Mollies or Men of Mode?
Sodomy and the Eighteenth-Century London Stage

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Go where we will, at every time and place,
Sodom confronts, and stains us in the face.
[Charles Churchill, The Times, lines 294–95]

If the theatre is indeed a speculum mundi, it can be expected to cast back reflections of social attitudes toward sexuality, reflections whose very distortions are revealing. The eighteenth-century English stage, avowedly “public” in a new sense, has been intensely scrutinized by scholars for the light it casts on the society and politics of its time, but only recently has it been studied as a reflector of sexual constructs and concepts. When it comes to questions of sodomy, “that utterly confused category” as Michel Foucault called it, and of the evolution of a modern homosexual identity, the theatre of this period casts a great deal of light.

Historically, the popular stage has had a split personality in this respect: for the most part, it entertains by presenting normative material and reinforcing public opinion; at the same time, it is often regarded as a subversive fringe phenomenon, harboring behavior inadmissible within society itself. If the theatre in some cultures, such as Tokugawa Japan, is demonstrably informed by a homoerotic aesthetic, in others the personal deviancy of the performers and the tastes of a minority public must be disguised, neutralized, or manipulated so that they seem to endorse accepted norms. Since sodomy, by definition, implies the legal and religious injunctions that criminalize a recurrent and ubiquitous human practice, the Western stage, itself subject to similar injunctions, has had to proceed gingerly in exploiting it as dramatic material.

The present paper examines the presentation and suppression of sodomy on the post-Restoration London stage in two ways. Primarily, it
explores the portrayal of sodomites as dramatis personae, as they shift from the universally promiscuous and aggressive rake and fop to the effeminate molly to a purely comic stereotype leached of sexuality. The curve of this development follows the theatre's own conscious striving for respectability, as it bows to a number of pressures. These derive in part from licensing laws but more essentially from a middle-class audience that preferred to see sentimental love rather than sexual conquest and required the stage to endorse a newly narrowed code of acceptable private conduct. As sodomy is dropped from the admissible accomplishments of a man of fashion and becomes more closely associated with a sect of freakish, chiefly petit-bourgeois delinquents, the stage personnel in turn must be careful to keep their private lives above suspicion. Careers and reputations that in the late seventeenth century could be enhanced or at least not injured by imputations of sodomy by the mid-eighteenth century could be destroyed by such charges.

I

Anyone who has seen a revival of a Restoration comedy, at least in the United States, has probably had to suffer through a recital of simpering, campy clichés set in motion by the actor cast as the fop. A pernicious performance tradition has endowed the fop character, already pilloried by the playwright for his extravagances of dress and deportment, with mannerisms that make him seem a fugitive from the Jewel Box Revue. This is partly due to the loss of cultural context; unaware of what constituted polite behavior in the late seventeenth century, the audience is hard put to distinguish between correct bearing and gaucherie. Consequently, the latter has to be heavily underlined for the comic point to be made. But, in greater part, an assumption prevails that the fop was the Restoration equivalent of "a screaming queen," itself a long-standing caricature whose antecedents have been insufficiently investigated. Mincing, muffins, and makeup are read as outward tokens of sexual deviance.

In a perceptive article in 1982, Susan Staves attempted to rehabilitate the fop, whom she saw as a forerunner of the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility.1 Enumerating the great variety of "vestimentary fops," the shifting attitudes toward the meaning of clothing, and changes in class signifiers, Staves reads into this a new awareness of women and a penetration

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of their concerns into fashionable society over the first decades of the eighteenth century. One item in her vindication states that the Restoration fop is "rarely presented as homosexual" (p. 414). A nobleman or gentleman, the Restoration fop, while no doubt a false wit, is most definitely focused on women as sexual object as well as decorative possession. His interest in them is so strong that it is projected onto women's appurtenances, such as fine lace and the mysteries of toilette.

Crowne's title character in Sir Courtly Nice or It Cannot Be (1685) despises his fellowmen as the "odious Sex—that have not always the most inviting smell." In this respect, the Restoration fop is less bisexual than the ordinary rake. Even in Tudor times, sodomy represented merely one among many sexual outlets for modish gallants: Lineeus, the fashion plate in Marston's Cynicke Satyre, is characterized both by his "fayre appendant whore" and his "Sodome beastlines." Under Charles II, sexual polymorphism was boasted of as an accomplishment. Thomas Shadwell mocked Dryden as a braggart who swaggers, "Let's Buggre one another now by G—d," "commends Reeves Arse, and says she Buggers well," and aims at a reputation as whoremaster and sodomite. On the Restoration stage a sign of the rake's omnivorous appetite is his appreciation of epicene beauty, and adolescent pages are fair game.

Typical is the character of Nemours in Nathaniel Lee's Princess of Cleve (1689), a libertine of epic vigor; while avidly pursuing women throughout the play, he lavishes endearments on his page (who proves in the course of the action to be bisexual too): "Now by this damask Cheek I love thee; keep but this gracious Form of thine in health, and I put thee in the way of living like a man— "; "Thou dear soft Rogue, my Spouse, my Hephhestion, my Ganymed, nay, if I dye to night my Dukedom's thine"; "But be gone, and no more of this provoking discourse, lest Ravishing shou'd follow thee at the heels and spoil my sober design." How much of this was a pose of sophistication, how much a token of actual practice is not easy to determine. In Lansdowne's The She-gallants (written 1684, produced 1696), the most rabidly womanizing fops and pimps address a handsome youth (the heroine in disguise) as "My Ganymed—my Hylas" and praise him as "a Rump-Jewel for a Prince," at the same time that they complain that "pale-fac'd Catamites" are an urban blight.4

Staves specifies only two characters in the repertory of the period as “explicitly homosexual”: Coupler in Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1696) and Maiden in Baker’s *Tunbridge-Walks* (1703). The two are quite unlike one another, however: Coupler exhibits a taste for young men but has no effeminate characteristics, whereas Maiden is effeminacy incarnate but seems to have no sex drive. In labeling them as homosexual, Staves has failed to distinguish between sexual orientation and behavioral gender-crossing. Indeed, to make use of the anachronistic coinage “homosexual” (a nineteenth-century coinage that makes sexual penchant the determining factor in personality) is to overlook a transition that was occurring in English attitudes toward nonstandard sexual behavior, leading to a shift in the stage depiction of foppery. Such a distinction was already available in *The She-gallants* between the “egregious fops” who make nuisances of themselves by soliciting women and “Your smooth Beaux who’s as tender and gentle as any Lady; always trickt and perfum’d like a lady, and were it not for his Breeches, a very Lady” (p. 15). The effeminate beau or pretty gentleman was to assume the fop’s dramatic function in the early eighteenth century, and his type was then passed down in stage tradition to interfere with later perceptions of the Restoration archetype.

The mentality of the period that leads to this transition is concisely summed up by Randolph Trumbach:

Sodomy had traditionally meant any of three things: sexual intercourse between males, anal intercourse between men and women, or intercourse with beasts. In the eighteenth century it came to refer increasingly to male homosexual relations alone. This sort of sodomite was presumed to have no interest in women. By contrast, his seventeenth-century counterpart would have been found with his whore on one arm and his catamite on the other. The new exclusive adult sodomite was also supposed to be effeminate, and effeminacy lost its seventeenth-century meaning of referring both to cross-dressing boys and to men enervated by too great a sexual interest in women. The majority of eighteenth-century men therefore constructed their masculinity around their avoidance of the sodomite’s role and, instead, fervently pursued women and, of course, prostitutes.\(^5\)

\(^{5}\)Randolph Trumbach, “Modern Prostitution and Gender in *Fanny Hill*: Libertine and Domesticated Fantasy,” in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), p. 74. Distinctions in terminology are not always so clear-cut as Trumbach suggests; as late as 1766, a guidebook to London nightlife characterized “unnatural beasts [who] pay an exorbitant price for being scourged on the posteriors” by female prostitutes as of “the black school of Sodom” (*The Midnight Spy, or, A View of the Trans-
Before this period, effeminacy might or might not imply sexual ambidextrousness, but a sodomite was not assumed to be an effeminate. On the stage, the "bisexual" Restoration fop was about to be supplanted by a newer type of effeminate, whose interest in women's ways was seen as a token of his sodomitical leanings.

The wider dissemination of information, particularly after the Licensing Act expired in 1695, led to greater familiarity with the sodomitical subculture, the world of the "molly," which in turn created new assumptions about how sodomites were to be identified. Historians have lately inquired into the rise in persecutions of sodomy in England (and Holland) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a time when such persecutions were decreasing in Catholic Europe. A number of reasons have been postulated for this upsurge in persecution: a possible increase in sodomy itself as men of different classes were thrown together in the military services, especially the navy; the emergence of a sodomitical subculture from its earlier shadows; new codes of gender identity that identified manly virtue with masculine domination; and the rise of competitive capitalism and bureaucratic organization, which needed to stigmatize behavioral patterns that imperiled their purposes. Whatever the causes, there is no question that at the turn of the seventeenth century the notion of a sodomite as one who on occasion committed the "nameless act" was becoming confused with the notion of certain distinct individuals whose whole natures were defined by an exclusive sexual taste. Unlike the occasional bugger, these "woman-haters" were conspicuously unmanly, exhibiting their tastes in

actions of London and Westminster from the Hours of Ten in the Evening, till Five in the Morning [London, 1766], p. 122). Around the same time, Charles Churchill pointed out that wenching and wedlock did not prevent a man from being a sodomite (The Times [1764], in James Laver, ed., Poems of Charles Churchill [London, 1933], lines 483–94). In two articles published after the present essay was written—Randolph Trumbach, "The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Equality in Modern Culture, 1660–1750," in Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, ed. M. B. Duberman et al. (New York, 1989), pp. 129–40, and "Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The 18th and 19th Centuries Compared," in Which Homosexuality? International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies (Amsterdam, 1989), pp. 149–70—Trumbach draws much the same conclusions about the shift in public perception of sodomy from the omnisexual rake to effeminate mollie; but I believe that, at least for the earlier period, he is too categorical in his distinction between rakes and fops. He also suggests that by 1700, the bow had emerged as an intermediate type between the two, but literary usage does not invariably support so sharp a discrimination.

their outward behavior. Concepts of what constituted effeminacy and its identification with exclusive homosexual conduct were reorganized during this period.

II

Dramatic innovation reflected these changes in mentality regarding male sexual deviance. Sodomy had been a general accusation leveled by moralists against the all-male Elizabethan stage; cross-dressing could only lead to and indeed emblazon a dissolution of gender boundaries congenial to the vice. In the eyes of these attackers, playing the woman entails acting the sodomite. The moralists, for all their hysterical overstatement, were not entirely off-target: the Renaissance English theatre, with its boy-players portraying young women, must have accepted an androgynous ideal of beauty and been permeated to some degree with homophilic feeling, acceptably neutralized by performance conventions. But the reformers' cries of sodomy had to be muted when confronted with the Restoration stage, which, by presenting flesh-and-blood women as objects of sexual desire, polarized the public libido in a different way. Male lust was to be directed not at adolescent male surrogates but at attractive heroines who were available offstage to the highest bidder. Female spectators were expected to lust, more discreetly, after a hero whose virility was never in question since his onstage partners were biological women. (This notion of female desire was, of course, the assumption of a theatre shaped by masculine sensibilities and was not necessarily keyed to reality.)

When the critic John Dennis, defending the theatre from Jeremy Collier's attacks on its licentiousness, insisted that "that unnatural Sin, which is another growing Vice of the Age" was "either never mentioned [by the Stage] or mentioned with the last Detestation," he was not being disingenuous. He was willing to grant that sodomy was, of the "four reigning vices" of England, "the growing vice" (love of women, drinking, and gambling being the others); but in contrast with its fellows, it barely took up stage space. Such sodomitical allusions and episodes as appear in Restoration drama tend to be set in foreign courts and exotic locales, a transmission.


8John Dennis, "The Usefulness of the Stage" (1698), in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. E. N. Hooker (Baltimore, 1939), 1:156.
of the tradition that Catholic Italy and Muslim Turkey were the native soil for such a vice. Thomas Southerne included such a scene in the published text of Sir Anthony Love (1691), which takes place in Montpellier; in it the heroine disguised as a youth is solicited by a frisky Catholic Abbé, who is sorely disappointed when, in defense, she reveals her true sex. The scene was omitted in production, and Southerne explained in his dedication that he chose to mar his character drawing rather "than run the venture of offending the women; not that there is one indecent expression in it; but the over-fine folk running it into a design I never had in my head: my meaning was, to expose the vice; and I thought it could not be more contemptibly exposed, than in the purpose of a wanton old man, that must make even the most reasonable pleasure ridiculous." This is ingenious pleading and indirectly suggests that had the scene involved two attractive young persons, the "pleasure" might have seemed tempting. Still, it advertises a growing gentility in the audience.

As moralists began to decry more loudly the spread throughout society of the practice "Translated from the Sodomitica Original, or from the Turkish and Italian Copies into English," similar attacks on stage sodomy die down. Perhaps because the targets are increasingly whoring and loose-living actresses, the accusations that the theatre is a little Sodom decrease remarkably. Occasional charges of sodomy are leveled against particular players; but even though such rumors were meant to be damaging, there is no evidence that they adversely affected the popularity of public favorites. Not surprisingly, the first to be so attacked were those who had begun their careers as boy-players. Edward Kynaston, whom Pepys called "the prettiest woman in the whole house" (and the "handsomest man," January 7, 1661, Samuel Pepys's diary) and whose portrait was painted by that limner of feminine beauty Peter Lely, was reputed to have been the catamite of the Duke of Buckingham. The highly esteemed comedian James Nokes (or Noakes) had grown from boy-player to character actor, his roles including fops such as Mr. Puny in Cutter of Coleman Street and dames, which won him the sobriquet "Nurse Nokes." As a sideline he ran a toy shop or "nick-nackatory," the kind of trade that would later be associated with effeminates. An anonymous Satyr on the Players cruelly warns against him:

10The Preface to The Tryal and Condemnation of Mervin, Lord Audley Earl of Castle-Haven . . . 1631 . . . (London, 1699). Ned Ward half-facetiously attributed the rise in sodomy to a preliminary rise in lesbianism: "Every female has her privado of her own sex; and the honestest part of men must either fall in with the modish vice or live chastly" (Ned Ward, "Letters from the Dead to the Living," in his The London Spy: The Vanities and Vices of the Town Expos'd to View, ed. A. L. Hayward [New York, n.d.], pp. 249–50).
You Smockfaced Lads, Secure your Gentle Bums
For full of Lust and Fury See he comes!
’Tis B[ugger] Nokes, whose unwieldy [Tarse]
Weeps to be buried in his Foreman’s [Ars[e]
Unnatural Sinner, Lecher without Sence,
To leave kind [Cunt], to live in Excrements.\(^{11}\)

Yet Nokes was highly respected both in the profession and by the audience. Even “Smockfaced” William Mountfort, a leading man celebrated for his success with women, owed to his physical beauty a reputation for bisexuality. At his murder, it was said, lovers of both sexes mourned. Another, Decameronian satire portrays Lord Chancellor Jeffries’s sodomitical revenge on Mountfort for cuckoldling him:

There’s a story of late
That the Chancellor’s mate
Has been f——d and been f——d by player Mountfort;
Which though false, yet’s as true,
My Lord gave him his due,
For he had a small tilt at his bum for it.\(^{12}\)

But this sort of “revenge of the cuckold” is a common folkloric motif from the days of the fabliau.

“A Nest of Leachers worse than Sodom bore” is how one satire characterized the players.\(^{13}\) But it is remarkable that throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, actors are not singled out in the innumerable accounts of arrests and trials for sodomy, raids on houses of assignation, and descriptions of private clubs but share space with the newly defined sodomite-in-the-street: small tradesmen, artisans, Parsons,

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\(^{12}\)Poems on Affairs of State (4:72), quoted in Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses . . . in London, 1660–1800* (Carbondale, IL, 1973–), 10:354 (hereafter referred to as BDA). Montague Summers, with characteristic exaggeration, calls Mountfort “a homosexual,” and, without adding evidence, says the same of the minor actors Richard Bell, Tom Clarke, and Hildebrand Hordern (Summers, *The Playhouse of Peps* [London, 1935], p. 295). In many of his writings, Summers strews such remarks with gay abandon, often referring to “manuscript sources” for his documentation. In the standard biography, *The Life and Death of William Mountfort* (Cambridge, MA, 1935), Albert S. Borgman has nothing to say about these rumors. For the displacement of audience desire to the actress, see Katharine Eisaman Maus, “‘Playhouse Flesh and Blood’: Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress,” *English Literary History* 46 (1979): 595–617. She declares not only that audiences were relatively disinterested in the sex lives of male players but that the actress’s “claim to public notice and professional competence is based upon an . . . association of role-playing with female sexuality” inherited from the boy-player.

laborers, soldiers. The Juvenalian barbs at the fad for sodomy in the poetic satires The Town Display’d (1701) and, over half a century later, Charles Churchill’s The Town (1764) are directed only at noblemen, fashionables, and politicians. They evidently did not take the influence of players to be a significant factor in setting sexual styles. Still, if the London stage was not populated to a large degree by sodomites, it would have differed remarkably from professional theatre in every culture from the Korean namsadang and the Roman mimi on. Actors, shape-changers by vocation, were able to gratify their pendants among their fellows or to find highly placed protectors, unlike the “civilian” sodomite who had to satisfy his appetite in public places or specialized houses. The professional theatre, relegated to the fringes of society, traditionally had license to harbor unconventional behavior.

A sociological study of the modern English theatre suggests that the prevalence of male homosexuality there is due to poor economic remuneration, low occupational prestige (among the rank and file), unpredictable and unstable employment, and geographic instability. Moreover, activities such as dancing, let’s pretend, making-up, and wearing costumes are associated in the public mind with women. These conditions, says the study, militate against men forming conventional, socially sanctioned relationships, such as marriage or single-partner liaisons; whereas actresses (except for down-market strippers) tend to be glorified by the stage and can “reach higher levels of the stratification system” (p. 151). Hence, it concludes, the theatre both promotes and fosters same-sex relationships among men.

This study can be faulted for its narrowly deterministic character; it neglects the historical role of the theatre as a safehouse for the depiction of gender ambiguities and mystery within restrictive societies, although with the potential for personal expression through impersonation. However, in terms of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England, some of its propositions are apposite. With the new polarization of the audience’s libido, men attracted to the voluptuous actress, women to the manly actor, pulchritude and allure began to be seen as primarily feminine attributes. Much of Mountfort’s dubious reputation seems to have been due to his extreme good looks; he is one of the last actors (before the

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15In 1754, the paper The World devoted an issue to deploiring too much handsomeness in a young man (no. 58 [February 7, 1754]). The complaint is that when good-looking men be-
aggressively womanizing Edmund Kean of the Romantic era) around whom a sexual folklore accreted. As the male player was displaced as the central object of desire, his already low social prestige was lowered further, and, with a few exceptions, his value as a sexual partner discounted. Although noblemen will continue to take mistresses from the greenroom, scandal has fewer tales to tell of male actors’ conquests in high society among either sex.

In addition, the theatre was forced to be less overt an alternative to conventional morality, just at the time when male sexual deviance was beginning to take on a definite profile in the public consciousness. The 1730s, a period of intensive legislation against the theatre’s outspokenness, also happened to be a high-water mark of English newspaper reporting on sodomitical arrests and on the Dutch executions of seventy men for sodomy.16 In collaboration with changes in taste, the mechanisms of social control were being applied concurrently in the sexual sphere and the theatrical. As society was constructing new categories of sexual behavior, the “legitimate” theatre was pressed to cast off its raffishness. The licensing acts that sought to confine it within a more rigidly monopolistic patent system continued to confirm the status of unattached players as “rogues and vagabonds.” The famous act of June 21, 1737, though largely meant to curb unbridled and scurrilous political satire, also came into being in response to complaints that the stage was inundated with “Immorality, Scandal, and unbounded Licentiousness.”17 The charges were old; what was new was that they issued not from the pulpit and the council chamber but from the House of Commons. Arguing for such a bill in 1735, one member of Parliament declared that a proliferation of playhouses had made a sedate and solid public “extravagantly addicted to lewd and idle diversions.”18 When theatre in London became a closed shop, with the patent

have as he-men, drinking, smoking, wenching, they come across as “Mrs Woffington in Sir Harry Wildair, making love to Angelica.” In other words, the discrepancy between male beauty and male behavior conjures up a male impersonator! That the modern equation of physical beauty to femininity was constructed in the Renaissance is argued in Marie-Claude Phan, “‘A faire belle,’ à faire femme,” *Communications* 46 (1987): 67–78.


18James Erskine, who also referred to the overpaid castrati at the Opera as “those animals” (quoted in Nicholson, pp. 56–57). For attacks on stage morality culminating in the Act of 1737, see Joseph Wood Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration* (New York, 1924), chap. 7.

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playhouses regarded as national institutions, actors had to conform to new standards of personal conduct or face disfavor and unemployment.

David Garrick, whose aspirations to respectability have been well documented and analyzed, is the clearest exemplar of the trend, anxious to integrate the player into the dominant society by bowing to its prejudices. By the mid-eighteenth century, partly by Garrick's efforts, the stage was trying to conciliate moralists and achieve an honorable status by disavowing its earlier bohemianism and sexual polymorphism. Those who clung to the older, looser ways tended to become marginal: the most garish instance, one that has riveted feminist attention of late, is that of Colley Cibber's cross-dressing daughter, Charlotte Charke. This helps to explain why mere accusations of sodomy against Isaac Bickerstaff and Samuel Foote later in the century injured them in ways unthinkable sixty years earlier.

In its evolving gentility, the theatre could validate its credentials for social utility by attacking only those abuses that might be mentioned in mixed company. Sodomy per se could not be pilloried without the stage being accused of obscenity; but it might be obliquely attacked through satire of effeminate behavior, which was increasingly identified with male-to-male sexuality. The identification of effeminacy with sodomy became an admissible dramatic code.

III

Colley Cibber confessed that his success in playing fops came from the archetypal pattern set for the role by Mountfort. Mountfort's impersonation of Sir Courtly Nice, for instance, was characterized by "the insipid, soft Civility, the elegant and formal Mien, the drawling delicacy of Voice, the stately Flatness of his Address, and the empty Eminence of his Attitudes," as well as by a pleasing counter-tenor in ballad singing. These traits combine "feminine" mollitude with an aristocratic impassivity: stateliness, formality, and eminence remind the spectator that, for all his quirks, the character is a well-bred nobleman. It might be noted that in his treatise on acting, John Hill classified the fop as a character "of politeness," which, though comic, was not a "clown," and that such characters required actors conversant with polite manners to play them, for "we have seen real fops in life make miserable ones on stage."

The earliest character cited by Susan Staves as "homosexual," Couper in The Relapse, does not partake of any of these qualities of the classic fop. A member of the artisan class, Couper pursues a trade, matchmaking, which is closely allied to procuring. Two other pederasts, the Abbé in Sir Anthony Love and Sir Jolly, the "old Goat" in Otway's Souldier's Fortune, are also go-

between, which suggests that the stage sodomite was viewed as a male Celestina whose titillation derived from voyeurism. Like them too, Coupler is advanced in years: the creator of the role, Benjamin Johnson, in this phase of his career specialized in comic old men and obscene interludes (just as the creator of the Abbé, Anthony Leigh, was famous for shady clergymen and fumbling old age). The penchant for mauling young men comes across as a senile vice, the exhausted debauchee’s spur to the flesh. And even though Young Fashion first spurns Coupler’s advances, he ultimately acquiesces, masks his squeamishness, and rewards the go-between for his ingenious plot. “Old Sodom’s” tastes, then, like those of the Abbé, Sir Jolly, and even Sir Davy Dunce in the Otway comedy, are presented not as an exclusive behavior pattern and a mortal sin but as simply another vagary of superannuated lechery.

As for Staves’s other “homosexual,” he may be taken to mark the initial appearance of a new type, drawn from life. Commenting in 1700 on how fads are ridden to death in London, the journalist Tom Brown noted that “the same folly infected the theatre, where a beau, at his first appearance upon the stage, happening to tickle the fancies of the auditors, you could have never a play without that animal to set it off. The first beau diverted them with his huge muff, the second with his monstrous periwig, the third with buttons as big as turnips, the fourth with an extraordinary cravat, the fifth with a fantastical sword-knot; ’twas the same original coxcomb all the while, but only a little diversified.”21 If the character of the beau had become so hackneyed by 1700, Maiden’s distinction from the standard stage fop must have been extreme to warrant memorial as a prototype. Masculine overattention to self-adornment had previously been considered vicious or ludicrous, but still a secondary characteristic. With the increased prominence of women on the stage and what commentators saw as the “feminization” of society, foppery was now taken as a sign of ingrained effeminacy, an inherent unmanning.

In discussing Thomas Baker’s Tunbridge-Walks, or The Yeoman of Kent, the Biographia Dramatica stipulates that

the character of Maiden, which is perhaps the original of all the Friibbles, Beau Mizens, &c. that have been drawn since, and in which effeminacy is carried to an height beyond what any one could conceive to exist in any man in real life, was absolutely, and without exaggeration, a portrait of the author’s former character, whose understanding having at length pointed out to him the folly he had so long been guilty of, reformed it altogether in his subsequent be-

haviour, and wrote the character, in order to set it forth in the most ridicule light, and warn others from that rock of contempt, which he had himself for some time been wracked upon. [4:358]

The reformation seems to have been shortlived, for another notice in the same work suggests that Baker's poor relations with his father late in life were due in part to his "effeminate turn of disposition" (1:16). Since the Biographica Dramatica was eager to defend Baker's reputation as a dramatist from the earlier detractions of Whincop, it is clearly not trying to defame him; and even Baker's Victorian chronicler in the Dictionary of National Biography, while admitting there is no hard evidence for these allegations, does not disclaim them.

In Tunbridge-Walks, two fool characters are listed in the dramatis personae: "Maiden, a Nice-Fellow, that values himself upon his Effeminacies" and "Squib, a Flutt'ry, Fop-Militia Captain." Despite the adjective "flutt'ry," which here implies simply "frivolous," the character denominated as "fop" is an updating of the traditional miles gloriosus and is much less vividly drawn than the more innovative Maiden. The pairing of the effeminate and the bragart warrior would remain a standard comic device. Maiden is essentially extraneous to the plot, and his appearances chiefly give him the opportunity to define his nature. Unlike the fops in Restoration drama or even in Congreve, whose vanity and pretenses to wit are ridiculed, it is Maiden's lady-like qualities that are dwelt on from his first entrance in act 1.

Woodcock. You—Thou Effeminate Coxcomb, Dost think she'll like one of her own sex—[Aside.] . . .

Maiden. Why, I can Sing, and Dance, and play upon the Guitar, make Wax-Work, and Fillagree, and Paint upon Glass. Besides I can dress a Lady up a Head upon Occasion, for I was put Prentice to a Milliner once, only a Gentleman took a fancy to me, and left me an Estate; but that's no Novelty, for abundance of People now-a-days take a fancy to a handsome Young Fellow. . . . For I can Raffle with the Ladies, Dance with them, and Walk with 'em in publick, I never desire any private Love-favours from 'em. 23

This aria of introduction makes some claims that are new to the comic fop. In particular the datum that he served as eromenos to a wealthy gentleman automatically puts him in the category of pathetic or catamite, whereas the fop was invariably the aggressor and active party in his liaisons. "People's"

22Baker's fastidiousness can have been only skin-deep, if Whincop is right in claiming he died of morbus pediculorum, a skin disease due to lice infestation.

23Thomas Baker, Tunbridge-Walks, or, The Yeoman of Kent (London, 1703), pp. 7–8. Subsequent citations to this work will be made in parentheses in the text.
amorous interest in handsome young fellows suggests an *embourgeoisement* of Lord Rochester’s aristocratic indifference to whether his prick entered a boy or a woman.

Hillaria the heroine complains that when two fops meet in a side-box at the theatre, they exhibit “The Side-Bow, the Embrace, and the fulsome Trick you/ Men have got of kissing one another” (act 2, p. 16). This is an old complaint, first made in 1684 by the orange woman in Etherege’s *Man of Mode*, where it alluded to Continental court manners introduced by the Restoration. (To complicate viewpoints, the orange woman was played by a male actor, George Bright.) Hillaria’s plaint is more original when it grieves that “the Greatest Beaux we have about town, now are Milliners, Mercers, Lawyers Clerks, and ‘tis such upstart Fellows that ruine so many poor Tradesmen; for amongst ‘em all you’ll scarce find a Periwig that’s paid for” (act 4, p. 60). The *embourgeoisement* of aristocratic tastes grows apace and, with a wider circulation of money and consumer goods, can be more readily indulged. Sparkish in Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* complained that all the fools on stage are knights; whereas the moral of Mary Pix’s *The Beau Defeated* (1700) is that fops are not gentlemen, but upstarts. Her fortune-hunting beau, Sir John Roverhead, for all his “Patchig, Powdering like a Woman, and squeaking like a Eunuch,” turns out to be a valet, trained into foppery by his fond mistress.24

Maiden’s middle-class status as man-milliner, a relatively new profession, automatically makes him a comic overreacher, aspiring to airs and graces beyond his birthright. It represents the debasement of fashion through cultural seepage. Baker seems to have promulgated this new type, for he is also purported to be the author of a scabrous gazette, *The Female Tatler*,25 in one issue of which (1709) “Mrs Crackenthorpe” describes a fashion boutique in Ludgate Hill, where the shop assistants were the “sweetest, fairest, nicest, dish’d out Creatures; and by their Elegant Address and Soft Speeches, you would guess them to be Italians.”26 Italian had long been a synonym for sodomite. The three owners, purveyors of “Gay Fancies,” are “positively the greatest Fops in the Kingdom”: the fop as shopkeeper is now installed in the comic gallery. There is an implicit belief that anyone so intimately connected with women’s fripperies will catch the contagion of womanishness, so man-milliner becomes a standard euphemism for effeminacy of sodomite. Throughout the nineteenth and into the

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26Quoted in Gerald Howson, *Thief-taker General: The Rise and Fall of Jonathan Wild* (London, 1970), p. 64. Compare “Look, yonder’s a Jew treading upon an Italian’s foot, to carry on a sodomitical intrigue, and bartering their souls here for fire and brimstone in another world” (Brown, p. 25).
twentieth centuries, ribbon clerks and counter-jumpers will be parodied as prissy sissies in plays, novels, comic valentines, and picture postcards. By 1914, the man-milliner takes on a villainous tinge: Leon Quartermaine will enjoy great success playing Jacquelina, “the malignant, unscrupulous and evilly-cunning dressmaker” in *My Lady’s Dress*, with the requisite mincing gait and limp-wristed gestures.27

Maiden admits at the start that he has no sexual interest in the women he frequents, which also sets him in a different world from Sir Fopling Flutter and Lord Foppington. Hillaria sighs, “I find nothing can be made of this Fellow, there’s somewhat in his Nature contrary to Love” (act 4, p. 42), but Maiden has already candidly admitted that he “never lay with a Woman in my life” (act 3, p. 30). Staves contends that the Restoration fop also exhibits “a lack of strong sexual appetite [which] was itself, in the increasingly polite mind of the eighteenth century, female or effeminate,” but this overlooks the sodomitical associations of effeminacy.28 Moreover, a sharper distinction must be made between the low libidinal temperature of the Restoration fop and an equivalent asexuality in the Maiden figure. The Fopling Flutterys and Foppingtons are patrician narcissists, so fixated on their own persons that they are indifferent to others;29 in this, they are still comrades-in-arms of the manlier Restoration rakes who may be polymorphously lecherous but are also egocentrically negligent of their bedmates’ feelings. The fastidiousness of the Restoration fop, his sensitivity to coarse smells and fine lace, are essentially solipsistic. With the emergence of eighteenth-century sensibility, this amalgam of fop and rake is no longer possible, and “breeding” rather than birth, fortune, or fashion is the hallmark of the gentleman. Maiden protests: “There’s as much different between Men of Breeding, and Rakes, as between a Lady’s fine Shock, and an ugly Dutch Mastiff—One knows a Gentleman by a great deal of good Manner, and a chaste, modest look that may be trusted in a Lady’s Bed-Chamber; and a Rake by a dirty double Button Coat, a cursed long Sword, and dam’d Irish Face, with more Impudence than the Box-keepers that are always teasing Quality for Money” (act 2, p. 22).

Obviously, the contrast between the chaste look and the long sword is freighted with sexual innuendo, emphasized later when Maiden admits, “I am naturally Apprehensive of a naked Sword” (p. 25). But for all the satirical intent, Baker is signaling a serious alteration in criteria for good society. Maiden is in the forefront of a new bourgeois gentility. When shoved aside, instead of picking a fight, he sighs only, “Breeding.”

The rakes’ congregating for long drunken orgies at low taverns had al-

28Staves (n. 1 above), p. 415.
29Of a beau, Ned Ward remarked, “He is a Narcissus that is fallen in love with himself and his own shadow” (Ward [n. 10 above], p. 280).
ready been supplanted by the polite coffeehouse. Now it is further tamed by the “nice fellows.”

_Maiden._ When I was at School . . . I lov’d mightily to play with the Girls, and dress Babies, and all my Acquaintance now never quarrel’d in their lives. . . . Oh! The best Creatures in the World; we have such Diversion, when we meet together at my Chambers. There’s Beau_Simper_, Beau_Rabbitsface_, Beau_Eithersex_, Colonel_Coachpole_, and Count_Drivell that sits with his Mouth open, the prettiest Company at a bowl of Virgin-Punch; we never make it with Rum nor Brandy—like your Sea Captains, but two Quarts of Mead to half a pint of White Wine, Lemon-Juice, Burridge, and a little Perfume. Then we never read Gazets, nor talk of_Venlo_ and_Vigo_, like you Coffee-House Fellows; but play with Fans, and mimick the Women, Scream, _hold up your Tails_, make_Curtsies_, and _call one another_, _Madame_—[Act 3, pp. 30–31]

Pressed to go a tavern, Maiden cries “O Lard [sic] I shall be Ravish’d” (p. 31). It even appears that he savors cross-dressing and once attended the theatre in “Lady Fussack’s Cherry-colour Damask” and was taken for a “Dutch Woman of Quality” (act 2, p. 21). Significantly, the role of Maiden was first created by the actor Bullock, who came of a family of players that specialized in dame roles as well as fops, which suggests that Maiden was, in the playing, conceived of as a conflation of the two lines of business. Since, at the time he wrote the play, expositions of sodomitical gathering-places were not common, Baker may well have based the description above on personal experience, making this play the earliest known description of the society of mollies. If he was in fact the model for his own Maiden, it may also explain a certain ambiguity in the treatment of the character. Although the extreme effeminacy is set up for ridicule, Maiden suffers no real defeat, for his pursuit of the ladies is half-hearted at best (“tho’ we Beaus seldom care for Marriage, ’tis pretty to have the Ladies fond of us” [act 4, p. 40]). He is portrayed not as an isolated freak but as the member of a coterie, which is identifiable as a component of society: “I have chambers at the_Temple_, and keep a Levee, and a Visiting-Day; for since the Lawyers are all turned Poets, and have taken the Garrets in_Druery-Lane_, none but Beaus live at their_Temple_ now, who have sold all their Books, Burnt all their Writings, and furnish’d the Rooms with Looking glass and_China_” (act 2, p. 21). (A nice taste in interior decoration and fine porcelain was a sign of an exquisite long before the Victorian caricatures of the Aesthetic movement.)

The portrayal of the effeminates who appear in John Leigh’s_Kensington Gardens_, or_The Pretenders_ (1718) is more implicitly censorious. Leigh was a

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30_BDA_ (n. 12 above) on Bullock, 2:399–401.
much employed actor at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, nicknamed “Handsome Leigh” for what Chetwood called his “particular amiable Form, and genteel Address.” But Chetwood qualified these charms by remarking that Leigh “might have been in the good Graces of the Fair-Sex, if his Taste had led him that Way.” 3¹ One might expect him to provide a more sympathetic portrait, but in fact, the two effeminate characters in Kensington Gardens, Varnish and Bardach, are delineated more negatively than Baker’s Maiden; and Leigh, who specialized in the roles of lovers and heroes, was careful to play the romantic lead in his own comedy.

Even their names are giveaways. Maiden had merely indicated a mild and girlish temperament. Varnish announces hypocrisy and deceit, and in Leigh’s comedy he is referred to misogynistically as “A Woman in Masquerade—a cringing, affected self-conceited Fop; with no more brains than a Dancing-master.” 3² The condemnation of Bardach is even stronger; his name, from the French bardache, a word in use since the middle of the sixteenth century, implicitly accuses its bearer of unnatural proclivities. Randal Cotgrave’s French-English dictionary had defined it as “an Ingle, a youth kept, or accompanied for sodomy”; by the eighteenth century, bardache was contrasted with bougre, the former seen as the passive, the latter as the agent in sodomitical copulation. It entered English in the 1690s as a smear of William III’s male favorites but also came to describe an ornamental sash, the confusion of the sexual and the sartorial once again in evidence. 3³

In Kensington Gardens, the unmanned fop has moved even further down the social scale. Bardach is a thieving valet who excuses his crimes by his tastes: “No Scripture ever declar’d that stealing China or Books was a Sin,” he protests. 3⁴ In a scene with his counterpart, an affected lady’s maid, he reveals both his effeminacy and his mendacity.

*  
Bardach. Your Apron is exceeding pretty! Pray, Madam, is it your own Work?  
Spleen. No, indeed, Sir. ’Twas given me by a young Gentleman.  
Bardach. A young Gentleman! I warrant, a pretty young Gentleman, if his Person be as Agreeable as his Fancy.  
Spleen. Yes, I assure you; and ’twas all his own Work too.

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3² John Leigh, Kensington Gardens (London, 1720), act 1, scene 2.
3⁴ Leigh, act 1, scene 2.
Bardach. His own work! Well, I vow and swear now, I thought so—I have nothing about me that's my own Work, except this Trifle of a Cravat—Oh, I lye, my Face is entirely my own Work; my Morning's work too.35

The play ran for no more than six nights, its lack of success due in part perhaps to the growing unpopularity of the effeminate, whose identification with the sodomite was more evident to the general public. Thomas Baker's male-milliners were contemporary with what have been called the "homosexual pogroms" of 1699 and 1707; it is unclear whether his play and gazette helped the public identify the victims they were seeking or tried to cash in on a new awareness of the victims' existences. Perhaps a little of both. His writing coexisted with works like The Women-Haters Lamentation (1707) and He-Strumpets (1707, 1710), which described in disapproving detail networks of sodomites in England.

Throughout the 1720s, the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, which had called for the suppression of playhouses as early as 1694, publicized, through their arrests and raids, the existence of a sodomitical "underground," the prevalence of open-air encounters, and, especially, the molly-houses, places of assignation rather than brothels, where like-minded men could meet for fun, frolic, and fornication. Ned Ward, reporting on a molly-house in his 1709 History of London Clubs, described it in the bemused tone of an urban tourist; the mood of the 1720s was more juridical and prejudicial. The number of trials for sodomy increased, be-speaking a greater public awareness of the subculture. Even the Bishop of London in a pastoral letter of 1728 felt moved to warn that "a new sort of Vice of a very horrible nature, and almost unknown before in these parts of the world, was springing up and gaining ground among us, if it had not been checked by the seasonable Care of the Civil Administration."36 What had been thought of as an aristocratic vice was seen to permeate all levels of society.

Most of the sodomites arrested and tried were indistinguishable from

35Ibid., pp. 50–51.

the rest of the population: solid fathers of families, hitherto respectable tradesmen, schoolmasters, and clerics, generally mature in age. But the reports on the molly-houses stressed the transvestitic masquerade and gender playacting of their inmates, and this sensational element made a profound impression on the popular imagination. Male prostitutes often worked under such noms de guerre as Mademoiselle Gent or Plump Nelly; but “in molly-houses all men, whether effeminate or not, were likely to be called Madam or Miss or your Ladyship. They spoke to each other as though they were female whores: ‘Where have you been saucy Queen? If I catch you strolling or caterwauling, I'll beat the milk out of your breasts I will so.’”³⁷

Most of the entertainments were performed “in drag,” so that their performers might appear before the magistrate in gowns, petticoats, and bonnets, the “come-as-you-are” status at the time of arrest. What more natural than that the public should assume that a man of feminine appearance, pursuits, or temperament was likewise a sodomite? It could no longer be assumed that the effeminate beau was asexual; since it was expected that an effeminate man would fancy other men, it became hard to conceive that a “manly”-looking man should share the same tastes. The hypermasculine aggression of the rake who buggers boys had been definitively replaced in the public mind by the notion of an intermediate gender whose sex drive was either denatured or unnatural.

IV

By mid-century the attitude had solidified, and journalistic accounts dwell upon what seems to them the anomaly of ordinary members of society going in for this exotic vice and adopting womanly behavior and address. The theatre continued to make use of the discrepancy for comic effect: the public delighted in incongruous drag on stage, as when Garrick, playing the churlish Sir John Brute in The Provok'd Wife, disguised himself as a woman and attacked the watch or when ugly Samuel Foote impersonated a Methodistical, tippling bawd; even Sir John Roverhead, the fake fop in The Beau Defeated, for all his mock-delicacy had been “bigger than a Whale” (prologue). But when a similar incongruity between allegedly “feminine” behavior and masculine appearance occurred in reality, it was met with shocked indignation. Attacks on beaux in the gazettes return to this with regularity. The World complained of “these louts of six feet high, with the shoulders of porters and the legs of chairman, [who] affect ‘to lisp, and to amble, and to nick name God's creatures.’”³⁸ The Connoisseur allowed that some men are “of such delicate make and silky constitution” and naturally

³⁸The World, no. 58 (February 7, 1754).
incline toward feminine refinement; but "what indeed can be more absurd, than to see a huge fellow with the make of a porter, and fit to mount the stage as a champion at Broughton's amphitheatre, sitting to varnish his broad face with paint and Benjamin-wash? For my part, I never see a great looby aiming at delicatess, but he seems as strange and uncouth a figure as Achilles in petticoats." These comments, directed at sartorial abuses, are still couched in terms of amused scorn ("surely we may laugh at such incorrigible idiots," said The World). When the discrepancy between masculine constitution and "feminine" manners leads to sodomy, the accusation is pitched in tones of outrage. A regency account of a later molly-house in The Phoenix of Sodom or the Vere Street Coterie (1813) is explicit: "It is a generally received opinion, and a very natural one, that the prevalency of this passion has for its object effeminate delicate beings only: but this seems to be . . . a mistaken notion; and . . . Fanny Murry, Lucy Cooper, and Kitty Fishers, are personified by an athletic Bargeman, an Herculean Coal-heaver, and a deaf tyre Smith: [who must be] monsters."

The paragon of effeminate fops on the stage of this period was Garrick's creation Fribble. Here too, an incongruous individual was cited as an original model for the character:

... a Person who is a very Falstaff in Size, yet speaks and moves for all the world like a Lady. This same delicate Object came not long since into a Coffee House, with his Hand muffled in black silk, and told a deplorable Story of a Hurt received, in Voice almost as fine, and Manner quite as melancholy as does the Fribble of Garrick; the Weapon of Offence indeed was not the same desperate one, a Whip, but a Fan, with which a cruel Lady had unfortunately struck him over the Thumb.

Garrick, being a little man, could not achieve this effect of incongruity, but he could crystallize the type for the increasingly genteel stage.

Garrick's farcical afterpiece Miss in Her Teens; or, The Medley of Lovers (1747) hangs on the standard plot of an eligible young woman oppressed by absurd suitors and was based on a slight French comedy; he may also have seen Baker's Tunbridge-Walks, which was revived in 1738 (and would be again in 1748 in the wake of Garrick's successful refurbishing of the effeminate role). Garrick's idea was to sharpen the satire by turning a timid suitor in Dancourt's original into a topical type, a "pretty gentleman." The name Fribble itself meant merely "a trifle," "a bagatelle," and its earlier use in drama had borne no connotations of effeminacy. Fribble in Thomas

39 The Connoisseur, no. 65 (April 24, 1755).
40 The Phoenix of Sodom, or the Vere Street Coterie (London, 1813), pp. 12–13.
Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* (1672) is a married haberdasher, whose plot function is that of deceived cuckold, while Fopling Fribble in *The Battle of the Poets* (1731) was intended as a lampoon of Colley Cibber. It was Garrick's performance that made Fribble a byword for effeminacy. His Fribble is out to be married but shares the characteristics of the preexisting stage type—he makes his own lip pomatum, takes milk poultices, attends bachelor tea parties, and promises, after marriage, to assume all domestic responsibilities. Like Maiden, he prides himself on his "civility," but (less urbane than Hillaria in *Tunbridge-Walks*) the Miss to be married proclaims "I hate the sight of him" as soon as he has complimented her prudence and beauty.

Garrick is more brutal than his precursors in constantly putting Fribble in physical danger. Mere mockery is not enough for him; he must abuse his molly. Fribble relates how a hackney coachman after insulting him by saying, "I'll carry you and your doll too, Miss Margery, for the same price," strikes him a cut with his whip on a fingernail; and how three drunken "naughty women" broke up one of the tea parties, smashing the china and looking-glasses, scalding and scratching the guests. Clearly, Garrick expects his audience to be on the side of the brutal coachman and the marauding whores, the representatives of normal virility and femininity. At a period when convicted sodomites were set in the stocks to be blinded and battered by whole carts of offal flung by an abusive mob, Garrick simply voices popular sentiment.

The set piece of the play is a duel manqué between the terrified Fribble and yet another braggart warrior, which owes something to *Twelfth Night*. In the denouement, the miles gloriosus is given a rude dressing-down, but Fribble, as the one representative of a whole class, is dismissed solely with scorn.

*Captain Loveit*. Thou art of a species too despicable for correction; therefore, be gone; and if I see you here again, your insignificance shan't protect you. 42

In a recent study, Leigh Woods sees Garrick's decision to play Fribble as an effort to trivialize "his image, with an eye to countering any public alarm at his growing influence" and "to moderate the public's sense of him as a charmer and manipulator in his personal affairs." 43 Woods's thesis requires the effeminate character to have been used as an emblem for social impotence, harmlessness, and futility, which means it would have lost its taint of pernicious immorality or unnaturalness. Otherwise, Garrick's ploy would


not have worked. The problematic element here is whether the London audience so identified actors with their roles, especially in the case of Garrick who was noted for his versatility. Colley Cibber, it is true, pretended to believe that the impersonation of Fribble was so convincing because Garrick was himself a Fribble, but this was merely Cibber’s jab at “character acting.” It is more likely that Garrick’s success in the role, as with his portrayal of Abel Dragner, came in part from its contrast with his public image, not unlike Richard Burton and Rex Harrison “daring” to play stereotypical queens in the film Staircase (directed by Stanley Donen, 1969). Rather than disempowering himself in the guise of a pretty gentleman, Garrick highlighted his own potency and virtuosity by getting under the skin of so alien a being.

Fribble was the mainspring of the play’s popularity, as one of its first spectators testifies: “Nothing can be lower [than Garrick’s farce] but the part he cuts in it himself (Mr Fribble) he makes so very ridiculous that it is really entertaining.” She too attested that the caricature was taken from life, “It is said he mimics eleven men of fashion.” Fribble, therefore, was appreciated not only as a masterpiece of comic playing but also as a satirical reflection of an extant phenomenon that had apparently spread far enough beyond the individual case to be familiar, not only to the fashionable world but to the public at large as well.

The playwright Arthur Murphy’s statement that the Fribbles were “laughed out of society” may be questioned, although Lord Chesterfield noted at this time that the fashion that new fad among fashionable young men was to avoid elegance and to dress as country bumpkins. According to Murphy, Garrick’s models had made “a display of delicacy that exceeded female softness”—they clove more to an ideal of feminine frailty than women did. Two years later, a moralistic exposé, Satan’s Harvest Home, was still inveighing against effeminate dress, equating it with the crime of sodomy.

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44Carola Oman, David Garrick (London, 1958), p. 43. John Hill (n. 20 above) thought Cibber the best Lord Foppington because he was “in real life (with all due respect be it spoken by one who loves him) something of the coxcomb.”


47Satan’s Harvest Home, or, The Present State of Whorecraft, Adultery, Fornication, Procuring, Pimping, Sodomy, and the Game at Flatts (London, 1749), pp. 50–51. The author also objects to fashionable dress because it prevents one from distinguishing a gentleman from a footman; in other words, sodomitical habits lead to leveling of ranks, a frequent objection to homosexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the growth of “homophobia” as a result of the economic restructuring of modern Western societies, see David F. Greenberg and Marcia H. Bystren, “Capitalism, Bureaucracy and Male Homosexuality,” Contemporary Critic 8 (1984): 33–56.
the sake of politeness and plot, Garrick did not impute sexual deviancy to his character, but the popular imagination could read into Fribble more than he put there. This is suggested by the alacrity with which the name was taken as generic and applied to men whose effeminacy went beyond sartorial and behavioral matters to undermine their sexuality.

An anonymous pamphlet of 1747, attacking the “pretty gentleman” under the guise of praising him, used barely veiled terms that could be readily interpreted by any contemporary reader.48 Staves believes there is an ambivalence in the anonymous author’s ironic use of terms such as “mollifying elegance,” “refinement,” and “cultivation” since, in other contexts, these are signs of good taste.49 A more pejorative ambiguity lurks in other phrases. The author enters into a history of “pretty gentlemen” and points out that the first came into England in the reign of James I, a monarch notorious for his male favorites.50 Buffeted by various opponents, at the present time (1747) they “have erected themselves into an amicable Society,” the Fraternity of Pretty Gentlemen. Their motto is given as “Magna est inter mollis concordia!” which means “Great is the harmony among the soft,” but with a macaronic pun on Molles, pronounced mollies.51 The pamphlet then proceeds to list a pretty gentleman’s characteristics, including the usual attributes of feminine occupations, weak-mindedness, affected pronunciation, overfastidiousness, and, a newer charge, membership in an intermediate gender. “Observe that fine Complexion! Examine that smooth, that Velvety skin! View that Pudor which spreads itself over his Countenance! Hark, with what a feminine Softness his Accents steal their Way through his half-opened Lips! Feel that soft Palm! . . . The whole System is of a finier Turn, and superior Accuracy of Fabric, insomuch that it looks as if Nature had been in doubt, to which Sex she should assign him.”52 This is no longer the comic discrepancy between Falstaffian girth and maidenly manners, but the description of an entity integral in all its properties. This is stressed again in the peroration, where “Genuine Elegance” is given as the exclusive attribute of “The Happy Metamorphosis,—Or, The Gentleman turned Lady.”53

When he was attacked in 1761 by Thaddeus Fitzpatrick’s Enquiry into the Real Merit of a Certain Popular Performer, Garrick himself chose to make

48[Nathaniel Lancaster], The Pretty Gentleman, or, Softness of Manners Vindicated from the False Ridicule under the Character of William Fribble, Esq. (1747), ed. Edmund Goldsmid (Edinburgh, 1885). Lancaster was a literary cleric who penned anonymous indecencies to pay for his extravagances.
49Staves (n. 1 above), pp. 419–20.
50Ibid., p. 10.
51Ibid., pp. 12, 13.
53Ibid., p. 30.
a wider application of his Friable character and, in the process, emphasized the existence of a diabolical “third sex.” Fitzpatrick led a group of fashionable young men who called themselves the Town; Charles Churchill later added a description of him to the eighth edition of his *Rosciaed* (1763):

> A motley figure, of the Friable tribe,  
> Which heart can scarce conceive or pen describe,  
> Came simpering on; to ascertain whose sex  
> Twelve sage, impannell'd matrons would perplex;  
> Nor male, nor female; neither, and yet both;  
> Of neuter gender, though of Irish growth;  
> A six-foot suckling, mincing in its gait,  
> Affected, peevish, prim and delicate.  

Again the incongruity between delicate manners and manly frame is emphasized; and the satirist is particularly annoyed that these milksops were setting themselves up as arbiters of taste. The effeminate who boasts of his connoisseurship, because of his finer senses, seems to become prominent in the 1750s, along with the rise of what is now known as the “opera queen.” The caption to a caricature of October 1756, showing the prima donna Mingotti honored with tributes by various fans, specifically berates “the soft enervate tribe / Their country selling for a song; how eager they subscribe!”

The British stage had become exempt from accusations of sodomy in part because those charges were now leveled at the Italian opera. The freakishness of its castrati stars and outlandish language associated it with sodomy as another unnatural import from the Mediterranean. John Dennis had been one of the first in the field to note ironically, “an *Englishman* is deservedly scorn’d by *Englishmen*, when he descends so far beneath him as to sing or to dance in publik, because by doing so, he practises Arts which Nature has bestow’d upon effeminate Nature’s.” By midcentury, moralists were complaining that the Italian opera was a major contributing factor in the breeding of sodomites: the English stage was now seen, in contrast, as a national school of character building. English comedy and tragedy would fortify its audiences’ morals, whereas young spectators were softened and effeminized by opera, as well as by masquerades, ridottos, and

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54 Laver, ed. (n. 5 above), 1:9, lines 141–49.
55 Thomas Wright, *England under the House of Hanover*, 2d ed. (London, 1884), 1:347–48. The high point of the operatic castrati’s popularity in London had been the 1730s, again concurrent with the “homosexual pogroms.”
56 John Dennis, “Essay on the Opera’s after the Italian Manner” (1706), in Hooker, ed. (n. 8 above), 1:391.
assemblies. Pretenders to taste who preferred opera must be suspect in their sexuality.

Churchill’s depiction of Fitzpatrick and his connoisseur comrades built on that in Garrick’s satiric poem The Fribbleriad (1761), where they are subsumed amid a convenicle of neuters. Garrick launches a much harsher attack than earlier against what he sees as a third sex.

A man, it seems—‘tis hard to say—
A woman then?—a moment pray;—
Unknown as yet by sex or feature,
Suppose we try to guess the creature;
Whether a wit, or a pretender?
Of masculine or female gender?

The denomination “creature” effectively dehumanizes the Fribbles and places them in the category of freaks of nature, thus withholding from them the empathy that even a Maiden had enjoyed. Garrick underlines this by denying his Fribbles whom he calls “the curse of nature” the ability to enjoy:

Whose rancour knows nor bounds nor measure,
Feels every passion, takes no pleasure;
The want of power, all peace destroying,
For ever wishing, ne’er enjoying—
So smiling, smirking, soft in feature,
You’d swear it was gentlest creature—
But touch its pride, the lady-fellow,
From sickly pale, turns deadly yellow—
Male, female, vanish—fiends appear—
And all is malice, rage, and fear.

Granted, the conventions of the Horatian satire promote just such abusive hyperbole when attacking a literary foe, but the equation of effeminate with fiend seems to tap into an older demonology for the persecution of sodomy. In fact, the whole scenario of the conspiratorial gathering was based by Garrick on Satan’s assembly in Hell in Paradise Lost.

In the fourteen years between Miss in Her Teens and The Fribbleriad there had been a witch-hunt against sodomy, which colored common attitudes toward pretty gentlemen. That Garrick now explicitly imputes sodomy to the mincing tribe is evident from his choice of images. One member of the club is described in terms that would apply to a latter-day “pansy.”

57 Satán’s Harvest Home, pp. 55–58.
59 Ibid., pp. 23–24.
With stretch'd-out fingers, and a thumb
Stuck to his hips, and jutting bum,60

this effeminate desires to take revenge on Garrick for his mockery of them:

But how attack him? far, or near?
In front, my friends, or in the rear?61

There are some other remarkable similarities to the modern caricature: the club reacts to an eloquent speech with “Twas divine!” and at the end as they take a vow “Like Fairies form a magic round.”62

Apparently, Garrick vented enough spleen against the pretty gentlemen not to have to return to attack them in his later writings. He so fully shared the common notion that sodomites and effemminates were identical that his astonishment was considerable when he learned that one of his closest collaborators was the former.

V

The career of Isaac Bickerstaff demonstrates how the stage could no longer tolerate suggestions of sodomy in either its characters or its participants. As Trumbach has pointed out, a pederastic romance such as Love Letters between a Late Nobleman and the Famous Beau Wilson could be openly published in 1722–23, whereas some twenty-five years later Fanny Hill was prosecuted specifically for its sodomitical episode. The more accessible and public nature of the theatre made it exceptionally vulnerable to attack on these grounds.

Bickerstaff was a veritable creative partner to Garrick and “one of the most successful writers for the stage.”63 Having polished the relatively simple ballad opera into a new style of musical comedy, he had become the most popular and lucrative playwright in England. Literary conservatives complained that his finicking, mollycoddle taste led him to rewrite Wycherley’s Plain Dealer to expunge it of “licentiousness,” but no personal slurs found their way into print.

Bickerstaff’s own depiction of a fop in his much-revived ballad opera Lionel or Clarissa: or, The School for Fathers (1768) has been thoroughly purified of any alloys of sexuality or “mollitude.” At first sight, Mr. Jessamy promises to be a high-society version of Maiden: the scion of a union between a noblewoman and a middle-class colonel, brought up by his uncle

60Ibid., p. 28.
61Ibid., p. 29.
62Ibid., pp. 32–33.
63Isaac Reed et al., Biographica Dramatica . . . as brought down to the end of November 1811 (London, 1812), 1:40.
“Lord Jessamy, who had no children of his own, and promised to leave him an estate.” His own father condemns him:

Zounds, Sir! then I'll tell you without any jest,
The thing of all things, which I hate and detest;
A coxcomb, a fop,
A dainty milk-sop;
Who, essenc’d and dizen’d from bottom to top,
Looks just like a doll from a milliner’s shop.
A thing full of prate,
And pride and conceit;
All fashion, no weight;
Who shrugs and takes snuff;
And carries a muff;
A minikin,
Finicking,
French powder-puff.\(^65\)

The act of accusation mixes the Restoration beau’s vanity and thralldom to fashion with early Georgian attacks on effeminacy and the unfailing allusion to the milliners’ shop. (The powder puff is a new touch that will linger long enough to blemish Rudolph Valentino’s reputation.) But for all Mr. Jessamy’s delicacy, it becomes clear in short space that he is not a petit-bourgeois effeminate.

Like his Restoration antecedents, he intends to wed a country heiress. He casts scorn on attorney’s clerks, “condescends” to speak to a steward, and travels with a French valet. He boasts of affairs with a Neapolitan prima donna and a Pisan principessa, as well as of the lucrative matches he has turned down. Unlike the cowardly Fribble, he challenges his future father-in-law to a duel. The actual butt of ridicule is his father, a colonel whose disapproval the audience might be expected to endorse, but whose scoundrelly plans are confounded by his “effeminate puppy” of a son. When he loses the girl, Mr. Jessamy is in no way discomfited. For all his airs and graces, he comes across as a gentleman.

In other words, Bickerstaff was presenting a newer social type, a Georgian libertine whose manners had been polished by the growth of sensibility. The character may have some roots in an essay in Hawkesworth’s *Adventurer* (October 20, 1753), “Gradation from a Greenhorn to a Blood,” in which a Jessamy was the third degree in the ascent to compleat rake. This rank is signaled by certain sartorial signs, such as silk stockings and clean

\(^{64}\) Isaac Bickerstaff, *Lionel and Clarissa*, in *The British Drama* (Philadelphia, 1856), 2:8, act 1, scene 1.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
gloves, but more by "an excess of softness and civility, especially when I spoke to the ladies." Hawkesworth’s taxonomy has young men evolving through given stages in a teleology of high living. A Jessamy is merely a phase, though one may be arrested in it, an embryonic form of the rake, immature in its rakishness, but still a gentleman. His effeminacy is not the inbred mincing of a middle-class sodomite, but a role chosen to set him apart from the vulgar herd, and therefore not subject to moral censure. This was, after all, a period when that arbiter Lord Chesterfield advised his stepson to avoid grossness and cultivate elegance by learning deportment from a dancing master. It is significant that the provincial actor T. G. Snagge, who became famous for playing Jessamy, enhanced his popularity by false rumors that he and the character were the same person.  

Bickerstaff’s version of the fop showed a shrewd understanding of public taste and current manners; but his avoidance of anything suggesting a molly may also be self-protective. He would not want to call attention to his own familiarity with a sodomitic underground. In late April and early May 1772, the papers were full of circumstantial reports that a certain gentleman had bestowed on a guards sentinel an amount of portable property; this was to placate the soldier whom the gentleman had unsuccessfully solicited for sex. The incident occurred at the Savoy Barracks, near Bickerstaff’s home, and soon his name was spelled out in the press. He himself, without contesting the veracity of the stories, fled to France. He may have been, like so many of his cosexualists, a victim of blackmail; eighteenth-century criminal records are full of tales of soldiers applying extortion to their admirers.

 Allegations were to surface that before 1772 Garrick had known of Bickerstaff’s relations with a male dancer and even with his own brother, George, but that these had not bothered the actor because they were never made public knowledge and so had not affected the box office. Had Bickerstaff confined his amours to the playhouse, scandal might not have erupted. Moreover, as one pamphleteer would state, it was hard to suspect Bickerstaff, “as the man had nothing effeminate in his manner.” The contrast between outward manner and inward appetite was still confusing the great British public.

Garrick’s reaction to Bickerstaff’s misfortune is most instructive about the leader of the English theatre’s repudiation of the stage’s raffish past. The indispensable colleague whom a few months earlier he had addressed as

“Friend Bickerstaff” was now “the Miserable Bickerstaff,” of whom he wrote on May 19, 1772:

All his friends hang their heads & grieve sincerely at his Misfortune—
My Wife & I have long thought him to be out of his Mind—. . . the Story they tell, if true is a most unaccountable one; but the Watch, Seal & ring are in the Soldier’s hands & B—— would not claim them, but absconded—this business has hurt me greatly, as well as my Wife, the Stage has a great loss, for he was preparing some pieces that would have been both profitable, & creditable.—

Garrick’s reaction is shocked, minimally commiserative, but ultimately concerned about his losses at the box office.

On June 24 Bickerstaff wrote him a long, pathetic letter in French from St. Malo; he characterized himself as “un homme . . . le plus malheureux qui soit sur la terre . . . Pénétré avec un chagrin le plus amer, qui peut blesser le coeur.” The letter protests that it asks nothing of Garrick except a few words to testify to his continued “prévention” (partiality). Garrick chose not to reply but simply wrote on the letter “from that poor wretch Bickerstaff—I could not answer it.” It is unclear whether he could not because of excess of sensibility or excess of caution. Three years later he would again be referring to Bickerstaff as “that Wretch.”

Garrick’s caution was justified, for he was quickly tarred with the same brush as Bickerstaff. A disappointed playwright named William Kenrick, who already had several bones to pick with Garrick, lost no time in publishing allegations that Garrick and Bickerstaff had been lovers. A poem called Leap-Frog, which appeared in the Public Ledger, portrayed the two playing at this equivocal game.

“No eye, tho’ c’er so peicing [sic] now can bone us”
Says the Theatric Caesar to his Sporus
“These pleasures licenc’d for the Rich, I prove
Illicit rapture, & forbidden Love.”

Kenrick’s more widely disseminated attack, Love in the Suds, a Town Eclogue, Being the Lamentation of Roscius for the Loss of his Nyky (“Nyky” was both a

70The letter is published in full in Peter A. Tasch, The Dramatic Cobbler: The Life and Works of Isaac Bickerstaff (Lewisburg, PA, 1971), 2:277. Percy Fitzgerald, writing for a Victorian readership, cannot bring himself to write “sodomy,” so refers to “a shocking and monstrous crime” and comments on Bickerstaff’s exile thus: “There were, no doubt, plenty who thought this was no more than incident to the degrading life of such creatures” (The Life of David Garrick [London, 1868], 2:277). Again note the dehumanizing term “creatures.”
71Garrick to George Steevens, January 13, 1775, in Little and Kahr, eds., 3:985.
72Quoted in Tasch, p. 228.
nickname of Isaac and slang for a simpleton), was cast in the form of Garrick’s plea for Bickerstaff and hence for sodomy in general. It begins with personalities, in the traditional vein:

Unhappy nyky, by what frenzy seiz’d,
Couldst thou with such a martial thing be pleas’d?
What, th’ thyself a gentle horse-marine,
Couldst thou with foot-soldiers at land be seen.73

But it soon moves to a more general justification.

And yet, ah why should nyky thus be blam’d?
Of manly love, ah! why are men asham’d?
A new red-coat, fierce cock and killing air
Will captivate the most obdurate fair.74

In an ironic premonition of nineteenth-century apologists, it argues that sodomy was practiced by the revered ancients and is a refinement accepted in Europe, yet one more form of love. England must shed its vulgar passions and accept it as part of polished civilization. Like so many of his predecessors, Kenrick uses sodomy to contrast an effete, effeminate Continent with a rough-hewn but virtuous England whose current refinements put it in danger of being overrun by foreign vices.

Contrary to his usual practice, Garrick did not rush into print with a counterblast. After planning a poetic satire, he decided to sue Kenrick for libel instead, a novel course of action for so public a figure as an actor, and one which demonstrates how damaging an accusation sodomy now was even in the theatrical world. In the ensuing paper war, although Garrick had defenders and detractors, no one stood up for Bickerstaff, least of all Garrick, and the literary world seemed as eager to divorce the actor from the playwright as the actor himself was. One squib, in its defense of Garrick, said of the “back-door cub” Bickerstaff:

You rail at Bick—with all my heart:
Think you I mean to take his part?
Think you I would one distich write

73William Kenrick, *Love in the Suds* (London, 1772), p. 3. Kenrick adds a cryptic footnote: “Nyky is a half-pay officer of means. The term horse-marines is well known to some kind of sailors. *Modo vir modo foemina.*” Bickerstaff had been a horse marine in Ireland and, despite allegations which postdate his flight, was probably honorably discharged. The horse marines were notorious for laziness, but Kenrick seems to be suggesting a reputation for something else, which dictionaries of slang of the period do not illuminate. However, Smollett’s novel *Roderick Random* (1748), with its proudly sodomitic Earl Strutwell, includes among its characters two Marine officers portrayed as pretty gentlemen.

T'exculpate a vile s——e?  
No, on him let thy rage be hurl'd;  
No,—lash him naked thro' the world:  
Expose in satire's keenest lays  
This skulking, dam'd detested race.  
Hang up to publick scorn each brute  
Who dares Love's rite to prostitute.\footnote{To Dr K —— in the Poetical Altercation between Benedick and Beatrice —— Extracted from the Morning Chronicle (London, 1772), p. 4. The claim that sodomites constitute a race apart indicates the new awareness of an extended subculture.}

The following year, a poem in which all the dramatic poets of the time were arraigned before Apollo, in asking the public to forget Bickerstaff’s name, went on:

Painful the thought! in these degenerate times,  
When men of sense commit atrocious crimes;  
When those, who shou'd example's force convey,  
And virtue in her fairest form display;  
In Private life, adopt a different plan,  
Degrade their nature, and throw off the man.\footnote{[William Heard], The Tryal of Dramatic Genius (London, 1773), pp. 15–17.}

With one voice, the papers characterized sodomy as the blackest, most indelible kind of stigma, “a detestable crime.” It is an interesting symptom of the public mood that, although Bickerstaff’s earlier plays continued to enjoy popularity, any new work believed to be by his hand was vigorously attacked. Still, sodomy as an abstract and sodomy as a fact received different treatment. During this controversy, on July 20, 1772, Captain Robert Jones was sentenced to death for committing sodomy with a boy under the age of thirteen; the circumstantial evidence was far heavier and graver than that against Bickerstaff, but Jones’s fellow officers petitioned the king, and he received a royal pardon.\footnote{St. James Chronicle, no. 1783. Special treatment through influence was not uncommon: in 1761 a well-to-do publican, Thomas Andrews, was condemned on very strong evidence but procured a reprieve. The criminous chronicle laments, “What sort of interest it was that procured a pardon for this man, it may be improper, because it could hardly be decent, to say” (B. Laurie, ed., The Newgate Calendar or Malefactor’s Bloody Register (London, 1933), p. 631).} Friends in high places could accomplish what the theatre neither could nor would.

Charles Dibdin believed that Bickerstaff’s case was a nine-day’s wonder and that he had stayed in London the whole affair would have died down.\footnote{Charles Dibdin, The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin (London, 1803), 1:84.} As it was, Bickerstaff’s flight became exemplary. Biographical accounts blackened his memory, by attesting that he had earlier left the horse ma-
rines under shady circumstances, although no evidence to this exists. Regular reports that he had shot himself, hanged himself, or drowned himself cropped up in the press, since those were the appropriate ends for such ignominy. The *Biographica Dramatica* noted in 1812, “He is said to be living at some place abroad, to which a deed without a name has banished him, and where he exists poor and despised by all orders of people.”79 A chronicler fifty years earlier would have named the deed. No one knows when or where Bickerstaff died.

VI

Samuel Foote, whose stage caricatures of prominent persons had made him many enemies, appears to be the only actor of the period to be tried for the nameless deed. The first such charges against Foote were trumped up around 1775 by his latest foes, the Duchess of Kingston and her henchman, the infamous pamphleteer William Jackson. The campaign began with a groundswell of rumors that Foote was a sodomite; these canards (if they were canards) affected Foote’s peace of mind, despite the vociferous support of his audiences. On July 8, 1776, Foote was formally accused by one of his servants of a criminal assault, and, when he posted advance bail, of a second assault. Jackson poisoned the air with more than innuendo and is probably the author of *Sodom and Onan*, which purports to be a Virgilian follow-up of Churchill’s *The Times* “to satirize those Fiends, who unconfined, / Will stop the propagation of Mankind.”80

As an exercise in character assassination, Kenrick’s *Love in the Suds*, compared with the sulphurous fulminations of *Sodom and Onan*, reads like a billet-doux. Just as McCarthyites were to find communists under every bed, so Jackson sees sodomites infiltrating and polluting all levels of polite society; peppering his couplets with initials, he accuses government ministers and gentlemen of the bedchamber, fears that a bribed Church and Bench are too soft on the crime, and vows that, if empowered, he would outdo the Inquisition in torturing perpetrators of “unnatural Transgressions.”81 The attack also indicates that the predilection of British sodomites to settle abroad was now habitual:

Where is the Author of the village Love?  
Sweet Isaac Bickerstaff, who never strove

79 Reed et al. (n. 63 above), 1:40.
To wipe away the ignominious stain,
Convinc'd that kicking 'gainst the Pricks was vain.
For Safety flown to soft Italia's shore,
Where Tilney, B——l, Jones and many more
Of Britain's cast outs revel uncountroul'd,
Who for their Beastial lust their Country sold,
Who dissipate Estates in Foreign Climes
To buy indulgence, for their darling Crimes.82

Turning to Foote himself, the prosecutor grows rabid, claiming that female prostitutes do not condescend to frequent his theatre, leaving it to "Male Whores of Quality."83 Jackson subscribes to the old belief that sodomy is not subject to venereal disease, and so he makes the climax of his indictment a nauseating imprecation that this state of things be altered in Foote.

Let his whole mass with poison be condens'd,
And for each pang of his, one Whore be cleans'd;
Let rank corruption, mining all within,
Consume his vitals, e'er the cause is seen,
'Til noisome stench prevents the Faculty
Approaching near, their Caustics to apply;
And he one tormenting B——boe feel,
From the Corona Veneris to the heel,
While shankers perforate his mouth and nose,
That not a simple want he may disclose.84

This was strong meat for the 1770s, hearkening back to the coarse libels of a hundred years earlier. But the theatre is not denounced wholesale as a hotbed of sodomy. Bickerstaff and Foote are exhibited as members of a seditious sect pululating throughout society, and Jackson seems to consider sanction in higher circles more relevant to sodomy's propagation than is the stage.

The trial in December completely exonerated Foote: his accusers, including the servant whom Jackson had idealized as "the wholesome hind."85 were shown to be perjurors and probably suborned. But when his friend the dramatist Arthur Murphy ran to give the comedian the good news, he found Foote "extended on the floor in strong hysterics; in which he continued near an hour before he could be recovered to any kind of recollection of himself, or the object of his friend's visit."86 Over the course of

82Ibid., p. 20.
83Ibid., p. 16.
84Ibid., pp. 26–27.
85Ibid., p. 5.
86William Cooke, Memoirs of Samuel Foote, Esq. (London, 1805), 1:231–32; during the trial, the warm applause of the audience in his theatre caused Foote to break into tears and
the next year, while he went on performing, he became partially paralyzed by a stroke, and died in October 1777.

A later publication, in defense of Bickerstaff, was to query, "If the robust nerves of Samuel Foote were unable to sustain a similar charge . . . how much less could one of Bickerstaff's refined sensibilities . . . support it?" The question is a teasing one in the matter of Foote. All his biographers over the past two centuries have assumed that since the charges instigated by Jackson were false, Foote was not a sodomite. Yet Jackson's libels were so overdrawn and so scattered in their targets that they should not have caused such violent repercussions to a clear conscience or a balanced mind. Throughout his long career, Foote had lived in a heady atmosphere of publicity, feuds, and personal attacks. His own style of performance, imitating and ridiculing the attributes of prominent individuals, had attracted similar personal invective and mockery directed at himself. He had reveled in the give-and-take of calumny, and his audiences were titillated by the sense that his performances made them party to intimate revelations. Although his marriage had been short-lived and his relations with women were always harsh and distant, although he had maintained a close friendship with another man whose death had had a traumatic effect on him, throughout a controversial lifetime no whiff of sodomy had earlier arisen. Consequently, Foote's nervous reaction to these imputations suggests more than mere fear of opprobrium: he seemed afraid that his real nature, whether expressed or suppressed, was about to be revealed. What psychologists used to call "homosexual anxiety," the fear of being labeled a deviant because it answers to one's suppressed identity, may have been at work.

It is telling that Foote's Victorian biographer Percy Fitzgerald, who cannot bring himself to use terms more explicit than "[the] most serious and degrading of all known charges" and "an offence which need not be named," nevertheless devotes two pages to speculation about Foote's frame

withdraw from the stage (p. 122). The transcript is given in *Particulars of the trial of Foote the dramatist, before Lord Mansfield and a special jury, 1776, for a certain crime* (London, 1830), and reported in *London Chronicle* 40 (December 7–10, 1776): 558.


88The best coverage of this aspect of Foote's career appears in Charles Carusi, "Scandal and Grimace: Personality and Mimicry in the Performance of Samuel Foote" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1979), esp. pt. 1, chap. 2.

89There was an odd notice in *The Public Advertiser* for October 16, 1761, that "Mr Foote was robbed, at Bayswater, near Kensington Gravel Pits, as he was coming to town, by a single Highwayman, who appeared to be a very young fellow" (*BDA* [n. 12 above], 5:341). The neighborhood is suspect, and the robbery report sounds as if it might be the coverup of a mugging following a more equivocal encounter.
of mind when faced by these nameless charges. Fitzgerald expatiates on the humiliation of having to face an audience while the rumors are still in the air: "One of the most terrible trials for a person moving in society is the first appearance before his acquaintances—say, at some familiar club—after passing through the ordeal of a public trial on some criminal charge which has ended in acquittal . . . if his courage fail him, he had better retire to foreign lands." Fitzgerald's biography appeared in 1910, and, for all the mention of acquittal, he would seem to have had Oscar Wilde in mind. Wilde, of course, was condemned and did indeed retire to foreign lands; but, like Foote, mutatis mutandis, he too had been a public man who could not withdraw from the limelight under obloquy.

The capital crime which in 1700 could not harm an actor's reputation had by 1770 become so damaging that a popular performer might be debilitating by a false accusation. The depiction of the sodomite, encoded in the pretty gentleman, came under the same ban. Careful not to lay itself open to censure on these grounds, the English theatre purged the effeminate stage fop of any passional nature whatsoever. By the end of the century, the fop had dwindled into a mere clothes-horse. In his textbook on gestural acting, Henry Siddons included a plate showing Munden as Jenny Jumps in O'Keefe's The Farmer (1787) "as a specimen of the fashionable habit which then prevailed. The dress and the character are so much dependent on each other that its costume is at present a matter of no small difficulty." In other words, the man of mode has no essence beyond his wardrobe, and even if his plot function is to complicate the love intrigue, his sentiments are mere convention. Such a caricature can have no sex drive. Vestiges of the molly may still be glimpsed in the prissy and intrusive Paul Pry, but essentially the effeminate would disappear from the English theatre until the aesthetic craze of the late 1870s and early 1880s brought satire of unmanly posing back into vogue. And with it reentered similar caricatures of questionable gender and mollycoddle mannerism to stand as emblems for "the love that dare not speak its name," least of all on stage.
