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# The ambiguity of women's voice on stage: between power and subjection (1721-1760)

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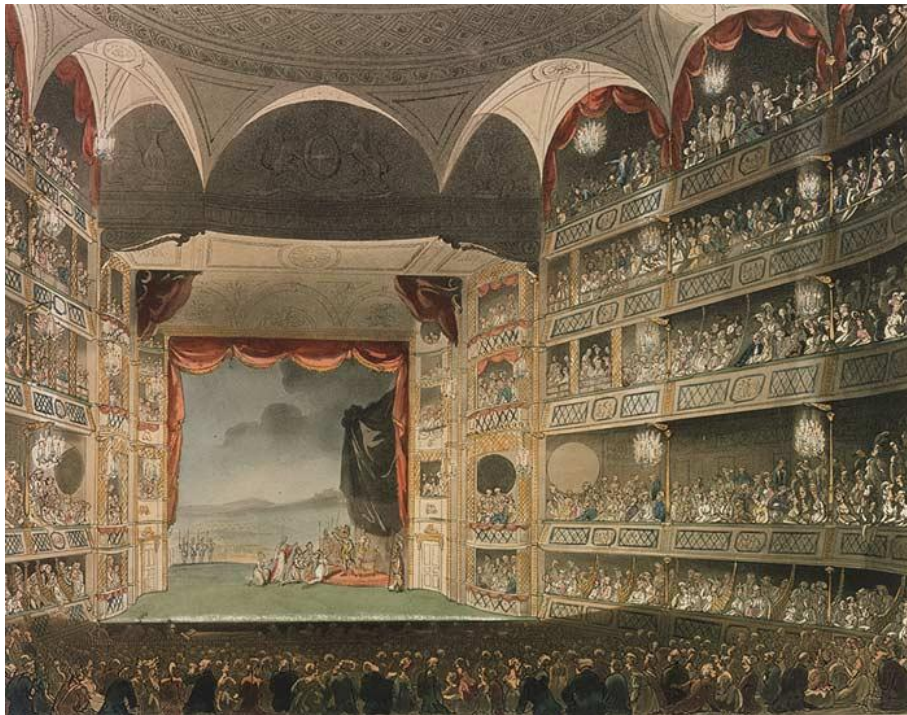
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## **The ambiguity of women's voice on stage: between power and subjection (1721-1760)**



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## INTRODUCTION

Having first appeared legally on stage in 1660, actresses reached their heyday in the eighteenth century. In a century when women were confined to the private sphere, actresses emerged as a symbol of transgression, not only by displaying their body on stage but also by having a voice in the public sphere. These women were amongst the first to become financially independent thanks to their work which enabled some of them to enjoy social mobility and maintain links with the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> Their fame was part of a wider European rise of celebrity culture and interest in the theatre. However, their celebrity was ambivalent, on the one side characterised by fame and power and on the other by obsession and objectification. Even though actresses had a relatively good economic status they were still considered to some extent as prostitutes in the eye of the public and their private lives were the source of gossip.<sup>2</sup>

Actresses' celebrity has attracted the work of many scholars and attention has also been drawn on the roles they played in different plays. However, since their first appearance on stage, not only did actresses have roles in plays, but they also performed prologues and epilogues before and after the play. These performances are equally important to study for they enabled players to address the spectators directly and so interact with the public in a way that could not otherwise be achieved in the play. Most of the time, actresses were performing prologues and epilogues detached from their theatrical character and therefore they seemed to be speaking in their own voice. These performances were written either by the author of the play or by a friend of the author, both of whom were usually men. Although it seemed that actresses were expressing their own ideas in their own voice, they were actually still performing a part written for them. This created ambiguity about who was speaking and for what purpose, especially considering that these women had a public voice and were very famous.<sup>3</sup>

Researcher Diana Solomon has focused on prologues and epilogues spoken during the long Restoration (from 1660 when women first appeared on stage to 1714 the death of Queen Anne) and argued that these performances enabled women to speak for the first time in the public sphere and to receive applause for creating comedy, for commenting on political, theatrical or cultural issues, for complaining about men and marriage or for creating female bonds by directly addressing women in the audience. Even though their content varied from

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<sup>1</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques: L'invention de la célébrité 1750-1850* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), pp. 32-40.

<sup>3</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 18-30.

proto-feminist to misogynist comments, she has demonstrated that performing them was a political and proto-feminist act for actresses as well as an opportunity to participate legally in the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> As an important study on Restoration female prologues and epilogues, we will use her work in this dissertation. She is not the first scholar to have studied Restoration prologues and epilogues however she is – alongside Audrey Nell Wiley and Michel Adam – the only one to have singled out the female example to understand the role women played in performing them. Wiley’s article ‘Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays’ (1933) and Michel Adam’s book chapter ‘L’utilisation des actrices dans les prologues et épilogues sur la scène anglaise de 1668 à 1689’ (1984) are insightful but too short to provide a thorough treatment and in-depth analysis of the role women played during these performances.

Although actresses were still delivering prologues and epilogues as often in the eighteenth century as in the late seventeenth century, their content has received less scholarly attention, and the present study aims to analyse them in order to bridge that scholarly gap. Mary Etta Knapp studied eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues<sup>5</sup>, but she did not single out female performances and therefore did not consider the particular themes addressed by women on stage nor the impact that these female performances had. Recurring themes in eighteenth-century female prologues and epilogues varied from comments on theatrical issues, love, marriage, women’s emancipation, or patriotism to making pleas for the playwright or the play or begging for the audience’s approval, even if some of them criticised the content of the play or the playwright. Actresses were not only public women but also a source of fascination for the audience and sometimes a source of inspiration for elite women despite their supposed lack of virtue.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, addressing these issues on stage may have been strategic and impactful. These prologues and epilogues written by male playwrights enabled them to address societal issues in the public sphere but at the same time actresses seemed to have been used by these writers due to their ability to persuade and win over the audience.

Bearing in mind that these prologues and epilogues were written by male playwrights and performed by women, this dissertation will aim to examine and understand their content. Seemingly, actresses were employed by playwrights to make pleas for them or their plays and win the audience’s approval. Therefore, we will attempt to identify the extent to which women on stage were able to address issues not directly related to the play or the playwright, such as

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender and Comedy, Performance and Print* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), pp. 1-135.

<sup>5</sup> Mary E. Knapp, *Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 3-31.

theatrical and societal matters. We will then explore the wider implications this had for a public woman to voice them. The ambiguity between the playwright's written work and the actress' performance will also be explored in order to identify the possible impact it had on the final message on stage. Pierre Danchin's work will serve as a basis for our study. This researcher has compiled male and female prologues and epilogues performed in Britain from 1660 to 1760 into twelve volumes. Our study will examine the four volumes<sup>7</sup> following Solomon's research period (1660-1714) that is to say the 312 prologues and epilogues identified to have been delivered by actresses between 1721 and 1760. These prologues and epilogues have mainly been performed in famous playhouses in London and Dublin and by famous actresses for lesser-known ones were confined to non-patent and provincial theatres.<sup>8</sup>

In order to identify the topics that actresses addressed and the extent to which they were able to divert from simply referring to the play and its author, this dissertation will classify prologues and epilogues into different categories. The first part will set out the context in which these female prologues and epilogues were delivered by bringing to light the characteristics of eighteenth-century theatre and the place actresses held within it. The origins and the features of prologues and epilogues as well as the gradual inclusion of women in these performances will also be explored. After having provided the context, the 312 female prologues and epilogues spoken between 1721 and 1760 will be classified into different categories according to their content. The characteristics of the performances in each category will be introduced. This typology will enable us in a last part to derive meaning as well as wider trends from each category and try to understand the possible impact that they could have had in that era.

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<sup>7</sup> Danchin, Pierre, *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century: A Complete Edition*, 6 vols (Nancy: Presses Universitaires De Nancy, 1993) (volumes 3 to 6 are studied).

<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum, p. 10.

**I. The eighteenth-century theatre and its characteristics**

## **Chapter 1: From Restoration theatre to eighteenth-century theatre**

This chapter will first explore the context in which actresses first appeared on the British stage in 1660 as well as the reasons why they were driven to the theatre. Then, we will turn our analysis to the characteristics of eighteenth-century theatre by looking at different elements such as playhouses, audiences, actresses and celebrity culture.

### **1. Restoration theatre and the first appearance of women on stage**

This section explores the context in which women took their first steps on stage after the theatrical ban that lasted for eighteen years.

#### **1.1 The Interregnum ban and the reopening of theatres**

When women first appeared on stage in 1660, theatres had been closed for eighteen years. On the 2 September 1642, the Parliament banned all theatre performances with immediate effect. This drew an end to the Elizabethan theatre and the new theatre era, the Restoration theatre, which started in 1660 would have a totally different face. Even though there had been some debates before 1642 over the immorality of the theatres nothing suggested their closure. The main reason that led to their closure was linked to the political turmoil of August 1642: “that extraordinary moment in national history, the greatest crisis that early modern England experienced”<sup>9</sup> and the ensuing Civil War. The hostilities between Ireland and England and the rebellion of 1641 had created a tense atmosphere in Britain. On the other side, hostilities between the King and the Parliament were heightening until Charles declared war on his own Parliament on 22 August 1642. The closure of theatres was therefore mainly due to a desire for security in the midst of a turbulent climate. Although this was not the main purpose, the closure was also part of a wider drive for morality since plays were sometimes considered as immoral or lascivious. It was not the first time that people in Britain saw the closure of their theatres in times of crisis. Playhouses had been previously closed after the deaths of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Henry as security measures and during the Great Plague (1665-1666) to limit the spread. Additionally, were often closed during Lent because of the austerity of the season. Even though in 1642 no one knew how long the shutdown would last for, the demolition of playhouses which started in 1644 confirmed that this was not a temporary measure. This ban on theatre did not

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Butler, ‘The Condition of the Theatres in 1642’, in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. by Jane Milling and Peter Thomson, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), I, pp. 439-458 (p. 443).

mean however that there were no performances for eighteen years – some clandestine theatres were still operating throughout the Interregnum. Had the playhouses not been closed, the future of theatrical management might have been different. Prior to 1642, there were two types of theatrical management. The most prominent company, the King’s Men, was run by several player-sharers whereas the two other companies – the Cockpit and Salisbury Court – were run by impresarios<sup>10</sup>. This second type of management became dominant in 1660 when theatres reopened. During the Restoration and the eighteenth century, theatres were managed by a small monopoly – usually one person – who had control over the playhouse. In that context of theatrical monopoly, women took their first steps on the British stage.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2 The first appearance of women on stage

Although actresses on the continent had mounted the stage earlier, in England they officially did so in 1660. Some women had been seen on stage before the official permission in 1660 but it was mainly in private and academic venues and their presence on stage was not particularly appreciated. The first official actress appeared on the 8 December 1660 in the role of Desdemona in *Othello*.<sup>12</sup> At the time, Charles II had granted two theatre patents: one to William D’Avenant for the Duke’s Company in Lincoln’s Inn Fields and the other to Thomas Killigrew for the King’s Company in Bridges Street. Actresses were granted access to the stage partly because of the shortage of male actors that the theatrical ban had caused. Female players did not enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts. They were underpaid, did not have enough money to fulfil their basic needs and could not hope to hold any shares in a theatre company. Theatre-managers exploited their bodies by exposing them on stage in a lascivious manner and by allowing gentlemen to have access to actresses after the performance for an extra fee. Actresses were employed to draw crowds thanks to their sexual appeal and thus be profitable for theatre companies. After they appeared on stage, the morality of plays was degraded, and this led Jeremy Collier’s to write his essay *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* published in 1698.<sup>13</sup>

Most actresses started their job because their families needed money. However, since they did not earn enough to survive most of them had to be under the protection of a nobleman and were therefore his property. In other cases, some women were brought to the theatre thanks to

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<sup>10</sup> An impresario is a person in charge of organising and financing plays.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, pp. 439-454.

<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 1-16.

noblemen. The theatre was closely linked to the court during the Restoration, so the recruitment of actresses by noblemen was seen as the norm. Towards the end of the century, some actresses tried to achieve economic independence such as Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle and Mary Knepp. As the link with the court gradually faded into the new century, these actresses paved the way for other actresses to become financially independent and therefore no longer be dependent on the patronage of noble men.<sup>14</sup> The early years of actresses on stage were thus marked by financial dependence, prostitution, objectification and poor earning power. Although their status improved later in the century and into the eighteenth century this would have a lasting impact on their image as prostitute.

## **2. The eighteenth-century theatre**

This section introduces the characteristics of the eighteenth-century theatre and especially the different playhouses, the audience as well as the rise of celebrity culture.

### **2.1 The most influential theatres in London and Dublin**

At the turn of the eighteenth century, there were only two patent theatres in London: Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields. As mentioned earlier, these patents had been granted during the Restoration by Charles II. In 1732, Lincoln's Inn Fields moved to Covent Garden. Their theatre managers Colley Cibber (Drury Lane) and John Rich (Covent Garden) were great rivals and were always competing to have the best plays performed as well as the best players and props. From the 1720s, other theatres flourished in London such as the Little Theatre in the Haymarket (1720), the new theatres in Goodman's Fields (1729 and 1732), the Sadler's Wells in Islington (1733) and quite a few in Richmond. By the end of the century there were seven patent theatres in London. Although London had the most important theatres, they multiplied in several English towns reaching about 280 playhouses in 1805. Many of these hosted travelling companies performing the latest plays for people living far from London.<sup>15</sup> Most prologues and epilogues that will be studied in this work have been performed either in Drury Lane or Covent Garden for two distinct reasons. First, these two playhouses were the most famous and were at the centre of the theatrical economy, therefore famous actresses mainly performed there. Secondly, after the 1737 Licensing Act, only these two playhouses were

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<sup>14</sup> Richards, pp. 5-14.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Dickson, 'An Introduction to 18<sup>th</sup>-Century British Theatre', *British Library* (2018), <<https://bit.ly/3Qxpx1Q>> [accessed 28 March 2022].

allowed to perform legally under the royal patent.<sup>16</sup> Thus, they retained their monopoly from the Restoration and throughout the eighteenth century.

A few prologues and epilogues in the corpus were performed in Dublin. Indeed, Smock Alley, Dublin's leading theatre – run by actor-manager Thomas Sheridan from the 1740s onwards – was a respected rival to Covent Garden and Drury Lane in London. Moreover, several eighteenth-century actors were born in Ireland and some of them started their careers on the Dublin stage before moving to London. For example, George Anne Bellamy, Charles Macklin, Kitty Clive and Peg Woffington were Irish. Woffington was brought to the Dublin stage by Mme Violante an Italian acrobat and ropewalker. Leading players from London also performed in Dublin's Smock Alley during the summer season when London theatres were closed. For example, in the summer of 1742 Peg Woffington and David Garrick both went for the theatre season to Dublin.<sup>17</sup> Nussbaum argues that there were “frequent exchange of personnel and plays with the Dublin theatres”<sup>18</sup>.

## **2.2 The audience**

Audience members played an important role in the theatrical event and, as we will demonstrate in the next chapter, prologues and epilogues enabled actresses to create a bond with them. This section introduces the different social classes that frequented the theatre, the audience's attitude and rights but also the different groups that could be found amongst it.

### **2.2.1 Theatregoers and their organisation in the playhouse**

The period following the Restoration was marked by the democratisation of the theatre. It was no longer reserved for the nobility and upper classes and was increasingly attracting the emerging middling-classes. The audience was divided into three different parts according to their social class: the pit, the box and the gallery. Davis summarises the different sections as follows: “the more aristocratic, fashionable and affluent patrons in the boxes; intellectuals, less affluent gentlemen and professionals in the pit; tradesmen and their wives in the middle gallery and servants, footmen and sailors among the inhabitants of the upper gallery”.<sup>19</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Judith W Fisher, ‘Audience Participation in the Eighteenth-Century London Theatre’, in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. by Susan Kattwinkel (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), pp. 148-169 (p. 60).

<sup>17</sup> Norman S. Poser, *The Birth of Modern Theatre: Rivalry, Riots, and Romance in the Age of Garrick* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), pp. 13-59.

<sup>18</sup> Nussbaum, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Davis, ‘Spectatorship’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830*, ed. by Jane Moody and Daniel O’Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 57-71, (p. 57).



description demonstrates that even though the theatre was a place where different social classes gathered, the social hierarchy within the audience prevented them from mingling with each other. From 1696 onwards, footmen were allowed to attend the whole play. Before that date they were only allowed to enter to hold places for their masters and could only return after the fourth act. Their admission in the playhouse made the social make-up of the audience more heterogenous at the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> Almost all classes were attending the theatre in the eighteenth century and after the pressure exerted by the business community to hold theatre performance later in the evening as well as the emergence of the half-price admittance, the working class finishing late could attend at least part of the performance and for a lower price. It also benefitted the leisure class and business people. Gradually in the eighteenth century appeared what theatre managers Dryden and Garrick called a mixed-audience made up of the populace and the nobility. Although we have to bear in mind that all classes were not represented equally in the audience.<sup>21</sup>

Different social classes could be found on different days of the week. For example, on Tuesdays and Saturdays – which were usually opera nights – mainly bourgeois if not plebeian were found in the audience. Over the course of the century, lower classes mainly went to the theatre on Mondays. Similarly, the social make-up of the audience would vary depending on the time in the season. The leisure class and the affluent and genteel were usually not in town at the beginning and end of each season. Christmas and Easter holidays were times when the lower classes enjoyed going to the theatre and so pantomimes, shows and boisterous plays were performed in order to please them. Later on, in the century it would even become common for children to attend the theatre during the holidays.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.2.2 Audience's attitude and rights**

In the eighteenth century, lights were being placed upon the audience as well as the stage since theatregoers came to see and to be seen. The spectators were usually louder than the actors, therefore there was little distinction between both groups.<sup>23</sup> Famous painter Hogarth

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<sup>20</sup> Kristina Straub, 'The Making of an English Audience: The Case of the Footmen's Gallery', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830*, ed. by Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 131-145 (p. 132).

<sup>21</sup> Leo Hugues, *The Drama's Patrons; a Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 170-173.

<sup>22</sup> Hugues, pp. 157-163.

<sup>23</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 124-130.

gives us an insight into what the eighteenth-century audience might have looked like in his painting entitled *The Laughing Audience* (1733).

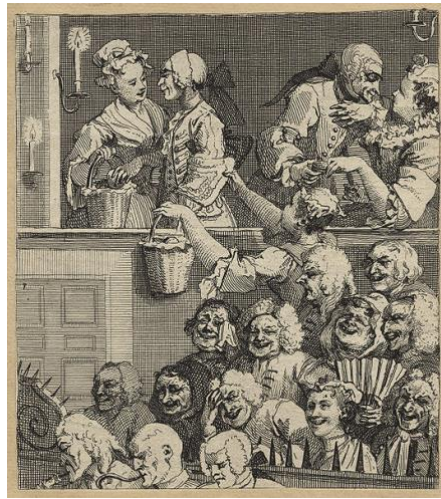


Figure 1: William Hogarth, *The Laughing Audience*, Wikimedia Commons, 1733  
<<https://bit.ly/3A23sCO>> [accessed 25 June 2022].

He offers, as Jim Davis suggests, a contrast between disinterested gentlemen in the boxes and attentive members of the pit.<sup>24</sup> Members of the pit seem interested in the performance, even laughing at the spectacle while men in the boxes look more interested in courting women than paying attention to the play. On crowded nights Davis also underlines that spectators were allowed to sit on stage.<sup>25</sup>

Leo Hugues in his study on eighteenth-century audience demonstrates that spectators were very powerful and controlled the entire theatrical performance. Throughout the century, they approved or disapproved plays through hissing or clapping their hands during performances. Audiences retained this type of control even after the 1737 Licensing Act came in place meaning that plays had to be approved by a state licenser.<sup>26</sup> They also had the power to ask for a play to be revised.<sup>27</sup> The relation between players and the audience was often seen as a servant/ master relationship and the spectators were often referred to as a jury, a legislature or an electorate. The latter were aware of their power and justified it by saying that they were paying players' wages and therefore were entitled to choose which plays were to be performed or banned. The continuous riots led by the footmen in the theatre in 1737 for they wanted to be

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<sup>24</sup> Davis, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> Davis, p. 61.

<sup>26</sup> Hugues, pp. 3-10.

<sup>27</sup> Nussbaum, p. 127.

allowed into the gallery as well as the Beaux<sup>28</sup> recurrent pelting at the stage when they were forbidden access behind the stage show the power that the audience exerted. Similarly, throughout the century many spectators rioted against the unrestrained hissing from some members of the audience. These events prove that the audience retained in almost all cases control over the playhouse and thought themselves to be superior to theatre managers. The audience maintained a liberty to express their opinion that was almost unalterable.<sup>29</sup>

### **2.2.3 The different members of the audience and their respective attitudes**

There were different groups inside the audience that were characterised by their attitude rather than by their social class. The first group were the critics who would only come to the theatre in order to damn plays regardless of their overall quality. Other members of the audience often joined them in damning plays. Condemning plays was a pleasure for the critics, even more than the actual entertainment. In order to show their dissatisfaction, they used catcalls – a sort of whistle – that they blew as soon as the play ended. In the second half of the century, catcalls gradually disappeared but they were replaced by pelting orange at the stage. In order to calm down the critics and unruly audience, theatre managers started threatening those pelting at the stage with prosecution. As a result, there were fewer attacks after 1769, but they became more violent. The cabals shared characteristics with the critics. A cabal was a group formed either by enemies of the author coming to damn him or on the contrary by friends of the author praising him. In both cases, their judgment had no link with merit and therefore a bad play could be praised by the author's friends while a good one could be damned by the author's enemies. Another group were referred to as 'vizard masks' or 'the ladies of Drury'. They were actually prostitutes seeking customers in the audience. As the century progressed, they were increasingly despised by some spectators and theatre managers who thought that they were distracting the gallants during the play.<sup>30</sup>

The fine ladies, the beaux and young men of leisure class only attended the theatre to draw attention on them and to show off. Even though they did not interrupt the performance they were quite loud and annoying as they spend the whole performance chatting and laughing and paid no attention to the performance. The wealthy theatregoers formed another group. They saw the theatre as a place to socialise. Going to the theatre was fashionable and as such it was

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<sup>28</sup> The Beaux were gentlemen who usually adopted a careless attitude, often disturbed other members of the audience and loved quarrels, see Hugues p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Hugues, pp. 5-30.

<sup>30</sup> Hugues, pp. 32-168.

a place to be seen. During plays, they were often going from box to box to meet their acquaintance and some even slept. Men sometimes saw the theatre as the ideal place to court women. Even though these members of the audience were not as disturbing as others could be, they were still not the ideal spectators either. The last group were the ‘candid’ spectators as Leo Hugues calls them. These were the spectators coming to enjoy the entertainment and therefore were usually quiet. Despite the unruly behaviour of some members of the audience, most of the time, the rest of the audience could enjoy the performance peacefully.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3 The rise of celebrity culture

Another feature of eighteenth-century theatre was the emergence of the cult of celebrity outside private social circles in England. According to Nussbaum, it emerged thanks to “the loss of faith in monarchical divine right accompanied by increased parliamentary control, the lessening of the hold of the 1695 Licensing Act on printing, and an emergent public sphere”<sup>32</sup>. This rise was also fostered by the decline in the power of the aristocracy, a wider access to leisure and the rise of the printing press which enabled the cult of famous figures.<sup>33</sup> Lilti also mentions the role played by the democratisation of portraits and their subsequent reproduction through etching and engraving which enabled the wide circulation of celebrities’ portraits in the public arena and made it easier for admirers to get a portrait of their favourite celebrity.<sup>34</sup> Quoting Tillyard, Nussbaum highlights the fact that celebrity culture kickstarted when private life became public and could be capitalised upon.<sup>35</sup> She expands on Tillyard’s argument by explaining that the rise of celebrity was also linked to the appearance of women on stage. Since they were fascinating, magnetic and had more sexual power than men, they enabled the rise of celebrity culture probably faster than men would have.<sup>36</sup>

Antoine Lilti’s book-length study on eighteenth-century celebrity in Europe must be cited too. He demonstrates that theatre had been flourishing in the second half of the seventeenth century, therefore, by the eighteenth century, performances had become important in urban culture. The theatre increasingly became a commercial venture during the century especially in London and Paris. In order to increase benefits, theatre managers displayed their best players

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<sup>31</sup> Hugues, pp. 59-72.

<sup>32</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Lilti, pp. 66-73.

<sup>35</sup> Stella Tillyard, ‘Celebrity in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century London’, *History Today*, 55.6 (2005), pp. 20-27 cited in Nussbaum p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 13-17.

on stage and relied on advertisement in the press. An entire printing press dedicated to performances emerged and players' portraits were frequently put up for sale. This commercialisation of the theatre led to a growing hierarchy within the various theatre companies, both in London and Paris. The best players saw their salaries increase while the lesser known saw theirs decrease. In London benefit nights<sup>37</sup> enabled famous actresses to draw crowds and earn all the profits of the night.<sup>38</sup> Actresses rose in the midst of this celebrity culture and the way they both benefitted and took advantage of this celebrity will be considered in the following section.

### 3. The eighteenth century: “the age of the actress”

Felicity Nussbaum has named the eighteenth century “the age of the actress”<sup>39</sup>. Players surpassed writers in fame during the century, but it is worth mentioning that many female players surpassed the fame, skills and even earning power of their male counterparts. Even theatre manager David Garrick in the second half of the century feared that some actresses in his company would become more talented than he was. At the turn of the century, their celebrity was quite new and the power and confidence that they displayed on stage was both a source of admiration and anxiety. As a matter of fact, these women “were among the first of their sex to achieve social mobility, cultural authority, and financial independence by virtue of their own efforts”<sup>40</sup>. Unlike Restoration actresses, they were able to make a living from a theatrical career. It was threat to the established order, but it also fascinated the public.<sup>41</sup>

Despite their celebrity, actresses were still regarded to some extent as prostitutes<sup>42</sup> until the end of the century. They were labelled as such during the Restoration both because a woman earning money at the time could not be seen otherwise and because most of them used to satisfy men after the play or were under the protection of noble men. In the eighteenth century it was less common for actresses to sell their bodies, but it was still considered quite immoral for a

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<sup>37</sup> Benefit nights were evening performances organised in favour of a famous actress to whom all the receipts of the night were given. See Lilti, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Lilti, pp. 30-40.

<sup>39</sup> Nussbaum, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Nussbaum, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 1-7.

<sup>42</sup> Gwen Brewer and Vern Bullough argue that prostitutes were quite common in eighteenth-century London and prostitution was a major source of employment for lower-classes women. Although the sexuality of proper women was taboo, it was common for men to employ prostitutes or courtesans. Men used prostitutes to satisfy their fantasy and prostitutes were often the object of fantasies for them. See Gwen Brewer and Vern Bullough, ‘Women, Pornography, and Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Sexuality & Culture*, 9.1 (2005), 14-27 (pp. 14-16) <<https://bit.ly/3zUtEQ1>> [accessed 20 June 2022]. Since actresses were often sexualised on stage and led men to fantasise about them, we better understand the proximity between the figure of the prostitute and that of the actress.

woman to display her body on stage. The gossips and scandals about their private lives such as their sexual lives and affairs with men were published in the newspapers tarnishing their image and contributing to this long-lasting image of them as prostitutes or at least as lacking virtue. Their sexuality was also the focus of their memoirs which referred to their virtue or lack thereof. This focus on actresses' lives and sexuality in the newspapers was part of a wider obsession and fascination with actresses in society which also reflected their fame. Lilti explains that the celebrity of actresses was ambivalent. Even if they were talented, their fame transformed them into objects of desire exposed to the public eye.<sup>43</sup> He continues arguing:

La proximité avec la figure de la courtisane est évidente, et la célébrité de certaines actrices, dès la fin du XVIIe siècle, repose sur la trouble curiosité du public pour leurs frasques supposées. La célébrité, très éloignée ici de l'admiration qui sous-tend la gloire, relève en partie de la fascination érotique pour des actrices libertines dont la vie privée suscite rumeurs et ragots. La comédienne, en tant que femme publique, semble confondue, sous le regard d'un public masculin, avec la courtisane ou la prostituée.<sup>44</sup>

Their celebrity was intertwined if not fostered by their image as prostitutes. Nevertheless, actresses did not particularly regard their image as prostitutes as a fatality and many played on this obsession with their sexuality to shape their careers and fame.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as the century unfolded, this association faded gradually. Laura J. Rosenthal points out to the fact that in the eighteenth century – and especially in the second half of the century – there was a drive for morality as the middle class became more powerful and bourgeois propriety was accentuated. It was most notably seen with the rise of domestic novels such as Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue rewarded* (1740) or *Clarissa* (1748) which depicted virtue as rewarded and vice as punished. On stage, this meant that bawdy comedies of the Restoration in which actresses were overtly sexualised were gradually replaced by sentimentalism and decency which improved actresses' social position. For example, Wycherley's Restoration comedy *The Country Wife* (1675) was adapted into *The Country Girl* (1766) by Garrick for the first piece was considered too lascivious and sexually explicit. Since actresses performed less sexualised roles on stage, it weakened their image as prostitutes, which until that point portrayed them as sexually available, although it did not completely alter it. Their enduring image as prostitutes, she argues, was thus linked both to the gossip on their private lives but also to the close link between actresses and

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<sup>43</sup> Lilti, p. 45

<sup>44</sup> Lilti, pp. 36-37.

<sup>45</sup> Kimberly Crouch, 'The Public Life of Actresses: Prostitutes or Ladies?', in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), pp. 58-79 (pp. 59-67).

prostitutes. Both were public and working women and both had their portraits painted or their biography written alongside those of higher rank ladies. Biographies of actresses and prostitutes were so similar that they were almost indistinguishable.<sup>46</sup>

Actresses quickly realised that they could make money thanks to their reputation and their skills on stage. They understood that they could capitalise on their lives and especially on the thin boundary between their ‘self’ and their dramatic characters.<sup>47</sup> Actresses manipulated their public image by creating a fictional persona that combined their private identity with their public character to create a sense of privacy and access to their private life. By doing this, not only did they gain fame and agency but they also “challenged the boundary between public and private, between the virtual and the real”<sup>48</sup> since they were exposing their private lives in public. They embodied what Nussbaum calls ‘public intimacy’ or ‘the private-in-the-public’ and their popularity depended heavily on how they performed it on stage. This in-between persona was intensified by playwrights who usually wrote specific parts for specific actresses and therefore intertwined actresses’ private character with the one they impersonated on stage. Actresses were successful in capitalising on this ambiguous image since they were often referred to as the character they impersonated on stage. For example, Anne Oldfield was named Lady Betty Modish and Mary Robinson Perdita after their respective famous roles. A wide market with goods imprinted with actresses in their famous character also existed as well as paintings.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, while women were not allowed to possess property, actresses made themselves ‘performative properties’ – as named by Nussbaum – that they could control.<sup>50</sup> In short, not only were the audience obsessed with actresses’ private lives but also with the characters they performed on stage and this created class instability.

The social rank of actresses was difficult to define and the fact that they did not belong to any specific class fostered class instability. As working women, they were seen as prostitutes but on stage they mastered social emulation. When they borrowed clothes from noble women to perform aristocrats and fine ladies, it led men to think that they could marry them for their status and women of quality to emulate them and take them for fashion icons. This shows that their status was not clearly defined and was unstable. Because actresses were able to perform different social classes – especially nobility – both on stage and in real life, they destabilised

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<sup>46</sup> Laura Rosenthal, ‘Entertaining Women: The Actress in Eighteenth-Century Theatre and Culture’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830*, ed. by Jane Moody and Daniel O’Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 159-175 (pp. 159-163).

<sup>47</sup> Nussbaum, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Nussbaum, p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> Nussbaum, p. 44-64

<sup>50</sup> Nussbaum, p. 23.

social classes showing that they were only a matter of performance. Some actresses actually achieved social mobility. Not only did they have all the accessories that fine ladies had (tapestries, jewellery, gold snuff-boxes, diamonds) and bought country estates but they were also often invited to the home of ladies of quality. Such was the case of Anne Oldfield, Frances Abington and Kitty Clive. Some actresses married aristocrats. Lavinia Fenton married the Duke of Bolton and became duchess, Elizabeth Farren married the Earl of Derby. Whether simulated or actual, celebrity enabled actresses' social mobility and access to higher social ranks.<sup>51</sup>

The earning power of actresses depended on their fame and famous actresses often had a better income than their male counterparts. In order to be successful, they had to be cast in the best roles therefore they often competed for leading roles. Playwrights encouraged these rivalries for they often designed two main female parts for their play.<sup>52</sup> However, the 1737 Licensing Act which reduced the number of patent theatres limited that competition since only famous actresses stayed in main playhouses.<sup>53</sup> Wealthy actresses had influence and "became patrons of the arts, subscribers to book publication, philanthropists, or benefactors to their relatives and heirs; they loaned money, made wagers and investments, extended credit, borrowed substantial funds, and even entertained the possibility of purchasing theatre patent"<sup>54</sup>. Some became managers and co-managers of theatre such as Charlotte Charke. In addition to their salary, famous actresses earned between a third to a half of their annual income during their benefit nights. They were also offered bribes, favours, gifts or even accommodation.<sup>55</sup> Actresses retained control over theatre managers and their salaries. They did not hesitate to change playhouse when the salary they were being offered was too low. Kitty Clive is one of the actresses who defended player's right to earn a decent income.<sup>56</sup> They controlled their careers by negotiating their condition of employment, their salaries, benefits, sales of tickets, assignment of roles and their costumes.<sup>57</sup> Actresses also took advantage of their friendship with men of letters and writers to have specific pieces written for them.<sup>58</sup> For example, Fielding adapted his play *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1733) especially for Clive, which made her famous. In the eighteenth century, husbands could claim half of their wife's salary and therefore many actresses chose to remain single. Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle never married, Peg

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<sup>51</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 46-48.

<sup>52</sup> Richards, pp. 26-31.

<sup>53</sup> Nussbaum, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Nussbaum, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 51-55.

<sup>56</sup> Richards, pp. 33-34.

<sup>57</sup> Nussbaum, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> Richards, pp. 39-40.



Woffington had different lovers and Catherine Clive and Frances Abington decided to separate from their husband. These acts challenged the patriarchal system since they were financially independent women.<sup>59</sup> Others experienced a marriage where their husband took advantage of their earning power.<sup>60</sup>

To conclude, although actresses' fame depended on the public opinion, many of them were autonomous women capable of shaping their public and private identity. They played on their image as sexually available to create a fictive onstage persona and to foster a sense of intimacy and access to them. Their earning power, financial independence, their role in the public sphere and their social mobility gradually represented a threat to the established gender and class order. Nevertheless, the public's obsession with them prevailed and was capitalised on in the prologues and epilogues that they performed.

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<sup>59</sup> Nussbaum, p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> Charlotte Charke's husband seemed to have married her for her earning power and as soon as they got married, he started having affairs with other women. He nevertheless kept hold on Charke's belongings and earnings. Similarly, Theophilus Cibber exploited Susannah Cibber's earning power. He drank a lot, was a constant debtor and deprived his wife from clothes, linen and half of her salary. See Richards, p. 36

## Chapter 2: Prologues and epilogues: history of this practice

This chapter traces the origins of prologues and epilogues in Greek and Roman drama as well as medieval drama and brings to light their characteristics and functions which developed mainly in early modern drama. It also introduces the first female speakers of prologues and epilogues during the Restoration. Since the standard form of prologues and epilogues was achieved in early modern drama (1562-1642), their initial characteristics in classical drama will often be compared to those of early modern drama.

### 1. Origins

In *The Framing Text in Early Modern English Drama: “Whining” Prologues and “Armed” Epilogues* (2011), Schneider traces the history of prologues and epilogues – which he calls ‘framing texts’ – from their origins in Greek and Roman drama to early modern drama (1562-1642) and, to some extent, Restoration drama. Although prologues were used in Greek and Roman drama, there is little evidence of the use of epilogues before medieval drama.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, at the time of the recovery of classical texts in the sixteenth century, it was noted that while prologues derived from them, epilogues find their roots in previous British performances.<sup>62</sup>

#### 1.1 Origins of prologues in classical drama

Although our corpus includes only thirty-nine prologues, it is still important to understand their origins since they framed – together with epilogues – the play. According to Schneider, the earliest performance of a prologue probably took place in 534 BC when the Greek playwright Thesis sent a single actor to introduce the play. This introductory part was called *prologos*. At the time, prologues were not always delivered by one speaker and as such it was defined as everything that preceded the Chorus.<sup>63</sup>

In the work of the four major ancient Greek playwrights – Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides, Aeschylus – Schneider identifies elements that were still found in Tudor, Jacobean and Caroline prologues, thus suggesting that they originate from then. When *prologos* first appeared, they were quite long – especially Aeschylus’s *prologos* - until Sophocles and

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<sup>61</sup> Bryan W. Schneider, *The Framing Text in Early Modern English Drama ‘Whining’ Prologues and ‘Armed’ Epilogues* (Florence: Routledge, 2011), p. 32.

<sup>62</sup> Schneider, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> Schneider, pp. 32-34.

Aristophanes shortened them. Sophocles's *prologos* were not spoken by a single actor as it is found in the early modern drama but could be performed by several actors. On the contrary, Euripides' *prologos* resembled those of early modern drama: they were performed by a single actor who could assume different identities. George Spencer Bower even argues that by the time of Euripides the opening speech was "for all practical purposes a prologue in the Shakespearian sense"<sup>64</sup>. *Prologos* also included a thorough exposition of the play, which made them quite long. Aristophanes rejected the length of Euripides' *prologos* and his *prologos* consisted of a Chorus addressing the audience to introduce the play. Aristophanes was probably the only ancient Greek playwright who paid attention to the audience and therefore his *prologos* developed a strong link with them by addressing them directly, asking for their approval of the play or giving them advice. There were therefore common characteristics between Greek drama and early modern drama such as the direct address to the audience, the various identities that speakers could assume (ghost, god, hero, etc.) and the monologue or dialogue format.<sup>65</sup>

George Spencer Bower highlights that Greek prologues fulfilled many of the functions found in the earliest English prologues such as the exposition of the plot and comments on the *dramatis personae*. However, he suggests that the later form of English prologues – which included praise for the poet, criticism of other playwrights, threats to the critics and contempt for the audience – is not derived from the *prologos* but from the *parabasis* which was spoken by the Chorus usually in the middle of the play. Nevertheless, in Greek drama, prologues did not have an independent existence like modern prologues and therefore had a strong link with the Chorus and the play. It is not until the Roman era that they separated from the main body of drama.<sup>66</sup>

Roman playwrights wrote prologues and amongst the three major Roman playwrights – Plautus, Terence and Seneca – some derived their work from Greek drama while others completely changed the structure of prologues. Plautus' innovations to the prologue can still be seen in early modern drama. He introduced the complex figure of the speaker being both a character in the play and a prologist and he did not reduce the prologue to its expository function but increasingly added self-reference on the part of the speaker. He gradually made prologues both anonymous – having no recognisable character speaking it – and autonomous. Therefore, prologues, having no link with the play, could stand on their own, be spoken by any actor and

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<sup>64</sup> George Spencer Bower, *A Study of The Prologue and Epilogue in English Literature from Shakespeare to Dryden* (London: Kegan Paul, 1884), pp. 2-3.

<sup>65</sup> Schneider, pp. 34-42.

<sup>66</sup> Bower, pp. 2-3.

be attached to any play. They included elements still present in early modern drama such as “cajolery, explanation, exposition, appeal and humour”<sup>67</sup>. Terence’s prologues were both self-referential and discussed theatrical practice. Unlike Plautus, his prologues were written for specific plays. They included a plea to the audience for applause, a plea for the playwright and players, an attack to the critics or the prologist explaining his role. Terence’s prologues were completely detached from the play since they no longer unfolded the plot. Therefore, Plautus and Terence were at the origin of the free-standing prologue found in early modern drama. Seneca’s major contribution was to break the link between the Chorus and the prologue that was found in Greek drama therefore making it gradually of less importance than the prologue. The modern characteristics of prologues were therefore already found in classical drama which indicates that their origins lie there.<sup>68</sup>

## 1.2 Origins of epilogues and evolution of prologues in medieval drama

According to Schneider the origins of epilogues lie in medieval drama, but not all scholars agree on that. Schneider defends the fact that although the few lines delivered by the Chorus at the end of Greek plays as well as the request for applause in Roman drama could suggest their origin in classical drama, there is not enough evidence for that. Moreover, the practices were not called epilogues at the time and the epilogue-style speech developed some of its modern characteristics before the recovery of Greek and Roman drama in the sixteenth century suggesting that they could not have borrowed from classical drama.<sup>69</sup> On the contrary, Bower argues that English epilogues developed both from the moral reflection delivered by the Chorus at the end of Greek plays and the “vos plaudite” of Roman comedies. The Chorus of Greek tragedies usually referred back to the action of the play and justified them but also tried to appease the critics of the audience and then dismissed them. The speakers of “vos plaudite” addressed the audience directly, appealed for favour from the audience and tried to send them home pleased by the play. Some of them – like modern epilogues – made no reference to the play. All these characteristics were found in modern epilogues. It is therefore likely that Schneider did not take these performances into account since they were not called epilogues unlike the *prologos* of classical drama. We shall now introduce Schneider’s argument on the origins of epilogues.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Schneider, p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Schneider, pp. 42-49.

<sup>69</sup> Schneider pp. 51-54.

<sup>70</sup> Bower, pp. 7-8.

He argues that not only did epilogues appeared from the fourteenth century onwards, but prologues also evolved. Throughout the fourteenth century, theatrical performances gradually included a single person addressing the audience in the opening and closing speeches. This person was usually an Expositor or a distinct figure from the play. Into the fifteenth century, playwrights progressively acknowledged the importance of having framing texts and therefore the same person delivered both of them. This was reinforced by the ‘Mary’ plays in the early fifteenth century which introduced a specific costume for the speaker of prologues and epilogues and methods of presentation which were close to that of Tudor, Stuart and Caroline drama. Framing texts progressively included apologies to the audience, a level of intimacy with the public and became gradually free-standing (not depicting the actions of the play) – characteristics that were still found in the eighteenth-century. Their content was similar to that of modern epilogues since they included address to the ladies in the audience, they begged for forgiveness, thanked the spectators or commented or criticised the play. Nevertheless, epilogues were still not called as such during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

During the sixteenth century, prologues and epilogues shared even more characteristics with those of the Restoration and eighteenth century. They included request for indulgence, excuse to the author and some epilogues commented upon power, sin, judgment and authority. Prologues expanded including literary, political, moral and extra-dramatic comments. They also included political awareness and acknowledgment of the power structure and the king therefore developing for the first time a link between theatre and politics. Epilogues started to include rhyming couplets as it was the norm in the eighteenth-century. While some prologues and epilogues were complementary being thematically and structurally linked and delivered by the same person, others were virtually unrelated, suggesting that they could have meaning and stand on their own. These variations however proved that epilogues were difficult to define.

The first time the word ‘epiloge’ has been used was in 1569 when the play *The Play of Patient and Meek Grissell* was published. A name was thus given to a practice that had developed earlier. This text included many features of modern epilogues such as a comment on the play’s theme, acknowledgment of the audience’s patience, a plea for the play, a submission to the audience’s judgment and a rhyme scheme. Even though they had not reached their final complex structure, it was the first time that epilogues were recognised as different from the play. In the sixteenth century, the ‘prologue’ still did not have a clear definition. In 1560, the first prologue in rhyming couplets was performed, this was to become the most popular form in early English drama and compulsory during the Restoration. This prologue also displayed no exposition and was self-referential and it was one of the first prologues to refer to the author in

the third person and to ask for forgiveness for the author's faults. Thus, more and more prologues and epilogues became independent of the play to which they were attached and could be attached to any play or be written by someone else than the playwright. Between 1550 and 1570, new prologues and epilogues displayed roots from the classical tradition and from the development of this practice in the preceding centuries.<sup>71</sup>

In short, prologues mainly find their origins in classical drama and epilogues in medieval drama. Nevertheless, both types of performances expanded their characteristics in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and the importance of these framing texts was gradually acknowledged.

## 2. Characteristics and function of prologues and epilogues

Although some characteristics of prologues and epilogues have already been developed when commenting on their origins, it is still important to summarise them. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the prologue as “a part that comes at the beginning of a play, story, or long poem, often giving information about events that happened before the time when the play, story, or poem begin” another definition reads “a series of events that happen before the main event and are related to it” or “a part at the beginning of esp. a play, story, or long poem that introduces it”.<sup>72</sup> The epilogue is defined as “a speech or piece of text that is added to the end of a play or book, often giving a short statement about what happens to the characters after the play or book finishes”<sup>73</sup>. Both definitions emphasise the link between plays and their prologues and epilogues. They imply that in most cases the prologue introduces the play giving more information about it and the epilogue concludes the play referring back to its characters and plot. According to Schneider this view is too limited and does not take into consideration the wide range of variations and experimentations in framing texts. Therefore, for Schneider, a basic but limited definition of a ‘standard’ prologue would be “one that gains the audience’s attention and silence, introduces the play and more or less humbly asks for the spectator’s approval, or at least tolerance for the author’s shortcomings or the play’s perceived imperfection”<sup>74</sup>. A ‘standard’ epilogue would be “one that praises the spectators, excuses the author and solicits audience applause”<sup>75</sup>.<sup>76</sup> These definitions, although generalising, give an idea of the purpose and content of prologues and epilogues.

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<sup>71</sup> Schneider, pp. 55-68.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Prologue’, in *The Cambridge Dictionary* [online], <<https://bit.ly/3y3hCSI>> [accessed 22 April 2022].

<sup>73</sup> ‘Epilogue’, in *The Cambridge Dictionary* [online], <<https://bit.ly/3zKmv12>> [accessed 22 April 2022].

<sup>74</sup> Schneider, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Schneider, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Schneider, pp. 2-13.

Schneider argues that it is not easy to give a clear definition of prologues and epilogues since they are quite diverse. Drawing on the definitions of other scholars' and pointing out their shortcomings, he attempts to draw up a list of the elements that constituted these framing texts in early modern English drama – the period when the characteristics of modern prologues and epilogues developed. These performances included “the direct address to the audience, the pleas for silence and applause, the *faux* modesty, the attack on critics, exposition and explanation, among others.”<sup>77</sup> Herbert Grierson mentions that they built a strong link between the audience and the author<sup>78</sup> and Anne Richter argues that prologues, epilogues and the Chorus worked as bridges between reality and fiction<sup>79</sup>. Chambers suggests that the prologist combined the figure of the playwright, the presenter of dumb-shows and the Chorus of neo-classical tragedies<sup>80</sup>. Although Grierson and Richter's definitions are accurate, Schneider argues that Chambers does not take into account the fact that characters from the play could speak the prologue or the epilogue and could make references to the speaker. Schneider expands on these definitions arguing that these performances varied in the degree of intimacy they created with the audience. Indeed, Nussbaum highlights that prologues and epilogues enabled a reciprocal relationship between the speaker and spectators since the speaker addressed them directly and therefore gave spectators an imaginative access to them<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, Schneider refuses to describe prologues solely as the beginning of a play and epilogues as the end since they act as a bridge between the past and present, as argued by Richter, and give explanation on the play. It cannot be argued either that they are meant to appear alongside a single play, since some of them were attached to various plays in early modern drama. Therefore, prologues and epilogues have meaning on their own and do not need to be read alongside the play to be understood.<sup>82</sup>

Robert Hannah devoted an article to the study of prologues and epilogues from their origins to the eighteenth century. She expands on the function of epilogues – the performance that will be mainly studied in the present work – and underlines that they have a threefold objective: “sometimes explanatory; sometimes apologetic; and frequently it is an appeal to public favor for the play it follows”<sup>83</sup>. Indeed, the epilogue is meant to apologise for the play

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<sup>77</sup> Schneider, p. 11

<sup>78</sup> Herbert Grierson, *The Personal Note*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 62, cited in in Schneider p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> Anne Richter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 55, cited in Schneider p. 13-4.

<sup>80</sup> Edmund K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), II, p. 547, cited in in Schneider, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 20-1.

<sup>82</sup> Schneider, pp. 9-29.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Hannah, ‘The Interpretation of the Prologue and Epilogue’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 13.2 (1927), 123-132 (p. 124) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00335632709379673>> [accessed 21 April 2022].

and extol its virtues and appeal for the audience to be kind and spare the author from criticism. The ultimate aim being to send the audience home happy and in good humour. As the last piece being performed, the epilogue has a pivotal function even more than the prologue. Since they have their own characteristics and functions, prologues and epilogues are acting piece on their own. They usually have a distinct speaker. In the earliest English plays it used to be the author himself before it was entrusted to a specific person called “The Prologue”. Both of them were wearing a black velvet cloak and a garland of bays. In the seventeenth century, actors dressed in specific characters – different from those of the plays – could speak prologues and epilogues. It was finally entrusted to players performing in the main piece. After the Restoration, playwrights assigned these performances to specific actors. Therefore, prologues and epilogues were personalised and could not be spoken by anyone. When an old play was revived, the old prologue and epilogue were dropped, and new ones were designed for the new players. Many actors and actresses became famous for delivering prologues and epilogues such as Mrs. Mountford and Mrs. Bracegirdle who were able to captivate the unruly audience. As mentioned above, the speaker addresses the audience directly and – as it is indicated on the printed version of prologues and epilogues – they deliver them in *propria persona* most of the time. They assume their true identity and not that of the character they played in the play which removes the barrier between the character and the player and strengthens the connection with the audience. The tone employed by players in these performances is formal since they bear in mind the aim of apology, commendation and exposition. These performances are quite short – usually the script is no more than a page long – and they are written most of the time in rhyme resembling closely the form of a poem.<sup>84</sup>

### **3. Restoration prologues and epilogues and the first female speakers**

The appearance of women on stage in 1660 gave a new meaning to prologues and epilogues. Although female prologues and epilogues were officially performed from 1660 onwards, Autrey Nell Wiley has pointed out that as early as 1600 the term “She-Prologue” was coined. The term “Female Prologue” did not appear before 1638 in print although they had been performed as early as 1581. As mentioned by Wiley, “out of the plays that were written in England during the fifty-four years that elapsed between 1581 and 1635, [...] no less than four plays with female epilogues, six with female prologues, and two with female prologues and

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<sup>84</sup> Hannah, pp. 124-131.



epilogue”<sup>85</sup> could be found. Although most of them were performed by men dressed as women, the fact that playwrights were giving a voice to ‘women’ at the beginning or at the end of the plays showed that a trend for female oration was emerging. From 1660 onwards, the number of female prologues and epilogues gradually increased each year. For example, in 1662 only one play displayed a female prologue or epilogue, while in 1695 and 1697 nine plays featured women in these performances.<sup>86</sup> However, as pointed out by Michel Adam, before 1672 it was quite rare to find the name of the speaker of the prologue or epilogue attached to it. It should therefore be borne in mind that the specific number of female orations cannot be accurate before 1680, by which time the name of the speaker is almost always known.<sup>87</sup>

During the Restoration women mainly performed epilogues, and this remained the case in the eighteenth century. At first, female players were entrusted the performance of epilogues for their ability to persuade the audience, but Wiley notes that the coquetry they displayed on stage was actually the main reason for their popularity.<sup>88</sup> Michel Adam develops Wiley’s argument by explaining that playwrights considered actresses to be more graceful than men and therefore better able to convince the male audience at the end of the play. In the epilogue, women had to catch the attention of the public and, therefore epilogues dealt with topics that would appeal to them. Actresses were often wearing the “breeches” – men’s clothes – because the latter were tight and therefore revealing their bodies in order to please the male audience. Thanks to their sexual appeal and persuasion playwrights hoped that they could save a bad play with a catchy epilogue and very often in the epilogue they would excuse the playwright’s weaknesses and appeal for applause. Some actresses even invited men to join them behind the stage after the play.<sup>89</sup> These early Restoration epilogues therefore reinforced actresses’ sexual objectification: they were mainly meant to please the men in the audience.

As mentioned in the introduction, researcher Diana Solomon studied female prologues and epilogues of the long Restoration (1660-1714). She argues that these female performances broadened the subject matters usually covered in prologues and epilogues and therefore female performances covered a wider range of topics than those of their male counterparts. Both men and women would “discuss or satirize the same subjects of cultural and theatrical politics; [...]

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<sup>85</sup> Autrey Nell Wiley, ‘Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays’, *PMLA*, 48.4 (1933), 1060-79 (p. 1062) <<https://bit.ly/3GeyiIB>> [accessed 13 November 2021].

<sup>86</sup> Wiley, pp. 1060-1063.

<sup>87</sup> Michel Adam, ‘L’Utilisation des Actrices dans les Prologues et Epilogues sur la Scène Anglaise de 1668 à 1689’, in *De William Shakespeare à William Golding : Mélanges à La Mémoire de Jean Pierre Vernier*, ed. by Sylvère Monod (Rouen : Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 1984), pp. 65-77 (p. 67).

<sup>88</sup> Wiley, pp. 1064-1066.

<sup>89</sup> Adam, pp. 66-74.

innocuously, or wryly, welcome audiences; or [...] adopt clownish poses such as riding an ass onstage”<sup>90</sup> for example. However, women were also able to make sexual jokes or joke about their characters, the play and the plot. Solomon describes female paratexts as a turning point in the history of drama not only because they gave women a voice in the public sphere but also because they enabled a different relationship with the audience compared to male paratexts. They also “offered opportunities for women to create comedy, comment on politics and culture, address both male and female audiences, and receive applause for their outspokenness”<sup>91</sup>. Although their content could be both feminist and misogynist, they afforded the first approved space for women to participate in the public sphere. Furthermore, female prologues and epilogues enabled actresses to interact with the female audience and communicate directly with them. Actresses appealed for women’s favour notably by showing their sense of virtue, their capacity to persuade men in the audience or by appealing to their wit and charms. Beyond the fact that actresses were speaking publicly for the first time, Solomon argues that their ability to control the audience through laughter and through making jokes showed that they were equal to men in this aspect. Women’s impact in prologues and epilogues extended beyond the performance since many prologues and epilogues were used as advertisement for the play and were printed in broadside form. Therefore, women influenced the reception of a play both before and after its performance.<sup>92</sup>

Mary E. Knapp argues that Restoration prologues and epilogues – often those spoken by women – included indecent innuendoes and lascivious jokes. As mentioned above, it was due to the fact that women’s body was exposed to persuade the audience to approve the play. However, at the turn of the eighteenth century there was a growing movement for more morality on stage and the number sexually explicit epilogues gradually decreased although they remained popular at least until the 1750s.<sup>93</sup> Eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues were continuations of those of the Restoration: although their subject matters were different, they were linked to the society in which they were produced, and their style was borrowed from the Restoration. Finally, Knapp argues that Restoration prologues and epilogues dealt with political plots and upheaval whereas in the eighteenth century they showed more gaiety but also ingenuity.<sup>94</sup> In conclusion, Wiley, Adam and Solomon demonstrated that prologues and epilogues were gendered. Women were mainly performing epilogues since their role was to

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<sup>90</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 9-24.

<sup>93</sup> Knapp, pp. 286-312.

<sup>94</sup> Knapp, pp. v-vii.

appeal to the spectators – often using their persuasiveness and sexual appeal – so that they would approve the play. Epilogues during the Restoration were quite immoral and reinforced actresses' objectification, but they also enabled them to address political and cultural issues.

## Chapter 3: Eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues

This chapter introduces eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues, highlighting first the interest that they had continuously aroused since the Restoration. It then explores the connection that these performances created with the audience as well as their aim to convince, appease and tame the audience and especially the critics and the female patrons. It also demonstrates that actresses played a key role in performing epilogues. Finally, it analyses the ambiguity of actresses' voice in epilogues.

### 1. Widespread interest in prologues and epilogues

Before turning to the analysis of prologues and epilogues, it is important to understand their status and influence at the beginning of the century. Solomon has argued that during the long Restoration (1660-1714) prologues and epilogues were considered very important by the public and were seen as a significant part of the performance. Indeed, some spectators came only to see prologues and epilogues. On the contrary, others left just before the epilogue since they wanted to preserve the illusion of the play. This particularly shows the importance of epilogues in altering the audience's judgement of the play.<sup>95</sup> By the eighteenth century, the interest of spectators in these performances was so strong that they became almost compulsory – every new play had a prologue and an epilogue. Their importance was demonstrated by the fact that they were always printed alongside the play and therefore available anytime to the reader. They were also announced in the newspapers as an advertisement with the name of their speaker. In the second half of the century, some were even printed in the newspapers or magazines after their performance with comments on the speakers or their reception. Prologues and epilogues were thus advertised, performed and published which demonstrates the interest they generated. Their fame extended beyond the period studied in this work, since from the 1760s until the end of the century numerous anthologies containing prologues and epilogues flourished.<sup>96</sup>

Although these performances were very important to the public and to most playwrights, some playwrights started to complain at the turn of the century that the only reason these performances still existed was because the audience demanded them. Theatre manager and playwright Colley Cibber was a fierce opponent and often scorned these performances in his writings. Playwright Nicholas Rowe defended the fact that all the themes had already been used

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<sup>95</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Knapp, pp. 4-7.

in Restoration prologues and epilogues so that a revival of these performances in the eighteenth century was not possible. Similarly, Dryden emphasised the inefficacy and banality of such performances or their worn-out and predictable topics. John Gay blamed them for having become so influential that the plays were subordinated to them. Henry Fielding went even further by denouncing their prose and rhyme. Playwright Fielding was one of the fiercest critics of prologues and epilogues even after he stopped writing plays. He found prologues and epilogues unnecessary because they always dealt with the same themes – taste of the audience, critic of contemporary authors and defence of the play just performed – and were an opportunity for the critics to hiss. Nevertheless, Fielding wrote many prologues and epilogues to follow the trend but some of them were a critic of their own nature. Nonetheless, despite these criticisms at the turn of the century, spectators’ interest in them never waned and even continued into the early nineteenth century, until interest in them declined rapidly after the turn of that century.<sup>97</sup>

## **2. Prologues and epilogues as a contract with the audience**

Solomon argues that prologues and epilogues were the result of a collaborative work between the audience, actors and playwrights where everyone played a role and had a degree of power. Although playwrights were responsible for writing prologues and epilogues, actresses were equally important when they performed them: the combination of the actresses’ public and private persona and onstage character were the key to the success of these performances. This identity they assumed, gave them power and almost concealed the work of the playwright. Out of the three entities sharing power – audience, actress, playwright – the player on stage and the audience had more importance than the written work from the playwright. In the few cases where the latter bore more importance, the actress was used as a means to convey the author’s ideas.<sup>98</sup> It is nevertheless important to bear in mind that the audience held the most power when it came to deciding the fate of a play. As much as they had the power to ask for a prologue or epilogue to be revised, they also usually called for the prologue thus creating a tumult that the prologue was meant to end. Similarly, at the end of the play the pit and gallery often called for epilogues they liked – often those written by Garrick. Their capacity to give their opinion and influence decisions was seen through the success of Mrs. Oldfield’s prologue to *the Distrest Mother*. The audience asked Oldfield to repeat it twice for the first three nights. Due to its success, it was subsequently performed by Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Bellamy and Mrs. Siddons,

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<sup>97</sup> Knapp, pp. 23-33.

<sup>98</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 18-22.

whereas usually prologues and epilogues were designed for a specific actress and dropped after the first three performances.<sup>99</sup>

### **3. Epilogues as a tool to win the audience**

Felicity Nussbaum argues that epilogues were often addressed to specific members of the audience “such as apprentices, milliners, cits and beaux, and especially “the Ladies”.<sup>100</sup> The purpose of the epilogue was to please the audience in order to make sure that they would approve the performance they had just seen.

#### **3.1 Taming the audience**

As mentioned in the first part, the theatrical audience was usually unruly, and the critics were the worst group amongst them since they came only to damn the plays. Actresses were therefore employed to try to appease their judgment at the end of the play. Many eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues addressed the critics directly and begged for their kindness. To ensure that the audience was satisfied by the play, prologues and epilogues were written by the playwright or one of his friends, but in some cases, it could also be provided by the manager of the playhouse who wanted to ensure that the audience would come back. David Garrick was one of the theatre managers who wrote the largest number of prologues and epilogues during his management of Drury Lane theatre in the second half of the century. He was anxious for the success of his playhouse and wrote over one hundred and sixty prologues and epilogues between 1740 and 1778. Therefore, if a prologue or epilogue was appreciated by the audience it could save the play and send the satisfied audience home. Mary E. Knapp defines the function of eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues as follows: “the purpose of the prologue was to cajole the audience into a pleasant frame of mind so that they would be in a friendly mood before the curtain was drawn up. [...] The purpose of the epilogue was to sound their humor and to flatter or amuse them into saving the play”<sup>101</sup>. Her definition highlights the power of prologues and epilogues to alter the reception of a play, positively or negatively. Prologues and epilogues were therefore as much the concern of the audience as of playwrights or theatre managers. The latter were always working to keep up to standard and write epilogues that satisfied the audience. Garrick maintained this trend and was responsible for their enduring

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<sup>99</sup> Knapp, p. 18-22.

<sup>100</sup> Nussbaum, p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> Knapp, p. 9.

success in the second half of the century. His prologues and epilogues were so popular that even when they were written anonymously the audience still recognised them for their specific style.<sup>102</sup> Although prologues and epilogues were intended to appease the public and the critics, another distinct group needed to be specifically addressed to ensure their support for the play: the female patrons.

### **3.2 Pleasing the female patrons**

The direct address to women in the audience in prologues and epilogues was not a new phenomenon in the eighteenth century and has its roots in medieval and early modern theatre (c.1560-1642). Some evidence has shown that in medieval drama, court ladies were part of the theatrical audience. Some of them were patrons and funded plays, others participated to some extent in performances. Similarly, in early modern drama, female aristocrats were patrons of the arts and women were also found as spectators, critics and doorkeepers. At the time, prologues and epilogues invited women to express a judgement about the play or begged them to approve the play reflecting both an awareness of their presence in the theatre and their power to decide the fate of a play. Some prologues and epilogues ignored the male audience, especially when the subject matter of the play was supposed to be of more interest to women. It was believed that women had a power of persuasion over their husbands. The aim was to please them so that they would approve of the play and then invite their husbands to do the same. Therefore, sixteenth and seventeenth-century prologues and epilogues gave women a central and pivotal position in deciding the success of plays.<sup>103</sup> Their influence in the theatre was gradually recognised and continued during the Restoration where female address took on a new meaning thanks to the appearance of women on stage.

During the Restoration, the use of prologues and epilogues to seek approval of the female audience and the female patrons was more frequent when the speaker was a woman. Different strategies were used to win over the female audience. For example, actresses praised their virtue or their wit and charm, they boasted English wives' freedom compared to Spanish or told women that they could control men. It was still thought that if women liked the play, they would encourage their husband to approve it.<sup>104</sup> However, it has to be noted that female patrons were mostly elite women and women of rank. The average female spectator could not decide which

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<sup>102</sup> Knapp, pp. 2-14

<sup>103</sup> Schneider, pp. 96-113

<sup>104</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 107-110

plays would be performed. As mentioned earlier, it was also due to the close connection between the theatre and the court, Charles II being a protector and patron.<sup>105</sup>

In the eighteenth century, female patrons became very influential and they “shaped the economics and repertoires of the playhouses as well as the theatrical event itself [...] they were active participants in creating eighteenth century theatre culture”<sup>106</sup>. They were often ladies of quality<sup>107</sup> and had the power to decide almost all aspects of the performances. Prologues and epilogues therefore had to soothe them if they did not like the play or thank them if they did. As Nussbaum argues, there was a theatrical contract between the female audience and the woman on stage. Women spectators exerted their control over the theatrical performance at the turn of the century when they supported the drive towards morality and decency on stage. They despised bawdy Restoration comedies and vulgar plays. The reaction of women to plays was monitored as it was never predictable – they became true critics capable of making their own judgements. While in early modern drama it was being gradually recognised that women had the power to decide the fate of a play, by the eighteenth century this was fully established and their image as a “jury of women” – often employed in prologues and epilogues – testifies this. They were addressed as judges in prologues and epilogues and it was feared that they were either going to damn the play for its ribaldry or on the contrary condemn its decency. Indeed, female spectators sometimes enjoyed the bawdiness of plays but found ways to avoid being blamed for taking pleasure in them.<sup>108</sup>

Under and after the reign of Queen Anne (1707-1714), the theatre became a commercial venture and the old court patronage system of the Restoration started waning. Nevertheless, actresses still relied financially on the support of ladies of quality. Their power became more important in the early century and it became increasingly common for them to request specific performances each season. By requiring specific plays to be performed, they played a role in determining the playhouses repertoire between 1700 and 1770. It was equally important to tame these women in prologues and epilogues since they filled the seats by inviting their friends and often bought unsold tickets or overpaid theirs. They financially supported the plays they liked and therefore enabled some actresses to become very famous or others to be paid a decent wage. Ladies of quality had the power to make actresses rise or fall through the plays they were choosing. In order to seek new benefactors or to maintain their relationship with them, actresses

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<sup>105</sup> Nussbaum, p. 137.

<sup>106</sup> Nussbaum, p. 126.

<sup>107</sup> Nussbaum defines ‘ladies of quality’ as women of means and privilege. See Nussbaum p. 126.

<sup>108</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 135-136.



visited their patrons' homes. Some female patrons even organised benefit performances for specific actresses. Patronesses were strongly bonded and were so devoted to the success of a specific actress that they sometimes cooperated with one actress against another.<sup>109</sup> In short, one of the playwrights' aim in eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues was to please the female audience and ask them to approve the play. Gaining their approval and therefore their financial support was a key element for playwrights, theatre managers and actresses. It led some playwrights to acknowledge the female audience in the sole purpose of increasing receipts. Nevertheless, the theatre represented one of the only places where these women could exercise their judgment, give their opinion and create a bond with actresses.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4. The centrality of actresses in epilogues

Like Restoration prologues and epilogues, those of the eighteenth century enabled actresses to bond with the audience as they spoke in *propria persona* and at stage's edge. Nussbaum defines eighteenth-century epilogues as "those occasions at the play's conclusion when the actress appeared to be most in synchrony with the times, and most herself, as she migrated toward the edge of the stage to establish greater rapport with the audience"<sup>111</sup>. Actresses acted as intermediaries between the stage and the audience thanks to a persona that they created that was not themselves nor the role they performed in plays. Actresses sometimes unveiled some elements of their private lives. For example, Peg Woffington and Kitty Clive – whose prologues and epilogues will be studied in this work – flirted with the audience. This was also a way for them to seek patrons and benefactors in order to earn more. Moreover, prologues and epilogues linked past and present and acted as bridges "between the historical moment of the play and its actual performative occasion, to update classical or heroic plays and translate one culture or period to another"<sup>112</sup> and actresses occupied a central position at this boundary between the theatre and the real world and between past and present. Therefore, not only did these performances brought lessons from the past into the present but also linked "the classical characters and the modern women who embodied them"<sup>113, 114</sup>.

Solomon argues that in epilogues, women demonstrated ability to perform comedy and control the audience through laughter. She underlines that Restoration and eighteenth-century

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<sup>109</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 140-148.

<sup>110</sup> Nussbaum, p. 236.

<sup>111</sup> Nussbaum, p. 106.

<sup>112</sup> Nussbaum, p. 21.

<sup>113</sup> Nussbaum, p. 107.

<sup>114</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 21-148.

prologues and epilogues shared many characteristics with stand-up comedy which is characterised by a single person making the audience laugh. In prologues and epilogues as well as in stand-up comedy, the comic effect is based solely on the character on stage that is why there was no elaborate props for the performance of epilogues but only a curtain. Since the persona was the source of laughter and the audience usually knew what to expect from each speaker, some speakers were more famous than others. The subject matter of both performances is also topical. The point of Solomon in underlining the similarities between these two types of performances is to argue that at the time women were not expected to make jokes or self-mockery even less in public and in front of men. It was therefore both difficult but also daring for actresses to control the theatrical audience through laughter. They were doing the contrary of what was expected from women since they made fun of members of the audience or themselves.<sup>115</sup>

## **5. An ambiguous voice**

Since these performances were written by male playwrights to be performed on stage by women, there was ambiguity about whose ideas actresses were uttering. Moreover, actresses' public persona often merged with the characters they impersonated in plays leading to another type of ambiguity.

### **5.1 Written by male playwrights for female players**

Most prologues and epilogues in the eighteenth century were written by male playwrights. There were some female playwrights such as Susanna Centlivre (c. 1669-1723) or Eliza Haywood (c. 1693-1756) but they were largely outnumbered by their male counterparts. It is therefore important to take into consideration that most of the time, these performances were written by men to be performed by women. It had been argued in the previous section that prologues and epilogues created a link between actresses and the audience not otherwise possible during the play and that it seemed that actresses were voicing their own ideas. These performances therefore created ambiguity regarding who was speaking and for what purpose. Whereas some critics argued that "an actor is merely the empty vessel that the (usually male) playwright filled with words"<sup>116</sup> others defended that the player also has its importance. Diana Solomon addressed this issue in her work and argued that prologues and epilogues were always

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<sup>115</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>116</sup>Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 12.

written for a specific actress and they that these performances lived and died with their speakers so we can consider that actresses were as essential as playwrights. The playwright chose the actress for whom he was writing and adapted his piece to her. Consequently, actresses were seldom found delivering epilogues that had not been designed for her which means that actresses were not merely an empty vessel. Similarly, Solomon defends the fact that the fascination with actresses that the public had, came from what actresses said on stage which shows that their voice mattered. Whether the ideas were from the actress or the playwright, actresses were performing it, so it led the audience to think that the ideas were theirs. Finally, she proves her argument by highlighting that both the actress and the playwright could be arrested for the content of epilogues. For example, playwright Aphra Behn and actress Mary Lee got arrested for the epilogue to *Romulus and Hersilia, or, the Sabine War* (1682) because of its political position thus proving that even though they might not have been the actress' ideas she was nevertheless repressed for that. Solomon therefore sees prologues and epilogues as a collaborative work between playwrights and actresses where the author's words had an importance but relied on the actresses' onstage character and public and private character.<sup>117</sup>

## 5.2 The ambiguity of the "I"

Not only was there ambiguity between the voice of the playwright and that of the actress, but prologues and epilogues also created ambiguity between the character that the actress impersonated in the play and her real person. This created what Solomon calls "betweenness" and ambiguity of the "I". Actresses were supposed to deliver epilogues in *propria persona* but the fact that they had just impersonated a character on stage and were often still wearing their costume created confusion. That is why "betweenness" was mostly occurring in female epilogues and rarely in male prologues because in the latter men had not yet played their part. The ambiguity occurred on three levels: the "I" actresses used could refer to their character in the play, their public persona or the playwright who wrote the epilogue. The message uttered by the actress was never clear since "their language [could] be seen to channel an author's point of view, whether monologically, with the author's voice apparently speaking through the actor's body, or dialogically, with the actor, speaking in his or her own voice, either promoting or protesting the author"<sup>118</sup>. The public was therefore led to constantly try to decipher whose ideas it was – the actress, her character or the playwright.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 9-13.

<sup>118</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 7-19.

Nussbaum developed the same argument as Solomon. According to her, actresses capitalised on their “interiority effect” and created a new persona combining their public and private persona with elements of their onstage character. This persona although present in the play was more important in epilogues for actresses interacted directly with the public and made self-referential comments. Therefore, “actresses exploited the fact that the “I” they were impersonating, even in self-referential epilogues, was distinct from the “I” who was performing”<sup>120</sup>. The ambiguity between both personas called “betweenness” by Solomon is called “double consciousness” by Nussbaum: the fact that actresses both knew that they impersonated a character while still being themselves.<sup>121</sup> This ambiguity was reinforced by the fact that playwrights often exploited the private lives of actresses and combined them with their onstage personas. This is particularly the case in epilogues spoken by Kitty Clive. In the epilogue to *Lethe* for example, she played the part of a maid and chose a lover in the audience. This correlated her personal life since at the time her husband had retired from her and she had to choose a new lover. This promiscuity between her character on stage and her real person therefore invited men in the audience to fantasise about having an affair with her.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, several ambiguities could be found in prologues and epilogues. The first ambiguity occurred when the actress was speaking – she seemed to be voicing her own ideas, but these ideas were written by a male playwright. Secondly, the identity of the actress was blurry in prologues and epilogues: she was supposed to speak in her own voice, but she was still wearing the costume of the character she had just performed in the play. Similarly, her public and private persona mingled when she spoke epilogues for, the latter sometimes included references about her personal life.

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<sup>120</sup> Nussbaum, p. 22.

<sup>121</sup> Nussbaum, p. 22

<sup>122</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 167-8.

## **II. A typology of eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues (1721-1760)**

In the first part we examined the theatrical context of the eighteenth century and emphasised the centrality of actresses in the theatre world. Furthermore, we discussed the characteristics and function of prologues and epilogues and highlighted the importance of these performances for the audience. We underlined the fact that they were gendered and that actresses played an important role in epilogues. The aim of this second part is to propose a classification of the 312 prologues and epilogues that were spoken by actresses between 1721 and 1760. Firstly, we will analyse how other scholars have classified prologues and epilogues from the Restoration. Then, we will explain the method used in this dissertation to classify and analyse eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues. The classification of eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues will be introduced along with the nine categories it includes. The characteristics of prologues and epilogues belonging to the same category will be discussed. Finally, the prevalence of each category will be explored.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **1. Classification of prologues and epilogues according to their content**

The corpus is composed of 312 prologues and epilogues performed by women between 1721 and 1760. Since actresses were mainly performing epilogues, it includes 39 prologues and 273 epilogues. One of the purposes of this dissertation is to understand what topics actresses addressed in these prologues and epilogues. More specifically, the aim is to identify whether actresses could deviate from simply commenting on the play and the playwright or seeking approval from the audience and instead comment on theatrical matters and societal matters such as love and marriage, patriotism or women's emancipation. Since the aim is to focus on the content of these performances, they will be classified in different categories depending on their subject matter. This classification will make possible to identify the proportion of prologues and epilogues in which actresses mainly talked about the play, pleaded in favour of the playwright or asked the audience to approve the play, and the proportion of these performances which enabled them to address themes not directly related to the play that they had just performed. In the third part, we will analyse more specifically these performances which offered the possibility for actresses to comment on theatrical and societal matters in order to understand the possible impact that these had.

In the next section, the way in which other scholars have classified prologues and epilogues from the Restoration and early eighteenth century will be analysed, and their classification will

be compared to the classification in this dissertation. Since we are focusing on the content of prologues and epilogues, they will be studied independently that is to say that the play to which they were attached will not be studied alongside them. As Schneider argues, framing texts are not liminal to plays and have a performative value on their own.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the anthologies that flourished in the eighteenth century such as *Collection and Selection of English Prologues and Epilogues, Commencing with Shakespeare and Concluding with Garrick* in 1779 prove that eighteenth-century readers could read them as autonomous paratexts. Therefore, prologues and epilogues will be analysed as autonomous performances.

## **2. Similarities and differences with the classification of other scholars**

There are different ways in which prologues and epilogues could be classified. They could be classified according to their rhetorical pattern, their speaker, their author or even the time period in which they were spoken. I have classified them according to their content. Before introducing my classification, it is important to analyse how other scholars have classified Restoration and eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues and highlight how their classification has influenced mine. Firstly, the classification of Diana Solomon and Autrey Nell Wiley who focused on Restoration prologues and epilogues will be discussed before turning to the work of Mary Etta Knapp on eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues.

### **2.1 Classification of prologues and epilogues by Diana Solomon**

Solomon is the only researcher to have thoroughly analysed female prologues and epilogues of the long Restoration (1660-1714). She argues that these performances should be analysed alongside the play to which they were attached since they ensure continuity with the play. She highlights the fact that firstly, the speakers of prologues and epilogues usually performed them wearing the costume of the character that they were playing in the play. Secondly, the curtain was not pulled down after the fifth act therefore suggesting a link between the prologue, the epilogue and the play. She also emphasises the fact that epilogue-speakers were often commenting on events from the play and that, therefore, separating these performances from the play would prevent scholars from fully understanding the context. Similarly, she argues that since prologues and epilogues were meant to shape the audience's reception of the play, it is important to know the play's content in order to analyse them.<sup>124</sup> Her approach is consistent.

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<sup>123</sup> Schneider p. 7.

<sup>124</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 4-6.

However, since she focuses both on the content of the play and the reception of prologues and epilogues to interpret them, she cannot analyse many of these performances in depth. For example, in the second part of her book – which consists of two chapters – she discusses the paratexts spoken by one actress in the first chapter and one epilogue in the second chapter. Furthermore, my research is more limited than hers and I will not be able to take into account the content of the play or the reception history of some prologues and epilogues. However, on the same basis as Solomon, I will analyse a few prologues and epilogues in each category in depth.

Solomon's corpus is composed of 1,570 prologues and epilogues. She separates male and female paratexts in her classification so I will only discuss the categories including female prologues and epilogues. The latter are divided into two main categories – “cloaked” paratexts and “exposed” paratexts. She defines the “cloaked” paratext as a prologue or epilogue that hides the identity of the speaker but also her politics, appearance or religion and therefore makes the speaker sound both neutral and authoritative. These paratexts often deal with political, cultural or theatrical matters or with current events therefore giving authority to the speaker. The female cloaked paratext avoids self-reference, so the actress never refers to herself or her character in the play when performing it. According to Solomon, epilogues in this category enabled women to be amongst the first to address cultural, political and theatrical issues in the public sphere. On the contrary, the “exposed” paratext reveals the identity of the speaker and often produces comedy that exploits the speaker's public persona. She divides the female exposed paratexts into six subtypes: the “revived” epilogue (when the actress has died in a tragic play and rises to speak an epilogue with sexual connotations), the “breeches” paratext (when an actress is wearing men's clothes), the “virgin” paratext (when a young or virgin actress barter her virginity for audience approval), the “tendentious” paratext (creates comedy upon misogynist or sexually objectifying comments), the “female solidarity” paratext (when the actress addresses women in the audience) and the “social critique” paratext (when the actress is mocking masculinity, criticising love and marriage or complaining about male infidelity or male mistreatment).<sup>125</sup>

Since Solomon argues that there is a link between prologues, epilogues and plays, some of her categories are linked to the genre of the play or the events unfolding in the play. For example, exposed epilogues could only occur after a tragedy. The other categories focus either on the actresses' outfit or on the content of prologues and epilogues. In order to define my

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<sup>125</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 1-135.



categories, I have therefore mainly looked at Solomon's categories that were linked to the content of prologues and epilogues. However, my categories are different since the eighteenth-century historical context, the composition and the interests of the audience were different from those of the Restoration and, as a result, the subjects dealt with in the eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues had changed. Their form was derived from Restoration prologues and epilogues, but their content was different.<sup>126</sup> At the turn of the century there was a drive for decency and morality on the stage. The sexually lascivious epilogues that actresses used to perform in order to appeal to the male audience became less frequent although they were still present.<sup>127</sup>

Accordingly, I have not divided eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues into two main categories ("cloaked" and "exposed" paratexts) as Solomon has done. Even if the actress was not making any self-reference in some prologues and epilogues, I argue that as long as she was speaking in her own voice (i.e. not performing a part), she could not entirely conceal her identity. I also did not keep some of Solomon's subcategories. The "virgin" paratext could seldom be found between 1721 and 1760 and therefore cannot represent one category in this study. The "breeches" paratext emphasised the sexual attractiveness of actresses since it required them to wear tight clothes and reveal their ankles. Although some "breeches" epilogues can still be found amongst eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues, these are too few to justify devoting a category to their analysis. Moreover, this category does not take into account the content of these epilogues which is my focus. The "revived" epilogue is not a category in my work because it relies on the link between the play and the epilogue. Revived epilogues were usually comic epilogues with sexual undertones after tragic plays. "Tendentious" epilogues objectify female players since actresses often make sexual jokes. These epilogues do not represent a category in my work. However, I will discuss how in some prologues and epilogues playwrights sexualised actresses in order to appeal to the male audience. "Female solidarity" paratexts will not be classified in one single category in my work since the address to the female audience can be found in many epilogues dealing with various subjects. The link between actresses and the female audience will therefore be discussed in several of my categories. Finally, Solomon devotes a category to "social critique" which includes prologues and epilogues mocking masculinity or criticising love and marriage, male infidelity and male mistreatment. One of my categories is devoted to the analysis of prologues and epilogues

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<sup>126</sup> Knapp, p. 8.

<sup>127</sup> Knapp, p. 286.

commenting on love and marriage. I also discuss performances that criticise masculinity in my category on love and marriage and patriotism.

Therefore, Solomon focused mainly on the form of prologues and epilogues as well as their link with plays in order to create her categories. My categories are created according to the content and issues addressed in prologues and epilogues. Therefore, Solomon's categories devoted to paratexts on "social critique", "female solidarity" and "tendentious" have influenced my work.

## 2.2 Classification of prologues and epilogues by Autrey Nell Wiley

Autrey Nell Wiley has devoted a book and a journal article to the study of Restoration prologues and epilogues. Her book entitled *Rare Prologues and Epilogues, 1642-1700* (1940) is dedicated to the analysis of specific rare prologues and epilogues and does not classify them. However, in her journal article entitled 'Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays' (1933), she introduces the different types of prologues and epilogues that existed during the Restoration period. She does not classify these performances into different categories as Solomon did, but identifies five types of prologues and epilogues during the Restoration: adjuring or conjuring, occasional, begging and challenging, preaching and merry.

Adjuring epilogues were those urging women to love for example whereas conjuring epilogues were those using the usual pattern of asking the audience a *plaudite*. Conjuring epilogues probably have their roots in Roman drama – as mentioned in the first part – and therefore one of my categories will include performances in which actresses requested the audience's favour. Occasional prologues and epilogues were performed on special occasions such as the visit of the royal family to the theatre or the opening of a new playhouse. I have not devoted any category to these performances. In begging epilogues, actresses were usually begging the audience to approve the play but, in some cases, they could also adopt a defiant tone and challenge some members of the audience such as the critics to approve the play. Eighteenth-century begging epilogues will also be included in my category in which actresses requested the audience's favour. Preaching prologues and epilogues according to Wiley were those in which actresses "lectured the vanity of the audience"<sup>128</sup> and often ridiculed the gallants, the fops and the vizors. Wiley also includes in this category prologues and epilogues commenting on politics such as the victories of Marlborough. Although a few eighteenth-century epilogues make fun of some members of the audience and especially the Beaux, I have

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<sup>128</sup> Wiley, p. 1074.

not devoted a category to their analysis since there are too few of them. The last type of prologues and epilogues are the merry ones. Merry prologues and epilogues were comical and light-hearted pieces before or after a tragic play. Solomon classifies them in her category entitled “revived epilogues”. These types of prologues and epilogues have been criticised throughout the Restoration period and the eighteenth century for they were deemed to break the tragic feeling of the play. Once again, I will not have such category for they imply knowledge of the play to which these prologues and epilogues were attached. Nonetheless, merry epilogues will be discussed in one of my categories entitled “criticism on the nature of epilogues”.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, the main categories from Wiley that have influenced mine are the adjuring and conjuring prologues and epilogues as well as the begging and challenging ones. These are grouped in one of my categories named “request for the audience’s favour”.

### **2.3 Classification of prologues and epilogues by Mary Etta Knapp**

In her book entitled *Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century* (1961), Mary Etta Knapp did not classify these performances into different categories. However, through the analysis of a few eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues, she argues that these performances reflected the context in which they were produced. Some chapters in her book have helped me to create my categories and to analyse some prologues and epilogues. Knapp discusses the fact that some of these performances deplored the decline of drama in favour of other entertainments such as Italian opera, French dancers and pantomimes. I will discuss these performances in one of my categories focusing on current events in the eighteenth-century theatre world. Similarly, her chapter dedicated to the evolution of the comic epilogue will be used in my analysis of prologues and epilogues in which actresses condemn comic epilogues. Finally, Knapp devotes a chapter to the analysis of patriotic prologues and epilogues. These performances also constitute a category in my work. Knapp’s book is therefore useful for acquiring a general knowledge of eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues rather than for classifying them but her insight on some prologues and epilogues has nevertheless enabled me to build my classification.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Wiley, pp. 1069-1079.

<sup>130</sup> Knapp, pp. 1-312.

### **3. Method of analysis of prologues and epilogues**

Now that the classification of different scholars has been brought to light, and the similarities and differences with the classification in this dissertation have been explained, we will explain the method of analysis for both the classification and the prologues and epilogues of each category in this dissertation.

One of the objectives of this research is to evaluate whether actresses were mainly employed in epilogues by playwrights in order to advocate their plays and beg the audience for approval or whether they also had opportunities to comment on societal matters thanks to these performances. In order to determine the proportion of prologues and epilogues in which women had the opportunity to comment on topics not directly related to the playwright or the play, we will look at the content of prologues and epilogues and classify them into different categories as it has already been mentioned. The range of categories will give us an insight on the topics that actresses covered and the number of prologues and epilogues in each category will highlight the proportion of these performances that enabled them to deviate from solely commenting on the play, the playwright or the audience. The two following chapters in this part will therefore both identify the characteristics of prologues and epilogues in each category and the proportion of prologues and epilogues in each of them. In the third part, the most representative prologues and epilogues of their category will be studied in depth. A series of guiding questions will be raised for each category in order to better understand their necessity, the role that actresses played in them but also the possible impact of their content. Prologues and epilogues which enabled actresses to comment on theatrical and societal matters and therefore in which they did not simply sought the approval of the audience will be analysed in more depth.

For each category in our study, a series of questions will be addressed. Although the purpose will not be to answer each of them individually, they will still guide our analysis in the third part. The subject matter of each category will be discussed, and we will explore the reasons why each theme needed to be addressed in the eighteenth-century theatre context and why it was addressed by a woman. We will try to understand what the objective of the male playwrights was in writing these different prologues and epilogues addressing specific subject matters. Moreover, we will consider whether it was possible in the performance of the actress to perceive that the words that she uttered were in fact not hers but those of the playwright and how it could have altered or not the message conveyed. Similarly, the relation of power between audience, actress and playwright in these performances will be explored. It is not the scope of

this dissertation to study the impact that prologues and epilogues had on the audience, on actresses and on society. Nevertheless, by linking these performances to the context in which they were produced, we will wonder what it could have meant for a public woman to address specific issues such as love and marriage on stage and the possible impact it could have had. Finally, we will analyse whether specific rhetorical patterns could be found amongst prologues and epilogues in the same category and whether these performances were addressed to specific members of the audience or whether we could find different interlocutors within a category.

Now that the methodology has been explained, and more specifically the approach to classify and analyse the prologues and epilogues in the corpus, the next two chapters will introduce the different categories of the classification.

## **Chapter 5: Prologues and epilogues commenting on the theatre**

I have separated my typology into two main parts. The first part includes prologues and epilogues that comment on the theatre and is composed of six categories. They will be introduced in this chapter. The next chapter includes prologues and epilogues that comment on societal matters and is composed of three categories. There are nine categories in total. This chapter firstly introduces the four categories of performances in which actresses fulfilled the main purpose of prologues and epilogues as it was defined in classical drama that is to say to get the audience to approve the play and its playwright. These categories are the following: “plea in favour of the playwright”, “criticism of the playwright or the play”, “request for the audience’s favour”, “commentary on the play”. Secondly, two categories entitled “criticism on the nature of epilogues” and “reflection on the theatre world” will be introduced. Prologues and epilogues in these two categories do not fulfil the main purpose of prologues and epilogues as mentioned above. However, since they address issues linked to the theatre, they can be conceptualised as themes located between performances in which the actress merely fulfilled her function of defending the play and asking for applause and those in which the actress commented on societal matters.

### **1. On the playwright or the play**

The categories entitled “plea in favour of the playwright”, “criticism of the playwright or the play”, “request for the audience’s favour” and “commentary on the play” are intertwined since their objective is similar: to get the audience to approve the play and its playwright. Therefore, some prologues and epilogues belong to more than one of these categories. For example, some epilogues both request the audience’s favour and defend the playwright while commenting on the play. Nonetheless, although their purpose might be similar, prologues and epilogues in a same category have distinct characteristics. Therefore, to preserve clarity, it is easier to separate them into four different categories.

#### **1.1 Plea in favour of the playwright**

This category includes prologues and epilogues in which the actress pleads for the playwright, praises his qualities or asks the audience to be kind with him. This category includes five prologues and thirty-eight epilogues. Performances in this category are quite typical and common since they share some characteristics and functions with the early prologues and

epilogues of classical and medieval drama. Indeed, as mentioned in the first part, epilogues which developed in medieval drama already included an excuse to the author. This is why this category is mainly composed of epilogues. The peculiarity of the paratexts in this category is that they were written either by the playwright of the play to which they were attached or by one of his friends. Therefore, on stage, it might have seemed that the actress was defending the playwright, but it was in fact the playwright who was praising himself. Even though they were performed by actresses on stage, the voice of the playwright seemed to have been sometimes quite explicit. At least, it was understandable that the playwright, anxious for the success of his play, would have written a piece to plead for himself.

Before turning to their analysis in the third part, a few characteristics of paratexts in this category will be given. Since playwrights employed women to defend them, in most epilogues, the actress introduces herself as the poet's champion. In some cases, she mentions directly that the playwright has sent her to know his doom or to plead for him and in that case the purpose of the playwright is clear to the audience. In other cases, she just mentions that she is here as the poet's champion without specifying whether this was the playwright's intention. There are three main ways in which the actress pleads for the playwright. The first one is for the actress to tell the audience what the author has asked her to say for his defence. In that case she uses the personal pronoun "he". The second one is when the actress mentions that she has just seen the author and she relays his own words, therefore using the personal pronoun "I". The third one is when the actress does not mention that the playwright has asked her to defend him and therefore, she pleads for him and gives the impression there these are her own thoughts.

By mentioning that the playwright has chosen her to defend him, the actress introduces herself as a lawyer and the playwright as a culprit. Several epilogues indeed refer to the audience as judges who either approve or damn the playwright. The actress often describes the fear of the playwright using similes and metaphors. She emphasises the playwright's fear for his play, his humility but also his persistence. In a few prologues and epilogues, the actress mentions briefly the play or requests the audience's favour but the main aim of these paratexts is to defend the playwright, so I have included them in the present category. References to the play are often made in order to justify the choices made by the playwright and to highlight that the elements in the play are meant to please the audience. Therefore, performances that mention the words "poet", "playwright", "author" or "bard" belong to this category.

Actresses often address the ladies in the audience in these performances in order to underline that the playwright wishes to please them and that their approval of the play is more

important than that of other members of the audience. Actresses also address the critics and in that case their tone is more assertive and defying: they challenge them to praise the playwright. Finally, prologues and epilogues in this category have a distinct rhetorical pattern. They are divided into different stanzas and usually have three or four distinct parts. For example, a common rhetorical pattern includes the actress first positioning herself as the playwright's champion, then exposing the playwright's fears and finally asking the audience to be kind with him. Another typical epilogue includes the actress first justifying the events in the play as well as the choices that the playwright made, then asking the audience about the fate of the playwright and finally begging them to spare him. In most of them, therefore, the actress concludes by asking the audience to spare the author or by begging for forgiveness.

Now that we have explained the characteristics of prologues and epilogues in this category, some questions arise which will have to be examined in the third part. Actresses often address the women in the audience directly. We will then proceed to investigate the reasons that made playwrights to specifically address the ladies in the audience within their epilogues. During the in-depth investigation of epilogues, we will pay attention to the way in which the actress represents the playwright and how she defends him. The attitude of the actress towards the audience will also be considered in order to evaluate whether she was mostly begging or on the contrary commanding the audience. As mentioned in the first part, Solomon argued that prologues and epilogues gave power to the audience, the actress as well as the playwright. We will therefore investigate whether or not this type of prologues gave the actress power.

## **1.2 Criticism of the playwright or the play**

This category includes prologues and epilogues in which actresses criticise the playwright or the play. These performances contrast with those in the previous category in which actresses would defend playwrights. It is composed of three prologues and twenty-three epilogues. The main difference between this and the previous category is that, in this one, actresses tend to refer more to the play in order to criticise it whereas in the former they would mainly praise the playwright but not his play. Therefore, in some of the performances in this category, the actress only despises the play without mentioning the playwright. It could be argued that several performances could be part of the category entitled "commentary on the play" which includes prologues and epilogues commenting on the play. However, I have decided to create this category since it seems unusual at first glance that playwrights would write prologues and epilogues in which they would criticise themselves or their plays.



Performances in this category share common characteristics. As in the performances in the previous category, the actress sometimes states that she has come to know the fate of the playwright. However, instead of introducing herself as the poet's champion, she usually asks the audience to condemn him and his play. As mentioned above, the actress often refers to the play. She usually either despises the way in which the playwright has portrayed her and made her behave in the play or the morality of his play. Therefore, in some epilogues it seems that actresses are trying to make the audience feel sorry for them. Some of them on the contrary seem to be angry with the playwright and show a strong hatred towards him. Most notably, a few actresses give suggestions to the playwright about what they should have done instead. Epilogues in the previous category usually ended with a plea for the audience to praise the playwright. Similarly, epilogues in this category often end with a plea for the audience to condemn both the playwright and the play. In the few cases where the actress asks for applause, she requests the audience to approve of her character in the play because the playwright has put her through many trials.

Although actresses sometimes address the ladies or the critics, addressees are not clearly defined, and these performances seem to be directed to all members of the audience. Most performances in this category have a specific rhetorical pattern. They are divided in different stanzas and we can usually define three to four distinct parts. They do not all have the same pattern, but we can nevertheless identify some recurring ones. A frequent pattern first includes the actress coming forward to know the playwright's fate, then she criticises either the events in the play or the way in which the playwright has made her behave. In a third part, she usually draws the moral of the play or asks the audience to condemn the playwright. The rhetorical pattern of prologues and epilogues in this category is similar to that of the previous category, but instead of praising the play or the playwright, actresses generally despise them.

In the third part, we will try to understand why some playwrights wrote prologues and epilogues in which they despised their own play and why they made actresses beg the audience to damn them. We will also try to find whether actresses were addressing specific members of the audience in order to suggest why they would damn the playwright and whether or not they were trying to side with some members of the audience.

### 1.3 Request for the audience's favour

This category includes prologues and epilogues in which actresses ask for the audience's favour or protection, beg the audience to pardon their faults or explain that the purpose of the epilogue is to please the audience. Some actresses therefore thank the audience. These prologues and epilogues derive from the "vos plaudite" of Roman comedies as it has been mentioned in the first part.<sup>131</sup> In most performances across all categories, actresses usually request the audience's favour in the last stanza. However, some of them are mainly made up of requests for the audience's favour, therefore I have decided to devote a category to their analysis. Another reason for this category is that the early prologues and epilogues of classical and medieval drama were intended to beg the audience for their approval and applause. Performances in this category are therefore quite typical. The category includes fifteen prologues and thirty-five epilogues. Since most performances include a request for the audience's favour, I have chosen those in which this was the dominant theme.

As it is the case in most epilogues, the actress often states in the first lines that she has come to know their fate and that they are waiting for the audience's decision. She probably refers to the fate of the playwright, the players and the theatre manager. The tone that actresses adopt is often calm and begging since they stress that their aim is to please the audience but also because they hope that the audience will be indulgent. They often seem submissive to the audience's judgement. While some actresses directly ask the question "what can we do to please?" others introduce their aim of pleasing the public as a duty and it almost seems that their happiness depends on it. Furthermore, actresses often address the ladies in the audience. They ask for their opinion on the play and, as it has been mentioned, emphasise the fact that the playwright's sole purpose is to please them. In some epilogues actresses also ask men for their opinion. They also regularly address the critics and beg for their indulgence. In some performances, a different group of the audience is addressed in each stanza to ask for their applause and kindness. The image of the audience as a parliament or as a court deciding the fate of playwright, play and players is also found in this category. There is no clear rhetorical pattern in these prologues and epilogues although they are still divided in stanzas.

In the third part, we will investigate for whom the actresses asked for favour: for themselves, the playwright or the play. The attitude of actresses towards the audience will also be studied. We will also wonder why such a submissiveness to the audience was needed and

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<sup>131</sup> Bower, pp. 7-8.

whether or not it placed the actress in a position of vulnerability. The balance of power between the playwright, the actress and the audience will therefore be considered.

#### **1.4 Commentary on the play**

In most prologues and epilogues across all the categories, actresses refer to the play. However, some of them only comment on the play and they are included in this category. The latter includes forty-five epilogues. In most of them, actresses explain in more detail some of the events that took place in the play or focus on specific elements of the play. Therefore, we can reflect on whether these were elements that could have attracted criticism from the audience. Sometimes, they also give their opinion on the play. Epilogues in this category are similar to those in which actresses defend the playwright, however in these they only advocate for the play.

In these epilogues, the actress either assumes the identity of the character that she impersonated in the play or she speaks in her own voice. However, in several epilogues, the actress uses the personal pronoun “I” to refer to her character in the play even when she supposedly speaks in her own voice. Therefore, a case of “betweenness” – as defined by Solomon – occurs.<sup>132</sup> As mentioned in the first part, this ambiguous “I” creates confusion as to whether she is pretending to be her character in the play or her real person. Usually, the actress uses this “I” to justify her behaviour in the play. In other cases, she does not defend the part that she played but instead praises other characters in the play as well as their actions. It seems that actresses are meant to justify the events that occurred in the play in order to soothe the audience’s judgement. In other performances, the actress links the past to the present by, for example, justifying that behaviour that may seem immoral at the time the play is performed may not have been immoral at the time represented in the play. Moreover, the typical address to the ladies is found in epilogues in this category. Actresses also address other members of the audience and invite them to further think about the events that happened in the play and what they would have done if they had been in the same situation as the main character. These epilogues seem to foster a closer relationship between actresses and the audience, but they also show that actresses are able to reflect on their role in the play.

In the third part, we will explore what was the playwrights’ aim in writing epilogues that justified actions in the play as epilogues were supposed to be free-standing and detached from the play. Similarly, we will investigate why there was a need for the actress to further justify

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<sup>132</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 7-19.

events in the play when the audience had just seen it. The ambiguity that actresses created when using the personal pronoun “I” will also be explored. Finally, we will wonder who actresses were addressing in these epilogues.

## **2. On the theatre world**

This section includes the two categories entitled “criticism on the nature of epilogues” and “reflection on the theatre world”.

### **2.1 Criticism on the nature of epilogues**

This category is devoted to epilogues that offer reflection on their own nature. The majority of them are critical of their own genre. I have dedicated a category to their analysis since it is quite interesting to investigate why some playwrights would both write epilogues and despise them. This category is formed of one prologue and sixteen epilogues. As it has been mentioned in the first part, some playwrights at the turn of the century started despising prologues and epilogues for different reasons. Some of these playwrights found that all the themes had already been used during the Restoration and therefore their topics were worn-out and predictable. Others blamed the fact that they were so important that they had become subordinate to plays. Some playwrights were against the tradition of performing a comic epilogue after a tragic play. Indeed, most epilogues in this category blame this tradition. Comic epilogues were in fact bawdy and included sexual innuendoes. They were common during the Restoration, but since the eighteenth century was marked by a drive towards morality – accentuated in the second half of the century – these types of performances were more and more despised.<sup>133</sup>

In epilogues in this category, it is sometimes clear that the actress is voicing the playwright’s ideas since she uses the personal pronoun “he” or mentions clearly that the bard hates this type of epilogues. In some others, the actress uses the personal pronoun “I” and seems to be despising them herself. However, we have to bear in mind that it was playwrights who were writing these performances and therefore we will need to investigate whether some playwrights were more inclined to despise epilogues than others. These epilogues seem to give a key role to the audience by telling them that it is their duty to oppose the immorality of comic epilogues.

In the next part, we will analyse in depth some of these epilogues in order to understand how playwrights voiced their ideas about comic epilogues and how they used actresses to do

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<sup>133</sup> Knapp, pp. 23-33.

so. We will also explore whether some playwrights and some actresses were more likely to deliver this type of epilogues. The characteristics and the history of the comic epilogue will also be investigated in order to understand why some playwrights loathed them. Finally, the taste of the audience will be taken into consideration to evaluate whether they would also condemn the indecency of these epilogues.

## **2.2 Reflection on the theatre world**

This category includes prologues and epilogues that reflect on eighteenth-century theatre and more specifically on the change of taste in the audience. It comprises six prologues and twenty-four epilogues. The majority of these performances deplore the changing taste of the audience and especially the fact that the public prefers foreign entertainment such as Italian operas, farces or pantomimes to tragedies. For example, some epilogues reject Italian singers and on the contrary praise British players. Similarly, in some epilogues, actresses deplore the fact that the playhouse in which they perform is empty since they do not manage to entertain the spectators anymore. In others, actresses boast British performances and at the same time invite the audience to take pride in them. In the third part, we will analyse these epilogues as part of a wider rejection of foreign culture and entertainment. We find performances in which it seems that actresses voice their own ideas and others in which they use the personal pronoun “we” as if they were referring to themselves, players and playwrights. Actresses adopt different attitudes. While they sometimes seem to be mourning the old days when they were able to please the audience with British tragedies, at times they are more accusatory towards the audience and either blame them for their taste or complain about having to adapt to their changing taste and use novelty. Moreover, this category includes timely epilogues: one epilogue comments on the role of passion in the theatre, another one on the opening of a new playhouse in York, one is about the decline of a playhouse and two of them describe the competition between two playhouses over the performance of a play. Similarly, in one of them the actress complains about the new law which forbids the Beaux on stage. These performances seem to be aimed at all the members of the audience and not specifically at some of them.

In the third part, we will examine whether playwrights used these epilogues as an opportunity to voice their ideas about the changes in the theatre world or whether actresses could also have expressed these ideas as their own. We will also investigate why playwrights were eager to address these issues in the public sphere and how the audience could have reacted.

## Chapter 6: Prologues and epilogues commenting on societal matters

This section includes prologues and epilogues in which actresses comment on societal matters. I have differentiated them from the prologues and epilogues that comment on the theatre since the performances in this category offered actresses the opportunity to address themes different to those directly related to the play they had just performed. The three categories introduced are “patriotic prologues and epilogues”, “commentary on love and marriage” and “advocacy for women’s emancipation”.

### 1. Patriotic prologues and epilogues

As mentioned in chapter four, Mary Etta Knapp has discussed eighteenth-century patriotic prologues and epilogues. However, since she did not single out female performances, she did not take into account the potential influence that women had in delivering these prologues and epilogues which is our aim. Furthermore, Felicity Nussbaum in her work on eighteenth-century actresses<sup>134</sup> focuses on the numerous patriotic epilogues that Peg Woffington performed throughout her career. She highlights that women on stage played a role in the formation of patriotism especially when they were dressed as men.<sup>135</sup> Danchin – who collected prologues and epilogues spoken in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – argues that the late seventeenth-century was favourable to the blossoming of patriotic prologues and epilogues because of the irruption of state problems such as the Popish Plot, the Exclusion Crisis and the divisions between Whigs and Tories. In the 1690’s many of these performances dealt with foreign wars such as the war in Flanders against Louis XIV and the war in Ireland as well as their consequences on Britain.<sup>136</sup> Knapp points out that in the first decades of the eighteenth century the victories of Marlborough led to several patriotic epilogues boasting Britain’s power. Similarly, the Jacobite rising of 1715 enabled prologuists to show favour and loyalty towards the House of Hanover and the Protestant Succession while despising the Jacobites. Many patriotic prologues and epilogues praised the king or a current hero, including praise for King George III, Pitt, Edward III and Queen Anne.<sup>137</sup> The patriotic prologues and epilogues in this category include fewer performances dealing with eighteenth-century political and historical

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<sup>134</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>135</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 191-194.

<sup>136</sup> Pierre Danchin, *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration, 1660-1700: A Complete Edition*, 6 vols (Nancy: Presses Universitaires De Nancy, 1988), III, pp. XVI-XX.

<sup>137</sup> Knapp, pp. 205-233.

events. Only the 1745 Jacobite rising, and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) are mentioned. This might be explained by the fact that this dissertation only includes female performances.

Previous research highlighted the need to create a category devoted to patriotic prologues and epilogues. Yet, Danchin and Knapp did not consider female patriotism in these performances. Linda Colley argues that we tend to overlook the role that women played in forging a national sentiment<sup>138</sup>, therefore female loyalty will be central to our analysis of these performances. In order to define which prologues and epilogues to include in this category, I have relied first on a definition of patriotism. According to the Cambridge Dictionary patriotism is “the feeling of loving your country more than any others and being proud of it”<sup>139</sup>. Moreover, Colley argues that after the Act of Union that joined England and Wales in 1707, Britain was trying to define and shape its identity as a new nation. She highlights that between 1707 and 1837, “a sense of British national identity was forged”<sup>140</sup>.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, I have included in this category pieces compatible with the above definitions that is to say those in which the actress praises Britain, its citizens or people in power. The latter therefore includes four prologues and nineteen epilogues. Although they represent less than one percent of all the prologues and epilogues in our study, it is nonetheless important to recognise the opportunity that patriotism gave women to take part in the public debate.

Although belonging to the same category, these patriotic prologues and epilogues are nevertheless distinct from each other. In some of them the actress appeals to the patriotic feelings of the audience. In others she addresses the women in the audience and encourages them to support the nation or she highlights the patriotic role that they already play. Some epilogues are built on hatred of foreigners and especially of the French. These epilogues praise Britain and despise French culture and traditions by arguing that the latter are corrupting British people. Two of them were spoken at the time of the Seven Years' War between France and Britain. Furthermore, as it is the case in most categories, the actress gives the women in the audience a mission to carry out. She tells them that it is their role to reinstate the age when British values were worth more than foreign ones.

In the next part, we will analyse in detail some of these performances in order to try and understand how playwrights used actresses in these prologues and epilogues to appeal to the

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<sup>138</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 237-273.

<sup>139</sup> 'Patriotism', in *The Cambridge Dictionary* [online], <<https://bit.ly/3xXGdIJ>> [accessed 28 March 2022].

<sup>140</sup> Colley, p. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Colley, p. 1.

patriotic virtues to the audience. We will also link them to the historical context in order to evaluate whether women were already playing a role in the patriotism of the country.

## 2. Commentary on love and marriage

Prologues and epilogues commenting on love and marriage were always found before or after a play in which these were central themes. In these performances, actresses reflect and give their opinion on love and marriage only by commenting on the events that occurred in the play. Therefore, we have to bear in mind that performances in this category rely on the play's theme and the arguments developed are always compared to love or marriage stories in the play. Nevertheless, I have decided to devote a category to their analysis since – as Tanya Evans argues – “the family and marriage were central to contemporary British social, political, and cultural concerns between 1700 and 1850”<sup>142</sup>. Moreover, Knapp argues that marriage had been a common source of jest in prologues and epilogues of the first three decades of the century. However, with the advent of more morality on stage, she underlines that towards the end of the century, the usual raillery or commentary on cuckoldry was replaced by comments on the devotion of husband and wife for each other while marriage was described as the purpose of life.<sup>143</sup> As mentioned in chapter four, Solomon dedicated a category to the analysis of Restoration paratexts on social critique and some of these Restoration performances criticised love, marriage and infidelity.

Before bringing to light the different types of prologues and epilogues in this category, it is important to define what love and marriage meant in the eighteenth century. Bridget Hill explains that the institution of marriage cannot be described as something monolithic since it was experienced differently by different social classes. Therefore, she highlights that “in talking of courtship and marriage in the eighteenth century it is the relationship between the two partners that needs emphasising, not the particular form of marriage – regular, irregular, or common-law”<sup>144</sup>.<sup>145</sup> I have therefore relied on Evans' definition in order to select performances to include in this category.

Marriage was an important part of the lives of men and women in the eighteenth century and getting married was seen as compulsory. Although it was experienced differently across

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<sup>142</sup> Tanya Evans, ‘Women, Marriage and the Family’, in *Women's History, Britain 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London; New-York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 57-78 (p. 58).

<sup>143</sup> Knapp, pp. 302-305.

<sup>144</sup> Bridget Hill, *Women, Work & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), p. 175.

<sup>145</sup> Hill, p. 175.



the different social classes, marriage was often patriarchal. After women got married, they had no legal status, no legal power and, in law, husband and wife were considered as one person.<sup>146</sup> Gender roles were clearly defined: women had to raise the children and men had to support their family financially. Women had no rights in marriage and were often submissive to their husbands. It was very difficult to divorce especially for women and therefore marriage was for life.<sup>147</sup> Amongst the upper classes, there was little courtship or wooing since arranged marriages were common. Financial arrangements prevailed over love. Usually, parents arranged marriages when their children would still be young, and the latter could not object. On the contrary, amongst the working-class, it was not unusual for men to court women and Hill argues that there might have been ‘love’ between husband and wife, at least at first. Arranged marriages were not common amongst the working-class and children had often lost their parents by the time they got married.<sup>148</sup> Women did not have much decision-making power in their marriage and that is why it is important to analyse the voice that actresses had on this issue. Most women had no voice in their marriage and in these prologues and epilogues, playwrights were giving women a voice on stage. In the third part, we will analyse whether it seemed that it was the actresses’ thoughts or whether the voice of the playwrights could still be perceived in these performances.

This category is composed of two prologues and sixty epilogues. In many of these performances, actresses draw from their characters’ experience in the play in order to give advice to the ladies in the audience. For example, they warn women to be careful in their choice of lovers or husbands, they advise them to put no trust in men and be careful of traitors, to remarry after the death of their husband or to marry instead of getting wanton lovers. These performances enabled actresses on stage to create a bond with the ladies in the audience. Similarly, actresses sometimes address the men in the audience and advise them to give more liberty to their wives or on the contrary to assert their authority over them. It seems that prologues and epilogues in this category enabled more intimacy between the audience and actresses since the latter directly addressed them and gave them advice. There is a confrontation between performances in favour of the emancipation of women in marriage and those in favour of male superiority. In the third part, we will investigate why both types of performances occurred. Other performances include criticism about the fact that marriage is based on a

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<sup>146</sup> Hill, pp. 198-201.

<sup>147</sup> Wendy Moore, ‘Love and Marriage in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain’, *Historically Speaking*, 10.3 (2009), 8-10 (pp. 8-10) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/hsp.0.0038>> [accessed 13 April 2022].

<sup>148</sup> Hill, pp. 175-213.

transfer of money and not love, others comment on cuckoldry in marriage. Sometimes actresses compare love and marriage between the time the events of the play take place and the time the play is performed. Finally, in some performances they comment on the attitude of men and women in love. In all these performances, actresses use the play and the behaviour of characters as a starting point to draw their argument. There are three ways in which actresses address the audience. In some performances, they assume the identity of their character in the play, in others they speak in their own voice and comment on the attitude of the character they performed in the play by referring to it in the third person, or they speak in their own voice but refer to their character using the personal pronoun “I”. Once again, a case of “betweenness” – as defined by Solomon<sup>149</sup> – occurs and there is ambiguity over whether actresses speak in their own voice or still assume the identity of their character in the play.

We will not be able to consider the impact of these paratexts on the men and women in the audience or whether they have succeeded in improving the status of women in marriage. In order to do that we would need to investigate the reception history of each prologue and epilogue which is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, we will try to link the comments that actresses made on love and marriage to the eighteenth-century historical context in order to try to assess what rights women had in marriage and how the actresses’ comments may have been perceived by both men and women in the audience. Finally, we will touch upon the playwrights’ aims in writing these performances and whether or not the playwright’s written words could be discerned during the actress’ performance.

### **3. Advocacy for women’s emancipation**

The position of women in society in the eighteenth century was complicated and as Barker and Chalus point out, women had different roles and responsibilities in society. The rules governing gender relations were complex and they were influenced by different factors such as social status, age, race, location, occupation and religion. Women were indeed “subject to a vast array of social rules and obligation, many of which were gendered”<sup>150</sup>. For example, participation in the public sphere was limited for women. Nevertheless, although it might seem that men had more opportunities in the public sphere since, for example, they had access to coffee-houses and clubs, it does not mean that women were totally excluded from the public

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<sup>149</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 7-19.

<sup>150</sup> *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1997), p. 25.

arena.<sup>151</sup> As mentioned in the previous section, women were usually submissive to their husband and under his legal power. Similarly, women could not participate actively in politics: they could not run for elections nor had the right to vote. However, as it will be demonstrated in the last part, upper-class women were not totally excluded for political activities.<sup>152</sup> As such it is beyond the scope of this study to trace the different studies that have been made on women's history. Nevertheless, regarding the complexities of women's position in the eighteenth century, it seems important to analyse the voice that actresses had on this issue.

This category is composed of three prologues and thirteen epilogues in which actresses advocate for more liberty for women or assert that women have power over men. As it was the case with performances in the previous category, actresses' arguments are most of the time developed through their comment on the play but not exclusively as it will be seen in the third part. They often use their character's experience in the play in order to give advice. Some prologues and epilogues assert the power of women to rule the mind of men thanks to their charms, others advocate for the inclusion of women in politics and others advocate for more liberty for women in society. In this category, actresses often address the women in the audience in order to advise them. In these prologues and epilogues, they advise them to retain some liberty in their lives.

In the third part we will analyse how such performances could have created a bond between actresses and the female audience but also how these performances could have been perceived by the audience. We will also analyse the reasons why male playwrights would write pieces advocating for increased women power.

#### **4. Prevalence of the different categories**

The different categories of female prologues and epilogues performed between 1721 and 1760 have been introduced. We can now look at the proportion of prologues and epilogues in which women fulfilled the main aim of these performances that is to say to please the audience and get them to approve the play and the playwright and the proportion of prologues and epilogues in which they were able to deviate from this aim. Figure 2 shows the prevalence of each category of prologues and epilogues. Figure 3 shows the proportion of these performances in which actresses fulfilled the main function of prologues and epilogues (in blue), the

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<sup>151</sup> *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>152</sup> Elaine Chalus and Fiona Montgomery, 'Women and politics', in *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 217-260 (pp. 219-249).

proportion of performances in which they commented on the theatre world (in orange) and the proportion in which they commented on societal matters (in grey).

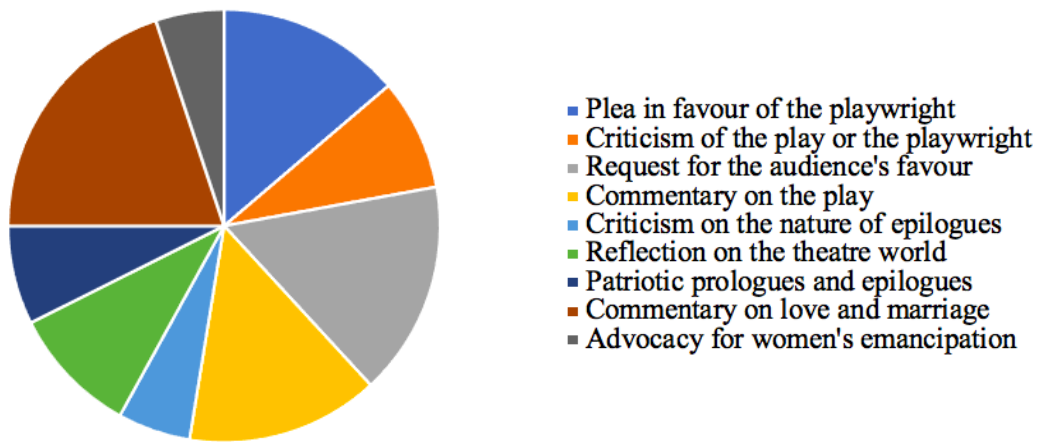


Figure 2: Prevalence of each category

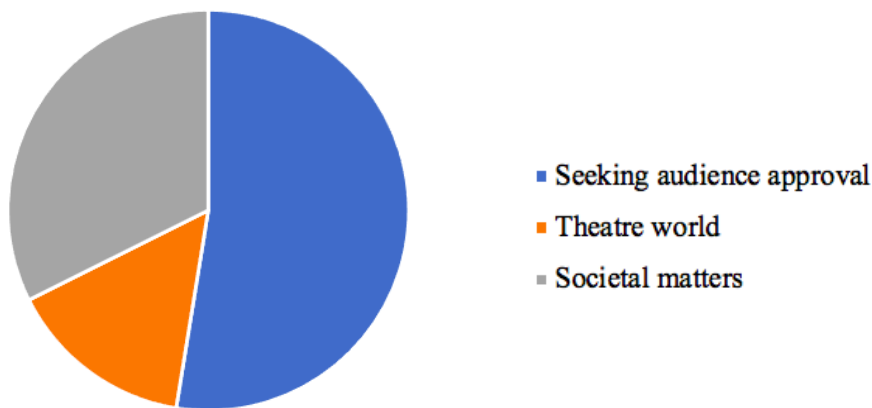


Figure 3: Types of issues addressed in prologues and epilogues

These figures are used as an indication and the boundaries between categories are not absolute since some performances might cross categories. Indeed, as mentioned in the presentation of the different categories, when actresses commented on societal matters – respectively the categories entitled “patriotic prologues and epilogues”, “commentary on love and marriage” and “advocacy for women’s emancipation” – they often used the play as an example to illustrate their argument or they tried to convey a message through commenting on the attitude of different characters in the play. It has also been indicated that most epilogues end with a request for the audience’s favour. One of the purposes of this dissertation is to understand the extent by which women were able to deviate from the main function of prologues and epilogues. Actresses fulfilled this function in performances in the categories entitled “plea in

favour of the playwright”, “criticism of the playwright or the play”, “request for the audience’s favour” and “commentary on the play”. These categories are represented by the blue segment in figure 3. Therefore, in more than half of these female performances spoken between 1721 and 1760, actresses accomplished the main purpose of trying to win over the audience.

It seems therefore that in the other half of the performances, they were able to deviate from this objective. The orange segment in figure 3 shows the performances included in the categories entitled “criticism on the nature of epilogues” and “reflection on the theatre world”. These epilogues did not fulfil the main aim but nevertheless dealt with the theatre world. In less than one fourth of these performances, actresses reflected on epilogues and on the theatre world. Finally, as shown by the grey segment in figure 3, in about more than a quarter of performances actresses were able to address societal matters including “patriotic prologues and epilogues”, “commentary on love and marriage” and “advocacy for women’s emancipation”. Out of the three categories in which they addressed societal matters, the majority of performances were part of the category “commentary on love and marriage” as shown by the brown segment in figure 2. A reason for that might be, as already mentioned, that several plays included these topics and actresses often drew links with the play in their prologues and epilogues.

Female prologues and epilogues performed between 1721 and 1760 seem to have enabled actresses to address themes not directly linked to the playwright or the play in almost half of the performances. In the latter, they were able to reflect on the theatre world but also comment on patriotism, love and marriage and women’s emancipation. Nevertheless, as already indicated, in almost all of the performances under study, actresses fulfilled the main aim of prologues and epilogues which was to win the audience, even in performances in which they addressed theatrical and societal matters. Our focus here has been to see whether actresses could also address other themes. Now that the categories and their prevalence in the corpus have been highlighted, we need to analyse some of these performances in order to try and understand their possible impact as well as how playwrights articulated their ideas for women to convey them on stage.

**III. TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
ROLE OF WOMEN IN EIGHTEENTH-  
CENTURY PROLOGUES AND EPILOGUES  
(1721-1760)**

The second part outlined the different themes that could be found in prologues and epilogues delivered by actresses between 1721 and 1760 and the quantitative analysis has demonstrated that actresses were able to deviate from the main purpose of winning the audience's approval in about half of the prologues and epilogues in the corpus. This part aims to analyse in more detail these performances in which actresses deviated from this main objective or used it in order to address issues either related to the theatre world or issues such as patriotism, love and marriage, and female authority. The most representative texts in each category will be analysed and interpreted in relation to the eighteenth-century historical context and we will explore the meaning and significance that these words spoken by a woman on stage could have had for the audience. Bearing in mind that these texts were written usually by a male playwright or author, we will explore the playwrights' aim in writing them. Since actresses' main objective in epilogues – even those in which they commented on societal matters – was to please the audience and ensure that they approved of the play, we will firstly analyse the strategies employed by playwrights in these performances to achieve this goal. Therefore, in the first part we will analyse representative prologues and epilogues of the categories entitled “plea in favour of the playwright”, “criticism of the playwright or the play”, “request for the audience's favour” and “commentary on the play”. The length of our study being limited does not allow for in depth analysis of many of these performances. Therefore, I have decided to limit the number of prologues and epilogues analysed in these four categories. Nevertheless, since they represent about half of our corpus, their content cannot be overlooked, and the strategies employed by playwrights in these performances shed light on the position of actresses on stage which will be useful for the analysis of epilogues addressing theatrical and societal matters. After having analysed these categories, we will turn on to the analysis of the other categories, respectively: “criticism on the nature of epilogues”, “reflection on the theatre world”, “patriotic prologues and epilogues”, “commentary on love and marriage” and “advocacy for women's emancipation”.

## Chapter 7: The use of actresses by playwrights to win over the audience

As mentioned above, this section aims to study how actresses were employed by playwrights to win over the audience by analysing respectively the categories entitled “plea in favour of the playwright”, “criticism of the playwright or the play”, “request for the audience’s favour” and “commentary on the play”.

### 1. Between sexualisation and authority

In the epilogue to *Periander* (1731), which belongs to the category “plea in favour of the playwright”, Mrs. Younger seems to be employed in order to create a bond with the ladies in the audience, but she is also strongly sexualised. She starts:

There stands our Bard, --- poor Wretch! In such a Fright!  
Think Ladies, on the Fears of a *First Night*.  
The Fears! --- ‘tis well, --- but Ladies, You, we know,  
Can quickly make those Fears in Pleasure flow:  
Tho’ for a while he droops, You quickly can  
Raise him to Life, and warm him into Man.  
As for the Criticks, ---- Those I’ll take in hand;  
[...]  
But know, the Author’s Champion I appear,  
And for ten Nights dare you to meet me here.  
Nay, --- don’t ye, --- hideous Creatures! don’t ye frown,  
I soon shall find a way to take ye down.  
I soon shall --- before we part, --- shall make you say,  
You’re satisfy’d, --- extreamly --- with the Play.<sup>153</sup>

In order to win the ladies’ approval, the actress shows them that they share a common experience with the playwright: “the Fears of a *First Night*”<sup>153</sup>. By drawing from a feeling that they know, the actress – and indirectly the playwright – probably hoped that they would be more sympathetic in judging the play. However, it seems that the double entendre of this expression was a way to catch the attention of the men in the audience. Indeed, it refers both to the author’s first night and the virgin’s first night. The actress is also ambiguous when inviting the women in the audience to transform the fear of the playwright into “Pleasure”<sup>153</sup> or “warm [the playwright] into Man”<sup>153</sup>. The author plays on the image of actresses as sexually free in order to appeal to the male audience. The actress creates a sexually ambiguous image when she says that she will “take in hand”<sup>153</sup> the critics in order to soothe their judgement and “[satisfy]”<sup>153</sup> them. These double entendres as well as the fact that she invites them to come

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<sup>153</sup> Pierre Danchin, *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century: A Complete Edition*, 6 vols (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1993), III, p. 391.



“for ten Nights”<sup>153</sup> lead the men in the audience to fantasise about having sexual access to the actress. As mentioned in the first part, this practice was common during the Restoration: after the play some gentlemen paid to have access to the actress.<sup>154</sup> Although this practice was not widespread in the eighteenth century, actresses’ sexuality was nevertheless the focus of gossip and newspapers.<sup>155</sup> Making the actress seduce the critics, was probably a technique from the playwright to charm the critics into approving the play. Finally, she tells the ladies that the fate of the play lies in their hands.

Our Author’s young, then take him to your Care,  
The Youth were always Favourites of the Fair.  
If you approve, no Critick dares to frown.  
But grows polite, and lays Ill-manners down.  
The *British* Fair can never smile in vain,  
One Smile from them o’er-pays an Age of Pain.<sup>153</sup>

The author again capitalises on the seductive power of “the Fair”<sup>153</sup> (i.e. the women in the audience) and the actress invites them to approve the play because the playwright might be a good lover. This last stanza also refers to the widespread idea at the time that if the ladies approved the play then they would encourage their husbands to do the same.<sup>156</sup>

In some epilogues, the playwright sexualised the actress in order to gain the favour of the audience. However, in most epilogues, the actress introduces herself as a figure of authority in relation to the playwright, whom she portrays as frightened using imagery. Indeed, he is often compared to a virgin on her first night, a young girl tempted by gold and gallants or even a sailor on his first cruise. By drawing on common experiences of fear, the objective is for the audience to picture the playwright’s anxiety and sympathise. The first stanza of the epilogue to *The Nest of Plays* (1738) is an example of the balance of power between the playwright and the actress:

At length, *Gallants*, you’ve seen the *Nest of Plays*!  
And now I come to plead for Master *Bayes*.  
Doubtful, and pale, behind the *Scenes* he stands;  
Yet hopes a gen’rous Pardon from your Hands.  
Forgive those Faults he freely has confess’d,  
Since I dare say, poor *Bard*, he did his best!  
In Pity set the *Scribler* at his Ease:  
He merits something, who attempts to please.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Richards, pp. 4-5.

<sup>155</sup> Rosenthal, pp. 161-163

<sup>156</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 107-110. See in this dissertation, part I, chapter 3, section 3.2: Pleasing the female patrons.

<sup>157</sup> Danchin, V, p. 20.

As mentioned in the first part, Solomon argues that epilogues were a collaborative work between the audience, actors and playwrights in which each shared a degree of power.<sup>158</sup> However, here, the playwright, by giving voice to the actress to defend him and by hiding behind the stage empowers the actress at his expense. He is described as fearful, weak and subjected to the judgment of the public when the actress is on stage facing on his behalf the audience's judgment. It could be argued that actresses were merely employed by playwrights to defend them, but this type of epilogues demonstrates that she was also a powerful figure on stage. The same balance of power occurs when the actress mentions that she has advised the playwright on what to write in the epilogue in order to please the audience.

Actresses' authority is reinforced when they question their roles in epilogues. In these cases, the voice of the playwright is almost invisible to the audience. In the epilogue to *Penelope* (1728) the actress says:

Well, I suppose, good Folks, you're all agogue,  
 To hear a Goddess speak an *Epilogue*.  
 My Bus'ness now is to defend the Poet;  
 But I can scarce persuade myself to do it:  
 Defend him? Why? Because he brought me here,  
 To rant, to swagger, and to call for Beer.  
 It is a Trick the Puppy learn'd at School,  
 To make Us shew our Shapes, and play the Fool.<sup>159</sup>

Similarly, in the epilogue to *Othello* (1751), the actress mentions:

Why what a Trick they've play'd me here egad  
 [...]  
 To make us *tender Souls* speak Epilogues:  
 But yet I partly guess what they're about;  
 [...]  
 The Chaps are all *ashm'd to shew their Faces*;  
 But shame's th' *Effect of Guilt* --- it is most certain  
 No wonder then they've *sneak behind the Curtain*.  
 And send me here to gild the dirty Cause  
 To tickle you good-natures for Applause.<sup>160</sup>

Both epilogues denounce the fact that playwrights use actresses as "Pupp[ies]"<sup>159</sup> to do the show in front of the audience and that they are "trick[ed]"<sup>159</sup> by them. Once again, they reveal the very reason behind that: playwrights are scared to do it themselves. However, it reinforces the authority of the actresses since it shows a willingness to detach themselves from their main role in epilogues – an attitude which might be useful to interpret epilogues in which actresses

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<sup>158</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 18-22.

<sup>159</sup> Danchin, III, p. 255.

<sup>160</sup> Danchin, V, p. 362.

comment on societal issues. It is nevertheless odd that the playwright would write a piece in which the actress complains about her mission. We can therefore imagine that it may have been a strategy to catch the audience's attention by hearing an actress rebel or an incentive to raise pity in the actress.

Finally, in epilogues in which the actress pleads in favour of the playwright, not only does she assume power and authority over the playwright but sometimes also over the critics. In the epilogue to *Art and Nature* (1738), Mrs. Clive attacks the critics:

Ye cruel bloody Criticks of the Pit,  
Who kill and quarter all that you think fit,  
'Tis a hard case when a poor Wretch has sweat,  
And rack'd his Brain to make a Play compleat,  
And we, to get it up, come shiv'ring hither,  
Thro' Cold and Wet for Forty Morns together,  
Not to be heard at last.<sup>161</sup>

She accuses them to be too harsh both with the playwright and the actresses who always come to plead for him in vain. She tries to command them and to arouse their compassion for actresses. As we have seen, actresses tried to soothe the judgment of critics by seducing them but at times they were more assertive.

To conclude, although actresses were sent by playwrights to defend them it does not mean that they were always submissive. In some epilogues, playwrights sexualise actresses in order to gain the public's approval but in others, actresses assert their own authority both on the playwright and on the audience. These sexualised and commanding attitudes are used in epilogues in which they comment on societal matters.

## 2. Evoking sympathy for the actress

The main questions raised in the second part for performances in the category "criticism of the playwright or the play", was to understand why playwrights would sometimes write epilogues in which they decried themselves or their play and why they would use actresses to perform them. Through the analysis of the epilogue to *Hibernia Freed* (1750) spoken by Mrs. Bullock, we will demonstrate that playwrights used this technique in order to gain approval for their plays. In the first part, the actress opposes the playwright by refusing to use her charms – as he asked her – to "soften [...] the Critick Foes, / [...] please the Ladies, and subdue the

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<sup>161</sup> Danchin, V, p. 29.

Beaux”<sup>162</sup>. This refusal echoes the epilogues in which actresses question their roles, as seen above. The fact that she did not beg them to approve the play may have seemed unusual to the audience, but she explains the reason for her anger:

While I for three long Acts neglected sat,  
Another was pursu'd with amorous Chat.  
Nay almost forced! I, in my Turn, deny'd,  
But one's not always angry to be try'd.  
Whate'er Resentment Decency demands,  
The Lover should not fall by Hang-mens Hands.  
He should have made me shine in every Scene,  
And treat both Lovers with a cold Disdain.  
For well our Sex can tell, the Pleasure's sweet,  
When Lordly Man lies crouching at our Feet;  
When we the Lover treat with scornful Air,  
And tho' just yielding, drive him to Despair.  
Barr'd of these Pleasures, what can he expect?  
What Woman e're forgave a cold Neglect?  
No: let him find some other to excuse,  
And beg Remission for his whining Muse. [...]  
What's this to me? My Injuries remain;  
From You I may some Recompence obtain;  
Should some of you depart this Place content,  
Let him not fancy that for him 'tis meant,  
Let me prevail; resent my slighted Cause,  
And justify my Wrath by your Applause.<sup>162</sup>

According to Mrs. Bullock, the playwright cannot receive the audience's approval since he has neglected her in the play and has not made her behave as she wanted. The playwright may have had different objectives when writing this. Firstly, he probably sought to make the audience feel sorry for the actress, he even positions her as a victim in the last part. Secondly, he probably anticipated the reaction of the audience and potential criticism about the fact that the heroine had been neglected. In this way, he made the actress side with the audience's opinion. Thirdly, he made the actress create a bond with the ladies in the audience by generalising the fact that no women would like to be neglected. This was reinforced by the fact that the actress' identity was ambiguous. While the "I" in the first part of the epilogue – when she said that she refused to defend the playwright – seemed to be referring to the actress, the "I" in this part is referring to the character she impersonated in the play. According to Solomon, this is a case of "betweenness".<sup>163</sup> By linking the fictional world to the real world, she suggests that she could still be suffering from the events that happened to her in the play. These techniques were probably intended to get the audience to side with the actress and applaud her. This aim is quite clear in the last lines when the actress positions herself as a victim and asks for applause for

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<sup>162</sup> Danchin, III, p. 50.

<sup>163</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 7-19. See in this work part I, chapter 3, section 5.2: The ambiguity of the "I".

herself rather than for the playwright. The playwright nevertheless ensures that the play will still be applauded.

### 3. The actress as a humble and submissive figure

In most epilogues in the category “request for the audience’s favour”, actresses appear as humble and almost submissive figures and acknowledge that the power of decision lies with the audience. They are not confrontational with the audience, as is the case in some epilogues, but rather beg for their forgiveness. This is the case in the epilogue to *The Female Fop* (1723):

Well now, the bold, th’ambitious Task is o’er,  
And now we stand *Victims* to decisive Power.  
Embassadress Extraordinary I come,  
To view your killing Looks, and know our Doom;  
To guess how you can bear with young Beginners,  
Which may in time prove --- tolerable Sinners;  
I only mean for --- Motion ---- right in Acting,  
Which all you Critics know, and are --- exact in.  
PARDON our Faults, and grant Us but your Favours.  
I’ll lay my Life --- ‘will quicken our Endeavours.  
What can I urge to win you to our Cause?  
Where Merit reigns, That may command Applause.  
We plead not That, knowing our little Skill;  
But what we want in Power we have in Will.  
We boast no artful Playing, nor skilful Dance,  
No strange Machines, nor timely Helps from *FRANCE*.  
But since we cannot Conjurers commence,  
We’ll always treat you with good *English Sense*.<sup>164</sup>

She places her fate and that of the playwright in the hands of the audience. She contrasts the “decisive Power”<sup>164</sup> of the audience to the submission and passivity of the playwright and actors who are “Victims”<sup>164</sup>. She highlights the fact that they are humble, they do not pretend to have skills. She is ready to do anything to please them and even asks “What can I urge to win to our Cause?”<sup>164</sup>. This is a common rhetorical pattern, and, in most epilogues, we find the question “what can I say”. By appearing desperate for approval, she probably looks for compassion. She nevertheless justifies the fact that they wish to please with “good *English Sense*”<sup>164</sup>. In epilogues in this category, there is no specific technique used by playwrights to gain the audience’s approval, they usually make the actress beg for pardon. In the last stanza, she submits to the ladies:

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<sup>164</sup> Danchin, III, p. 145.

To the *Ladies*.  
 With humblest thanks to this commanding Sight,  
 We own the Obligation of To-Night;  
 Here we can find no Cloud, no Cause of Fear,  
 But ev'ry Constellation bright and clear.  
 To you, the Universe doth Homage pay,  
 And where you deign 'approve, Mankind obey:  
 From hence we unfledg'd Players beg Support,  
 And slight the Censure of the Critic's Court.  
 Assert your Power to save, the Tyrants awe;  
 For *BRITISH LADIES* ne'er admit the *Salique Law*.<sup>164</sup>

In several epilogues, the actress addresses the ladies in the audience in order to beg for their support, to flatter them or to acknowledge the fact that their approval is crucial for the success of the play. Here, the actress uses a strong imagery and compares the judgement of the ladies to a clear sky implying that they will not damn the play. She is submissive to their judgement when explaining that “the Universe”<sup>164</sup> pays homage to them. She puts women on a pedestal and gives them confidence by showing that if they approve the play even the critics will do. We have seen in the first part that the approval of the female patrons was important since they financed plays and players. Playwrights addressed them in order to increase receipts, but actresses also sought to maintain a bond with these female patrons in order to gain more popularity.<sup>165</sup> This performance therefore enabled women in the audience to exert a judgment and create a bond with the actress.

#### 4. Justifying the actress' behaviour in the play

As mentioned in the second part, the majority of prologues and epilogues refer to the play to which they were attached, even if they have meaning independently. The main question raised in the second part for epilogues in the category “commentary on the play” was to understand the purpose of commenting on a play that the audience had just seen. In the epilogue to *The Insolvent* (1758), the actress – still impersonating the character of Amelia – justifies her theatrical conduct in the play:

I'VE 'scap'd, to-night, two terrible disasters;  
 My honour's indignation ---- and my master's:  
 And heaven best knows what hapless hole can hide me,  
 If (to crown all my woes) you help's deny'd me.

*LADIES*, you see how much expos'd our sex is;  
 Sleeping, or waking, some sad chance perplexes.  
 Man's a more wily snake than mother *EVE*'s was;  
 In his own shape --- and others too --- deceives us.  
 Hungry devourer! never tir'd with snapping;

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<sup>165</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 126-236. See in this dissertation, part I, chapter 3, section 3.2: Pleasing the female patrons.

Shun him with open eyes ---- he'll catch us napping:  
And how to 'scape him, if I know ---- ne'er let me  
Break thro' th' entangling nets, that thus beset me.

Now, *GENTLEMEN*, to your own thoughts appealing,  
(Fitter, I doubt, for making wounds --- than healing)  
What wou'd you have poor women do with honour.  
When danger heaps such monstrous loads upon her?

D'ye think in conscience now – half-wak'd, half-weary  
With foregone frights, for one's departed deary ----  
'T had been so strange a crime ---- or worth such pother,  
In darkness to mistake one dear for t'other?

Pray think on't --- Put yourselves behind the curtain;  
What can't be cur'd must be endur'd ---- that's certain.

'Tis a fair question ---- and 'tis plainly ask'd ye:  
Answer it ---- or confess, I've over task'd ye.  
Suppose me bound in sleep's soft, silken fetter,  
And one of your dear selves the dark besetter:  
Sight has no eyes, at midnight ---- and, for touches,  
"JOAN," (says the proverb) "in the dark's a dutchess."  
For my part --- I can't find we've any senses,  
Can furnish such attacks with fit defences.  
Let trusty spouse, when business sends him packing  
("Safe bind safe find") leave no due caution lacking.

I see some judge-like eyes, that look too sprightly  
To miss a she law-point, but to 'em rightly.  
Is mine the court's decree? ---- I humbly move it;  
That, if your hearts affirm ---- your hands approve it.<sup>166</sup>

As mentioned by Danchin, she had mistaken another man for her husband in the play.<sup>167</sup> She seems to want the audience to forgive her sin. The playwright probably anticipated the criticism that this infidelity in the play would have provoked and therefore positioned the actress as a victim who appeals first to the ladies and then the men to feel sorry for her. Here, the "I" that the actress uses refers to her character in the play and not to herself directly, so her voice is less ambiguous. When addressing the ladies, the actress draws on a common experience shared with them: all women are trapped by this monstrous creature man. She compares the nature of men and women by saying that men are "more wily"<sup>166</sup> than women and therefore she could not have escaped the usurper in the play. Moreover, the universality of her argument highlights the fact that it could happen to any lady in the audience therefore they cannot condemn the play for her behaviour. Then, in order to win the men in the audience, she plays on the fear of women. She blames men for being monstrous creatures from whom women cannot escape. Giving this background information was probably meant for men and women in the public to think about how they would have reacted had they been in the same situation. She

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<sup>166</sup> Danchin, VI, p. 634.

<sup>167</sup> Danchin, VI, p. 631.

underlines the fact that it is too late now, the play is done, and the sin is done. She can only endure pain, therefore if they feel sorry for her, they should applaud. Epilogues in which the actress refers to specific events that occurred in the play therefore seem to have been used in order to alter the judgment of the audience or at least mitigate it.

These epilogues therefore highlight the different techniques used by playwrights in order to incline the audience to approve their plays. In some epilogues the actress is used as a passive means to appeal for the audience's favour but in most of them her presence is essential. At times she is a sexualised or submissive figure, in other epilogues she assumes authority over both the playwright and the critics. The ambiguity between her character in the play and her real *persona* is used as a means to evoke sympathy for the actress. Actresses also create a bond with the audience in order to highlight that their character's experiences in the play are shared by the audience and therefore give them reasons to sympathise. The different status that actresses acquired can be found in most epilogues addressing theatrical and societal matters. We will now turn to the analysis of epilogues in which actresses were able to address issues not directly related to the play and the playwright. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that in most epilogues, actresses still sought to please the audience.



## Chapter 8: Reflection on the nature of epilogues and on the eighteenth-century theatre world

Prologues and epilogues in the categories “criticism on the nature of epilogues” and “reflection on the theatre world” can be conceptualised as themes located between performances in which the actress merely fulfilled her function of defending the playwright and asking for approval of the play and those in which the actress commented on societal matters. Indeed, they enabled the actress to disengage from the main purpose of epilogues – to win over the audience – but nevertheless addressed topics related to the theatre world. The objective of this section is to study how playwrights employed actresses in these epilogues and for which purpose.

### 1. Epilogues as an instrument to denounce their own genre

In several performances, and increasingly from the 1730s onwards, actresses denounced comic epilogues after tragic plays. Before analysing these performances, we must explain the characteristics of comic epilogues and why they were rejected by some playwrights. For clarity, these epilogues were called comic epilogues by Knapp, merry epilogues by Wiley and bawdy epilogues by Solomon.

According to Mary E. Knapp, in comic epilogues, an actress – often the heroine of the tragedy – ridiculed the plot and the characters and blamed their unheroic conduct. These performances destroyed the artistic unity of the play and the indecent observations and sexual innuendoes that they included tarnished its virtue and the chastity of its characters. Their purpose was to cheer up the audience after a tragic play but also please the audience by sexualising the actress. They had been prominent during the Restoration and remained popular in the first three decades of the century thanks to the actress Oldfield who performed over thirty of them. Oldfield’s bawdy epilogue to *The Distrest Mother* then remained a model for epilogue writers who copied its obscenities at least until mid-century.<sup>168</sup> Solomon argues that the continuous publication and performance of the bawdy epilogue to *The Distrest Mother* testify the audience’s interest in these pieces. According to Solomon, the fact “that actresses continued to perform bawdy epilogues throughout the century suggests that we need to rethink the nature

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<sup>168</sup> Knapp, pp. 286-298.

and success of the efforts to censor London Theater”<sup>169</sup>. The audience were especially interested in the actresses’ sex comedy in these pieces.<sup>170</sup> However, at the turn of the century, some playwrights started denouncing the indecency of this practice and its destruction of both the moral value and virtue of tragedies. Jeremy Collier attacked indecency on stage in his pamphlet *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) and playwrights such as Henry Fielding, Colley Cibber and Johnson denounced bawdiness in their epilogues. The eighteenth century therefore witnessed a confrontation between the supporters of the bawdy epilogue and its opponents who tried to reform the stage and its immorality. For example, while in Richardson’s novel *Pamela* (1740), Pamela criticised the immorality of the epilogue to *The Distrest Mother* in one of her letters, on the other side, the *Spectator* No. 341 argued that the play and the epilogue were two distinct performances which were not meant to excite the same feelings. Similarly, theatre manager David Garrick oscillated between writing indecent or moral epilogues. Reflecting this, over the course of our study period (1721-1760) both bawdy and morally-bound epilogues could be found. Comic epilogues were constantly an obstacle to the appeal to sentimentalism that some playwrights tried to foster in their epilogues. The last decades of the century, however, seem to have displayed reformed comic epilogues in which the traditional sexual innuendoes and banter were partly chastened.<sup>171</sup> We will demonstrate through the analysis of two epilogues how playwrights used actresses in order to articulate their views on epilogues but also the fact that the actresses themselves may not have been indifferent in this debate.

There is no distinct playwright or author who seem to have written more on the topic than others. Nevertheless, Colley Cibber has written two epilogues for the actress Catherine Clive and the latter seems to have been performing several epilogues in which she denounced bawdy epilogues. Moreover, Clive spoke several epilogues in which she opposed the playwright and seemed to have had contradictory views. For example, we find epilogues in which she scorned the playwright for having written a tragedy, others in which she advocated for playwrights to write two epilogues depending on whether the play was a success or a failure but also epilogues in which she boasted her writing skills<sup>172</sup> and seemed to be taking the liberty to criticise the playwright. Indeed, Felicity Nussbaum argues that Clive – as one of the most

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<sup>169</sup> Diana Solomon, ‘Tragic Play, Bawdy Epilogue?’, in *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-Raisers, and Afterpieces: The Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*, ed. by Daniel James Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle (Newark: University Of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 155-179, (p. 169).

<sup>170</sup> Solomon, ‘Tragic Play’, pp. 156-169.

<sup>171</sup> Knapp, pp. 266-311.

<sup>172</sup> Clive wrote three comedies.

popular speakers of epilogues – appeared as a “drama critic”<sup>173</sup> in them. In addition to her assertive attitude on stage, Clive was politically involved in the theatre world. She fought for players’ rights to own their parts in plays and epilogues, their celebrity but also their talent in what could be called a ‘performative property’. She therefore defended actresses’ right to own themselves at a time when British women could not possess any property nor themselves. She also defended the rights of players to earn a decent salary and sought to protect them against theatre managers’ unfair treatment and working conditions. She articulated these ideas in her polemical pamphlet *The Case of Mrs. Clive* (1744), an appeal which “rested on common law and civil rights”<sup>174</sup>. Clive was therefore a powerful figure who refused to base her talent on sexual exchange or inherited property.<sup>175</sup> This context might shed light on the interpretation of Colley Cibber’s epilogue to *The Miser* (1733) performed by Clive. Cibber was a fervent opponent of bawdy epilogues, and, in this epilogue, Clive scorns him for having refused to write a bawdy epilogue for the play:

Our Author’s sure bewitch’d! The senseless Rogue  
 Insists no good Play wants an Epilogue.  
 Suppose that true, said I, what’s to this?  
 Is yours a good one? --- No, but *Moliere*’s is,  
 He cry’d, And Zounds! No epilogue was tack’d to his.  
 Besides, your modern Epilogues, said he,  
 Are but Ragouts of Smut and Ribaldry,  
 Where the false Jest are dwindled to so few,  
 There’s scarce one double *Entendre* left that’s new.  
 Nor wou’d I in that lovely Circle raise,  
 One Blush, to gain a thousand Coxcombs Praise.  
 Then for the thread bare Joke of Cit and Wit,  
 Whose fore-known Rhyme is echo’d from the Pit,  
 ‘Till of their Laugh the Galleries are bit.  
 Then to reproach the Criticks will Ill-nature.  
 And charge their Malice to his stinging Satyr:  
 And thence appealing to the nicer Boxes,  
 Tho’ talking Stuff might dash the *Drury* Doxes.  
 If these, he cry’d, the choice Ingredients be  
 For Epilogues, they shall have none for me.  
 Lord, Sir, says I: the Gallery will so bawl;  
 Let ‘em, he cry’d, a bad one’s worse than none at all.  
 Madam, these Things than you I’m more expert in  
 Nor do I see no Epilogue much hurt in,  
 Zounds! When the Play is ended --- Drop the Curtain.<sup>176</sup>

Unlike most performances, the playwright’s voice and the actress’ voice are distinct here. In the eyes of the audience, Clive therefore seems to stand against the playwright’s ideas. She

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<sup>173</sup> Nussbaum, p. 177.

<sup>174</sup> Nussbaum, p. 166.

<sup>175</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 151-188.

<sup>176</sup> Danchin, IV, p. 552.

appears confident since she insults Cibber but also mocks the fact that his play is not very good. Bawdy epilogues were still popular with the audience in the early thirties.<sup>177</sup> Accordingly, in order to articulate his ideas without attracting the wrath of the audience, Cibber possibly made Clive side with the audience. Indeed, she recognises the fact that the public will “bawl”<sup>176</sup> if they do not provide them with an epilogue. Nevertheless, Cibber is able to get his message across. Not only does he despise bawdy epilogues for their “Smut”<sup>176</sup> and “Ribaldry”<sup>176</sup> but he also criticises the fact that they always deal with the same topic and make the ladies blush. However, although Clive might have been used by Cibber as a way to make his ideas heard, it seems that she was not simply ventriloquising them. As a famous comic actress, it is plausible that Clive sought to perform comic epilogues. Moreover, knowing her political involvement in the theatre world, this epilogue reinforces her figure as a powerful actress capable of standing in front of the audience and express her own opinions against the playwright. This performance emphasises her image as an actress capable of shaping her own career and making choices for herself.

In some epilogues, and especially those delivered by Clive, the actress demonstrates her ability to reflect on what she performs although it is done through the playwright’s words. However, in other epilogues the use of actresses is more instrumental. In the epilogue to *Alzira* (1736&1755), the playwright seems to use Mrs. Giffard as a way to evoke sympathy for her and make his case against bawdy epilogues heard:

The Fifth Act past, you’ll think it strange, to find  
 My Scene of deep *Distress* is, yet, behind!  
 Task’d, for the *Epilogue*, I fear you’ll *blame*  
 My *want* --- of what you *love*, behind that Name.  
 But, for my Soul, I can’t, from such *High Scening*,  
 Descend, plum down at one, ---- do *Double-meaning*.  
 Judges! Protect me ---- and pronounce it *fit*,  
 That *Solemn Sense*, should end, with *Serious Wit*.

When the full Heart o’erflows, with *pleasing Pain*,  
 Why should we wish, to make th’*Impression* vain?  
 Why, when two thinking Hours, have *fixt* the Play,  
 Shou’d two light Minutes, laugh it’s Use away?  
 ‘Twere to proclaim our Vertues but a JEST,  
 Shou’d they who *ridicule* ‘em, please us, best.

No,---- rather, at your Actor’s Hands, require  
 Off’rings more Apt; and a *Sublimer* Fire!  
 Thoughts, that may rivet, not *efface*, the Scene:  
 Aids to the *Mind* : not *Flatt’ries* for the Spleen.  
 When Love, Hate, Pity, --- Doubt, Hope, Grief, and Rage,

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<sup>177</sup> Knapp, pp. 290-292.

With clashing Influence, *fire* the glowing Stage;  
 When the touch'd Heart, relening into *Woe*,  
 From *Others* Fate, *does* its *own Danger* know;  
 When soft'ning *Tenderness* unlocks the Mind,  
 And the *stretch'd* Bosom takes in *all Mankind*:  
 Sure! 'tis no Time, for the bold Hand of Wit  
 To *snatch* back Virtues, from the *Plunder'd* Pit!

Still, be it *Ours*, to give you *Scenes, thus strong*,  
 And *Yours*, to cherish, and retain 'em *long*!  
 Then, shall the *Stage* its General *Use* endear;  
 And every Virtue, gather *Firmness, here*.  
 Pow'r he, to *Pardon*, --- Wealth to *Pity*, MOV'D;  
 And *Truth* be taught the Art, to grow *belov'd*:  
*Women*, to *charm*, with fast, and sure, Effect;  
 And *Men*, to love 'em, with a soft respect.  
 Till all alike, some *diff'rent Motive* rouses:  
 And *Tragedy*, (un-farc'd) invites full *Houses*<sup>178</sup>

The playwright plays on the “betweenness” figure<sup>179</sup> of the epilogue speaker: the “I” that the actress uses refers both to the character that she impersonated in the play and to her own persona. As we have seen in the previous section, the playwright uses this technique in order to evoke sympathy for the actress: the character that she impersonated in the tragic play does not want her “distress”<sup>178</sup> and “virtue”<sup>178</sup> to be stained by a sexual epilogue. The playwright also relies on a strong imagery to achieve that. Indeed, the actress compares the passage from “High Scening”<sup>178</sup> (i.e. the tragic play) to “Double-meaning”<sup>178</sup> (i.e. the bawdy epilogue) almost as a descent into hell. Secondly, the epilogue relies on feelings and emotions to persuade the audience. The actress personifies “Love, Hate, Pity, --- Doubt, Hope, Grief, and Rage”<sup>178</sup> to demonstrate that these feelings have real importance on stage and on the spectators and they cannot be wiped at once by “two light Minutes”<sup>178</sup> of epilogue. Similarly, she personifies feelings as divine powers: “Tenderness unlocks the Mind”<sup>178</sup> and “pleasing Pain”<sup>178</sup> fills up the heart. The lyricism of these lines was probably meant to underline the importance of tragedy and virtue on stage and invite the audience to contemplate on it. If they really liked the tragedy, why would they want it to be stained by a bawdy epilogue? Finally, the actress places the audience in a central position by asking the judges to “pronounce it fit, / That Solemn Sense, should end, with Serious Wit”<sup>178</sup> and asking the audience to “cherish”<sup>178</sup> tragic plays. She acknowledges the fact that the audience plays a key role in shaping the theatrical repertoire. The playwright may have sought to boast their confidence and their power to change the established order.

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<sup>178</sup> Danchin, IV, pp. 751-752.

<sup>179</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 7-19. See in this work part I, chapter 3, section 5.2: The ambiguity of the “I”. “Betweenness” is a concept defined by Solomon as the ambiguity between the character the actress impersonated in the play and her real identity.

In this epilogue, the playwright probably sought to reform the taste of the audience by drawing an image of the actress as a victim stained by bawdy epilogues. Whether it actually worked is not the scope of this study. Nevertheless, according to Solomon bawdy epilogues endured throughout the century and the audience continued to appreciate them despite the criticism. The effort to censor the stage and emphasise theatrical decorum was to some extent inconclusive.<sup>180</sup> Throughout the century, we find epilogues highlighting the virtue of the play and others sexualising actresses which demonstrates that both types of epilogues were still competing.<sup>181</sup>

Nevertheless, these epilogues show that some playwrights sided with moralists willing to see decency on stage. It seems that they tried to inculcate in the audience morality or maybe explain that change in the theatrical repertoire needed to occur. The role of actresses in these epilogues seem to have been both instrumental as shown in the second epilogue but also an opportunity to articulate their ideas – as in the case of Clive – and demonstrate that they were not just passive about what they performed on stage but could develop an opinion and shape their own image.

## **2. Epilogues as an instrument to lament the change of taste**

In several epilogues, actresses lament the fact that the taste of the audience has changed and that spectators prefer entertainment such as farces, comedies, pantomimes, Italian songs or French dances over British plays. Indeed, Knapp argues that playwrights and authors were concerned by the fact that the audience preferred miscellaneous performances over British plays and therefore used prologues and epilogues in order to voice their fear and anger. Playwrights accused the audience of having lost their ability to appreciate drama, but they also feared the decline of serious entertainment in favour of pantomimes and foreign drama.<sup>182</sup> Knapp suggests that the change of taste in the audience was mainly because “the audience [was] no longer dominated by the court or the upper class”<sup>183</sup>, and therefore entertainment had to be adapted to the emerging middle-class audience.<sup>184</sup>

By analysing the epilogue to *The Orphan* (1747) we will demonstrate that actresses were employed in epilogues to denounce lesser forms of entertainment as well as foreign entertainment and we will show that this denunciation was part of a wider rejection of foreign

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<sup>180</sup> Solomon, ‘Tragic Play’, pp. 169-170.

<sup>181</sup> Knapp, pp. 284-285.

<sup>182</sup> Knapp, pp. 178-204.

<sup>183</sup> Knapp, vi.

<sup>184</sup> Knapp, vi-vii.

performances and foreign culture. In the first stanza of the epilogue to *The Orphan* (1747), the actress wonders how she is going to please the audience now that their taste has changed. She mourns the old days when spectators enjoyed tragedy and when the stage was “Naked of song, dance, farce, --- or HARLEQUINADING”<sup>185</sup>. In the next stanza, the actress substitutes her sorrow for irony in a somewhat mocking attitude towards the audience:

THIS age, thank heaven, is wiser --- *Pit and Gallery*,  
 Treat their good, grave, *forefathers* taste, with *raillery*,  
 What! sit *three hours*, to hear dull *Actors prating*,  
 No ENTERTAINMENT, after all that *waiting* ---  
 I'd give a *dozen* such Plays --- for one *Bear-baiting*?  
 Your humble *actors*, *slowly* stretch *ambition*,  
 To *top* these *arts of Play-house erudition*:  
 How e'er unapt by *time*, and *you* conducted,  
 WE *too*, shall *mend*, grow *wise*, and be *instructed*;  
 Would I were *six yards taller* tho' --- to *charm* ye!  
 Or PETITE MADEMOISELLE EN CHIENNE t'alarm ye.  
 Something, I soon, must *learn* above *plain speaking* ---  
 Teach me, some *pig of taste*, thy art of *squeaking*!  
 No *Patentee*, now, holds us *worth* contracting,  
 'Till we have learnt *more ways than one*, of *acting*,  
 What *thinking* face will any *praise* ordain us,  
 Whose *climbing eyes* have *seal'd* --- MYNHEER CAJANUS!  
 Give place *Great Alexander*! --- GO, retire ---  
 We have enroll'd a HERO --- *Three foot higher*!  
 From CAESAR'S *death*, no *future grief* shall flow,  
 Since every joyful *night* restores PIERRO!  
 While poor *Monimia's* and *Castalio's* die,  
 Aye, let 'em go --- the *improv'd spectators* cry:  
 Mind what a *cunning fellow* --- HARLEQUIN is!  
 Well! in *our* turns, *we* yet may *entertain* ye;  
 We shall be *soon* struck *dumb* --- and, *then* we gain ye.<sup>185</sup>

The actress underlines the ridiculousness of the situation and the new forms of entertainment. For example, she derides the fact that “Great Alexander”<sup>185</sup> is replaced by “Mynheer Cajanus”<sup>185</sup> who was according to Danchin, “a giant [who] came to London from Germany in 1734 to “be shewn for a Sight”<sup>186</sup>. She highlights the lack of seriousness of these shows by ironically asserting that actors will “grow wise”<sup>185</sup> by learning them while in the last lines she underlines that it will actually make them “dumb”<sup>185</sup>. Similarly, she ridicules the fact that if she “were six yards taller” or if she could “[squeak]”<sup>185</sup> or if she could train dogs<sup>187</sup>, she would please the audience. She probably wants to highlight the ridiculousness of the situation in which the wisdom and “plain speaking”<sup>185</sup> of tragedies has been replaced by “dumb”<sup>185</sup> productions that require no skill. Therefore, this denunciation accentuates playwrights’ concern that British

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<sup>185</sup> Danchin, V, p. 259.

<sup>186</sup> Danchin, V, p. 257.

<sup>187</sup> Danchin mentions that the epilogue refers to a French trainer of dogs, p. 257.

plays were being replaced. However, actresses might not have been indifferent to that fact either, when touching upon it through these epilogues. Indeed, we can imagine that actresses' parts in tragedies were also threatened by the apparition of performances requiring no skill. Clive spoke several epilogues in this category and as Knapp argues, she was negatively disposed towards Italian singers for they "took away the livelihood of honest native actors"<sup>188</sup>. The rejection of Italian spectacles "Pierro"<sup>185</sup> and "Harlequin"<sup>185</sup> also reflected a wider rejection of foreign performances and especially Italian operas and French Musical Theatre. Indeed, Italian operas were thought of being potentially effeminising. This label that endured throughout the eighteenth century was due to the fact that Italian players arrived in Britain during the war of the Spanish succession. In this war context, the frivolity, luxuriousness and potential effeminising of this type of entertainment became a danger to the nation's masculinity and Italian singers were thought of seducing men to abandon their war duties.<sup>189</sup> Knapp argues that protests against Italian opera lasted throughout the century.<sup>190</sup> A similar treatment was reserved for French entertainment, but we shall analyse this rejection of French culture in more detail in the next section which focuses on patriotic epilogues.

In conclusion, epilogues criticising bawdy epilogues and those denouncing the changing taste of the audience seem to have been used by playwrights in order to show their desire to moralise the stage and as a way to promote British entertainment. Similarly, performances in which they addressed for example the role of passion in the theatre or competition between two playhouses were used in order to articulate their ideas about the theatre world. Actresses were probably not indifferent in these debates since these issues directly impacted their careers and fame.

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<sup>188</sup> Knapp, p. 191.

<sup>189</sup> Amy Dunagin, 'Opera, War, and the Politics of Effeminacy under Queen Anne', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 50.1 (2021), 127-139 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2021.0012>> [accessed 14 June 2022].

<sup>190</sup> Knapp, p. 190.



## Chapter 9: Feminine contribution to the patriotic sentiment

Mary Etta Knapp argues that patriotic prologues and epilogues in the eighteenth century were simply a way to win over the audience by appealing to their patriotic feelings.<sup>191</sup> Although Knapp's argument seems to be valid, it suggests that the role of actresses in these performances was passive and only aimed at satisfying the playwright. It does not take into consideration either the fact that these women encouraged patriotism by sometimes addressing the women in the audience and creating a bond with them, nor the fact that these epilogues were designed specifically for these actresses. They manifested patriotism, in a country where a female Briton "in law [...] could never play the part of an active patriot within [the nation]"<sup>192</sup> since she did not have any legal existence and she was under the legal authority of her husband. However, as demonstrated by Linda Colley women were not excluded from all forms of patriotism and we will demonstrate how patriotic prologues and epilogues reflect this argument.

Before turning to the analysis of some epilogues, it is important to consider Colley's argument about eighteenth-century female patriotism. Colley builds on Rousseau's idea of the role of women in the private sphere to highlight the fact that while women's patriotic role in the public sphere was limited, they were nevertheless expected to instil patriotic values in their children. This implied that they had to be patriotic as well. Women warriors and politicians were seen as improper but women's influence in the domestic sphere was seen as essential for the prosperity and the vitality of the nation. Moreover, although women of higher ranks could not exert direct political power, they were supposed to influence, support and advise their husbands. They could also canvas for elections on behalf of their male relatives as long as it remained within the boundaries of their family duties. In short, women had to "stay within the private sphere, while at the same time exerting moral influence outside of it"<sup>193, 194</sup>

### 1. Encouraging female patriotism

In the epilogue to *The Rival Father* (1730), Eliza Haywood shows the women in the audience that they have to be patriotic in their daily lives. The epilogue starts as follows:

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<sup>191</sup> Knapp, p. 205.

<sup>192</sup> Colley, pp. 238-239.

<sup>193</sup> Colley, p. 275.

<sup>194</sup> Colley, pp. 337-273

There was a Time, old Authors tell us, when  
 Women were Patriots as well as Men:  
 In every Action of their Lives, 'tis said,  
 The Public Good ran always in their Head;  
 And oft this Zeal has urg'd 'em on so far,  
 As to embroil their little Hands in War.<sup>195</sup>

The expression “old Authors tell us”<sup>195</sup> introduces authors as figures of wisdom and knowledge who have written many history plays and consequently know the past better. The actress appears as their spokesperson and this makes her argument – that women in the past were good patriots – more convincing. However, those days when women were constantly involved for the good of the nation seem to be over. She continues:

But let our Heroines do whate'er they will,  
 'Tis wiser for Women to --- lie still.  
 A modern Female wears no sword upon her,  
 A Fan's a fitter Weapon for her --- Honour.  
 Many a one receives a Wound and --- dies,  
 From a fair Hand skill'd in Fan-Exercise.  
 But such soft Arms as ours are hardly fitted,  
 To furnish out a Fleet like that at --- *Spithead*  
 But yet, what proves the Patriot little less,  
 Our Ladies show their ---- Principles in ---- Dress.  
 In such Attire ye see 'em still appear,  
 Their Country's Good's express'd in what they wear ;  
 For whether they shine forth in *stiff* Brocade,  
 Or foreign Silks, 'tis for the Sake of Trade :  
 If in the Produce of our *English* Loom,  
 'Tis to promote our staple Trade at home.  
 This is a better Way of doing good,  
 Than that old Heathenish one of spilling Blood<sup>195</sup>

Haywood's assertion that women are good patriots is quite ironic. She jokingly asserts that women can kill someone with their “Fan-Exercise”<sup>195</sup> and that they are patriots “with what they wear”<sup>195</sup> since it supports British trade. In fact, she satirises women for caring more about their “Honour”<sup>195</sup> than war. However, two interpretations of this stanza are possible. The actress either mocked women for their passivity, or she actually used humour in order to denounce the fact that women could not go to combat. By mocking women – a group to which she belongs – Haywood is self-deprecating. In the first part, we showed that Solomon compares prologues and epilogues to stand-up comedy.<sup>196</sup> She uses Gilbert's arguments on these performances. Gilbert, in her study on women stand-up comedy argues that self-deprecating humour is used as a way to denounce and mock the wider society.<sup>197</sup> By lampooning the fact that women are

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<sup>195</sup> Danchin, III, p. 354-5

<sup>196</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>197</sup> Joanne R. Gilbert, *Performing Marginality: Humor, Gender, and Cultural Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 141.

patriots by wearing dresses, Haywood actually denounces the wider culture that prevents women from showing their patriotism by going to war. However, in the last stanza, she mentions that we can scarcely find “Ladies inspir’d with *Trojan Spirits*”<sup>195</sup> which might suggest that women are not willing to go to combat. Therefore, both interpretations are possible, but each demonstrates that women must support the nation even by turning an everyday activity such as going to the theatre and boasting about their British clothes, into a patriotic act. It also shows women’s willingness to not be limited to solely exerting domestic patriotic influence, as demonstrated by Colley.

## 2. Female patriotism in times of political turmoil

The following epilogue in our analysis underlines the role that women played in times of political turmoil and battles by encouraging men to fight for their country. “The Female Volunteer or, An Attempts to make our Men Stand” was performed by Peg Woffington in 1746 “in the Habit of a Volunteer upon reading the Gazette extraordinary, containing an Account of the Battle of Falkirk, fought January 17. 1746”<sup>198</sup>. The battle of Falkirk was part of the Jacobite rising of 1745 which were a series of battles and rebellions in which the Catholic Charles Edward Stuart tried to regain the British throne. He was the grandson of James II who had been deposed during the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Since then, Protestant-ruled Britain had always been under the threat of an attempt by the exiled Stuarts to regain the throne. After the failed attempt of 1715, the Jacobite rising of 1745 was the last attempt.<sup>199</sup> This epilogue was spoken just after the Battle of Falkirk which opposed the Jacobite army to the British army officer Hawley and his men. Due to bad weather conditions, Hawley’s army had decided to retreat enabling the Jacobite army to pillage their camp and be victorious.<sup>200</sup>

At the time of the Catholic and Jacobite threat, Peg Woffington had performed several patriotic and comic epilogues and the figure of the female soldier that she often impersonated had “served as a rallying point for patriotism”<sup>201</sup>. In the 1730s and the 1740s, she was a well-known patriotic figure on stage who defended the interests of the Hanoverians against the Jacobites but also against foreign Catholic powers such as France. By embodying men on stage, Woffington demonstrated that national identity did not rest on strict sexual differences and

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<sup>198</sup> Danchin, V, p. 215.

<sup>199</sup>Morrill, John S, ‘Jacobite | Meaning, Risings, & History’, *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2018) <<https://bit.ly/39vPIpm>> [accessed 17 June 2022].

<sup>200</sup> Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Jacobite Rebellion 1745-46* (Oxford, Uk; Long Island City, Ny: Osprey Pub, 2011), pp. 56-58.

<sup>201</sup> Nussbaum, p. 205.

therefore she “embodied a break with the past, a movement toward modern British nationhood, and a prefiguring of a nation that promised new opportunities for women as part of its proud self-definition”<sup>202</sup>. Her cross-dressed figure challenged the idea that women embodied traditional and conservative nationalism. However, Nussbaum stresses that Woffington’s sexual impersonation also exposed the vulnerable nature of the nation by highlighting its constructed nature. Cross-dressing was not without criticism. It was seen as immoral and indecent by Jeremy Collier since it eroticised women’s body by revealing their ankles, legs or breast and it also represented a threat to God-given sexual difference. Therefore, “women masquerading as soldiers were perceived to be simultaneously erotic and patriotic, for sexual freedom paralleled other kinds of dangerous independence.”<sup>203</sup> In the analysis, we will demonstrate how the playwright played both on Woffington’s eroticised image in order to charm the male audience and her patriotic image in order to encourage the ladies to support the nation. Lastly, Woffington’s various patriotic epilogues were linked to the need to recruit volunteers to defend the country against the Jacobites.<sup>204</sup>

Woffington, firstly invites the women in the audience to join the fight because men are cowards and have retreated at the battle of Falkirk:

PLAGUE of all Cowards, I say, --- Why, bless my Eyes ----  
 No, no, it can't be true ---- The Gazette lies.  
 Our Men retreat! before a scrub *Banditti* !  
 Who scare could fright the Buff-Coats of the City !  
 Well, if 'tis so, and that our *Men* can't *stand*  
 'Tis Time we Women take the Thing in *hand*.  
 Thus, in my Country's Cause, I now appear,  
 A bold, smart, *Kevenhuller'd* Volunteer;  
 And, really, mark some Heroes of the Nation,  
 You'll think this no unnat'ral Transformation;  
 For, if in Valour real *Manhood* lies,  
 All Cowards are but Women in Diguise.  
 They cry, These Rebels are so stout and tall!  
 Ah, lud! *I'd lower the proudest of them all!*<sup>205</sup>

Woffington uses humour to mock the cowardice of men. She describes them as “coward[s]”<sup>205</sup> crying in front of the enemy when women on the contrary are “bold”<sup>205</sup> and “strong”<sup>205</sup>. By portraying the enemy as harmless she teases them for having lost their courage. By asserting that women will be better in combat, she questions their masculinity and implies that a woman performing masculinity – like her – might be braver than actual men. At a time when cross-

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<sup>202</sup> Nussbaum, p. 206.

<sup>203</sup> Nussbaum, p. 195.

<sup>204</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 189-213.

<sup>205</sup> Danchin, V, pp. 215-216.

dressed women in society threatened God-given sexual difference because they highlighted the performativity of gender categories<sup>206</sup>, Woffington mocking men's cowardice and jokingly asserting the ability of women to replace them was probably part of a strategy to provoke the men in the audience into asserting their manliness and enlist. By suggesting that all the cowards are probably women in disguise since supposedly "in Valour real *Manhood* lies"<sup>205</sup> she gives the men a second chance to assert their manliness by giving them the benefit of the doubt. This emphasis on "manhood"<sup>205</sup> came from the fact that in the eighteenth century, the British nation was constructed as manly as opposed to the French nation that was deemed to be effeminate. There was a constant anxiety that French influence would make British men effeminate.<sup>207</sup> This anxiety was heightened by the depiction of British body politics as corrupt and the increasing questioning of the virility of British soldiers.<sup>208</sup> By placing an emphasis on men's potential lack of manhood, Woffington tries to recruit men who will not accept to be categorised as cowards, but she also reminds the audience that it is British manhood that will enable them to defeat the enemy. She then ironically gives the reason why women would be better than men in a fight:

Had we an Army of such valorous Wenches,  
 What Man d'you think would dare t'attack our Trenches?  
 O! how the Artill'ry of our Eyes would maul them!  
 But our mask'd Batt'ries, lud! how they would *gall them!*  
 No Rebels 'gains such Force dare take the Field;  
 For, demme, but we'd die before we'd yield.<sup>205</sup>

In this stanza, the playwright plays on the eroticised figure of the cross-dressed soldier. Woffington highlights that women soldiers will defeat the enemy thanks to their seductive power and their charms. Woffington is using her charms and sexualised figure to seduce men to join her in combat. Not only did her garments revealed some parts of her body, but her speech is full of sexual innuendoes. For example, she mentions the fact that women will "take the Thing in hand"<sup>205</sup>. Straub highlights that the British audience was fascinated with actresses' sexual lives and many upper-classes men fantasised about having sexual intercourse with actresses.<sup>209</sup> The playwright probably intended to use the eroticised figure of Woffington to appeal to the men to join the fight and metaphorically have access to her. After having encouraged men to join combat, she assumes a more serious tone, gives the real reasons for opposing the Catholics and activates female patriotism:

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<sup>206</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 189-213.

<sup>207</sup> Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 7-12.

<sup>208</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 205-208.

<sup>209</sup> Kristiana Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 12-13.

Jesting apart ---- We Women have strong Reason  
 To stop the Progress of this Popish Treason;  
 For sure, when Female Liberty's at Stake,  
 All Women ought to *bustle* for its Sake.  
 Should these audacious Sons of *Rome* prevail,  
 Vows --- Convents --- and that Heathen Thing --- the *Veil*,  
 Must come in Fashion. Oh! Such Institutions.  
 [...]  
 And I've some *private Reasons* 'gainst *Confession*.  
 Besides, our good Men of the Church, they say,  
 (Who now, thanks Heav'n may *love* as well as *pray*)  
 Must then be only wed to cloister'd Houses  
 Slap then, we're nick'd of Twenty thousand Spouses.  
 Faith, and no bad Ones, as I'm told: Then judge ye,  
 Is't fit we lose our *Benefit of Clergy*?

In Freedom's Cause ye Patriot-Fair, arise,  
 Exert the sacred Influence of your Eyes;  
 On valiant Merit deign alone to smile,  
 And vindicate the Glory of our Isle.  
 To no base Coward prostitute your Charms,  
 Disband the Lover who deserts his Arms:  
 So shall you *fire* each Hero to his Duty,  
 And *British Rights* to be saved by *British Beauty*.<sup>205</sup>

The words “Jesting apart”<sup>205</sup> underline the fact that she was not serious about inviting women to go to combat and that her irony was just a strategy to recruit men. However, Woffington encourages women in the audience to oppose the enemy by using the concept of liberty. As mentioned above, the fear of the Catholics regaining the throne was constant throughout the eighteenth century and this anxiety was fed by popular literature.<sup>210</sup> Protestant Britons thought that they were blessed by God and enjoyed superior religious freedom and that Catholicism would probably corrupt this freedom. Catholics were also seen as ignorant, credulous and poor therefore falling under Catholic rule would mean losing the prosperity offered by Protestantism.<sup>211</sup> Woffington plays on this anxiety and the potential loss of religious liberty to highlight the key role that women must play against the enemy. She invites women to use their seductive power to encourage men to fight for their country. She emphasises the ‘acceptable’ female patriotism. Seducing their husbands to go to war is a patriotic act within the private sphere that is nevertheless vital. A similar technique was used at the beginning of the Seven Years’ War in the epilogue to *Agis* (1758) in which the actress implored women to “exert [their] matchless charms, / And rouse [their] lovers to the love of arms”<sup>212</sup>. Women are invited to use their seductiveness for patriotic purpose.

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<sup>210</sup> John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs, containing an account of the sufferings and death of the Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary* (1563), for example, was read by people across different social classes in the eighteenth century and contributed to the anti-Catholic feeling. See Colley, pp. 33-43.

<sup>211</sup> Colley, pp. 33-43.

<sup>212</sup> Danchin, VI, p. 630.

It therefore seems that female patriotism on stage was activated at times of political turmoil such as the Jacobite threat and the Seven Years' War. With Woffington as a rallying figure for patriotism, these epilogues seem to have been intended to raise male spirit for combat, to highlight the British values of manhood but also to remind the women in the audience that their loyalty at home was necessary in order to encourage men and lead the country to victory.

### **3. Consolidating national sentiment**

The last type of patriotic epilogue is the one that demonstrates British hatred of the French, usually by denigrating the French while extolling British superiority or by complaining that French habits corrupt the British. Michèle Cohen argues that although French had been considered in the early eighteenth century as a polite language that British gentlemen ought to learn to achieve politeness, paradoxically, over the course of the eighteenth century, French politeness had been gradually characterised by effeminacy and servility and the French language was considered as too refined, too purified and too polished. It was said to corrupt the strength and virility of the English language and “all things French were thought to be so powerfully attractive and seductive to the English that they feared they might be taken over and subjugated.”<sup>213</sup> This growing anxiety of British men becoming effeminate was embodied by the figure of the Fop: a man who had been seduced by French manners, dress and smatterings. The image of the Fop was meant to emphasise that spending too much time with women – as the French did – made men too effeminate. Therefore, by the mid-century and increasingly towards the end of the century – if France had once been the model of politeness that gentlemen ought to achieve – it was now depicted as the effeminate Other. Because language and national character were deemed to be interrelated, unlike French politeness, English politeness referred to manliness and liberty and was meant to instil the virtues of patriotism.<sup>214</sup> Colley completes this argument by showing that after the Act of Union in 1707, Britain was trying to define its identity as a new nation. It was gradually defined in relation to the identity of other countries and more specifically Catholic countries on the continent such as France. The British identity was constructed as opposed to what was represented as the Other. Britain was therefore deemed to be a manly nation in opposition to the effeminate French. Britain had always seen France as an enemy. Not only did it have a larger population, more land, a powerful army but it was also a commercial and imperial rival, but most importantly it was Catholic.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Cohen, p. 38.

<sup>214</sup> Cohen, pp. 1-111.

<sup>215</sup> Colley, pp. 3-25.

Women on stage denounced this effeminacy of the French in an effort to try and consolidate the new national identity as manly. In the epilogue to *The Astrologer* (1744), Woffington complains about the fact that French habits are corrupting:

A modish Phrenzy so corrupts the Town,  
That nought but *A-la-mode de France* goes down:  
We all submit to this fantastic Yoke ;  
Like them we dress, we dance, we eat, we joke ;  
From Top to Toe they change us at their Will ;  
All but our Hearts ---- and those are *British* still.<sup>216</sup>

Woffington conjures up an image of the British as submissive and the French as controlling. By describing the British as puppets of the French, she emphasises the fact that British no longer have free will and are no longer masters of their actions. Nevertheless, the situation is reversible, and their British heart can set them free. By highlighting the fact that their liberty has been taken, the playwright probably hoped that they would abandon their French manners. By placing the blame on the French and their seductiveness, Woffington gives them hope that they can still break free. It is vital for the country to oppose the French:

Rouse, rouse, for shame! This modish Pest oppose!  
Nor meanly ape your vain, insulting Foes!  
To kill this fatal Weed for ever toil.  
Nor let it e'er take root in *British* Soil!  
Let low, inglorious Arts to *France* belong,  
The close Deceit, false Heart, and double Tongue!  
Let us by noble, generous Arts be known,  
By Valour, Wit, and Honesty, our own!  
Produce your Worthies, *Britain* ; and be taught,  
That none like *Shakespeare* writ, or *Marlborough* fought,  
By these to former Heights your Glories raise,  
Nor yield to *France* the Laurel or the Bays!<sup>216</sup>

Woffington dehumanises the French and compares them to invasive plants trying to “take roots in *British* soil”<sup>216</sup>: she calls on the audience to act before it is too late. Usually represented as seducing, here the French are represented as invading. Her tone must have been exclamatory and accompanied with grand gestures as to underline the threat that they represented. She also urges Britons to take pride in their country since British values are better than French ones and the British have an inherent superiority in literature but also in combat. Woffington who was a well-known patriotic figure in epilogues seems to have been used as a tool to shape a strong British identity.

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<sup>216</sup> Danchin, V, pp. 159-160.



Women on stage played a role in the consolidation of national sentiment at a time when the idea of a nation was new (England and Scotland had been united in 1707) and was still threatened by foreign powers and Catholicism. Although they were sometimes sexualised by the playwright, they nevertheless used strategies such as irony and satire to encourage the public in their patriotic actions. Actresses highlighted that the nation could only function if both men and women participated. Indeed, female patriotism, characterised by charming and advising their male relatives was the starting point for all actions undertaken by men.

## Chapter 10: Public women addressing the theme of love and marriage

As mentioned in the previous part, actresses addressed various issues related to love and marriage. This section will analyse prologues and epilogues in which actresses denounced the condition of women in marriage and encouraged them to emancipate themselves, but also performances in which actresses seem to have been taking part in the debate over the concern about arranged marriage. Finally, we will turn our analysis to the epilogues in which actresses advised men. By shedding light on the role of women in marriage as well as linking these performances to the historical context in which they were performed we will try to understand how they could have been perceived by the audience but also how they reflected the fact that marriage was experienced differently by members of different social classes.

### 1. Denouncing the condition of women in marriage and encouraging women's sexual fantasy

In the epilogue to *The Patron* (1729), the actress Mrs. Nokes, still performing Peggy Lure – a character in the play who pretended to be the wife of Merit for one day – uses humour to denounce the fate of married women:

Here ends the Dream, no longer Merit's Wife [...]  
Tho but a Day, I stood the sober Joke,  
My Neck's e'en gall'd with this same nuptial Yoke.  
What then must be the Case of real Wives?  
They lead, no doubt on't, strange delicious Lives,  
Cage'd up like Squirrels, the same Rounds they ring,  
And all their Pastime's but the self-same thing.<sup>217</sup>

She is ironic: marriage is anything but a “dream”<sup>217</sup>. She creates a feeling of confinement by comparing wives to squirrels in cage who cannot escape and by highlighting the tightness of the “nuptial Yoke”<sup>217</sup>. She denounces the repetitive nature of women's lives who “the same Round [...] ring”<sup>217</sup> and probably cannot have many hobbies or participate in public life. The actress acts as a spokesperson for women confined with their duties in the household. Moreover, Gilbert argues that humour is a way to make social criticism acceptable on stage since the audience sees this as mere entertainment. Women comics, she contends, use humour as a way to point at cultural fissures and convey their message with impunity.<sup>218</sup> The actress' irony about her enjoyment of marriage is used to denounce the prison that it can be for some women.

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<sup>217</sup> Danchin, III, p. 292.

<sup>218</sup> Gilbert, pp. 177-178.

These epilogues in which the actress voices the condition of women seem to be directed at men in the audience who have political power. They acknowledge the suffering of some women confined in their house and therefore, they do not depict the reality of all women. Indeed, as Turner argues, genteel women living in cities had more opportunities to take part in activities outside their homes such as going to the theatre, concert hall or parks.<sup>219</sup> Vickery also demonstrates that upper-class women were linked to the outside world through different activities such as hosting dinners.<sup>220</sup>

In most epilogues, the actress acts as an advisor for the women in the audience by advocating for more liberty for women when choosing their husband, in marriage or after the death of their husband. In the epilogue to *The Fatal Secret* (1733), the actress uses her commentary on the play to advise the women in the audience to remarry after the death of their husband. Beyond this advice, she encourages women sexual agency and sexual freedom. Before studying the epilogue, it is necessary to clarify how female sexuality was viewed.

Roy Porter argues that the eighteenth century was a century of sexual liberation. The Enlightenment ideology reconceptualised sexuality as part of nature, therefore sexual urges were seen as natural. It was also argued that everyone should follow pleasure and that sex was pleasurable. Since it was unrestrained, sex was part of the written and printed culture (erotic literature, pornography) and it was visible in the public arena mainly thanks to prostitutes and sexual entertainments. Nevertheless, sexual freedom was mainly enjoyed by men: women were still expected to be faithful to their husband and avoid extramarital sex since it would bear bastard children. As the century progressed and as the role of women as mothers was more and more underlined, sexual independence for women was increasingly seen as immoral. Similarly, excessive sexual activity amongst the plebeian was threatening since it meant that they would breed faster and not be able to provide for their offspring, thus they would put the economy in danger.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, Karen Harvey argues that while women had been depicted as sexually voracious in the early modern era, towards the end of the eighteenth century, they were gradually desexualised. The eighteenth century was an in-between period in which women were

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<sup>219</sup> David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 96.

<sup>220</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>221</sup> Roy Porter, 'Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-century Britain*, ed. by Paul-Gabriel Bouc e (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 1-28 (pp. 2-28).

both seen as “sexually insatiable creature[s]”<sup>222</sup> and as “inert stretches of land”<sup>223</sup>. Popular literature and especially erotica depicted this dichotomy of female sexuality. Harvey points out that the gradual enforcement of women’s sexual passivity may have been evidence of an anxiety about women’s seductive power and the public expression of their sexuality.<sup>224</sup>

The actress first comments on the “odd Doctrine” that “To Wed twice [was] *downright Incontinence*”<sup>225</sup>. She explains that if this doctrine would still be defended then women would prefer to die with their husband. She mentions that the character she impersonated in the play wedded twice and therefore she draws a moral from her experience:

Six Husbands buried, we might take the next,  
[...]  
Ladies, believe, ‘tis foolish Self-denial,  
To sit down easy with a single Tryal. ----  
Our gen’rous Poet some good Conscience shew’d,  
Scorning to make my Wedding Sheets my Shroud;  
And tho’ my Brothers swore they’d ne’er forgive it,  
He let me marry twice, and yet out-live it.  
His Lesson, then, is, “*Each fair Offer seize,*  
”*While you have Beauties, and the Pow’r to please.*”<sup>225</sup>

By exaggerating the fact that women can take more than six husbands, the actress invites the women in the audience to follow their desire even if it appears as transgressive. She encourages them to have sexual agency but also sexual fantasy. They should not restrain themselves but “please”<sup>225</sup> as long as they can. This word is ambiguous and probably refers to sexual pleasure. With more than a quarter of households headed by a woman and 12,9% of them by a widow between 1574 and 1821<sup>226</sup>, the issue of remarriage was probably part of the life of some female spectators and these words may have impacted them. The image of the actress as sexually greedy could have had two types of influence on the men in the audience. Her words could have been perceived as dangerous since remarrying meant that women could bear children and as Hill points out, represent a threat for the children from the first marriage.<sup>227</sup> However, it seems that the playwright tried to capitalise on the image of the actress as sexually available but also on the fact that actresses’ sexuality was fascinating to audiences as mentioned in the first part. Rather than thinking about the potential dangerousness of her words, men are led to fantasise about being the actress’ next husband. Moreover, by saying that the playwright sides with her

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<sup>222</sup> Karen Harvey, ‘Sexuality and the Body’, in *Women’s History: Britain, 1700-1850: An Introduction*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 78-100 (p.86)

<sup>223</sup> Harvey, p. 87.

<sup>224</sup> Harvey, pp. 78-100.

<sup>225</sup> Danchin, IV, p. 561.

<sup>226</sup> Hill, p. 241.

<sup>227</sup> Hill, pp. 250-258.

since he made her remarry in the play, she tries to make her argument valid and make the audience accept it.

In sum, it was common for actresses to advise the women in the audience by acting as an intermediary between their character's experience in the play and their real persona on stage to draw a moral. As mentioned in the first part, Nussbaum argues that the role of actresses in epilogues was to link the historical moment of the play to the eighteenth-century context and to link one culture to another.<sup>228</sup> Not only did they encourage female sexual fantasy but also advised women to be careful in their choice of lovers or husbands. In both epilogues under study, we demonstrated that women were able to advance their argument while fulfilling their main mission of pleasing the audience. As we have seen in chapter seven, actresses were often employed by the playwright to justify their conduct in the play and were often sexualised in order for the audience to approve and applaud the play.

## **2. Participating in the debate on arranged marriages**

In several epilogues, actresses denounced the fact that marriage was only for money interests and that parents chose their daughter's husband, leaving them little choice. Arranged marriages were indeed common amongst upper-class families who wanted their children to marry a person of good standing, from the same social class, and with some wealth. Since money interests prevailed, daughters were guided in their choice of lovers if not deprived of any choice.<sup>229</sup> I argue that actresses, by taking a stand against arranged marriage – although they were performing the words of the playwrights – took part in the public discourse and encouraged debates in the audience on arranged marriage at a time when the increasing number of illegal marriages amongst upper classes was threatening the stability of families.

Indeed, in the first half of the eighteenth century until the Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, marriage was not governed by any strict legal procedures (i.e. there was no church or state authorities regulations) which meant notably that parental consent was not needed. Since marriage was not regulated, informal and clandestine marriages were the norm amongst the poor classes who could not afford the wedding licence and parish fees. However, as the number of clandestine and illegal marriages increased steadily after 1660 and became uncontrollable in the eighteenth century, and as elite women started to run away with unwanted lovers, the lack of regulations started posing a threat to upper-class families. This problem was partly solved

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<sup>228</sup> Nussbaum, p. 21.

<sup>229</sup> Vickery, pp. 43-44.

by the Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 – lobbied by elite men in the Parliament – which imposed the purchase of banns or a licence, a public ceremony, consent of parents and evidence of each marriage by signature of a registration. Nevertheless, we must see the debate over arranged marriage as a wider debate in society between those who advocated for parental control over marriage and those who advocated for affective marriages in which love prevailed.<sup>230</sup>

The epilogue to *Venice Preserv'd* (c. 1737) was performed at a private performance but was subsequently printed in *The Gentleman's Magazine* which demonstrates that this debate was of a wider importance in society. It was spoken by the actress still impersonating the character of Belvidera. In a seductive tone and with sexual innuendoes, she first starts saying that she is looking for a husband in the audience but is afraid that the ladies might have already “engross[ed] them all”<sup>231</sup>. She then continues:

O! might a widow dare to give advice,  
In marriage, ladies, you'd be very nice;  
For in that state there is no medium found,  
But all with bliss, or wretchedness, are crown'd.  
They, only they, can be completely blest,  
Whose choice soft love directs, not interest.  
If to a wealthy fool a slave you're sold,  
Poor comfort 'tis to drag a chain of gold,  
Poor joy to shine, and all the world controll,  
If discontent sits heavy on your soul.  
The mutual lovers lasting treasure find  
Lock'd in the casket of a peaceful mind.  
From *Jaffier's* love, and *Belvidera's* see  
What sweets might flow from souls of constancy;  
Had not *Priuli* try'd their joys to pall,  
And dash'd their cup of happiness with gall.  
Be warn'd, ye fathers, take your daughter's part,  
And give her hand, where she has given her heart;  
For wedlock would not always prove a curse  
If all would wed the person, not the – purse.<sup>231</sup>

Still assuming the identity of Belvidera, the actress exposes her argument by drawing from her situation in the play. In the play, she had married secretly<sup>232</sup> and she bears a moral from this experience in the epilogue. She caricatures marriage in a playful tone by describing it as either full of “bliss”<sup>231</sup> or “wretchedness”<sup>231</sup> with no in-between situation. Ladies are described as mere commodities or even “slave[s]”<sup>231</sup> whose only purpose it to be sold and, similarly,

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<sup>230</sup> David Lemmings, ‘Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753’, *The Historical Journal*, 39.2 (1996), 339-360, (pp. 343-349) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2640184>> [accessed 17 June 2022].

<sup>231</sup> Danchin, VI, p. 12.

<sup>232</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, ‘Venice Preserv'd’, *Wikipedia* (Wikimedia Foundation, 2021), <<https://bit.ly/3MWM3yk>> [accessed 17 June 2022].

husbands are reduced to being mere “purse[s]”<sup>231</sup>. Her point is to draw attention on the fate of unhappy marriages. In order to support her argument, she also uses the lexical field of richness in order to contrast the wealth brought by a chosen marriage with that brought by an arranged marriage. The first one brings money and power, but is pointless as it makes one unhappy, the second one might not bring physical wealth, but love which is a “lasting treasure”<sup>231</sup>. Similarly, when she advises fathers in the audience, she highlights that in arranged marriages husbands are mere “purse[s]”<sup>231</sup> whereas in loving marriages they are real “person[s]”<sup>231</sup>. Once again, the actress does not advocate directly and in her own voice against arranged marriages but relies on her “betweenness” figure encompassing Belvidera – who enjoyed her secret marriage in the play – and the actress who bears the moral that love in marriage is more important than money. The actress was still fulfilling the playwright’s aim of winning the audience by further commenting on the play, but this epilogue was probably also intended to foster debates in the audience. Indeed, as Moore argues “the secret of a successful marriage was one of the most hotly debated topics in the salons and coffee-houses of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century England”<sup>233</sup>. The actress’ stance on the topic may have fostered conversations in the audience. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that women had little say in marriage<sup>234</sup> and that they did not take part in official debates in the House of Commons for example<sup>235</sup>, therefore the actress on stage taking a stand against arranged marriage might have appeared as transgressive but also as inspiring for women in the audience. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that arranged marriages were more common amongst upper classes and therefore might have been mainly addressed to men and women from higher social ranks. Some actresses were well known for deciding not to marry in order to retain their economic power, others had affairs with men from the upper class.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, we are not sure about how men in the audience might have perceived her words. The transgressive figure of the actress who married secretly might have represented a threat since she could inspire such behaviour amongst women or, on the contrary, the fact that some actresses had unstable marital relationships might have led men in the audience to mock her ideas about love in marriage. Similarly, we can explore the potential reaction of men being advised by actresses on stage.

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<sup>233</sup> Moore, p. 8.

<sup>234</sup> Moore, pp. 8-10.

<sup>235</sup> Colley, p. 238.

<sup>236</sup> As mentioned in the first part, Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle never married, Peg Woffington had different lovers and Catherine Clive and Frances Abington separated from their husbands. See Nussbaum p. 48.

### 3. Advising men and mocking their lack of masculinity

As it has been demonstrated, actresses often advised women in the audience and created a bond with them by sharing experiences. However, in a few epilogues on marriage, actresses advised men and this section is devoted their analysis. Since women were under the legal status of men in marriage<sup>237</sup>, it seems rather unnatural that a woman on stage would advise them that is why we need to investigate how it could have been perceived by the male audience.

A few epilogues address the issue of women cuckolding their husband. Solomon analysed Restoration prologues and epilogues in which actresses mocked masculinity and linked cuckoldry to men's sexual failure. She argues that these paratexts enabled women on stage to "satirize male sexual inadequacy"<sup>238</sup> and this criticism reinforced the power of actresses. In the epilogue to *The Roman Maid* (1724), Mrs. Moffett – after commenting on the play and the fact that some modern women cuckold their husbands – warns men to be careful because their wives might cuckold them:

[Making Horns with her Hands.  
Take heed, Ye Lords and Masters, then beware  
In this wild Nation how You treat the Fair.  
In vain You rave and hold a senseless Chat  
Of Whig and Tory, and the Lord knows what,  
Lay by Your Politicks, and mend Your Lives,  
For Passive Husbands may have Active Wives.<sup>239</sup>

Her tone is light-hearted and she probably addresses men from higher ranks who take part in politics. David M. Turner explains that cuckoldry was different from adultery, since it mocked men for their inadequacy and failed authority over their wife. Being cuckolded was humiliating for men since they were seen as incomplete and not manly enough. The fear of being cuckolded was also widespread in society and it was heightened as genteel women carried on more and more activities outside the house such as going to the theatre or parks without their husbands. In satirical literature, gardens were seen as places where one could find sexually rapacious men and wanton wives seeking to find a lover.<sup>240</sup> In the epilogue under study, the actress therefore mocks the lack of manhood of cuckolded husbands, asserts the power of women to cuckold men but also cautions them to be careful and maybe control their wife's activities. One question arises: how would the men in the audience have perceived being mocked for their wife's potential unfaithfulness? If we rely on Gilbert's argument about women comedy, it can be

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<sup>237</sup> Hill, pp. 198-201.

<sup>238</sup> Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, p. 122.

<sup>239</sup> Danchin, III, p. 162.

<sup>240</sup> Turner, pp. 83-105.



argued that the audience saw it as humour, as an entertainment but not as a social critique *per se*. The actress, thanks to humour, is able to mock men's potential lack of manhood with impunity. The actress is empowered by this action. Although men in the audience sees this as a mere entertainment, as Gilbert demonstrates "humor produces real social and psychological effects"<sup>241</sup>. Gilbert also argues that men either consider themselves to be part of the group being mocked or outside of this group and therefore can laugh.<sup>242</sup> In this epilogue, most men probably laughed at other men being potentially cuckolded without thinking that it could be their case. Although Moffett's tone is playful and the audience probably laughed at it, it may nevertheless have unveiled some fear amongst men in the audience.

This epilogue therefore seems in contradiction with those in which the actress encourages women to take power over their husband since this one advises husbands to retain control over their wife. However, it also enables the actress to mock men's possible failed authority and lack of manhood.

Similarly, in the epilogue to *The Provok'd Husband* (1728), Mrs. Oldfield cautions men in the audience to not let themselves be governed by their wives. In the first part of the epilogue, she explains that the playwright has decided to depict a "mended wife"<sup>243</sup> in the play even if the critics may not like it. She then continues:

From whence, you see, by Common Sense's Rules,  
Wives might be govern'd, were not Husbands Fools,  
What-e'er by Nature Dames are prone to do,  
They seldom stray, but when they govern you.  
When the wild Wife perceives her Deary tame,  
No Wonder then she plays him all the Game.  
But Men of Sense meet rarely that Disaster ;  
Women take Pride, where Merit is their Master :  
Nay, she that with a Weak Man wisely lives,  
Will seem t'obey the due Commands she gives!  
Happy Obedience is no more a Wonder,  
When Men are Men, and keep them kindly under.  
But modern Consorts are such High-bred Creatures,  
They think a Husband's Power degrades their Features:  
That nothing more Proclaims a Reigning Beauty,  
Than that she never was reproach'd with Duty:  
And that the greatest Blessing Heav'n e'er sent,  
Is in a Spouse Incurious, and Content.<sup>243</sup>

At first sight, these lines seem to blame women for trying to tame their husbands. The actress even mentions in the last stanza that "these Scenes were wrought"<sup>243</sup> in the play "to give such Dames a different Cast of Thoughts"<sup>243</sup>. However, under what seems to be a reproach for

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<sup>241</sup> Gilbert, p. 177.

<sup>242</sup> Gilbert, pp. 137-169.

<sup>243</sup> Danchin, III, p. 243.

women, the actress is actually mocking the lack of control of some husbands over their wife. By contrasting two types of husbands “Fools”<sup>243</sup> and “Men of Sense”<sup>243</sup>, she lays the blame on the first ones. Since no husband in the audience wants to be the weak husband it probably sought to provoke them. Moreover, by underlining that in the state of “Nature”<sup>243</sup> women “seldom stray”<sup>243</sup>, she points at the fact that when they do, it is linked to the lack of authority of their husband. She lays the blame on men: because of their lack of vigilance women take power. Moreover, they must be careful of “modern Consorts”<sup>243</sup> who are probably wives enjoying leisure activities outside the house. Not only does the actress mock their incapacity to tame their wives, but she also links it to a lack of manliness. As we have seen in patriotic epilogues, British identity was constructed as manly in opposition to the effeminacy of the French.<sup>244</sup> In a century during which Britain was trying to define its identity as manly, these lines were probably meant to provoke men into asserting their authority over their wife possibly in order to avoid for them to become effeminate. The fact that the actress on stage, criticises the weakness and helplessness of men gives her power. As Gilbert has demonstrated, she assumes power by insulting men.<sup>245</sup> Even though she invites men to take control over their wives, she criticises the fact that they are currently not manly enough. We cannot be sure of the reaction of the men in the audience. They might have thought themselves to be powerful husbands and have laughed at the incapability of some men in marriage. Equally, they might have laughed with sarcasm watching a woman pointing at their defects in front of other women.

In conclusion, both epilogues reminded men of their duties over women in marriage. However, under the guise of this advice, women on stage took the opportunity to mock their lack of masculinity and reversed the balance of power. The woman on stage giving advice to a man sat in the audience who cannot reply to her is in a position of power.

However, a few epilogues alongside those advising women to take more liberty in marriage also asked men to give more liberty to their wives. We will explore the reason behind the existence of two types of epilogues: those advising men to control their wives and on the contrary, those advising them to relax this control. In the epilogue to *The Fatal Extravagance* (1721), Mrs Seymour, argues that the play has shown how husbands are happier when they let their wives do as they please:

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<sup>244</sup> Colley, pp. 3-25.

<sup>245</sup> Gilbert, xv.

--- *Say they*, of Plays, --- that Men *learn* Nothing by ‘em?  
 I stand --- the Stage’s Champion --- and defye ‘em.  
 Who, that has seen, to Night, how I, a Wife,  
 Gave Counsel ; fit to’ve saved my Spouse’s Life,  
 Learns not this *Moral*, past all Contradictions,  
 That *Disobedient Husbands* --- meet Affliction?  
 That He’s most happy, who, his Fetters *eases*,  
 And lets his *wiser Wife* --- do --- what she *pleases*?<sup>246</sup>

Using the impersonal phrase “say they”<sup>246</sup>, the actress draws from a common perception that plays do not teach anything. However, she contradicts this argument by extracting a moral from the play. The actress stands as a figure of both knowledge and authority since she is here to “defye ‘em”<sup>246</sup>. Although in this epilogue the actress asks men to give more liberty to women when in other epilogues, she argues the contrary, it nevertheless shows that once again, actresses were blaming men’s conduct in a public space. The epilogue is therefore built on two levels: it encourages men to listen to their wives and give them more liberty and it shows women in the audience that, like the actress, they can be assertive with their husband by using the same argument. This epilogue mainly demonstrates that even though women were not meant to take power over their husband, they still had a key role in “[giving] Counsel”<sup>246</sup> to them.

The confrontation between epilogues in which the actress asks men to assert their masculinity and those in which she advises them to release pressure on their wife shows us that actresses’ spoken words were in fact the playwrights’ written words and that very often what actresses said in epilogues was explaining their behaviour or that of other characters in the play and was therefore linked to the play’s theme. However, one aspect that they all have in common is the social critique that they address to men. The actress on stage, by mocking men’s inability reverses the gender hierarchy of power.

In conclusion, epilogues on marriage enabled actresses to create a bond with women in the audience by advising them or by encouraging their emancipation and sexual fantasy. Actresses acknowledged and denounced different realities of marriage such as arranged unions and those in which women were confined to their home. In addition, these performances enabled them to mock men and their potential lack of masculinity but also ridiculed the lack of control some men had over their wives. Humour and caricature offered the opportunity for actresses on stage to denounce these vices with impunity. Actresses also often relied on their “betweenness” figure which encompassed their real identity and their character in the play in order to convey their message.

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<sup>246</sup> Danchin, III, p. 36.

## Chapter 11: Advocating for women's emancipation

In this section, we will analyse performances in which actresses advocate for more liberty for women, for the participation of women in politics and in which actresses demonstrate women's power of persuasion thanks to their charms. We will try to understand what impact these prologues and epilogues spoken by women could have had on the audience. We will also try to reflect on the intentions the authors may have had in writing these texts.

### 1. Women's liberty

In the epilogue to *Eurydice* (1731), Miss Robinson appears in boys clothes and explains that she has decided to “forsake” “weak WOMAN”<sup>247</sup> because dressing like a man gives her more power.

Who'd be a wife? when each new *Play* can teach us,  
To what fine ends these *Lords of ours* beseech us ?  
At first, whate'er they *do*, they do --- so *charming* !  
*But* mark what follows ; frightful! And alarming!  
They feed too *fast* on *Love* ; then sick'ning tell us,  
They can't, forsooth, be *kind* --- because they're *jealous*.  
Who wou'd be a woman, then? to sigh --- and suffer,  
And wish --- and wait --- for the *slow-coming* proffer !  
Not I --- farewell to petticoats, and stitching,  
And welcome dear, dear, breeches ! more bewitching.  
Henceforth, new-moulded, I'll rove, love, and wander,  
And fight, and storm --- and charm --- like PERIANDER.  
Born for this dapper age; pert, short, and clever;  
If e'er I grow a MAN --- 'tis *now*, or never.<sup>247</sup>

As it is the case in most epilogues, the actress uses plays as examples to bear a moral: men are deceitful and make women suffer. However, her main point here is that women should change their identity and become men. By asking the two rhetorical questions “Who'd be a wife?”<sup>247</sup> and “Who wou'd be a woman?”<sup>247</sup> Miss Robinson mocks women who have not yet turned men and invites them to wonder why they inflict themselves this pain. This is underlined by the two opposite images of men and women that she draws: women “sigh”, “suffer”, “wish” and “wait” whereas men “rove”, “love”, “wander”, “fight”, “storm” and “charm”. Men's life seems to be idle and careless while women's life is characterised by suffering and boredom. By mocking women who still assume their identity we can argue that Miss Robinson – as a woman herself – uses self-deprecating humour. Joanne Gilbert argues that a self-deprecatory joke – even if it

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<sup>247</sup> Danchin, III, p. 410.

might seem derogatory towards the comic or women – nevertheless “calls cultural values into question by lampooning them”<sup>248</sup>. According to her, women comics use this subtle social critique in order to “voice women’s discontent with cultural norms and expectations”<sup>249</sup>. By constructing themselves as victims of this society, they also empower the comic who “subvert their own status by embodying the potential power of powerlessness”<sup>250</sup>. In this epilogue, by lampooning the fact that being a woman means staying in a state of boredom and submissiveness she indirectly criticises the society which imposes this state on women. In the second stanza, she derides the fact that it is easy to be a man:

Well! but *what conduct* suits this transformation?  
 I'll *copy* some smart *soul* of conversation.  
 Shou'd there be *war*, I'd talk of fields and trenches ;  
 Shou'd there be *peace*, --- I'd toast *ten* favourite wenches !  
 Shou'd I be *lov'd* --- Gadso! how then? --- no matter,  
 I'll bow, as you do --- and *look foolish* at her.  
 And so, who knows, that never means to prove ye,  
 But I'm as *good a Man*, as any of ye !<sup>247</sup>

By using a caricatured image of men as liking war and women, she jokingly asserts that it is easy to become a man but also points at its superficiality. Nevertheless, men in the audience probably laughed at the actress pretending that she could be “as good a man as them”<sup>247</sup>. Although, the tone of the actress is humorous and ironic, there are wider implications behind her message. By jokingly asserting the ease of becoming a man, she points at the wider anxiety of women who actually did so in the eighteenth century. In her article on theatrical cross-dressing, Friedman-Romell, argues that the “anxiety [...] produced by the transvestite woman in culture is represented on stage by the cross-dressed actress”<sup>251</sup>. Women who cross-dressed in real life in order to fight in battle, engage in a profession, own a property or even marry another wife “usurped male privilege”<sup>252</sup> and refused their duty as wives and mothers in the domestic sphere or any male authority over them. Women who used their pseudo male identity to cohabit or to get married with other women refused to assume one of their main roles: to bear children. Finally, she argues that actresses performing men on stage in the roles of soldiers, sprites, or thieves “imagined a world of female activity and agency”<sup>253</sup>. We cannot be sure about

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<sup>248</sup> Gilbert, p. 141.

<sup>249</sup> Gilbert, p. 141.

<sup>250</sup> Gilbert, p. 137.

<sup>251</sup> Beth H. Friedman-Romell, ‘Breaking the Code: Toward a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London’, *Theatre Journal*, 47.4 (1995), 459-479 (p. 464) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3208987>> [accessed 24 October 2021].

<sup>252</sup> Friedman-Romell, p. 479.

<sup>253</sup> Friedman-Romell, p. 470.

how the audience perceived Miss Robinson on stage, and as Friedman-Romell highlights, “there can be no simple interpretation of the way cross-dressing was received by eighteenth-century audiences”<sup>254</sup>.<sup>255</sup> Miss Robinson was not serious about usurping male identity she even mentions that it was a “charming frolick”<sup>247</sup>. Nevertheless, under the guise of humour, she argues that dressing as a man in society can give women more opportunities. The audience was probably also aware that some actresses such as Charlotte Charke cross-dressed in society to achieve greater mobility or cohabit with other women. The debate about cross-dressed women was therefore real and Miss Robinson seemed to have fuelled it. In the last stanza, the actress plays on her seductive power as a man:

Well! ‘tis charming frolick – and I’ll do’t:  
Sirs! --- have I your consent? --- What say ye to’t?  
Yet hold --- Perhaps they’ll dread a *rival beau*:  
I *may* be what I *seem*, for aught *they* know.  
Ladies! *farewell* --- I shou’d be loth to *leave ye*,  
Cou’d an *increase of pretty fellows* grieve ye:  
Each, like *myself*, devoted, ne’er to *harm ye*,  
And full as *fit*, no doubt, to *serve* and *charm ye*.<sup>247</sup>

She ironically asserts that men might consider her as a rival but most importantly, the seduction that she uses with the ladies sexualises the actress and invokes homoerotic feelings and images. This last stanza shows that the purpose of the playwright might have been once again to sexualise the actress on stage in order to please the men in the audience.

In conclusion, cross-dressing was probably a way for the playwright to play on the actress’ sexuality and please the men. The light-hearted tone of the actress enables her to both criticise the inferior position of women in society but also to offer them a solution to escape this state. This epilogue proves that women could not advocate directly for more liberty but had to find ways – such as humour – in order to make their voices heard. A similar technique was employed to advocate for women’s participation in politics.

## 2. Women in politics

The general elections of 1754 gave Mrs. Pritchard the opportunity to advocate for the participation of women in politics. Before considering the epilogue in more details we need to shed light on women’s political involvement in the eighteenth century to better understand the possible impact of this epilogue.

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<sup>254</sup> Friedman-Romell, p. 479.

<sup>255</sup> Friedman-Romell, pp. 459-479.

Although they could not run for elections, be elected, make or vote on laws, women – especially from upper-classes – participated to some extent in some forms of political activities. Upper-classes widows and dowagers often controlled their late husband’s estate and were involved in its political interests. Chalus and Montgomery highlight that women’s participation in politics was acceptable as long as it remained within their domestic duties that is to say furthering the family’s interest and supporting their menfolk. The social arena was increasingly used by men and women for political purposes and social encounters such as assemblies, balls, theatre or even walks, talks, tea tables, public days or visits enabled women to use “the social arena and social contacts for political ends”<sup>256</sup>. Social encounters were even more politicised at times of crisis or elections. Women frequently disseminated the political news that they learned in these social spaces especially by writing letters to their female friends. Court and aristocratic women also sought political patronage for their male relatives, tried to develop networks or carried on “dutiful visiting, dining, and taking tea”<sup>257</sup> to maintain the family’s political presence in a locality. Political hostesses, although they were more prominent in the nineteenth century played a key role by hosting political meetings providing the food, drinks and some entertainment but also by introducing young men to political society. Women also participated in electioneering activities such as canvassing, sponsoring or taking part in processions and parades. These activities enabled some of them to improve their socio-political skills. Not all upper-class women participated that widely in political activities and women from lower classes did not have such opportunities. In short, although in 1754 – at the time Pritchard spoke the epilogue – women had not yet started to take part in female societies as they would later in the early nineteenth century, some upper-classes women had already understood that the social arena could be an opportunity for them to get involved politically.<sup>258</sup>

In the epilogue to *Creusa* (1754), Mrs. Pritchard proposes the creation of a female Parliament to women. She first explains that she is tired from her part, but that “a lucky Thought kind Heaven has sent”<sup>259</sup> so she needs the ladies to stay and listen to her. She suggests:

The Men you know are gone, And now, suppose,  
 Before our Lords and Masters are rechoose,  
 We take th’ Advantage of an empty Town,  
 And chuse a House of Commons of our own,  
 What think ye, cannot we make Laws? --- and then,  
 Cannot we too unmake them, like the Men?  
 O place us once in good St. *Stephen*’s Pews,  
 We’ll shew them Women have their public Use.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Chalus and Montgomery, p. 225.

<sup>257</sup> Chalus and Montgomery, p. 227.

<sup>258</sup> Chalus and Montgomery, pp. 219-249.

<sup>259</sup> Danchin, VI, pp. 487-488.

Danchin explains that the men were out of town because a general election was taking place.<sup>260</sup> As mentioned above, elections brought about political conversations in the social arena so we can imagine that the women in the audience were discussing them. By asking them two rhetorical questions – “cannot we make Laws”<sup>259</sup> and “Cannot we unmake them like the Men?”<sup>259</sup>– the actress invites women in the audience to think about how they could extend their political actions. A few women from upper classes were already canvassing for their husbands and some of them had socio-political knowledge. The words “public Use”<sup>259</sup> underline the fact that so far, they were mainly valued for their ‘domestic use’. It was probably not insignificant that the actress pointed at their potential political power at a time when women were reminded of their exclusion in the elections. Then, she introduces the political program that she would put in place:

Imprimis they shall marry: not a Man  
 Past twenty-five, but what shall wear the Chain.  
 Next, we’ll in earnest set about Reclaiming.  
 For, by my Life and Soul, we’ll put down Gaming.  
 We’ll spoil their deep destructive Midnight Play :  
 The Laws we make, we’ll force them to obey :  
 Unless we let them, when their Spirits flag,  
 Piddle with us, ye know, at Quinze and Brag.  
 [...]

Then for ourselves, what Projects, what Designs!  
 We’ll tax and double tax their nasty Wines;  
 But Duty free import our Blonds and Laces,  
*French Hoops, French Silks, French Cambricks, and – French Faces.*<sup>259</sup>

As in a political speech, she demonstrates good oratory skills and clearly structures her ideas using the linking words “imprimis”<sup>259</sup> and “then”<sup>259</sup>. Her authoritative tone probably showed the ladies in the audience that women could introduce their political ideas like men. Her tone is also aggressive, and she probably exaggerates by saying that she wants to put down all the law in favour of men. The idea of prohibiting alcohol and games was probably a way to rally women to her cause. Similarly, she caricatures the laws she will make in favour of women in order to emphasise that laws are currently made by men and in favour of men. Whether she provoked revolutionary thoughts in the audience or whether her attitude made the audience laugh is not known. Nevertheless, her ideas were quite radical and might have been an incentive for upper-class women to get more involved in politics. The audience being mainly composed of women indicates that this epilogue probably sought to foster conversation. In a century where “the polity was resolutely imagined to be male – and that assumptions about women’s nature were

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<sup>260</sup> Danchin, VI, p. 485.



understood to render them constitutionally unfit for political responsibility”<sup>261</sup> this epilogue – by using hyperbole and exaggeration – suggests a reversal of the laws: they should be made by women and in favour of women.

We are not sure whether some men were still in the audience but if so, the actress’ words might have appeared as confrontational to them. In the next stanza, the actress mimics a man asking whether women would still “consider Men are Men [...] That [they]’ll not Speak”<sup>259</sup>. To which she answers, “For this, Sir, I shall bring your on your Knees”<sup>259</sup>. Once again, she exaggerates the fact that women seek total control over men. Men in the audience might have mocked the idea of a woman taking power over them, but as argued above, humour was probably used as a social critique. The motive of the playwright in this epilogue is clearer in the last stanza:

In short, my Scheme is not complete quite,  
But I may tell ye more another Night,  
So come again, come all, and let us raise,  
Such glorious Trophies to our Country’s Praise,  
That all true *Britons* shall with one Consent,  
Cry out, “Long live the Female Parliament!”<sup>259</sup>

The actress’ story about the “Female Parliament”<sup>259</sup> seems to have been a way for the playwright to draw the female audience to come back but also a strategy to ensure their approval of the play. Although women on stage were able to advocate for the emancipation of women in their epilogues, this was part of the playwrights’ strategy to please the female patrons. Nevertheless, the words uttered on stage were heard by women and probably had an impact. It may have fostered conversation or even led some of them to talk about this epilogue in letters to their friends. As shown by Chalus and Montgomery, women could never participate directly in politics and always had to find ways and strategies to get involved.<sup>262</sup> Therefore, this epilogue should be seen as an opportunity for the actress to advocate for the participation of women in politics. In the context of general elections, it demonstrates that women were also participating in the political debate.

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<sup>261</sup> Chalus and Montgomery, p. 219.

<sup>262</sup> Chalus and Montgomery, pp. 219-249.

### 3. Women's influence on men

We have seen so far that epilogues enabled actresses to advocate for more liberty for women in society and a greater participation for them in politics. In a few epilogues throughout the period under study, actresses advise ladies that they have a natural way to hold control over men: their charms. This was also conceptualised by Rousseau in his treatise *Emile, or On Education* (1762) in which he argued that a woman's "strength is in her charms, by their means she should compel him to discover and use his strength"<sup>263</sup>. Rousseau argued that the roles between the two sexes were defined by the law of nature and men had to be strong and active while women had to be weak and passive, subjected to them. These roles according to him had to be accepted with little resistance. Paradoxically, the surest way for a woman to make a man virtuous through his strength was by using her charms.<sup>264</sup> His perspective reveals the prevalence of this argument in western thought which unsurprisingly appeared in the public discourse of that era.

The epilogue to *The Married Philosopher* (1732) delivered by Mrs Younger draws the moral that female charms always prevail over reason:

Ladies, we've treated you with what is common,  
A Man of Learning prov'd too weak for Woman.  
Reason was long oppos'd to Female Charms.  
But that and Books, were poor defensive Arms:  
The Art or Reas'ning strikes at Nature's Laws,  
And Nature always glows in Beauty's Cause :  
Her dazzling Splendor, deep Impressions leave,  
Awakes the Dull, and animates the Brave :  
In us asserts her Rights, defies the Schools,  
And, by Experience, proves all Reas'ners Fools.  
In Beauty's cause the Coward desperate fights;  
When Beauty warms, the ravish'd Poet writes.  
The sordid Miser, wretched to himself,  
When charm'd with beauty, lavishes his Pelf.  
Priests, who to heaven the sacred Path can shew,  
Subdu'd by Beauty, oft that Path forgo,  
And gladly own a Heaven is found below.  
Beware, ye Wits, nor dare our Charms provoke,  
When Men of Sense submit to Beauty's Yoke :  
Make no Pretensions to superior Pow'r ;  
The haughtiest of you all we soon can low'r<sup>265</sup>

To prove her point, the actress conjures up visual images. She opposes "res'ning"<sup>265</sup> and therefore reason to beauty. She describes beauty as an all-powerful force first by showing that

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<sup>263</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or Education*, trans. By Barbara Foxley (New York: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1911), p. 322.

<sup>264</sup> Rousseau, p. 322.

<sup>265</sup> Danchin, IV, p. 503.

as it is part of nature it is not controllable and therefore “the Art or Reas’ning strikes”<sup>265</sup> at it. Secondly, she personifies beauty in order to underline its power to transform people. It has power in all spheres of life and on every individual. Her point is that, since beauty is almost supernatural, “Men of Sense”<sup>265</sup> and “Wits”<sup>265</sup>, whenever they “submit to Beauty’s Yoke”<sup>265</sup> cannot hope to act with any reason. As argued by Soile Ylivuori, beauty was deemed to be the most important characteristics for a woman and a sign of her femininity. She explains that “beauty was a disruptive force; it shook the foundation of the patriarchal order by forcing men to abandon their rationality and self-control, and especially by giving women active agency and power over men’s feelings and actions”<sup>266</sup>. This epilogue shows women that although they might not have men’s physical power nor much influence in society and politics, they can nevertheless control them thanks to their charms. It may have also been a warning for the male audience to be careful about the fact that women might influence their decisions. Opposing beauty to reason in the epilogue was probably strategic since reason was the central concept of the Enlightenment “by which humans understand and improve[d] their own condition”<sup>267</sup>. “Female Charms” because they are part of women’s nature might represent a threat to good reasoning and men must be careful not to be subjugated. This epilogue also echoes the role of actresses in epilogues: thanks to their charms they had to seduce the audience into liking the play and as we have seen they were often sexualised.

Similarly, in the epilogue “on Shakespeare’s Women’s Characters” (1743), Woffington demonstrates that men have power only because they are supported by women:

Tho *Shakespeare* often shews that Man is brave,  
 Each, once at least, in Life’s a Woman’s Slave ;  
 Her influence guides his Heart to Good or Ill,  
 And she directs his Hand to save or kill.  
 This is a truth in ev’ry Place and Hour,  
 While Man has Strength to act, he is in Woman’s Pow’r.<sup>268</sup>

She caricatures men as women’s puppets in order to assert that in every action a man takes, he is guided by a woman. She almost describes men as deprived from any thinking but only receiving commands. Her exaggeration is meant to make women in the audience realise that – as it has been shown in patriotic and political epilogues – any actions women do such as canvassing for elections, raising patriotic children or supporting men in furthering the interest of

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<sup>266</sup> Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York: Routledge), p. 135.

<sup>267</sup> Brian Duignan, ‘Enlightenment’, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2018 <<https://bit.ly/3tKkRMw>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

<sup>268</sup> Danchin, V, p. 140.

the family plays a vital role in society. The balance of the family and the nation is only achieved when both men and women participate. Women might not act in the public arena but their support in the private arena is needed.

In conclusion, although these epilogues were a way for the playwright to win the loyalty of the female audience and at times seduce the male audience by sexualising the actress, it enabled women on stage to bond with the female audience. Actresses advocated for the inclusion of women in the public arena but also encouraged them to use their charms in order to influence men. Once again, actresses used humour, hyperbole and caricature to convey their message and to draw attention on the lack of inclusion of women in society. Although their light-hearted tone might not have been taken seriously, it is nevertheless what enabled them to relay their ideas.

## CONCLUSION

Limited research has been conducted on female prologues and epilogues performed after the first two decades of the eighteenth century and this dissertation aimed to analyse performances spoken between 1721 and 1760 seeking to bring to light the opportunity that playwrights offered to actresses to address issues related to marriage, women's emancipation and patriotism.

As a genre that derived from an old tradition in classical and medieval drama, prologues and epilogues gained popularity during the Restoration period before reaching their peak in the eighteenth century. The audience's obsession with them indicated their importance but also the fact that the words uttered on stage probably had an impact. Ironically, the popularity of prologues and epilogues was both due to the fact that they were needed to appease the unruly audience after the play but also because theatregoers were fond of them. The apparition of women on stage during the Restoration gave new meanings to these performances. Women were given the task of delivering epilogues because their charms and flirtatious attitude appealed to the male audience and therefore ensured their approval of the play. However, the subject matters addressed by actresses were more diverse than those dealt with by men and actresses were able to perform jokes and self-mockery on stage. By the 1720s, actresses became central figures in the burgeoning celebrity culture. The interest that famous actresses gathered around their persona made them central figures in the theatre but also central speakers of epilogues. Their sexually charged image was capitalised in these performances. Nevertheless, the closeness with the audience that they achieved during prologues and epilogues helped to develop feelings of intimacy between the audience and their favourite celebrity, something that playwrights took advantage of.

Between 1721 and 1760, actresses were employed by playwrights to soften the judgment of the audience. In doing this, they were perpetuating a tradition which initially appeared during classical drama. Despite the work of reformers seeking morality on stage from the early years of the century, throughout the period under study playwrights capitalised on the sexually ambiguous image of actresses. In many pieces, actresses aimed at winning the approval of the audience by seducing the men or making various sexual innuendoes. These pieces might have been prevalent in the first three decades of our study but were still present in the last decade. Female patrons were continually reached out by actresses throughout these decades. Playwrights ensured that actresses created a bond with these women since the latter played an essential role in financing plays and performers. Playwrights might have been instrumental in

their use of actresses to flatter female patrons, but women players also had to maintain good relationships with them if they wanted to enhance their fame. Over these forty years, actresses were employed by playwrights to defend their plays but nevertheless alternated between position of power and submissiveness. At times, they were meant to evoke compassion for their character or adopt a submissive and begging attitude towards the audience to win their approval. In other cases, they were able to assume authority over the playwright and the audience and command the latter's judgement. In addition to the objective of gaining public approval, playwrights also articulated their ideas about change in the theatre world through these performances. Starting in the 1720s and increasingly towards the end of the period, some of them sought to reform the taste of the audience and their acceptance of bawdy epilogues. Similarly, throughout the period under study and even beyond, playwrights continuously deplored the decline of tragedies in favour of other forms of entertainment. However, some actresses such as Catherine Clive who was politically involved in the theatre from the 1730s took part in this debate over theatrical taste.

Nevertheless, envisaging these female prologues and epilogues solely as a means for playwrights to win over the audience would fail to consider the opportunities that they offered for women on stage to comment on societal issues. Admittedly, in all prologues and epilogues under study actresses tried to win over the audience, yet, in more than a quarter of them they did not remain limited to this role but also addressed societal matters. Perhaps their position could be envisioned as submissive when they were used instrumentally by the playwrights to defend their play, but this would not take into account the power and authority that they assumed when addressing other issues.

Women on stage participated in forging a national sentiment at a time when the concept of nation was new. In the 1730s and the 1740s, Peg Woffington became a rallying figure for patriotism on stage. Alongside other actresses, she acknowledged the key role that women played in fostering loyalty and raising men's spirit for combat in times of political turmoil such as the Jacobite rising of 1745 and the Seven Years' War. Actresses conceived women as a symbol of patriotism in a newly united nation. Besides, by rejecting the French and their culture throughout the period under study, actresses contributed to shape British identity which was developed in opposition to the effeminacy of the French. Furthermore, at a time when marriage was central to most people's lives and there was an ongoing debate about arranged and affective marriage, actresses participated in this debate on stage. Even though they were ventriloquising playwrights' words they nevertheless seemed to be voicing their own ideas and might have influenced members of the audience. The stage gave them the opportunity to create a bond with

the female audience by advising them in their choice of lovers, in encouraging their sexual emancipation or by advocating for more liberty in marriage. Since marriage was not experienced in the same way by upper, middle and lower classes, actresses acknowledged this reality and addressed a variety of issues on stage that related to different women. Besides, we cannot overlook the opportunity that these performances gave women on stage to criticise and mock men in the audience. Under the guise of humour and lightness, they pointed out their lack of masculinity, lack of control over their wives and the fact that they could potentially be cuckolded. At a time when the fear of becoming effeminate and the fear of being cuckolded was widespread, women reversed gender hierarchy of power by mocking men. Finally, in a century in which women did not have the right to vote and could seldom participate in political debates, actresses acted as their spokesperson in order to advocate for more women rights. Using humour and caricature, they advocated for more opportunities for women in the public sphere and increased participation in politics. Besides, they also acknowledged the fact that women could influence men thanks to their charms. In all these performances commenting on societal matters, women often used humour, irony and caricature as means of mocking society, defending their interests and making their voice heard.

Actresses continued to perform prologues and epilogues until the early nineteenth century. In the performances following our study period, it seems that the bawdy epilogues of the Restoration that could still be found between 1721 and 1760 were gradually chastened and gave way to more sentimentalism in the last decades of the century. Nevertheless, they still remained commentaries on life. The criticism levelled against lesser form of art such as pantomimes, farces and comic operas, might have been justified since they had become the main source of entertainment by the end of the century. By then prologues and epilogues no longer referred to the play or the actors.<sup>269</sup>

This research has intended to offer a survey of the themes addressed by women in eighteenth-century prologues and epilogues and has provided a first attempt to classify and interpret these performances in relation to the context in which they were produced. Further research could focus on distinct prologues and epilogues and investigate the reception and impact they had on the theatre and in society. Besides, female performances between 1760 and 1800 have not been singled out for analysis and could be the object of further research in order to track their evolution from the period under study in this dissertation.

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<sup>269</sup> Knapp, pp. 266-311.

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