: Pearson, 1872.

--------. An Epistle to Mrs. Wallup, Now in the Train of Her Royal Highness, The Princess of Wales. London, 1715.

[--------]. The Gamester. London, 1705.

--------. The Gotham Election. London, 1715.

[--------]. The Humours of Elections. And a Cure for Cuckoldom: or, The Wife Well Manag'd. Two Farces. London, 1715. British Library, 1489.k.18: lacks A Cure for Cuckoldom.

[--------]. Love at a Venture. London, 1706.

[--------]. Love's Contrivance: or, Le Médecin malgré lui. London, 1703.

--------. The Man's Bewitched: or, The Devil to Do about Her. London, [1710].

--------. Mar-Plot: or, The Second Part of the Busie-Body. London, 1711.

--------. The Perjur'd Husband: or, The Adventures of Venice. London, 1700.

--------. The Perplex'd Lovers. London, 1712.

[--------]. The Platonick Lady. London, 1707.

Centlivre, Susanna. A Poem. Humbly Presented to His Most Sacred Majesty. London, 1715.

[--------]. The Stolen Heiress: or, The Salamanca Doctor Out-plotted. London, [1703].

[--------]. A Wife Well Manag'd. London, 1715.

--------. The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret. London, 1714.

--------. The Wonder. London: J. Bell, 1776.

Cibber, Colley. An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber. Ed. B. R. S. Fone. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968.

[--------]. The Comical Lovers. London, [1707].

--------. The Double Gallant: or, The Sick Lady's Cure. London, [1707].

--------. Love Makes a Man: or, The Fop's Fortune. London, 1701.

--------. The Non-Juror. London, 1718.

--------. She Wou'd, and She Wou'd Not: or, The Kind Impostor. London, 1703.

--------. Three Sentimental Comedies. Ed. Maureen Sullivan. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973.

Cockburn, Catherine. Works. Ed. Thomas Birch. 2 vols. London, 1751.

Collier, Jeremy. A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. Preface by Arthur Freeman. New York: Garland, 1972 (facsimile reprint of first edition, London, 1698).

A Comparison between the Two Stages. Ed. Staring B. Wells. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1942.

Corneille, Thomas. Théâtre complet. Ed. Edouard Thierry. Paris, 1881.

Cowley, Abraham. Essays, Plays and Sundry Verses. Ed. A. R. Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1906.

Cowley, Hannah. The Belle's Stratagem. London, 1782.

The Daily Journal. 1722.

[Defoe, Daniel]. The Anatomy of Exchange-Alley. London, 1719.

--------. The Earlier Life and the Chief Earlier Works of Daniel Defoe. Ed. Henry Morley. London, 1889.

--------. A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain. Introduction by G. D. H. Cole and D. C. Browning. 2 vols. London: Dent, 1962 . (Everyman's Library).

Dryden, John. Four Comedies. Ed. L. A. Beaurline and Fredson Bowers. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967.

--------. Of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays. Ed. George Watson. 2 vols. London: Dent, 1962. (Everyman's Library).

--------. Poems and Fables. Ed. James Kinsley. London: O. U. P., 1962 (Oxford Standard Authors).

--------. Works. Ed. H. T. Swedenberg et al. X. Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1970.

Duncombe, John. The Feminiad. London, 1754.

Fane, Sir Francis. Love in the Dark: or, The Man of Bus'ness. London, 1675.

Farquhar, George. Complete Works. Ed. Charles Stonehill. 2 vols. London: Nonesuch Press, 1930.

The Female Tatler. 1709-1710.

The Female Wits. Introduction by Lucyle Hook. Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1967. (facsimile reprint of London, 1704 edition).

The Freeholder's Journal. 1722.

The Ghost. London, 1767.

The Ghost. Cork, [c.1770].

Hauteroche, M. de. Oeuvres. The Hague, 1683.

Hitchcock, Robert. An Historical View of the Irish Stage. 2 vols. Dublin, 1788-94.

Inchbald, Elizabeth, ed. The British Theatre. XI. London, 1808.

[Jacob, Giles]. The Poetical Register. London, 1719.

Jonson, Ben. [Works]. Ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson. 11 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52.

The Laureat: or, The Right Side of Colley Cibber. London, 1740.

Manley, Mary de la Rivière. The Adventures of Rivella. New York: Garland, 1972. (facsimile reprint of first edition, London, 1714).

[--------]. Almyna: or, The Arabian Vow. London, [1707].

--------. The Lost Lover: or, The Jealous Husband. London, 1696.

--------. The Royal Mischief. London, 1696.

May, Thomas. The Heire. London, 1633.

Mayne, Jasper. The City Match. London, 1639.

Molière, Jean-Baptiste. Oeuvres complètes. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962.

[Mottley, John]. A List of all the Dramatic Authors . . . appended to Thomas Whincop, Scanderbeg, London, 1747.

Murphy, Arthur. The Life of David Garrick. 2 vols. London, 1801.

New York Dramatic Mirror. 1897.

[Pix, Mary]. The Adventures in Madrid. London, [1706].

[--------]. The Beau Defeated: or, The Lucky Younger Brother. London, [1700].

--------. The Deceiver Deceived. London, 1698.

--------. The False Friend: or, The Fate of Disobedience. London, 1699.

--------. Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks. London, 1696.

Pix, Mary. The Innocent Mistress. London, 1697.

--------. Queen Catherine: or, The Ruines of Love. London, 1698.

--------. The Spanish Wives. London, 1696.

The Players Turn'd Academicks. London, 1703.

Pope, Alexander. Prose Works. Ed. Norman Ault. I. Oxford: Blackwell, 1936.

The Post Boy. 1709, 1714.

Powell, George. The Imposture Defeated: or, A Trick to Cheat the Devil. London, 1698.

Ravenscroft, Edward. The Wrangling Lovers: or, The Invisible Mistress. London, 1677.

Regnard, Jean-François. Oeuvres complètes. Ed. Alfred Michiels. 2 vols. Paris, 1854.

St. James's Journal. 1722.

She Ventures and He Wins. London, 1696.

Six Caroline Plays. Ed. A. S. Knowland. London: O. U. P., 1962. (World's Classics).

The Spectator. Ed Donald F. Bond. 5 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Steele, Sir Richard. Plays. Ed. Shirley S. Kenney. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

The Strolers Pacquet Open'd. Containing Seven Jovial Drolls or Farces. London, 1742.

--------. "An Annotated Edition of Three Drolls from The Strolers Pacquet Open'd (1742)". Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of Southern California, 1970. Ed. Heinrich Richard Falk.

The Tatler. Ed. George A. Aitken. 4 vols. London, 1898-99.

Taverner, William. The Maid the Mistress. London, 1736.

Tradescant, John. Musaeum Tradescantiarum: or, A Collection of Rarities. London, 1656.

[Trotter, Catherine]. Agnes de Castro. London, 1696.

--------. The Fatal Friendship. London, 1698.

Trussler, Simon, ed. Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century. London: O. U. P., 1969.

The Unnatural Mother, the Scene in the Kingdom of Siam. London, 1698.

Victor, Benjamin. An Epistle to Sir Richard Steele. London, 1722.

The Villainy of Stock-Jobbers Detected. London, 1701.

The Weekly Packet. 1720.

B. Secondary Sources

Aitken, George A. The Life of Richard Steele. 2 vols. London, 1889.

Allan, Mea. The Tradescants. London, 1964.

Alleman, Gellert S. Matrimonial Law and the Materials of Restoration Comedy. Wallingford, Pa., 1942.

Anderson, Paul Bunyan. "Innocence and Artifice, or Mrs. Centlivre and The Female Tatler", Philological Quarterly, XVI (1937), 358-375.

Appleton, William W. "The Double Gallant in Eighteenth-Century Comedy", in English Writers of the Eighteenth Century, ed. John H. Middendorf (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 145-157.

Avery, Emmett L. et al. The London Stage, 1660-1800. 5 pts in 11 vols. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1960-68.

Baker, David Erskine, et al. Biographia Dramatica. 4 vols. London, 1812.

Bateson, F. W. "The Double Gallant of Colley Cibber", Review of English Studies, I (1925), 343-346.

--------. English Comic Drama, 1700-1750. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963. [originally published, Oxford, 1929].

Bernbaum, Ernest. The Drama of Sensibility. Boston: Ginn, 1915.

Bowyer, John Wilson. The Celebrated Mrs. Centlivre. Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1952. Reviewed by Emmett L. Avery in Modern Philology, LI (1953-54), 140-141; by John Loftis in Modern Language Notes, LXX (1955), 298-299; and in Notes and Queries, CXCIX (1954), 43-44.

Brown, T. Allston. A History of the New York Stage. 3 vols. New York: Blom, 1964. [originally published in 1903].

Burke, Terrence William. "Susanna Centlivre's A Bold Stroke for a Wife: a Re-evaluation". Ph.D. Thesis, Case Western Reserve Univ., 1971.

Gagen, Jean Elisabeth. The New Woman: her Emergence in English Drama, 1600-1730. New York: Twayne, 1954.

Genest, John. Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830. 10 vols. New York: Burt Franklin, 1964. [originally published, Bath, 1832].

Harbage, Alfred. Cavalier Drama. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964. [originally published in 1936].

Hazlitt, William. Complete Works. Ed. P. P. Howe. 21 vols. London: Dent, 1930-34.

Hewitt, Barnard. Theatre U. S. A. 1665 to 1957. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.

Hill, Peter Murray. Two Augustan Booksellers: John Dunton and Edmund Curll. Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Libraries, 1958.

Hohrmann, Friedrich. "Das Verhältnis Susanna Centlivres zu Molière und Regnard", Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteratur Geschichte, XIV (1900-01), 42-75, 401-429.

Holmes, Geoffrey. British Politics in the Age of Anne. London: Macmillan, 1967.

Hoole, W. Stanley. The Ante-Bellum Charleston Theatre. N.p.: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1946.

Hughes, Leo. A Century of English Farce. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956.

Jerrold, Walter and Clare. Five Queer Women. London: Brentano's, 1929.

Kile, Sara Amanda. "John B. Wright's Staging at the National Theatre, Boston, 1836 to 1843". M.A. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1959.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949. [reprint of first edition, 1924, with preface, bibliography and index].

Lamb, Charles. The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia. London: O. U. P., 1946. (World's Classics).

Langhans, Edward A. "Wren's Restoration Playhouse", Theatre Notebook, XVIII (1963-64), 91-100.

Leacroft, Richard. The Development of the English Playhouse. London: Eyre Methuen, 1973.

Loftis, John. Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959.

--------. The Politics of Drama in Augustan England. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

--------. The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973.

Mackenzie, John H. "Susan Centlivre", Notes and Queries, CXCVIII (1953), 386-390.

Martin, Lee J. "From Forestage to Proscenium: A Study of Restoration Staging Techniques", Theatre Survey, IV (1963), 3-28.

McKillop, Alan D. "Mrs. Centlivre's The Wonder: A Variant Imprint", Book Collector, VII (1958), 79-80.

Needham, Gwendolyn B. "Mary de la Rivière Manley, Tory Defender", Huntington Library Quarterly, XII (1949), 253-288.

--------. "Mrs. Manley: An Eighteenth-Century Wife of Bath", Huntington Library Quarterly, XIV (1951), 259-284.

Nichols, John. Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century. 9 vols in 10. London, 1812-16.

Nicoll, Allardyce. A History of English Drama, 1660-1800. 6 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952-59. [revised edition of separate volumes published earlier].

Norton, J. E. "Some Uncollected Authors, XIV: Susanna Centlivre", Book Collector, VI (1957), 172-178, 280-285.

Odell, George C. D. Annals of the New York Stage. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1927-49. 15 vols.

Reynolds, Myra. The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920.

Rosenfeld, Sybil. A Short History of Scene Design in Great Britain. Oxford: Blackwell, 1973.

Rosenfeld, Sybil. Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces, 1660-1765. New York: Octagon Books, 1970. [originally published, Cambridge, 1939].

Rosenfeld, Sybil and Edward Croft-Murray. "A Checklist of Scene Painters Working in Great Britain and Ireland in the 18th Century", Theatre Notebook, XIX (1964-65), 6-20, 49-64, 102-113, 133-145, XX (1965-66), 36-44, 69-72, 113-118.

Schneider, Ben R. "The Coquette-Prude as an Actress's Line in Restoration Comedy during the Time of Mrs. Oldfield", Theatre Notebook, XXII (1967-68), 143-156.

Sherbo, Arthur. English Sentimental Drama. East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957. Review by John Loftis in Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (1959), 447-450.

Shafer, Yvonne Bonsall. "The Proviso Scene in Restoration Comedy", Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research, IX (May 1970), 1-10.

Sherburn, George. "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of Three Hours after Marriage", Modern Philology, XXXIV (1926-27), 91-109.

--------. "The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century", in A Literary History of England, ed. A. C. Baugh. New York: Appleton, 1948.

Smith, Florence M. Mary Astell. New York: Columbia College, 1916.

Smith, John Harrington. The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1948.

Southern, Richard. Changeable Scenery. London: Faber, 1952.

Speck, W. A. Tory and Whig: The Struggle in the Constituencies 1701-15. London: Macmillan, 1970.

Straus, Ralph. The Unspeakable Curll. London: Chapman and Hall, 1927.

Strozier, Robert. "A Short View of Some of Mrs. Centlivre's Celebrat'd Plays, including a Close Accounting of the Plots, Subplots, Asides, Soliloquies, Etcetera, Contain'd therein", Discourse, VII (1964), 62-80.

Sutherland, James R. "The Progress of Error: Mrs. Centlivre and the Biographers", Review of English Studies, XVII (1942), 167-182.

ten Hoor, Henry. "A Re-examination of Susanna Centlivre as a Comic Dramatist". D.Ed. Thesis, Univ. of Michigan, 1963.

White, Robert Benjamin, Jr., "A Study of the Female Tatler (1709-10)". Ph.D. Thesis, Univ. of North Carolina, 1966.

Wilson, Arthur Herman. A History of the Philadelphia Theatre, 1835 to 1855. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1935.