

Unmarried Mothers on the English Stage after the Godly Revolution

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Unmarried mothers and children born out of wedlock are notoriously absent from the Carolean stage, which, on the other hand, saw an abundance of rakish gallants and prostitutes populating sexually charged plots. It is not a coincidence that the only two plays premiered between 1660 and 1700 featuring an unmarried woman with a living child arrive just around the time that William and Mary take the throne. This paper analyses the ways in which these two plays—*The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) by Thomas Shadwell and *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692) by Thomas Durfey—use the unmarried mother to convey a moral message that echoed William and Mary's project of moral reform. However, these women are portrayed in radically different ways in the two comedies. Although she is customarily portrayed as a despicable character in *The Squire of Alsatia*, the unmarried mother in *The Marriage-Hater Matched* gets to be a good-hearted heroine who is eventually redeemed. This was a very challenging position for Durfey to portray, requiring of intra- and extra textual devices to support her redemption without appearing to condone vice.

Keywords: Restoration comedy; mothers; moral reform; Thomas Durfey; Thomas Shadwell

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Madres solteras en la escena inglesa tras la Revolución gloriosa

Las madres solteras y los niños nacidos fuera del matrimonio están significativamente ausentes de la escena carolina, en la cual, por otra parte, existía un abundante número de galantes libertinos y prostitutas que formaban parte de argumentos cargados de sexualidad. No es casualidad que las dos únicas obras estrenadas entre 1660 y 1700 con una madre soltera entre sus personajes se vean justo en la época en que Guillermo y María suben al trono. Este artículo analiza las formas en que estas dos obras—*The Squire of Alsatia* (1688),

de Thomas Shadwell y *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692), de Thomas Durfey—utilizan a la madre soltera para transmitir un mensaje moral que se hace eco del proyecto de reforma de índole moral de Guillermo y María. Sin embargo, estas mujeres son descritas de maneras radicalmente diferentes en las dos comedias. Mientras que en *The Squire of Alsatia* se representa a la madre soltera como un personaje despreciable, en *The Marriage-Hater Matched* esta se convierte en una heroína de buen corazón que finalmente es redimida, una posición muy difícil de retratar para Durfey, que requirió de recursos intratextuales y extratextuales para transmitir la idea de redención sin que pareciera que se admitía el vicio.

Palabras clave: Comedia de la Restauración; madres; reforma moral; Thomas Durfey; Thomas Shadwell

Carolean comedy revelled in complex plots where prostitutes, hypocritical Puritans, rascals and bullies rubbed shoulders with ladies and gentlemen of quality. Debauchery and licentiousness were necessary attitudes for comic gentlemen to have in order to prove their refinement, and fashionable scorn about marriage was a common jest in these scripts. Carolean comedies enjoyed, therefore, plenty of sexually charged plots and constant references to the characters' extra-marital sex. Within this milieu, one might be tempted to ask what happened nine months later. When the rakish gallant was one of the most popular stock characters available to seventeenth century playwrights, one might expect illegitimate children and single mothers to be recurrent in comedies. This is not the case, however, and the only two comedies premiered between 1660 and 1700 featuring an unmarried woman with a living child are *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) by Thomas Shadwell and *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692) by Thomas Durfey. There being just two such works out of the prolific dramatic production of the Restoration period might suggest that including a single mother in the cast list was pointedly avoided. In light of this singularity, it is important to ask why there was such reticence and why single mothers only appear after 1688.

1688 was a year of political upheaval in England. James II had been on the throne for only three years (1685-1688), but his reign was filled with religious conflict. The king was openly Catholic in a country that had developed a strong anti-Catholic paranoia since the Armada and the Gunpowder Plot, but lately spurred by the Popish Plot as well as the example of Louis XIV's absolutist rule, the persecution of the Protestant Huguenots and wars of expansion. Eventually, Tories and Whigs united to remove James II from the throne of England and arranged for his Protestant daughter Mary—safely married to the Protestant Prince William of Orange—to succeed him. The open Catholicism of James II and the moral laxity of the court and the Town were taken as a single phenomenon by the staunch Protestants, who feared divine repercussions against their island. So, when James II was deposed, “a tremendous enthusiasm for a reformation of morals broke forth” (Bahlman 1957, 14) and in line with this not just

the Church or the State but also the laity collaborated in creating the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, where citizens were asked to keep an eye on their neighbours and denounce any possible immorality. In fact, adultery and fornication were the main concern for the Societies established in London (Dabhoiwala 2007, 290). William and Mary became the spearhead of this movement and used moral reform to consolidate their position (Mora and Gómez Lara 2010, 145). They invested themselves with a Providential aura and led a “Godly Revolution”¹ intended to restore England to God’s favour (Bahlman 1957, 10; Dabhoiwala 2007, 291). The new monarchs intended to tackle the corruption of Carolean society in its many forms, and adultery and fornication were specifically mentioned by William III in a letter to the Bishop of London as early as 1689 (Mora and Gómez Lara 2010, 146). Similarly, the authors of pamphlets and tracts such as *Marriage Promoted*, written anonymously in 1690, worried that the unpopularity of marriage among the “Wits of our Age” and the licentiousness which accompanied it might destroy the country (quoted in Mora and Gómez Lara, 146).

It was precisely at this point in English history—when the court actively called for the restoration of moral principles throughout the country—that the theatre was criticised on the grounds of being a bad example (Mora and Gómez Lara, 147) and the consequences of sexual debauchery were further explored in drama. *The Squire of Alsatia* premiered in May, a few months before the arrival in England of William and Mary in November. However, Shadwell was a staunch Whig who had already positioned himself on the side of the new Monarchs’ ideology. In *The Squire*, we see how the unpleasant outcome of licentiousness affects the hero and underscores his final resolution: a peaceful life results from virtuous behaviour, whereas debauchery brings nothing but trouble. *The Marriage-Hater Matched*, premiered years after William and Mary’s coronation, takes a significantly new perspective and puts the single mother at its centre. It is the pain of a direct victim of sexual transgression that the audience perceives and her true virtue is highlighted despite her sin.

This paper explores the representation of maternity out of wedlock in *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Marriage-Hater Matched*. I argue that the emergence of the unmarried mother in these two comedies is related to the moral concern surrounding the licentiousness of the Carolean period and the role of the theatre in spreading examples of this model of behaviour. I will begin by providing the historical and literary context surrounding the figure of the unmarried pregnant woman and mother. I will achieve this by trying to reconstruct the socio-historical circumstances of the time surrounding illegitimacy through a combination of historical secondary sources and by reviewing several comedies written as early as the 1660s featuring pregnant single women—

¹ Tony Claydon (1996) is the first to use this term to qualify William III’s reformation. In his book *William III and the Godly Revolution*, Claydon studies how the new monarch legitimized his reign through propagandistic campaigns based on Protestant religious ideals, investing himself as a godly prince that would restore England to the true faith and end the corruption of the previous decades. I adopt this term as it links the Williamite regime with the religious overtones it adopted.

though at this point in time, not yet single mothers. Then, I will comment on the impact of the Godly Revolution on the theatre and society in general to link this historical event to *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Marriage-Hater Matched*. Finally, I will analyse these works with a special emphasis on Mrs. Termagant and Lovewell, the single mothers. We will see how their widely different characterization requires a given response from the audience and how each contributes, in their own fashion, to the reformation of manners proposed by William and Mary.

I. THE PLIGHT OF THE SINGLE MOTHER IN THE LATE 17TH CENTURY

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, an unmarried pregnant woman was immediately stigmatized as a “bastard bearer” and rejected by society (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 148). When her economic situation did not allow for self-sufficiency of some sort, her hopes were limited and her prospects, bleak.

If the pregnant woman had the means to force the—perhaps reluctant—father into marriage, this was the preferred way out of the predicament, especially if the child was not yet born. This regularized the situation as the impending family became an ordinary household, economically maintained by the husband. In fact, pregnancy triggered marriage in all social classes, included the court. Mendelson and Crawford (1998, 112) mention the scandalous case of Ann Hyde, who became pregnant by James II (before he became king) and was married to him thanks to her father’s political influence, despite it being a disadvantageous match for the prospective king.

Indeed, the number of pregnant brides far outweighs that of illegitimate births. A sample of rural parishes at the time reveals that “about 21 per cent of brides were pregnant,” and in London, 16 per cent (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 121, 149). We cannot, however, tell how many pre-marital conceptions were cases of failed contraceptive methods followed by unplanned weddings and how many were the result of the beginning of sexual practices after formal betrothal (121). Lawrence Stone (1995, 52-56) describes two scenarios that seem propitious for pre-marital conceptions. On the one hand, there was the case of contract marriages, which consisted in the exchange of vows in front of at least two witnesses. This type of marriage had existed since the twelfth century and was approved by church cannon law but not recognized in common law, especially after Cromwell’s Commonwealth. All three forms of court of the seventeenth century—civil, equity and common law—had overlapping competences and differing opinions as regards marriage, its validity, legality and related issues. This led to a lot of controversy during the seventeenth century, when there were many couples among the low and middling ranks with a binding marriage contract but illegal wedding. The children who were the fruit of those unions, of course, stood on equally unsteady ground. On the other hand, there was “bundling,” which was also practiced by people belonging to the low and middle classes. Bundling took place exclusively in England, Scandinavia and New England, and consisted in a visit paid by the man to his fiancée that lasted all night

and was done without the parents' knowledge or with their tacit consent. If not the parents of the bride, sometimes there were other people present during bundling sessions such as other youths or women, maybe to prevent full sexual relations from happening (Stone 1995, 61-63). Nevertheless, Stone claims that this custom rarely led to pre-nuptial conceptions in the seventeenth century, as opposed to the rise in such births during the eighteenth century. The repressive Puritan sexual mores still lingering in society by the end of the seventeenth century, together with the threat of economic ruin and social disgrace, account for the effective sexual restriction Stone's data reflect.

Whatever the reason for illegitimacy, Amanda Capern (2010, 110) explains that the bastardy rate of the period was at its lowest in the 1650s at about 1 per cent, and at its highest in the first decade of the eighteenth century at just over 4 per cent. However, even the highest rate is a surprisingly low figure given the lack of contraceptive methods. Capern clarifies that these numbers have "been calculated as far as possible from parish registers for baptism (which inevitably and unavoidably fails to count children born illegitimately who died or were not baptised)" (349 n). Therefore, the numbers estimated by historians may not reflect the reality of the time. Capern suggests that there was a "moral panic" due to the increase in illegitimacy in the second half of the seventeenth century but a four per cent rate might not justify such panic unless it was the increase itself—rather than the total number of illegitimate children—that alarmed the English thus (2010, 135). Liza Picard (2014, 159), however, does not question these numbers and believes that social pressure was enough to counter promiscuity throughout the century. She suggests that the illegitimate children of the period were mostly born of prostitutes, as premarital sex was so marginal it did not warrant consideration and, if there was premarital conception, a wedding was arranged (166). We should remember that the 1650s was the heyday of the repressive measures at work in Cromwell's Puritan Commonwealth. Picard's argument about social pressures, however, does not work so well as the century comes to its end and court cases concerning illegal impregnation grow in number.

A lawsuit was another resource for deserted women, namely via charges "for seduction of a daughter" and "for breach of promise" (Stone 1995). Bringing a lawsuit for seduction came into effect in the 1660s and grew in popularity until the 1700s, but only resulted in compensation for the damages for loss of domestic service in cases of impregnation and was only used by women who did not have enough proof to press for a breach of promise. Claiming for breach of promise also rose in popularity between the 1670s and the 1700s and did not require impregnation, although solid evidence of a verbal contract was needed. The result of this type of lawsuit was usually a monetary compensation for the breaking of the contract rather than enforcing marriage (Stone 1995, 83; 86), so that the defiled woman could offer a better portion and her value in the marriage-market would thus be compensated for. Thus, unmarried pregnant women with enough dowry to make up for their dishonour were generally married before the child was born.

Some unmarried mothers were not so lucky as to find a husband or economic means for subsistence. In the lower classes, women were employed as maidservants or similar from an early age and depended on their wages to live. Single mothers, however, were usually dismissed from employment (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 268) and, in some areas, physically punished or even imprisoned for a year “assuming and ensuring they would not be able to take care of the child” (Gowing 2012, 56). People in economic need could generally resort to their parish, which was in charge of dispensing poor relief. Nevertheless, parishes did as much as they could not to spend their funds on unmarried mothers. The main efforts of this institution were aimed at forcing the woman, once she was in labour, to confess the name of the father, sometimes even under the threat of not calling a midwife to assist her. The goal was to charge the man with the maintenance of the child and thereby relieve the parish from the burden (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 148). Another tactic was moving the pregnant woman, even while in labour, to another parish in order that the other parish would have to care for the mother and child (Gowing 2012, 56; Picard 2014, 254). St. Thomas’ Hospital, in the London borough of Southwark, provides another example of the neglect and prejudices unmarried mothers suffered. Although it was a hospital for the poor, it did not admit pregnant single women since it was intended for the relief “of honest people, not of harlots” (quoted in Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 268). Without the possibility of employment or charity, these women were forced into economic ruin, vagrancy and prostitution, fueling the vicious circle of the ignominy of the single mother.

When the parish did take care of the mother and her child, another woman on poor relief might be paid to help her raise her child. In most cases, however, the baby would be sent out to the countryside to nurse and the mother, if she had not been imprisoned for bearing a child out of wedlock, would be appointed to nurse another child. Mendelson and Crawford comment that having the mother employed in casual work like spinning, together with some economic help to support her child, would have been cheaper than paying for the baby’s nurse and clothing. However, the parish relied on the work that the women receiving poor relief did for the rest of the community. In fact, the recipients of poor relief were mostly female, old widows being the most readily helped social group. Laura Gowing explains how these women were expected to do tasks such as washing, lending domestic goods, providing housing, or, in the case of the younger women, wet nursing. Women under the care of the parish were a “useful feature of early modern England” (2012, 56). Therefore, it is not surprising that parishes preferred to support women without family duties, thus garnering a cheap workforce, to those taking care of their own child without doing much community service.

Unsupported pregnant single women were thus in a very difficult situation. If they had their child, they were instantly reduced to poverty, in which case the parish and poor law officials took the child away from them (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 149). The alternative to having a child to care for, however, often meant infanticide.

Infanticide made up 10 per cent of all murders (Capern 2010, 135). Punishment for this crime was especially harsh before the Civil War, in some cases resulting in the death sentence. A study on infanticide in the early seventeenth century revealed that more than 90 per cent of the accused mothers were single, while the other 10 per cent were widows (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 149). Unmarried mothers were indeed strongly suspected of murder if their child died, to the point that presumption of innocence—a policy applied to all other crimes—was denied to unmarried mothers. The statute of 1624 “To Prevent the Murthering of Bastard Children” assumed that any unmarried mother who had concealed her labour and whose baby was allegedly stillborn had committed infanticide. This accusation, and the subsequent sentence, could only be lifted if her innocence was proven. Married women, however, were not similarly prosecuted and presumption of innocence was observed in such cases (44). As we see, infanticide was strongly punished in the first half of the seventeenth century, when more women were executed for murdering their child than for theft without benefit of clergy. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, prosecution of this crime relaxed and the woman was only required to present baby bed linen to prove they had been prepared for a live birth, which supposedly ruled out her intention to kill her child and lifted the accusation of infanticide (44).

2. ALMOST UNMARRIED MOTHERS IN COMEDIES BEFORE 1688

Having a baby out of wedlock, then, was avoided at all costs in real-life and the comic tradition seemed to also avoid the subject. This is not to say that the dangers of having an illegitimate child were not used as a dramatic device in earlier and contemporary comedies. *The Squire* and *The Marriage-hater* do not have precedents in the Restoration period in their treatment of actual illegitimacy. However, female characters *almost* becoming single mothers was often used to propel the action. These “almost-mothers,” fall outside the scope of this paper, although they do provide some context to illustrate how the issue was addressed on stage. The unmarried pregnant women reviewed in this section are a comic device. They are little developed characters and have the chief purpose of presenting an obstacle to one of the main couples in the play.

Just as marriage was the preferred solution for an illegitimate pregnancy in real life, so it was for many of the young women with child in these plays. In 1662, a version of *Measure for Measure* was staged by William Davenant under the title *The Law against Lovers*. As in the original, there is a great scandal involving the illegitimate pregnancy of the protagonist’s lover, which foregrounds the social drama behind this problem. Although the play begins almost tragically, with the young man sentenced to death and the lady under arrest, everything is finally resolved happily as the laws are relaxed and the couple is allowed to marry. In Aphra Behn’s *The Debauchee*, staged in 1677, the woman with child is the rake’s mistress. He is pressed to marry her but it turns out that she has also been having sex with his manservant, who is the one to marry her in

the end once she is promised some money. A more comical variant can be found in John Lacy's *The Old Troop* (1672). The pregnant woman, Dol, who appears to be the camp prostitute, repeatedly tries to convince different soldiers to own her child, but none of them does. She becomes the centre of a few comical scenes and at the end of the play marries the farcical protagonist, Raggou. Marrying the pregnant woman is presented as a punishment, pointing to the public opinion single mothers deserved. In fact, Raggou is placed in a position where he either accepts this fate or is hanged for treason.

Marriage to the pregnant woman is also used as a dramatic device to chastise fops in other plays. In Restoration comedy, poetic justice tends to reward wit and punish folly, so at the end of a play fops and coxcombs often find themselves ridiculed by being trapped into unsuitable matches with women whose value in the marriage-market has been depreciated: older ladies, cast-off mistresses or servants. In William Wycherley's *Love in a Wood* (1672), a young fop named Dapperwit congratulates himself on having won a rich citizen's daughter, only to find out after the wedding that she is six months pregnant already; nonetheless, he takes comfort in her fortune. John Leaned's *The Country Innocence* (1677) offers a similar example, as Barbara, maid to a noble lady, has been seduced by the butler and is with child. The butler will not marry her but helps her secure a husband by deceiving one of their lady's foppish suitors. Being wedded to a fool might not seem an ideal outcome, but the economic stability and legitimacy provided by marriage is enough to outweigh any other consideration.

Although the social stigma of parenthood out of wedlock attaches chiefly to the mother, in a few comedies the fact that a male character has made a woman pregnant is employed to discredit his moral standing and disqualify him as a suitor. In Thomas Durfey's *A Fond Husband* (1677), for example, a raw young coxcomb just out of university courts a wealthy young lady, but he is followed by his pregnant mistress, who threatens to expose him unless he pays her off. On other occasions, the undesirable suitor's fatherhood is simply a comical ploy, a stratagem concocted by the actual lovers to remove him from their path. Thus, in Edward Ravenscroft's *The Careless Lovers* (1673) one of the two couples in the plot manages to evade the coxcomb who is intended for the young lady by arranging for two pregnant tavern wenches to appear and claim that he is the father.

The most intriguing use of the character of the unmarried pregnant woman appears in the manuscript play *Marriage Revived*, produced at Oxford c. 1682 (Mora 2019, 115–18). Caryotta has been made pregnant by a married man, Turner, who takes her away to Wales before her condition becomes too evident. However, as she experiences labour pains before she is (supposedly) at full term, he begins to suspect that the child is not his and decides to return to his wife. His suspicions were false, as Caryotta was not going into labour but having a miscarriage. In the end, she gets to marry an Oxford scholar who had been in love with her all along. In a play that purports to defend marriage, Caryotta's miscarriage seems to be a providential element that makes it possible for the man who makes an honest woman of her to not look like a fool.

In all these plays, however, the woman who becomes pregnant out of wedlock is as much a marginal figure as she was in seventeenth-century society itself. Even in the plays where her pregnancy is a central issue, as in Davenant's *The Law against Lovers* and the anonymous *Marriage Revived*, she never really takes centre stage and instead remains a problem to be sorted out by the male characters. Thus, unmarried mothers receive minimal representation and their problems are tackled so superficially that the darkest nuances of their lives are obliterated. Still, the side characters reviewed here offer a very valuable glimpse, if only a glimpse, into the situation of real-life women in a society whose institutions would much rather have turned their backs on them.

3. UNMARRIED MOTHERS ON THE STAGE AFTER 1688

The advent of William and Mary's reign and the campaign they launched for moral reformation played a crucial role in the changing perception of libertinism, so playwrights had to adjust. The new monarchs were not as accustomed to the theatre as their predecessors, but the court remained very influential, "not only as a source of patronage but also for its role in the definition of fashion" (Mora and Gómez Lara 2010, 148). Queen Mary had a special fondness for plays with "dashing heroes" (Potter 2003, 186) like the protagonist of *The Rover*, by Aphra Behn, played at the time by William Mountfort. He had specialized in this kind of rakish character and not surprisingly played the male lead in both *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Marriage-Hater Matched*. Nevertheless, the Queen was determined to support playwrights whom she considered morally acceptable, so between 1689 and 1694 many playwrights tried to adapt previously successful dramatic patterns to the changing sensibility (Mora and Gómez Lara 2010, 148). The variation used in the works analysed here consisted in reforming the Carolean libertine rake figure—still very successful with the audience—by providing him with moral acceptability in the end through marriage, thus producing an exemplary play.

3.1. *The Squire of Alsatia*

Unhappy with James II's reign (Ross 1996, 223) and supportive of the imminent social change so demanded by his fellow Protestants (Bahlman 1957, 1), Thomas Shadwell was quick to reflect on the ills of vice in this comedy (Ross 1996, 225). After all, the enthusiasm for a reformation of manners was already present before William and Mary became the monarchs of England (Dabhoiwala 2007, 293). In *The Squire of Alsatia*, first performed on May 3rd 1688, Shadwell retains the popular type of the rake but reforms him in the end and introduces an innovative figure, the single mother. Presented under a very negative light, the unmarried mother is there to underline the dangers of debauchery.

Belfond Jr., the protagonist of *The Squire of Alsatia*, needs to outwit the strict uncle of the woman he wants to marry, as well as help hide the shame of the girl he has just

debauched. However, his worst antagonist is Mrs. Termagant, a former mistress who has borne him a child. *The Squire* clearly reflects the sexual double standards of the time: Belfond is as guilty of sexual transgression as his mistresses, but he is not punished for it. The girl he has debauched, Lucia, is on the brink of being disowned by her family and Mrs. Termagant is insulted again and again because of her sexual activity, but Belfond can be redeemed by recanting his former life and marrying an honest woman. While the male hero can be forgiven, fallen women can hardly be reclaimed without appearing to condone vice. As with unmarried pregnant women in previous comedies, Mrs. Termagant is a negative character for the play's hero. What makes her different is that her child is already born and she plays a substantial role in the comedy, but still the take on her character is very conventional. She is a burden everyone tries to avoid.

Mrs. Termagant is a villain with respect to Belfond, as she tries to put obstacles in his way and take revenge for his leaving her. While Belfond is described as the embodiment of all virtues but for his sexual affairs, Mrs. Termagant is fashioned as a hateful character in all possible ways. She is irascible, violent, deceitful, overbearing and jealous; a true termagant. She is introduced in scene 2.1 and does not evolve at all throughout the play. Her first intervention consists in an argument with Belfond. To persuade him to stay with her, Mrs. Termagant tries different arguments, but all are met with Belfond's provocations, giving the impression they have had similar conversations before and that he does not trust or believe her anymore. She tries crying, but Belfond deems her tears a mere show, mocks her and calls her "a rare actor" (2.1 146), undermining her credibility and controlling the audience's opinion about her. Then she tries eliciting sympathy from Belfond by recalling their child in the line: "[M]ethinks the pretty child I have had by you should make you less inhuman" (2.1 146). However, when Belfond offers to raise his daughter himself, Mrs. Termagant threatens to "pull [the child] limb from limb" (2.1 146) before he ever has her. She is presented as a monster who values hurting Belfond above the well-being of her child. Mrs. Termagant's threats of violence are not only directed towards the infant but also possible rivals in Belfond's attentions. Suspecting his leaving her has to do with another woman, she threatens again to "find her [his new lover], and tear her eyes out" (2.1 146), validating Belfond's accusation that she is "jealous to madness" (2.1 146). Seeing that scorn is all she gets from Belfond, she states her aim is to pester him and trouble him as much as possible since he does not want her for a lover anymore, to which Belfond replies with yet more insults. She reveals herself to be a violent and manipulative character on top of being dishonest; all in all an essentially bad person who does not deserve sympathy.

The end of the play is, however, quite positive, as all characters arguably see an improvement of their situation. Not only can the protagonist and his beloved marry despite the obstacles, but neither of the "fallen women" is entirely condemned. Belfond helps Lucia convince her father no sexual activity has actually taken place, thus regaining the semblance of honesty and being readmitted in her family. Mrs. Termagant, although a villain, ends up well-off, economically speaking. Belfond will

be in charge of his daughter, who will benefit from a wealthy household away from the children's workshops of the poor, while Mrs. Termagant is assigned an annuity and is allowed to visit her daughter as long as she does not bring further trouble to the family. In real life, an arrangement such as this would have been the best option available to a single mother once marriage and legitimacy had been ruled out.

Shadwell's aim in this exemplary comedy was to promote morality on the stage without fully renouncing the successful dramatic formulas of debauchery. Although men and women struggle with the aftermath of sexual transgression, *The Squire of Alsatia* focuses on the difficulties debauchery can bring to a man through dramatizing his efforts to split with his former mistresses and marry into an honourable family. While Belfond's story is devised to be dissuasive of vice, Mrs. Termagant does not display any consciousness of the precarious economic and social state a real woman in her situation would face; rather she is an instrument to drive forward Belfond's story. Only Lucia expresses the ruin lost honour would imply for a woman of a certain status and the shame it would bring to her family. However, her storyline is not very developed and the warning against debauchery remains mostly aimed at men.

3.2. *The Marriage-Hater Matched*

Thomas Durfey staged *The Marriage-Hater Matched* in 1692, four years after the Glorious Revolution. By this point, William and Mary's propagandistic machine linking their reign to a providential act that will restore England to God's favour had long been functioning (Claydon 1996, 94-95; 102) and Durfey, who had a record of chameleonic political transformations (Gómez-Lara et al. 2014, 17; foreword to the listed critical edition of *The Marriage-Hater Matched*), became attuned to the new courtly atmosphere. After standing as a Tory and being on good terms with Charles II, in William and Mary's period Durfey wrote some of his most successful comedies, often dedicated to important figures in the Whig party (18). Therefore, *The Marriage-Hater Matched* is another exemplary play written with the changing standards of morality in mind in order to please the new court.

The Marriage-Hater Matched uses a number of the type-characters also featured in *The Squire*, only with a significant twist. The single mother, Lovewell, is a much more developed character. She takes up the story of the debauched innocent young lady where Lucia left it in *The Squire* and becomes the protagonist, while the rakish gallant Belfond is transformed into the satirical character of Sir Philip, the villain to Lovewell. In *The Marriage-Hater Matched* Sir Philip manipulates Phoebe, his former mistress, to cross-dress as a man, change her name to Lovewell and assist him in getting the deeds of a disputed property, all in exchange for marrying her and legitimizing the male child she has had with him. However, when it becomes clear that he does not intend to honour this agreement, she keeps the deed herself as leverage to convince Sir Philip to marry her. He pretends to change his mind and sets up a fake wedding, but

the trap backfires and it turns out they have been rightfully married. After this, the rake is reformed and even settles the issue with the deeds in a fairer way than initially intended. Durfey, therefore, does not redeem the rake alone, but also the unmarried mother, radically overturning the figure of the fallen woman in the process: a hard task. While making the fallen woman the villain of the plot was easy at the time, turning her into a sympathetic character was a challenge and giving her a happy ending without appearing to support vice, even harder. In *The Marriage-Hater Matched*, Durfey achieves this feat for Lovewell by making her an especially kind character—the embodiment of all goodness and innocence—so that she gets to stand for betrayed virtue in distress.

Unlike Mrs. Termagant, Lovewell gets to be the heroine of the play because of the many ways in which she redeems her sexual transgression. For one, Lovewell's love for Sir Philip excuses her having had sex with him after just the promise of marriage, just like Lucia's case in *The Squire*. These women's initial innocence makes them easy prey for the men's lies, but it is Lovewell who drives this point home most convincingly. In act 3.3, she reveals Sir Philip is the only dishonest one when she says: “[Y]ou know what's due to a vow of honour; and though my tender years and too fond heart [...] was won too soon at first, I could not doubt your vows and was as innocent of doing wrong as fearless of receiving it from you” (20-25). Sir Philip had falsely promised Lovewell to marry her, which, combined with her naivety, makes her an innocent victim of his deceit. Both Lovewell and Sir Philip have failed to keep their gendered definition of honour, that is, his word and her chastity. However, whereas Lovewell is ashamed of her state and strives to find reparation, Sir Philip is far from repentant but rather proves to be an inveterate perjurer as he reiterates his promise of marriage so he can use her further and get hold of the deeds (1.1). Furthermore, Lovewell was sexually inexperienced before Sir Philip and only had sex with him under promise of marriage, which implies that she intended to be chaste. We should remember that in seventeenth-century England pre-marital sexual relationships often took place, especially in rural areas, after formal betrothal (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 121). Mrs. Termagant, for example, could not say the same of herself so she could not defend her honour in a similar fashion.

Secondly, Lovewell is extremely conscious of her actions and regrets them deeply. She refuses to resume sexual relationships with Sir Philip until they are married (3.3.18) and only changes her mind when she is about to betray him and needs to prevent his suspicions. However, even then she is conscious of her misbehaviour: “[N]ow I don't touch upon marriage, the lewd wretch [Sir Philip] is as kind to me as he should really have been had he done me justice, whilst I, degenerated by my wrongs, lie in his arms and plot like a true jilt” (4.2.35–38). The adjective “degenerated” vividly conveys her sense of shame and responsibility for her own actions. However, given the circumstances of her defilement, the adjective bounces back to Sir Philip and also stains him with the shame of a transgression for which he is far more to blame than Lovewell. The heroine's act of self-loathing adds to the sympathy she inspires and invalidates the rake's self-defence. This is precisely the reason why only Lovewell can be the heroine of this morally concerned play.

She has acknowledged her sin and endeavours to achieve her own reformation, far from Sir Philip's intentions for himself. This gives her the moral upper hand and entitles her to fight vice in the form of the villain Sir Philip and reform him.

Indeed, Lovewell represents the desire for a respectable life through marriage. She is ready to follow all relevant social and moral rules and defends marriage in her discussions with Sir Philip (5.1) as the natural opposite to the ignominy of the dishonesty she suffers. At the end of the play, when Sir Philip and Lovewell are finally married, she says she has "help[ed] the marriage-hater here to a good wife [herself], that may be the occasion of his salvation hereafter" (5.1.275-77). This line brings up two important points. First, her self-proclamation as a "good wife" goes completely against commonplace exemplary literature, where the womanizer is redeemed by marrying a virtuous woman. This is an example of Duffey's radical take on the unmarried mother. Second, marriage is here regarded as a necessary step towards respectability and virtue, which is equated to the Christian salvation of the soul. Statements like this put Lovewell not only on the side of morality, but on the side of Grace, just as William and Mary intended for themselves.

Sir Philip perhaps has the same notion of marriage but a sexually transgressive life is more beneficial to him, so he evades marrying at all costs, instead taking the fashionable pose of the rakish gallant—the witty gentleman who cynically boasts of his debauchery. He talks about the impossibility for love and sexual attraction to survive wedlock. Adopting the libertine pose, he sees marital duties as a tedious task, a work requiring effort because it is compulsory. Sir Philip sums this up in his line: "Marriage in those of my humour is just like devotion, loved and practiced the less because it is enjoined us" (5.1.97-98). Also, one of his protests against marrying Lovewell is that if she becomes his wife, he would not love her anymore (3.3.9). For the libertine gentleman, pleasure comes together with promiscuity and lack of commitment. In fact, his image of marriage is to "be confined to moulder in a cage and batten in the excrement of marriage" (3.3.32-33). This very graphic description shows that it is not just reluctance, but sheer disgust that makes him reject marriage. His disgust, however, is so magnified that the utterance comes across as parodic rather than being in earnest. Duffey often uses this method to undermine his rake and his arguments, effectively marking the difference between the childish and egocentric Sir Philip and the reasonable and virtuous Lovewell. Despite the charisma of the actor William Mountfort playing the character of Sir Philip and the popularity the rake still enjoyed with the audience, the time for debauchery was coming to an end. Duffey gives his rake already stale arguments to support his lifestyle and offers a satirical take on a comical type who was enjoying the last of his glory before what Gómez-Lara et al. (2014, 19; foreword to the listed critical edition of *The Marriage-Hater Matched*) qualified as the gentrification of dramatic tastes in the new century.

Sir Philip tries to fake a wedding to fool Lovewell into cooperating but it ends up being a legal and binding ceremony. Lovewell's reaction is to attribute this turn of

events to “a special act of Providence” (5.3.402). This recalls the propaganda which presented William and Mary as a God-sent present for the English against the vices of their time, a Providential act to save them from divine punishment before it was too late (Bahlman 1957, 11; Claydon 1996, 47-52). Indeed, Sir Philip’s reformation through marriage has immediate effects. The play finishes very shortly after, so the audience does not get to see whether his personality has truly changed in the long term after his very manifest anti-marriage inclinations. However, he accepts the current state of affairs and reiterates that marriages are all “th’effects of Providence” (5.3.408). By repeating “Providence” in so short a space, the idea that marriage is a divine institution and its link with the Godly Reformation are strengthened. Moreover, his reformation is not only in marital matters at this point, as he immediately after suggests a fairer arrangement regarding the contested deeds, returning to the widow, who initially possessed them, the part of the estate he stole from her (5.3.409-11).

We should note that Sir Philip’s change is secured by a Providential marriage, but effected by Lovewell, the single mother, who is not the obstacle to but rather the means of reformation. It is interesting how in *The Marriage-Hater*, the instrument for the rake’s reformation—and by extension the end of vice—is precisely a participant in the sins which worried the Societies for the Reformation of Manners so much. This is not the case in most plays about reformed rakes. Typically, as with Belfond, former mistresses were a hindrance and had to be left behind before the rake was redeemed by marrying an honest lady. In fact, in Lovewell and Sir Philip’s last discussion about marriage he exclaims: “to marry one’s stale mistress, ridiculous!” (5.1.51). It does not matter that he was her first and only lover; Lovewell already counts as “stale.” This is an objectification and devaluation of the woman on the mere grounds of having had sex, while Sir Philip, the other participant in their relationship, is not only unaffected but feels himself to be above her—he does not think her fit to be his wife. Durfey’s unprecedented ending further supports Lovewell, who is spared the life of disgrace that awaits other former mistresses and is allowed a second chance among honest society instead. We could arguably say that Lovewell stands for England itself, as the moral reformers saw it. After being debauched by the libertine, which could be equated with the relaxed morality of previous monarchs, Lovewell/England rises from vice redeemed from her sin thanks to Godly intervention and becomes the representation of virtue, just as the English had liked to see themselves—God’s favourite nation—since the time of Elisabeth I. If we read *The Marriage-Hater* in this way, Durfey has attempted here a laudatory allegory of the reformation of England thanks to William and Mary’s policy. This makes sense given Durfey’s aim to gain the new monarchs’ favour and would further explain the innovative take on the single mother figure.

In any case, Lovewell’s love, innocence, and defence of marriage are not the only ways in which she redeems her sexual transgression. She continuously tries to do good throughout the play, even if sometimes she has to be flexible about the means to achieve her ends. In order to regain respectability, she has to trick the widow that is

also contending for the deeds and take her fortune, but even then Lovewell wants to compensate her—"I cannot in conscience but contrive something to do her a kindness" (5.2.2-3)—and finds the widow a rich fop to marry and regain her lost wealth. Lovewell's dubious actions seem justified by her seeking an honourable situation for her child and herself. Sir Philip takes the opposite approach and selfishly refrains from offering reparation to Lovewell, even though he is aware of the wrong he is doing her: "If consideration now could take place in me, I have no reason to deny doing justice to this pretty creature that is so kind and can do me so much good" (5.1.93-95). Although he is fully aware that Lovewell does not deserve the situation she is in, he finds it more convenient to remain single, so he will not marry her. He is moved by pure egotism and hedonism as opposed to Lovewell's goodness. Morality and poetic justice compensate for Lovewell's flaws in a way that Sir Philip or Mrs. Termagant cannot expect for themselves.

Moreover, Lovewell is not only a good person but also a good mother and appeals to the audience's sympathy in a way in which Mrs. Termagant, again, could not. Lovewell does not use her son to manipulate her lover as Mrs. Termagant did with her daughter, but only mentions him in the first scene of the play when Sir Philip reiterates his decision not to marry. She does not want marriage so much for herself as for the well-being of her son. She laments: "[I]f I should talk t'ye of my little boy now, 'twould set me a-crying and you'd but laugh at me," to which Sir Philip answers: "[L]et him alone then to his rattle and bells and observe me" and proceeds to call their affair, and by extension their son, a "venial slip" as he continues talking of his interest in the widow (1.1.95-98). Lovewell does not even expect him to be concerned about her situation, but to laugh at her pain. The audience cannot but sympathize with Lovewell's pathetic, humble tone in contrast to Sir Philip's callous answer. Later, in 5.1, Lovewell tries to fight back against Sir Philip's arguments in defence of marriage, which is his last opportunity to take her as a wife before losing his claim to the contested estate forever. She patiently counterattacks until he alleges disgust at children (5.1.68-70). At this point, Lovewell gets angry and is ready to give up and hand the deeds to the widow. In other words, talking about children is her breaking point. Her love and respect for her child is present precisely because she does not "play the baby-card" to manipulate Sir Philip. She is portrayed as a truly concerned mother.

Finally, Durfey's last resource to make an amiable character of Lovewell was extra-textual. Restoration drama was conditioned by the limited number of theatres and companies licensed to act in London after Charles II lifted the ban imposed on theatre during Cromwell's regime. In fact, there were only two companies licensed until 1682, and then just one, the United Company, until 1695. Playwrights thus knew exactly who would be playing the parts and often wrote with the specific actor already in mind. The charismatic William Mountfort would play Sir Philip and Anne Bracegirdle, Lovewell. Gómez-Lara et al. (2014, 34; foreword to the listed critical edition of *The Marriage-Hater Matched*) comment on the image of chastity and good reputation

cultivated by Bracegirdle, as opposed to the still questionable fame of other actresses at the time. Accordingly, Bracegirdle had specialized in portraying virginal and innocent characters. Indeed, it was Bracegirdle who played Lucia in *The Squire* as well. Moreover, the prologue to *The Marriage-Hater* consists of a conversation between Mountford and Bracegirdle in which she protests she is ashamed of playing a part “in breeches,” that is, cross-dressing. These parts often had the sexual allure of exposing women’s legs, usually hidden under voluminous dresses. Her reluctance to appear in this guise is but proof of the self-fashioning of her public persona, which Durfey uses to his advantage. The prologue invites the audience to superimpose Bracegirdle’s public image onto Lovewell’s character, ensuring that they will not identify Lovewell with an immoral woman. By choosing an actress with a good reputation who specialized in playing virtuous young women, the playwright conditioned the audience into believing in her innocence.

4. CONCLUSION

Many comedies in Restoration drama feature pregnant single women. Pregnant women had the function of tarnishing a man’s reputation or blackmailing them with that threat and in some cases the pregnancy was even fake. In the end, the pregnant woman usually got married to a fop before she gave birth, which was assumed to be a punishment for him—in itself quite revealing about the way unchaste women were regarded. Nevertheless, single pregnant women were side characters, intended more as a dramatic device than as fully developed personas. The single mothers in *The Squire* and *The Marriage-Hater*, however, have a very different function. They appear as a warning against the dangers of vice and promiscuity, a figure not especially welcomed in the carefree Carolean comedy. At the time of William and Mary of Orange, however, warning against excess was encouraged. *The Squire of Alsatia* and *The Marriage-Hater Matched* are not important simply because they are the only comedies of the period that portray actual single mothers, but also because they are the direct result of the Glorious Revolution’s influence on the stage. Thomas Durfey aligns with the moral propaganda of the new monarchs and in a very bold move the fallen woman is for once specially constructed to elicit the audience’s sympathy.

The Marriage-Hater highlights sexual double standards, common in the seventeenth century, as well as their consequences, for libertine mores functioned more positively for men than for women, whose sexual freedom was limited both by social constraints and laws against female promiscuity, while unchaste behaviour in unmarried women and especially pregnancy were serious taboos. The introduction of a single mother in a play radically changes the prevalent comedic discourse around libertine mores. A child out of wedlock sets the conflict in motion as it manifests a fracture in the moral and behavioural tissue of the time, and the characters’ objective is to clean their name and their honour from dishonesty, be it the man’s unfulfilled promise to marry or the woman’s lost chastity.

That is the reason why the unmarried mother appears precisely after 1688. Before the advent of the Glorious Revolution, vice could be condoned and dishonour avoided by a last-minute wedding. However, when the ideology that William and Mary represented took force, debauchery became a pressing matter. Like the living child in both works, it needed a solution and could not be overlooked any longer.

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