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“Ach for It”: Anthony Leigh, Autonomy, and Queer Pleasures in the Restoration Playhouse

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Abstract: Anthony Leigh (d. 1692) built his career as a Restoration comedic actor by playing a combination of queer, lascivious, old, and/or disabled men to audiences’ great delight. In this essay, I key in on two plays that frame Leigh’s career: Thomas D’urfeys’ *The Fond Husband* (1677) and Thomas Southerne’s *Sir Anthony Love* (1690). In *The Fond Husband*, a younger Leigh plays a “superannuated,” almost blind and almost deaf Old Fumble who, in the first act, kisses a man because he cannot navigate the heterosexual erotic economy of the play (as over-determined by able-bodiedness). Over a decade later, in *Sir Anthony Love*, Leigh plays an aging, queer Abbé who is so earnestly erotically invested in Love’s masculinity (unaware that Love is a woman in drag) that he attempts to seduce Love with dancing. I bring the beginning and end of Leigh’s stage life together to argue that Leigh’s body, performing queerly, asks audiences to confront the limits of pleasure in sustaining fantasies of the abled, autonomous heterosexual self. Using these two Restoration comedies that bookend Leigh’s career, I trace pleasures and queer structures of feeling experienced in the Restoration playhouse. While Durfey and Southerne’s plays-as-texts seek to discipline unruly, disabled queer bodies by making Fumble and the Abbé the punchline, Leigh’s performances open up alternative opportunities for queer pleasure. Pleasure becomes queer in its ability to undo orderings and fantasies based on autonomy (that nasty little myth). In his *Apology*, Colley Cibber reveals the ways that Leigh’s queerly performing body engages the bodies of audience members. In reflecting on the reading versus spectating experience, Cibber remarks, “The easy Reader might, perhaps, have been pleas’d with the Author without discomposing a Feature; but the Spectator must have heartily held his sides, or the Actor would have heartily made them ache for it” (89). Spectatorship is not a passive role, but rather a carnal interplay with the actor, and this interplay has immediate, bodily implications. Audiences laugh. They ache. They touch. Whereas the reader of a play in private can maintain composure, audiences in the theatre are contrarily discomposed, non-autonomous, and holding onto their sides. Leigh’s ability as a comedian energizes the text and produces pleasure on an immediate, corporeal level for audiences. And that pleasure is generated through stage business built on touching, feeling, and seducing male-presenting characters. Spectatorship may, in fact, be a queer experience as Leigh’s queerly performing body exposes the limits of autonomy.



Citation: Wiehe, Jarred. 2021. “Ach for It”: Anthony Leigh, Autonomy, and Queer Pleasures in the Restoration Playhouse. *Humanities* 10: 94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h10030094>

Received: 21 April 2021
Accepted: 23 July 2021
Published: 4 August 2021

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Keywords: queer theory; performance; theatre history; restoration theatre; restoration; Anthony Leigh; Thomas Southerne; Thomas Durfey



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1. ‘Fooling with the Boys’: Introducing Leigh

“Witness his bant’ring Nonsense, & his Noise,
Stealing from Stalls, and Fooling with the Boys.”
—Butler’s *Satyr on the Players* on Anthony Leigh

Restoration comedian, Anthony Leigh (d. 1692), was sensational—and by that, I mean he activated audiences’ senses in strange and exciting ways during his career from the 1670s through 1691. Biographical information on Leigh is scarce—the majority of what historians know comes from (Highfill et al. 1993). Langhans’ study of Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre persons, and from Colley Cibber’s *An Apology for the Life of*

Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian (Cibber [1740] 1889). Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, in their edition of John Downes' *Roscius Anglicanus*, report that Leigh may "have tried acting about 1671–72, but he did not establish himself solidly in the company until 1676" (68n196). Downes (Downes 1987), the prompter for the Duke's Company, reports:

Mr. Leigh was Eminent in this part of Sir William [in Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688)], & Scapin [in Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1676)]. Old Fumble [in Durfey's *A Fond Husband* (1677)]. Sir Jolly Jumble [in Otway's *The Soldier's Fortune* (1680)]. Mercury in [Dryden's] *Amphitruon* [1690]. Sir Formal [Shadwell's *The Virtuoso* (1676)], [Dryden's] *Spanish Fryar*, Pandarus in *Troilus and Cressida* [Dryden (1679)]. (p. 86)

These roles are pimps, cheats, dirty clergymen, and lecherous old (and impotent) men. Leigh's popularity comes from roles that explicitly ask audiences to think about the contours of fluid sexual communities: the wanton, the dirty, the aging, and the queer.¹ By "queer," I signal the type of capacious and fluid desires and sex acts that traffic in unexpected ways through early modern affects. Informed by contemporary queer theorists of affect, Christine Varnado (Varnado 2020) models how to read for "mood, relationality, embodiment, and nonverbal and linguistic expression. In other words, affects are legible. Their textual residues, their aesthetic and libidinal effects, constitute a body of significations—content that can be read" (7). While queer might signal wayward, variant, non-normative, queerness is very much a way of feeling.

Leigh also became the touchstone for foppish performances of masculinity in the Restoration theatre. Aphra Behn's (Behn 1997) epilogue to *The Rover* (1677) capitalizes Leigh's popularity to playfully tease the nay-saying fops in the audience:

Such fops are never pleased, unless the play
Be stuffed with fools as brisk and dull as they.
[. . .]
Oh that our Nokes, or Tony Lee, could show
A fop but half so much to th'life as you. (pp. 247–48).

Leigh and his counterpart, James Nokes, were famous enough for audiences to recognize the types of sexual roles that the two predominantly played.² Restoration audiences would have understood Leigh as a fop, as well as a hyper-sexual subject.³ Samuel Butler (Butler 1679), in *A Satyr on the Players* (1679), renders Leigh and his contemporaries as sexually perverse. Butler begins by calling all actors "Stage Ape[s]," and then he turns his satirical gaze on individual actors, often coupling queer sex acts and disabilities. He characterizes Nokes, Leigh's notorious co-fop, in the following way:

You Smock-fac'd lads, secure your gentle Bums;
For, full of Lust and Fury, see, he comes!
'Tis Bugg'ring Nokes, whose damn'd unwieldy T[arse]
Weeps, to be bury'd in his Foreman's A[rse]
Unnatural Sinner, Letcher without Sence
To leave kind Whores, to dive in Excrements! (272)

Butler shapes Nokes' desires as pointedly sodomitical, uncontrollable, and unreasonable. Part of what shapes Nokes' penis as irrational and "unwieldy" is a loss of phallic, masculinist control—it also is overly sensational and (ironically) weeping. Nokes' desires thus make him "unnatural," immoral, and senseless, and they accordingly call into question the actor's status as a rational subject. With regards to "Tony Lee," Butler writes,

But now, the Character of one you'll Read,
Who strove so long a Fool to be believ'd,
That at last he is a Fool indeed:
Witness his Bant'ring Noncense and his Noise,

Stealing from Stall, and Fooling with the Boys. (272)

As with Nokes, Butler deploys “fool” in order to connect sexual suspicion to mental health since Leigh’s “fooling” is tied to articulations of his cognitive impairments (his nonsensical bantering). Again, in lambasting Elizabeth Barry, Butler references Leigh and sexual health: “One that is *Pox* all o’er, *Barry* her Name, /That mercenary, Prostituted Dame; /Whose nauseous A[ss] like *Tony’s Tap* does Run” (273). By creating a simile with Barry’s leaky anus and Leigh’s penis, Butler reinforces Leigh’s body as queerly performing, sexually fraught, anally-oriented, and dirty.⁴ So what types of queer feelings might emerge in productions that capitalize on Leigh?

While certainly not gospel truth, Cibber’s *Apology* gives theatre historians insight into the ways that Leigh’s performances create different structures of feelings outside of the printed text.⁵ Cibber writes, “*Leigh* rais’d the Character as much above the Poet’s Imagination as the Character has sometimes rais’d other Actors above themselves!” (146). While clearly very flattering to Leigh, Cibber sets up a paradigm of understanding the relationship between actor and role—whereas other actors step into roles, Leigh takes roles that might be flat and animates them beyond themselves. I want to put pressure on performances, bodies, and pleasures that work beyond, outside, and besides themselves, and Leigh’s stage history gets us to that conversation. Cibber reflects, “But no wonder *Leigh* arriv’d to such Fame in what was so completely written for him, when Characters that would make the Reader yawn in the Closet, have, by the Strength of his Action, been lifted into the lowdest Laughter on the Stage” (146). Laughter, of course, is often a coercive and cruel disciplinary tool in the era. Simon Dickie’s *Cruelty and Laughter* (Dickie 2014) opens with the reminder, “Eighteenth-century Britons—or a high proportion of them—openly delighted in the miseries of others. Women as well as men laughed at cripples and hunchbacks” (1). Leigh’s performing body engages audiences on a different register—and one that is distinctly compelling in its ability to turn the ideas of loss of autonomy back on the audience. Leigh’s “Action” draws forth a physiological response from audiences’ bodies: laughter. That laughter has the power to expose the limits of audiences’ autonomy and pleasure: “the high Colouring, the strong Lights and Shades of Humour that enliven’d the whole and struck our Admiration with Surprize and Delight, were wholly owing to the Actor.” (88–9). While questions of “Surprize and Delight” and other affective relationships have occupied literary historians of sexuality and the novel, I want to think more deliberately about the queer possibilities such surprise offers in the playhouse.⁶

2. Queer Pleasure and the Limits of Autonomy

Cibber describes the very carnal implications of Leigh’s comedy, which engages with audience members’ bodies in different ways than with those of readers. He writes, “The easy Reader might, perhaps, have been pleased with the Author without discomposing a Feature, but the Spectator must have heartily held his Side, or the Actor would have heartily made them ach for it” (148–9). This image of holding, touching, laughing, and aching is central to my argument about the queerness of the Restoration playhouse. Cibber’s repetition of “heartily”—“with full of unrestrained exercise of real feeling”—speaks to the excess of pleasure and the physicality of the response (OED 1a). And there is something that shakes spectators out of autonomy through discomposing, recomposing, and aching; despite holding it in, their bodies respond to Leigh with queer pleasure. “Ache” is a provocative way into queer theatrical bodily experiences because it is a small, negative sensation. For Samuel Johnson, there is a temporal association—to ache is “continued”—and it will be linked will dull pains, possibly in waves or chronic experiences (OED 3). In Cibber’s reflection, the negative is a site related to tensions of pleasure and sovereignty: a sensation caused by holding back, trying to being in control, and by resisting, aching. “Ache” is a productive term for queer historical research given queer theories critical reconciliations with how queer scholars long and ache toward “archives of feeling”.⁷ Heather Love’s characterization of the relationship of queer history and research comes

to mind: “queer history is marked by a double impossibility: we will never possess the dead; our longing for them is also marked by the historical impossibility of same-sex desire” (21). Finally, aching bodies provide a different way into conversations about cripistemologies and queer pleasure.⁸ By queer pleasure, I mean affective experiences on and through the body that are not necessarily genitally based (though they certainly can be). I come to that idea of pleasure, laughter, and being beside oneself through two conversations: contemporary queer and feminist thinking and the British literary history of making genders—especially men *men*—through naturalized fictions of autonomy.

Queer pleasure, in this project, is not just sexual or erotic pleasure—it is about the perversely fun experience of watching orderings and categorization coming apart. Michel Foucault (Foucault 1973), in the preface to *The Order of Things*, reflects on how laughter and pleasure opened up a space to interrogating the history of human sciences. He writes:

This first book arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. (xv)

Although Foucault does not label his laughter as such, I see the Borgesian laughter—that odd outburst of pleasure in the face of familiar epistemologies and orderings coming undone—as a critically queer/crip tool.⁹ In laughing, Foucault transforms a jarring reading experience into a physical and vocal response that signals pleasure in seeing bizarre alternatives to the orderings “which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things” (xv). Laughter resists the disciplining of ordering, which is too often built on white, Western, heteromasculinist “rationality.” Since Borges’ text disturbs, threatens, and collapses notions of similarity and difference, boundaries between “Same and the Other,” it raises issues relevant to queer and disability studies: instability of binaries, making certain lives “the Other,” and undermining the universality of empirical knowledge.

This laughter is tinged with anxiety, and Foucault notes “a certain uneasiness [. . .] hard to shake off” (xvii). It is “the profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed” (*The Order* xviii-xix). Even so, in laughing at an undoing that produces lingering unease, Foucault gives himself a space to ask epistemologically shattering questions: “On what ‘table’ according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things? What is this coherence—which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an a priori and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents?” (xix). His laughter, spurred by experiencing alternative groupings, opens up a radical critique of “the process of establishing an order among things” (xix).

Of course, emotions and affective responses have a critical history of “undoing” categories and, for Judith Butler (2004), selves. In reflecting on the power of grief, Butler writes, “[G]rief displays the way in which we are in the thrall of our relations with others that we cannot always recount or explain, that often interrupts the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control” (19). For Butler, the nature of embodiment means realizing how we are always vulnerable in the face of others, that we never truly have control over what can happen to us: “The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency; the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. [. . .] Although we struggle for right over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own” (21). Dangerous acts serve as stark reminders of this very vulnerability, this very precarious fantasy of autonomy. Butler writes, “Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another” (22). While

violence and grief provide very clear moments where people become beside themselves, laughter, too, can lay bare the ways we do not have control over ourselves. It resonates with Cibber's description of Leigh's effect: "the Spectator must have heartily held his sides, or the Actor would have heartily made them ach for it" (89). Audiences have to try and hold themselves together or else ache. This is about experiencing comedy on and through a body—a body that is at the mercy of Leigh.

Giving oneself over to pleasure in the Restoration playhouse teases at the edges of nonsovereignty. In *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman think through "the ways that sex undoes the subject" and "the activity of affect phenomenologically and in historical context" (4). Contributing to the long tradition of Gayle Rubin (Rubin 2011) and ways of thinking about sex and the social as contrary to liberation narratives or discourses of wholeness, mastery, and telos, Berlant and Edelman find nonsovereignty to be a place of for multiplying pleasures and, by extension, livable lives.¹⁰ Though the two approach the concept of sex, nonsovereignty, and the pleasure of undoing in slightly different terms, Berlant and Edelman are concerned with "that muddled middle where survival and threats to it engender social forms that transform the habitation of negativity's multiplicity" (5). Which is to say, for the watershed moment of the Restoration, which worked to secure livable lives for some while foreclosing that survival for others, Berlant and Edelman's framework of pleasure and nonsovereignty helps me center those crip and queer bodies and "expand the field of affective potentialities, latent and explicit fantasies, and infrastructures for how to live beyond survival" in a crip/queer past (5). Such work on queer theory and laughter has been brought to bear on the eighteenth-century novel. Eugenia Zuroski (Zuroski 2020) picks up Berlant and Edelman to make sense of the queer potentiality of Frances Burney's *Evelina*.¹¹ Bringing such frames to bear on the playhouse instead of the novel allows theatre historians to put pressure on autonomy, sentiment, and heterosocializing affects.¹²

I value such queer frameworks of undoing because it gets at the queer pleasure of undoing autonomy—that nasty myth of the Enlightenment which sustains able-bodied, hetero-patriarchy. Thomas A. King (King 2008) maps the shift to private men making public, civic discourse about did not just work to secure a public masculine sphere: it made men *men*. He contends, "Within a newly privatized society, an ideology of desire represented the manly subject as autonomous of any occupation or negotiation of particular social places. The male subject of desire would locate his freedom in the pleasurable and subjective experience in his own sensations" (117). With this emergent eighteenth-century fantasy of autonomy and having and owning one's own private sensations, embodied performances like Leigh's, which shock the (male) audience out of the senses, is a provocative hiccup in the solidification of "man." If the era develops the "emergence of a new concept of manliness as that inner space of self-possession and autonomy preceding, and extending across, propertied men's interactions with each other as they unfold in time," then the public playhouse might be a queer site that ruptures self-possession and autonomy.

Such conversations about autonomy, gendered fictions, and resistance to congealing heteronormativity are happening in the history of the novel, poetry, and public discourse.¹³ Shifting media, the theatre offers such a provocatively queer affective network because of the unexpected circuits of pleasure between actors and audiences. Spectatorship is not a spectator sport; which is to say, spectatorship is not a passive consumption of the staged material. Audiences bring an active engagement to the Restoration playhouse, and of course, the audience members interact with each other. Kristina Straub's (Straub 1992) foundational work on actors and sexual ideology teaches us that fantasies of easy binaries (man/woman, masculine/feminine, homo/hetero) never hold up in the Restoration playhouse:

Discourse about the theater and its denizens serves a particular function in relation to the emerging dominant order of the bourgeois culture in which gender and sexuality come to be organized in separate spheres of gender and sexual object choice—masculine/feminine, hetero/homosexual. (23)

An easy binary of feminized spectacle and masculine spectator collapses, and Straub stakes out that “spectatorship might, then, be most usefully thought of, not as a stable authority, but as a continuously shifting site of struggle for control that plays out in terms of gender and sexual difference” (19). Jean I. Marsden’s foundational study of women and pleasure in the playhouse, *Fatal Desire* (Marsden 2006), begins with the reminder that “the gaze” is multidirectional in the Restoration playhouse, and the separation between audiences and actors were flexible at best.¹⁴ Most recently, in *Theatres of Feeling* (Marsden 2019), Marsden puts more pressure on the socializing effect of communal theater-going. The stage world “reflected not an actual reality but the reality they desired to inhabit, a reality that incorporated their national identity as a moral community and as participants in a far-flung empire, thus reinforcing their vision of themselves and their values” (2). Stage worlds and eighteenth-century culture could be mutually reinforcing circuits of pleasure and identification. While Marsden’s study of sentiment, morality, and performance centers national myth-making drama (Arthur Murphy’s *The Grecian Daughter*) and reform plays (Richard Cumberland’s *The Jew*), I take up the perverse collective pleasures of experiencing undoing. In theorizing community and affect, Marsden writes:

It is a communal rather than individual experience and cannot exist without an audience, just as it cannot exist without a performer. The two create a symbiotic experience that is more than a sum of its parts, a response the eighteenth century understood as sympathy—a *spectator’s involuntary emotional reaction to what he or she sees upon the stage*” (4, emphasis mine).

Alongside sight, I would add hearing and feeling on the body through vibrations as sensations that illicit sympathy, but this “involuntary” emotional response that activates the body hints at the experiences of nonsovereignty.

Through this framework of nonsovereignty, undoing, pleasure, and performance, I turn to two roles which bookend Leigh’s career. Durfey’s comedy gives concrete moments to this more abstract queer affective network, and Southerne imagines how these feelings might have worked in a visibly queer moment, which was unfortunately cut from the performance (though still printed). By doing a deep reading of Durfey and a smaller coda of Southerne, I theorize moments of performance that open up the queerness of Restoration theatre-going through Leigh.

3. Fumbling Pleasures: Crip/Queer Stagecraft in *The Fond Husband*

Durfey’s *The Fond Husband* (Durfey 1677) premiered at the Duke’s Theatre in 1677. The play begins with Emilia, who is married to Peregrine Bubble (the titular fond husband), and her lover, Rashley, in amorous intimacies, laughing. Bubble, unaware, has been authorizing this affair. Rashley says to Emilia, “Never doubt your Husband, Madam, he has so strange a confidence in my fidelity, that to possess him otherwise, were utterly to take away the little sence [sic] is left him” (2). Thus, the central joke of the sex comedy is immediately revealed: the audience is to laugh at the inclusions and exclusions within a sexual community. Ranger, Rashley’s rival for Emilia’s extramarital affections, arrives and is rejected, and when Bubble returns home, he is oblivious to his status as cuckold. In fact, Bubble is made to laugh at himself as Rashley tells him of his success with his lover (secretly Emilia) and his conquest of “the most credulous of all the cuckolds I ever met with” (2). The first act culminates in the entrance of Leigh as Old Fumble, an aging, deaf, and almost blind man who is desperately trying to pass as able-bodied to play in the erotic exchanges. Upon his entrance, Fumble flirts with the young Cordelia (Bubble’s niece), but when he goes to kiss her, Fumble instead kisses a young, male law student, Sneak. Everyone laughs. The other four acts develop this same theme: Old Fumble cannot participate in the sexual economy of the play in a straightforward way. The subsequent stage business opens up a consideration of how Leigh’s performances might create queer structures of feeling that run a bit resistant to the printed text.

While in print, *The Fond Husband* deploys ableist and heterosexist tropes in order to discipline sexuality (such as the fear of being cuckolded and mocking an aging man for

trying to participate in heteroerotic courtship), the experience in the playhouse engages audience members' bodies in a different way. While initially designed to be a coercive, ableist tool for maintaining compulsory able-bodiedness, laughter might elicit some other pleasures. Durfey understands the ways laughter and arousal activate the body. In the beginning of Act 3, the jealous Maria (Bubble's sister) and Ranger attempt to expose Emilia's affair. Ranger exclaims, "I have seen [Emilia] lie in *Rashley's* Arms and kiss him, play with his Nose, and clap his Cheeks, and laugh till her whole Frame was shook with Titulation" (26). Rashley's observations, which are meant to send Bubble into a hetero-masculinist panic over cuckolding, reveals the power of laughter to bring a body to an aroused state. Laughter, touching, and other physicality are sites of non-genital pleasure—sites which are amplified by the play's meta-theatricality.

In fact, Durfey seems to be thinking meta-theatrically about masculinity, heterosexuality, and performance. Durfey establishes this meta-theatrical framework in the first act as Bubble fails to recognize that the mistress Rashley is talking about is Emilia. Rashley reveals his mistress is married to "the most credulous of all the Cuckolds I ever met with" (6). Bubble ironically responds, "Poor Animal! Faith I pity him, but there's a number of 'em about Town ifaith—we men of wit should want diversion else" (6). The dramatic irony allows audiences to laugh at Bubble because he believes himself in solidarity with Rashley (rather than in competition). Ranger, in an aside to the audience, laments, "To be made a property all this while, and not discern it, Oh insufferable stupidity!" (6). While "property" most immediately denotes "a means to an end; a person or thing to be made use of; an instrument or tool," the term connotes issues of ownership (OED 6). Though a looser association, a "property," or, in modern shorthand, a "prop," is also a catch-all term for costume and hand-held materials of theatre.¹⁵ The layered concern of ownership, tools, and objects suggests that the pleasure comes from watching men grow anxious about the control they have over their bodies, privacy, and reputation on stage.

In print, the play feels pretty conservative in terms of queerness—a mode of desiring that seems generated through disability. The effect would appear to be framing queerness as a broken or malformed heterosexuality. Take, for instance, the character description of Old Fumble. Old Fumble is "a superannuated Alderman, that dotes on Black Women. He's very deaf, and almost blind; and seeking to cover his imperfection of not hearing what is said to him, answers quite contrary." Superannuated" signals a totalized concept of disability; the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "disqualified or incapacitated by age," which connotes a complete removal from the concept of an abled body (1a).¹⁶ "Dotes" refers both to Fumble's excess of passion and it extends the range of disability to highlight Fumble's waning able-mindedness, and likewise makes his sexual desire a symptom of the feeble-mindedness. His desire, seen as illicit and enfeebling, also plays into ableist representations where "[w]omen and men with disabilities are seen as less attractive, less able to marry and be involved in domestic production" (Davis 1995, p. 131). The character description thus removes Fumble completely from a spectrum of corporeality, situating him as quite totally disabled. The comedic turn (and thus the need for disciplining) comes from both his desire to pass. Dickie recaps the standard defense in polite, sentimental society when people with disabilities are mocked. Often, it is through a defense of making fun of artifice: "Deformed characters pretend not to be deformed, and it was therefore always appropriate to ridicule them" (63). Under this logic, Durfey ostensibly authorizes the audience to laugh at Fumble because of his affection. By not accepting his disqualification, Fumble is the punch line—at least on the page.

As Cibber's reflections remind us, Leigh's performances—as corporeal acts in space and time—take the printed text and create a different affective experience. Gesturing to the performance afterlives of Thomas Otway's *The Soldier's Fortune* (1683) and Thomas Shadwell's *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688), Cibber claims these plays flat-lined without Leigh and his comic partner, Nokes: "But alas! when those Actors were gone, that Comedy and many others, for the same Reason, were rarely known to stand upon their own Legs; by seeing no more of *Leigh* or *Nokes* in them, the Characters were quite sunk and

alter'd" (88). When comparing Leigh to the later comedian, William Penkethman, Cibber praises Leigh for being more capable in his disability drag: "For *Leigh* had many masterly Variations which the other [Penkethman] could not, nor even pretend to reach, particularly in the Dotage and Follies of extreme old Age, in the Characters of *Fumble* in the *Fond Husband*, and the Toothless Lawyer in the *City Politick*, both which Plays liv'd only by the extraordinary Performance of *Nokes* and *Leigh*" (89). Following Cibber, these plays are enlivened, animated, and driven by Leigh.

The end of the first act stages same-sex kissing with Fumble's misperformance of heterosexuality (as over-determined by able-bodiedness). Before Fumble's entrance, Bubble primes the characters and audience for Fumble's debut: "'Tis old Alderman *Fumble*: He's a little deaf, but ifaith very good company, and will so fumble about the Women" (8). Emilia adds, "I've heard he dotes on all the Women he sees, and is as passionate and inconstant at his age of Seventy Three, as the brisk Sparks of our times are at Five and Twenty" (8). The introduction closely braids sexuality and disability, framing Fumble's desires as at odds with his age, though maybe not his ability. Emilia perceives Fumble as having a sexual subjectivity. Rashley undercuts this by joking, "He says (the Devil take him that believes him) nothing fails him but his Eyes, which defect he has lately amended by a pair of Venetian Spectacles" (8). While the failure is allegedly about Fumble's auditory capacity, it invokes impotence and phallic failure to rise. Durfey gives audiences an explicit consideration of the limits of sexual culture, as demarcated by age.

Fumble's desiring body reveals, however, that he can still play in the erotic space—though not in a straight way. Fumble becomes taken with the young, beautiful Cordelia (Bubble's niece), and in order to gaze on her, he requires an adaptive device: "*Old Fumble pulls out his Spectacles, and looks on Cordelia*" (8). Leigh does not need assistive technology, so this moment becomes disability drag as it uplays a farcical visual impairment. This stage business of pulling out a disability prop—Venetian spectacles—and making a moment out of looking gives material life to the concerns about masculinity, sex, and becoming property. Fumble's prop use stages what the other men fear—being rendered non-autonomous. Fumble relies on adaptive technology to participate, revealing that access to erotic gazing sometimes needs assistance. Autonomy is not required. Simultaneously, it is supposed to be an ableist sight gag, which phenomenologically engages audiences through laughter. It is a moment of resistance and reinscription.

Fumble continues anatomizing Cordelia through his lenses, noting her "good Eye, good Hair, and ifack [. . .] everything good" (9). When he decides to "salute her," Fumble "goes to kiss Cordelia, and kisses Sneak" instead (9). As written, the joke seems to be about disqualifying Fumble, justifying laughing because he is failing to pass as abled; but, the reaction on stage seems to be one of curiosity rather than repulsion or exclusion. Sneak says, "What the Devil does this old Fellow mean? Uncle! did you ever see the like?" Sir Roger, Sneak's uncle, replies "Ha, ha, ha! a pleasant mistake ifaith" (9). A little same-sex kiss is only a "pleasant mistake." Fumble explains, "Ha! ifack I think I was mistaken, was I not, Gentlemen? was I not? I doubt my false light guided me to the wrong person;—Hah! But come, no matter, I meant it right, Madam, I meant it right: Never the older for a mistake ifack! I meant it right" (9). Fumble's line starts with confusion—he needs to be reassured that, indeed, he has mistakenly kissed a man, and he remains skeptical that he has. The misrecognition, facilitated by blindness, is excused because his intentions were toward a woman. He "meant it right." This logic separates erotic intent from object, and it exposes the ways orientations—as fantasies and desires that moves bodies toward or away from each other—may get messy. Sara Ahmed ([Ahmed 2006](#)) theorizes queer orientations through phenomenology, writing, "By implication the queer moment, in which objects appear slantwise and the vertical and horizontal axes appear 'out of line,' must be overcome because they block bodily action: they inhibit the body such that it ceases to extend into phenomenal space" (66). For Ahmed, queer orientations are made to "get in line" so that "the body 'straightens' its view in order to extend into space" (66). What Leigh's kiss gives audiences is a moment resistant to straightening and disciplining. As intent is

ruptured from agentic movement, the kiss creates a moment where audiences laugh at sexual autonomy failing.¹⁷ This initial stage business furthermore unsettles heterosexuality as a neutral or natural orientation—even if one means it right, it takes regulation and assistive tech to make it work.

When Fumble attempts to actively court Cordelia, Durfey provides a more explicit consideration of ontology and masculinity. In the third act, Fumble walks in on Sneak trying to woo Cordelia. Sneak is upset, but Fumble, unable to see or hear, does not recognize what is happening. It takes a beat before he realizes, "'Tis Sir Roger's Nephew! A pretty Fellow,—a very pretty Fellow" (18). When Sneak informs Fumble, "[T]his Lady and I have bus'ness," trying to scare Fumble off, Fumble replies, "Ifack, and so she is, Sir, very pretty, very pretty, *bona fide*" (18). Audiences are supposed to laugh at Fumble's non sequitur, and his disabilities create a bisexual moment where pretty men and women can be gazed on interchangeably. Instead of hearing Sneak and engaging, Fumble turns on a dime and reorients his gaze. In an aside, Sneak suggests Fumble's current embodiment is because of his past sexual exploits, characterizing him as "an old doting impotent Fellow, one that was rotten in his Minority, and now has lost three of his five Sences [*sic*]" (18). Cordelia encourages Fumble to stay because she does not like Sneak, and Sneak is astonished: "Why, he has Nothing, Madam: A Lady can like no Hearing, no Smelling, no Tasting, no Teeth, no Strength, no—nothing I say that a man should have? Besides, he's about four-score; and by being a stallion in his Youth, has acquir'd to be a Baboon in his Age" (18). Sneak's definition of "man" relies on compulsory able-bodiedness: cross-sex desire is drawn between and by abled bodies. Sneak's bias also reveals the precarity of the abled body—a sexual subjectivity which, under ableist models of the body, is unraveled by sex itself. It is a deep irony: only able-bodied, cross-sex couples are sexual subjects, but sex acts create disabilities. Durfey compounds the irony further; Sneak has syphilis and a pregnant mistress from Cambridge.¹⁸ In a later moment, Fumble calls attention to the wide-spread use of prosthetics in making men: "'tis my humor as long as I am healthy and jovial, to cover failings and imperfections in Nature as well as I can; 'tis a Wise-mans vertue, and I have patterns for't every day. Ah! here are a sort of jolly, brisk, ingenious, old Signiors about Town, that with false Calves, false Bellies, false Teeth, false Noses, and a false, fleering Face, upon the matter fill up Society" (41). It is hard not to image the "here" as a cue to mock audiences (in a move that would feel similar to a prologue or epilogue), and odds are that some audience members used such prosthetics (given the ubiquity of disability in the era). The comedic disqualification fails because if only able-bodied people are having sex, then no one is having sex. Thus, while the text disqualifies people with disabilities from hetero-erotic communities, the ironies, which surface in performance and in laughing at Leigh, complicate stable borders of an exclusive sexual culture.

The boundaries of exclusion are further undone by laughter when we consider the ways bodyminds respond similarly to different stimuli. That is to say, flesh and feelings do not have a one-to-one correspondence, and theatre provides "nonlinear spectacle" (Williams 2009, p. 604). Following foundational, feminist film theorist, Linda Williams, visual texts from different subgenres like horror, pornography, and melodrama could all be theorized under the "body genre" of film as spectators' flesh engages with filmic excess in similar ways.¹⁹ Williams's goal "is that by thinking comparatively about all three 'gross' and sensational film body genres we might be able to get beyond the mere fact of sensation to explore its systems and structure as well as its effect on the bodies of spectators" (603). Such an exploration of affective structures, sensations, and spectatorship opens up "questions of gender construction [. . .] and gender address in relation to basic sexual fantasy" (604). Williams ties these body genres to the deep eighteenth century: "So the bodies of women have tended to function, ever since the eighteenth-century origins of these genres in the Marquis de Sade, Gothic fiction, and the novels of Richardson, as both the *moved* and the *moving*" (605). Given the queer interventions of eighteenth-century studies since Williams' critique, I would add that queer and crip bodies so, too, are moved and moving.²⁰ On stage, audiences encounter this excess through the ways Fumble's body

makes people feel—starting with the audience. In the fourth act, after beating his servant for failing to act as an efficient go-between for him and Cordelia, Fumble is alone on stage. In this soliloquy, he thinks about a vision of Cordelia: “She’s young and plump, free in her nature, and of a sanguine complexion and bona fide; I never see her but some secret motion in my blood seems to imply that she is the cause” (4.3.108–10). Soliloquys foster a particular type of intimacy with audiences, and this moment is explicitly phenomenological. Fumble’s erection joke, as well as the disability joke reveals how the (performed) disabled body complicates a linear cause-and-effect between visual stimuli and the responding body. Because of his blindness, Fumble knows Cordelia is beautiful not because he sees her, but because his blood moves. This reflection gets at the thing performance does (at least following Cibber): bodies moving and responding to pleasure in non-autonomous ways.

Leigh’s soliloquy as Fumble also draws attention to his body as a sexual site. His reflection on his sexual ability inspires laughter, movement, and pleasure in audiences. He asks, “What? I am not bedrid. I can dance yet, aye, and run and jump too if occasion be, and why not t’other thing? Come, come, it must, it must: mine was ever a stirring family. It must, I say, and she shall know it suddenly” (4.3.112–6). Audiences might not believe Fumble’s proclamation of ability. He has been ridiculed and has demonstrated that he has a clumsy time working up toward “t’other thing” with cross-sex kissing turned same-sex by mistake. But as the soliloquy continues, the language of stimulating and arousing, coupled with the “come, come,” and the culmination of “she shall know it,” demands audiences to imagine Fumble as a sexual subject. This is an ironic moment because while the laughter might be working to disqualify Fumble from the erotic economy of the play world, the audience is experiencing pleasure through Leigh.

In the fifth act, Durfey stages Cordelia’s negative response to Fumble’s body. In a similar concern of turning men into properties, Cordelia sees Fumble as “a piece of antiquity” or “an old Gown” (48). This framework objectifies, and in doing so, removes autonomy. Fumble announces that Cordelia “fires [him] strangely,” and then sings a song and does a little dance for her (48). In response, Cordelia cries, “Your presence is more terrible than a death’s-head at supper. For my part I tremble all over. There’s a kind of horror in all your antick gestures, ‘specially those that you think become you” (49). As written, Durfey’s line contributes to the ideologies that view sex and disability as horrific, as a threat to able-bodied subjects.²¹ Cordelia then shouts, “Heav’n, how he tortures me!” (49). However, following Foucault, Butler, Williams, Berlant, and Edelman, there is pleasure in coming undone: “intense attachment induces a nonsovereignty that confuses the habits of the pleasure, pain, and fantasy circuits” (Berlant and Edelman, 80). Fumble, indeed, makes Cordelia “tremble,” but the physiological responses from both actress and audience members blur the boundaries of horror and pleasure.²² Audiences holding themselves with laughter asks us to reflect on the pleasure of undoing.

Ultimately, the plot and script seek to consolidate cross-sex desire as an exclusionary in-group—with queerness and disability on the margins. Durfey marries Fumble off in a trick to Cordelia’s Governess, whose cover is blown after their first kiss because of her “want of teeth” (5.4.120). Thus, by demonstrating the failure and horror of trying to participate in an able-bodied sexual culture, the disability drag role works to ideologically separate ability and disability. However, Durfey scripts an epilogue to be delivered by Fumble. As Diana Solomon (Solomon 2013) theorizes, prologues and epilogues are modes of theatrical paratext that play on multiple audience responses and recognitions. Solomon describes the “ghosted layers of audience-performer identification” that occur when prologues and epilogues allow a performer to synthesize their personal life, the play’s events, and the audience’s responses (2). The layered meanings have the potential to disrupt generic codes and borders, both in terms of literary genres and gender performances.²³ Leigh’s epilogue begins with a commonplace trope of calling out the audience for their behaviors and responses: “Well, Gentlemen, how d’ee? –Icod you sit, /As if you had no Souls, no Brains, no Wit” (62). For a play invested in anxieties about becoming “property,” Leigh’s first jab seems to be about inanimate objects. Leigh’s teasing continues in very carnal terms. He

promises the audiences that Fumble can “Frisk, and Jump, and Hope; /Icod, and Wriggle!” (61). He imagines old, sexual glory days, and throngs of women aroused by his jokes: “I had so many Smutty Jestes those days, /I could get none but Women to my Plays” (61). While the line directly connects the funny bone to other bones, it also reveals the queerness of Fumble’s older body: it’s not just women coming to his plays nowadays. In the last rhetorical flourish, the epilogue asks Leigh to step out of the Fumble role and then doom the audience members who do not like Durfey’s play: “I wish this Curse may bear, /That he be really my Character,—/Lascivious, Deaf, and Impotent as I” (61). The joke certainly does the containment work of disability drag wherein “the audience also knows that an actor will return to an able-bodied state” at the end of the production (Siebers 116).²⁴ Ultimately, though, the epilogue—a flirty, performative paratextual space—gives Leigh the last laugh. He gets to interact with audience members across genders and embodiments in erotic, carnal terms, thereby leaving the audience “beside themselves” with pleasure. While Durfey’s dialogue would remove Fumble, the physical stage business is precisely pleasurable because of these hiccups, glitches, and misrecognitions.

4. Queer Potentiality: A Coda with *Sir Anthony Love*

Southerne’s *Sir Anthony Love* (Southerne 1691) is in many ways a much more legibly queer play with Susanna Mountfort in a breeches role (one of her specialties) and an erotic drive deeply resistant to marriage built on gender complementarity. Youmi Jung (Jung 2020) uses Mountfort’s celebrity to make sense of the resistant plotting and gender performances in the play, and she argues that Mountfort’s performance as Sir Anthony “de-glamorises and destabilises male sexuality and authority” (314). The (slightly convoluted) play centers Sir Anthony Love, who is a woman named Lucia in disguise, and his manipulation of the erotic economy on stage: Love pairs off men and women, exposes a thief pretending to be a beggar, and even dupes his former husband again and takes more money.²⁵ Love’s sexually attractive masculinity is at the center of this play, and Mountfort’s performance reveals the ways masculinity is not inherently tied to male-presenting/ male-assigned bodies.²⁶ Jung notes how Love’s hetero-masculinity “is an imitation that outperforms the original” (316). Love “unveils how this status quo endeavors to sustain heterosexual patriarchy and its compulsory system of difference” (316). Although her framework and critique never explicitly mark the play as queer, Jung shows a gap in the construction of cis-normativity, where masculinity would seemingly *naturally* extend from male-bodiedness.²⁷

Such readings of *Sir Anthony Love* center Mountfort’s role as a queer, destabilizing force, but I would turn us to Leigh’s role as the queer Abbé, an older man who attempts to seduce Love. The Abbé’s seduction is a moment of comic disqualification. In the fifth act, the Abbé dances around Love, and this corporeal moment would have created movement across all bodies in the playhouse. However, as Straub (Straub 2001) reminds us in her introduction to *Sir Anthony Love*, the scene “was cut from performance, though included in the first and subsequent printings” (1215). While reading for absence might seem like a strange coda for a consideration of live bodies in performance, historians of sexuality are often reading opaquely, as Valerie Traub (Traub 2016) might call it. For Traub, “the opacities of eroticism—not just those aspects of sex that exceed our grasp, but those that manifest themselves as the *unthought*—can serve as a productive analytical resource” (4). Though unstaged, Leigh’s physicality was not “unthought.” Leigh’s body informs the reading experience. Southerne explains in his preface, “*The Abbe’s Character languishes in the Fifth Act for want of the Scene between him and Sir Anthony, which I plainly saw before, but was contented to leave a Gap in the Action, and to lose the advantage of Mr. Lee’s Playing [. . .] then run the venture of offending the Women*” (A2). Southerne’s prefacing speaks to what Cibber identifies in his *Apology*: Leigh’s playing animates roles in particular ways. There is also a hint of sexual illicitness, though Southerne immediately back pedals: “*not that there is one indecent Expression in it; but the over-fine Folk might run it into a design I never had in my head*” (A2). What queer potential emerges from *Sir Anthony Love*’s fifth act gap?

The aging Abbé, alone with Love, attempts to seduce him. The Abbé dances (presumably awkwardly as Love ironically calls him “nimble”), and he promises Love, “I will be as wicked as I can be for you, and with you” (66). When Love jokes about the Abbé’s age, the priest “unbuttons, and throws down his Cloak” and retorts, “What shall I do now, to convince you, that I am not an old Fellow?” (67). Southerne’s stage directions imagine a very physical Leigh, dancing, singing, and stripping. The Abbé’s explicit desire for Love’s attractive masculinity is obvious as he pleads with Love to join him offstage in the next room. Southerne scripts a reveal scene that would have dramatized queer orientations when Love reveals his sex:

Sir Anth. For very unhappily to your purpose; I am a—Woman.

Abb. Ha! how, a Woman! (drops her Hand)

Sir Anth. A Woman!

Abb. What the Devil have I been doing all this while. A Woman! are you sure you’r a Woman?

Sir Anth. How shall I convince you?

Abb. Nay, nay; I am easily convinced; the very Name has convinc’d me. (67–8)

The dash before “woman” suggests a pause before the reveal, and Southerne imagines Leigh-as-Abbé as being repelled physically by just naming Love’s sex. Love’s rhetorical question about convincing even shapes copulation with a woman as a challenge or threat. Much like Fumble’s misrecognition and miscommunications of desire, the Abbé’s misrecognition of “woman” in this exchange reveals the queerness of laughter. While the joke allows audiences to laugh at the Abbé’s desires, the removal of this scene sanitizes the messier orientations of performance. In print, the laughter works one way. In performance, with Leigh’s body dancing, singing, undressing, moving toward female masculinity and away from “woman,” the experience unsettles unidirectional encounters with queerness. It is not just that bodies respond in ways that trouble autonomy, but that when such phenomenological and psychocorporeal responses are formed through and by queer content/queer bodies, we might more strongly recognize the queer structures of feeling and undoing available in the Restoration playhouse.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Paul Hammond (Hammond 2002) references several of Leigh’s roles from 1680, 1681, 1691, and 1692 in order to make the claim that Leigh “specialized in roles for which the playwrights created occasional homoerotic possibilities” (229). For Hammond, one of these plays is *The Souldiers’ Fortune*, and he uses Durfey’s *The Royalist* to solidify his point that “male interest in a youth is often framed by some displacement to a foreign setting, or explained as being a misapprehension about the beloved’s true gender” instead of celebrated as “a libertine trait” (230). Leigh and his fame were colored by same-sex desire. Undertones of sexual fluidity and same-sex desire crystalize in Leigh’s role as Jumble—a character who, as his name suggests, jumbles emerging stable heterosexual and homosexual identities. See, for instance, Alan Bray (Bray 1996) *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1996) and Eve K. Sedgwick’s (Sedgwick 1985) *Between Men*.
- ² Highfill and his peers claim that “Nokes and Leigh [were] specialists in ‘Fops of all sorts’” (224). As Susan Staves articulates, “fops were clearly the favorite characters with both audiences and actors” (416). While this project does not center fops or queer temporalities, Emma Katherine Atwood’s (Atwood 2013) work on queer time and performance illuminates the queer disruptions to straight clock time. Of Nokes, she writes, “By arresting the action of the play with wild laughter and applause, the fop’s entrance causes the audience to break the temporal contract of the play and enjoy—and simultaneously expand—the present moment” (102). Such work is crucial in theorizing the multiplicity and multiplication of pleasures on and through bodies in space and time.

- ³ Cibber writes, “Leigh was of the mercurial kind, and though not so strict and Observer of Nature, yet never so wanton in his Performances as to be wholly out of her Sight” (145).
- ⁴ *A Satyr on the Players* ultimately generates what Gayle Rubin would later identify as “sexual stratification” rooted in assumptions about lines between “good” and “bad” sex acts. Rubin, in parsing a sexual value system, writes, “[S]exuality that is ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and noncommercial” (151).
- ⁵ I borrow “structures of feelings” from Raymond Williams’ *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977). Williams contends, “The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products” (128). As a way to resist this consolidation into product and fixed forms, Williams suggests being attentive to emergent and pre-emergent “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (132).
- ⁶ Most recently, see Kathleen Lubey and Rebecca Tierny-Hynes’ special issue of *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, “The Novel as Theory” (61.2 Summer 2020). This work extends foundational critiques like Adela Pinch *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, 1997) and Lubey’s *Excitable Imaginations: Eroticism and Reading in Britain, 1660–1760* (Bucknell UP, 2012).
- ⁷ See Ann Cvetkocih’s *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. For more on tensions between affect, identifications, and recovery in queer early modern scholarship, see Traub’s *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, Carla Freccero’s *Queer/Early/Modern*, and the debate in *PMLA*—Traub’s “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies,” vol. 128, no. 1, 2013, pp. 21–39 and Freccero, Menon, and Traub “Historicism and Unhistoricism in Queer Studies” *PMLA*, vol 128, no. 3, 2013, pp. 781–86.
- ⁸ For more on “cripistemologies,” see Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer’s introduction, “Cripistemologies,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2014: 127–48. Such consideration of circuits of pain and pleasure would extend work done by Michael D. Snediker on queer states of being interrupted (“Queer Philology and Chronic Pain”, *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015: 1–27) and Emma Sheppard’s work on chronic pain and BDSM practitioners (“Chronic Pain as Emotion,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2020: 5–20).
- ⁹ Foucault’s rhetoric of disorganizing and misrecognizing makes use of disability. Foucault explicitly connects the moment of laughter and Jorge Luis Borges’ Chinese encyclopedia with disability. He thinks about “aphasiacs” and the ways that people with aphasia organize and reorganize: “It appears that certain aphasiacs, when shown various differently coloured skeins of wool on a table top, are consistently unable to arrange them into any coherent pattern” (xviii). While “unable to arrange them into any coherent pattern” frames disability here as an inability to order, it becomes clear that Foucault sees a lot of potential in such space-making and meaning-making practices, as shaped by aphasia. He writes, “Within this simple space [of the rectangular table] in which things are normally arranged and given names, the aphasiac will create a multiplicity of tiny, fragmented regions in which nameless resemblances agglutinate things into unconnected islets” (xviii). The register slips into pathologized descriptions as Foucault writes, “[A]nd so the sick mind continues to infinity, creating groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety” (xviii). While words like “sick,” “frenziedly,” and “disturbed” serve as negative descriptors of an ordering process fueled by a disabled aesthetic, the exciting possibility to undo seemingly clear aspects of ordering remains. Laughter, incited by the undoing of familiar categories, exposes the constructedness of seemingly naturalized epistemologies.
- ¹⁰ “[A]s Gayle Rubin recommended, rethinking sex and posing it over and against education as a ‘leading out’ of ignorance, inability, and bewilderment and into the condition of mastery, understanding, and realized sovereignty” (Berlant and Edelman 2014, pp. 3–4).
- ¹¹ See Zuroski (Zuroski 2020) theory of how laughter undoes heterosocializing affect through sentiment and the marriage plot in “Evelina’s Laughter: The Novel’s Queerer Theories.” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* (61.2): 2020.
- ¹² Although his study centers the novel, *Making Love: Sentiment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (Kelleher 2016) traces the ways sentimental fictions naturalized heterosexuality as the primary mode of feeling in the era: “sentimental discourse played an instrumental role in deepening forms of sexual subjugation and normalization” through the construction and maintenance of gender complementarity (7).
- ¹³ See, for instance Declan Kavanagh’s (Kavanagh 2017) *Effeminate Years: Literature, Politics, and Aesthetics in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Bucknell UP: 2017).
- ¹⁴ Marsden writes, “Not only did members of the audience sit on stage, but in some cases they became part of the action and objects of the gaze, a gaze which could be wielded by the actress herself, as demonstrated in numerous prologues and epilogues” (10).
- ¹⁵ “Any portable object (now usually other than an article of costume) used in a play, film, etc., as required by the action; a prop” (OED 5). The OED cites Shakespeare, Massinger, and Sheridan for early modern uses of “property” as relating to stage objects. While thinking about “fourth walls” is anachronistic, it is interesting that Durfey consistently uses the word “property” in Ranger’s asides to audience—a gesture that is already meta in its form. Ranger proclaims his anxiety about being turned into a property three more times throughout the comedy. Hearing Emilia laughing, he cries, “Hell and Furies, what’s this I hear? am I made a property too?” (7). As Ranger’s panic continues, he refers to Bubble again as “that Property, that Fool,” and he questions his place in the erotic triangle, exclaiming, “Sdeath, am I still their Property?” (43) These concerns, given to audiences

in a heterosexual panic, hinge on making men into props—things to be trafficked across stage, wielded by actors who are already implicated in a tenuous/tense homo/hetero binary (following Straub).

- 16 “Disqualification” might also be understood through Tobin Siebers’s (Siebers 2010) *Disability Aesthetics*, which re-envision a critical space where the aesthetic is political. Disability aesthetics “represent flash points in the culture wars not only because they challenge how aesthetic culture should be defined but also because they attack the body images used to determine who has the right to live in society” (61). The term “disqualified” gains traction as a critical term in Siebers’ work. “Disqualifications” are “produced by naturalizing inferiority as the justification for unequal treatment, violence, and oppression” (24). Under this logic, Fumble has naturally grown old, so naturally, he is allowed to be mocked.
- 17 To link this back to Berlant and Edelman, think about their primacy conceit of the first chapter of *Sex*: “We both see sex as a site for experiencing this intensified encounter with what disorganizes accustomed ways of being”. While Berlant and Edelman differ on the implications of such disorganization and discontinuities, I find myself drawn to the conceit of drama and dedramatizing that runs throughout: “[N]egative encounters, such ruptures in the logic—which is always a *fantasy* logic—by which the subject’s objects (itself included) yield a sense of the world’s continuity (even if only the continuity of experiencing the world as incoherent), impose the abruptions that Lauren calls drama and undertakes to dedramatize. But in my understanding of how attachment binds the subject to the world, a tear in the fabric of attachment, and so in reality’s representation cannot be separated from threat or from the dramatic of undoing” (65). I trend toward Edelman’s articulation, but I see a distinct pleasure in this threat of undoing. For audiences watching the incoherence of Fumble, who writes off kissing a man, the “dramatics of undoing” is funny and fun. Edelman goes on to suggest that subjects must ‘see’ themselves in this process, but I would put pressure on “seeing” as a way of knowing, especially as disability is Durfey’s way in to disrupting fantasies of coherent sexuality.
- 18 In fact, there is a delightful moment of what I would call “disability stagecraft” or “disease stagecraft” in the fifth act. Cordelia visits Sneak in Sir Roger’s house, and Cordelia and Roger catch Sneak with an apothecary. Roger realizes his mistake—airing that Sneak’s “civil Clap” might develop into “an uncivil Pox” to the woman he is wooing (51). The stage composition is a great moment to think about medical materiality on stage. Cordelia sees “a Sweating-Chair within” (51), so the acting space in front of the moveable scene shutters is peopled with a medical examination while the moveable flat behind has been left open with a sweating chair upstage. After Cordelia leaves, finally finding an out to this courtship, and Roger berates Sneak, Durfey scripts the scene shutting on Sneak being set into the sweating chair (52). The result is a sort of on-stage palimpsest, where the STI positive body is always lurking behind the scene shutters.
- 19 Williams begins with the conceit that “heavy doses of sex, violence, and emotion are dismissed by one faction or another as having no logic or reason for existence beyond their power to excite. Gratuitous sex, gratuitous violence and terror, gratuitous emotion are frequent epithets hurled at the phenomenon of the ‘sensational’ in pornography, horror, and melodrama” (603).
- 20 For more on queerness and gothic fiction, see George E. Haggerty *Queer Gothic* (U of IL P:2006) and the introduction to Jason S. Farr’s *Novel Bodies: Disability and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Bucknell UP: 2019). For feminist-queer interventions on Richardson, see Susan S. Lanser and Robyn Warhol’s collection *Narrative Theory Unbound: Queer and Feminist Interventions* (Ohio State P: 2015); Lanser’s *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565–1830* (U of Chicago P: 2014); Sarah Nicolazzo’s “Reading Clarissa’s ‘Conditional Liking:’ A Queer Philology,” *Modern Philology* 112.1 (2014) and Hannah Chaskin’s “‘Precise, Perverse, Unseasonable’: Queer Form and Genre Trouble in Richardson’s *Pamela*.” *Modern Philology* 117.1 (2019).
- 21 Davis, in a reading of *Frankenstein*, concludes that “the risk of erotic touch, of the frankly erotic agenda of the creature, is seen as a contaminating danger to the ‘normal’ people” (146). Durfey seemingly anticipates this *Frankenstein* model of sex and disability when Fumble proclaims his desire for Cordelia.
- 22 Williams’ consideration of the “body genre” helps us make sense of the long history of affect and excess: “Visually, each of these ecstatic excesses could be said to share a quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm—of the body ‘beside itself’ with sexual pleasure fear and terror, or overpowering sadness. Aurally, excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to inarticulate cries of pleasure in porn, screams of fear in horror, sobs of anguish in melodrama” (605).
- 23 While Solomon’s work builds a case study through Anne Bracegirdle and Anne Oldfield’s repertoires to show how these paratexts create resistant moments to public misogyny, I think Solomon’s framework likewise allows us to see resistance to the ways emergent heterosexuality sanctioned such misogyny.
- 24 While fatness is not a disability, I would suggest that given Leigh’s corpulence, the return to “able-bodied” may not be read as so easily stable.
- 25 I use “her” when referring to Lucia’s actions and “his” when referring to Love’s, which mirrors the play’s pronoun usage. I am trying to avoid collapsing this radical comedy within a limiting cisnormative framework—a framework that this play is not invested in.
- 26 If, as King, Kavanagh, Fletcher, and others map out, the era sought to consolidate *naturally* corresponding gender from assigned sex, Mountfort-as-Love is a notable gap in such formations. Kavanagh writes that queer critique “should be the forceful unsettling of the ahistoricism that underwrites heterosexuality and serves to naturalize its universalizing tendencies” (xxi–xxii). As a play with a gender-queer lead and same-sex subplots, Southerne’s stage world reminds us that heterosexuality requires construction, policing, and rigor to maintain.

- ²⁷ Jung's essay intervenes in previous readings of anxious libertine masculinities, which make up the play's critical genealogy. See (Drougge 1993) 'We'll Learn That of the Men': Female Sexuality in Southerne's Comedies" (*SEL* 33.3) 1993: 545–63; Harold Weber (Weber 1984) "The Female Libertine in Southern's *Sir Anthony Love* and *The Wives' Excuse*" *Essays in Theatre* 2.2 1984: 125–39. For more on libertine erotics and crip/queer sensibilities, see Jason S. Farr (Farr 2016) "Libertine Sexuality and Queer-Crip Embodiment in Eighteenth-Century Britain" *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16.4: 96–118.

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