Esse versus Percipi: The Old and the Elderly in Restoration and Early Eighteenth-century English Plays

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Abstract

Christopher Martin, in his study on old age in Early Modern English literature, complained that "late to emerge as an orchestrated discipline, age studies have been slower still to find extended application to the fields of cultural and literary criticism" (Martin 2012: 6). Although somewhat exaggerated, humanist, or more specifically literary gerontology has indeed a much shorter history than its purely medical foundation. This interdisciplinary perspective has progressively been applied to the most well-known novelistic, poetic and dramatic genres, resulting in more or less period-focused studies on representations of age and ageing in literature. In the British context, despite the fact that more and more attention is paid to discourses of senescence, longevity and life cycles as represented within theatre and drama, there are few studies on the subject of the old and ageing in post-Shakespearean drama, which go beyond the reiteration of Frye's conclusions on the function of a senex *in literature. The proposed paper focuses on selected examples of Restoration (1660-1700) and early 18th-century English plays in order to analyse their presentations of old(er) characters, including their bodily (self-)perception, as well as the social attitudes of the younger generations towards their elders. It will thus give examples to Michael Mangan's statement that: "Ageing draws attention to the gaps that can exist between esse and percipi: between how one feels oneself to be, and how one may be perceived" (Mangan 2002: 5).*

Key words: *ageing, comedy, drama, Restoration, eighteenth century*

Prisca Von Dorotka Bagnell and Patricia Spencer Soper state that "late life itself is (…) a nebulous existence of unpredictable duration" (Von Dorotka Bagnell and Spencer Soper 1989: xix). Although with a definite 'closing bracket', in terms of its point of beginning this duration is indeed very difficult to assign. Gerontology and geriatrics may have their temporal, yet

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arbitrary frameworks on offer, yet in practice, and historically, these frames not only differ from century to century but also individually. As such, when it comes to the narrative of ageing, and to borrow from Ferdinand de Saussure, it seems that old age is like a free-standing signifier which gains meaning only through a combined paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis of physiological, mental, social and perhaps even spiritual factors. While there might be a communal and a cultural consensus on the markers of the final stage of life, it still does not facilitate an overall, objective conceptualisation of old age. The present paper utilises this aporia in the subsequent study of variously defined elderly individuals and their attitude towards their own ageing as well as their societies' perception of the same process. The methodology used in the paper draws from the discipline of humanistic gerontology, focusing on its cultural and literary perspective in particular, and takes Restoration and early eighteenth-century British plays as the main research material. The close study of the chosen play texts is organised around the, apparent, dichotomy between the ageing body and the seemingly ever-young mind, of course excluding instances of debilitating ageing, characterized, for example, by dementia.

Interdisciplinary age(ing) studies stress the fact that ageing itself is a binary process in that it involves the body as well as the mind, and the two constituents require equal scientific attention. Although Rene Descartes disconnected the two entities in order to prove the existence and omnipotence of God (Hatfield 2003), he likewise strove to explain how such seemingly independent constituents "interact so as to give rise to a human being capable of having voluntary bodily motions and sensations" (Skirry 2016). Going beyond this Cartesian metaphysics, though not the mechanics, the mind-body dualism is nowhere more applicable than in the eight (and ninth, added by Joan M. Erikson) life cycle, to use Erik Erikson's terminology, that is old age. Experiencing the inevitable changes in himself, and, if one trusts the account of his wife, bearing them with Stoic peace and understanding (Erickson 1998: 4), he identified the concerns and crises that physiological and psychosocial development brings. While the details of his analysis are beyond the scope of this paper, the dominant antithesis of the eighth cycle as seen by Erikson is integrity vs despair (Erickson 1998: 61), with wisdom seen as the wished for strength and result of the conflict's solution. That there might be more despair than prudent calm is suggested by Thomas R. Cole who reminds that "[a]ging … reveals the most fundamental conflict of the human condition: the tension between infinite ambitions, dreams, and desires on the one hand, and the vulnerable,

limited, decaying physical existence on the other – between self and body" (Cole 1986: 5). Synchronised deterioration of the mind and body is of rare nature; therefore, the self is usually at odds with the body and finds deterioration, biological and aesthetic, difficult to accept, and even to acknowledge. While the Stoic ideal is to accept the passing of time, and various state apparatuses, as understood by Althusser, expect one to continue by acting according to the age-related norms, the aforementioned individualised perception of ageing rarely leads to a meek and complacent slowdown or retirement. The more positive consequences of such possible defensive actions aim towards improved longevity, while in the most extreme examples of ageing, and old age in particular, may lead to frequent surgical interventions – rarely with the expected results – and depression. The first type of reaction is the result of a symbiotic relation of the body and the mind, and thus a coherent self, while the latter suggests the body and mind at strife. Such a conflict involves either a denial of the body's ageing processes or various, often quite comical attempts at trying to transform the body to fit the mind's perception of it. Real life, as well as its (para)literary expressions, engender various forms of ridicule and more or less drastic ostracism.

Thomas M. Faulkner and Judith de Luce, in their overview of Greek and Roman perspectives and representations of old age and the elderly, state that old people faced the harshest criticism when they broke the rule or "principle of *tempestivitas*" which meant disregarding appropriate or age-specific qualities (Faulkner and De Luce 1992: 19). This, of course, is not Antiquity-specific as in all subsequent epochs transgressions of age-normative behaviour were penalised one way or the other. As various moralistic and paraliterary Christian conduct texts taught, old age required a progressive retirement from the public life and public view. They suggested a withdrawal within oneself for the sake of self-study and spiritual preparation of the (after-)life to come. The body was to be progressively 'silenced', while it physically 'dried' on its own, and all passions were to be extinguished. Any other situation was potentially problematic, ridiculous and even monstrous in some way.

Studying literary and cultural paratexts, Lynn Botelho notes that in the seventeenth century some "… elderly were thought guilty of forgetting that they were no longer young and up-to-date. Instead, they were considered foolish in their obliviousness to that 'fact'" (Botelho 2016: xvii). While reactions to inappropriate conduct are easily identifiable, old age itself was not. Just as with the variety of the number of (st)age of the life

cycle, each century and culture saw the starting point of old age occurring at different ages. Pat Thane, therefore, noticed that to study ageing one cannot follow just one trajectory but research age in all its complexity. Her suggested typology in the case of old age is as follows: chronological or according to the date of birth; functional or fitness for tasks; biological or physical fitness; and/or cultural, studying the definitions and social perceptions (Thane 2000: 24). This division points to the necessary multidimensionality of ageing studies, and in their gerontological subcategory in particular, but it likewise explains and excuses the lack of neatly set up boundaries for old age.

Literary historians of the Early Modern period, like for example Nina Tauton, suggest that "[t]he onset of old age could be anywhere from the late forties to seventy for men but was accelerated by ten years in women" (Tauton 2011: 1). Despite its vastness, this indeed will be the arbitrary old age framework used in the present paper, even for the eighteenth-century. The Enlightenment itself brought with it not only technological modernisations initiated and prompted by industrialization, but also changes in the attitude towards one's own and others' physicality. For example death was being seen more as an obstacle to overcome, as Stephen Katz found out in his research on "cultural aging" (Katz 2005: 29). The historians of sociology remind that the eighteenth century, with all its transformations in thinking, induced "an enhanced realization of age, time, and quantity" (Pelling and Smith 1994: 5), and apart from formal consequences of this new awareness, such as a more organised welfare system, the eighteenth century also promoted the idea that "…age cannot be conquered or escaped, but its effects can be ameliorated through individual human effort" (Ottaway 2016: Vol. 2, xiv). And as the study of both centuries proves, despite the proliferation of more medicalised conduct/health guidebooks, to feel old and to be old could be two different things; and to be *perceived* as old yet another variable. Therefore, the 'esse versus percipi' conflict was not uncommon both in life and artistic expressions.

Theatre, and drama as its cultural paradigm, offered the most vivid and multi-dimensional exemplars of old(er) age. While the study of the embodiments of the elderly characters is perhaps more appropriate for performance studies – the actors performing age and ageing – published pieces of drama themselves can function as interesting sources of cultural perceptions of the aged/ageing ones. Looking for the formal and thematic origins of Shakespearean comedies, Northrope Frye anatomised the Greek

New Comedy, and characterised the comic conflict as caused by the blocking actions of an *alazon*, quite often a *senex iratus* or, in some cases, the actions of a gullible yet persistent *senex amans*. Restoration theatre (usually dated for the period between 1660 and either 1688 or 1700) in particular offered a plethora of types of *senex* in its comedies of manners, and in their progressive generic transformations, such as libertine comedy, since, like in the previous centuries, comedies were partially based on the intergenerational conflict of more or less related characters. Even though the generic pattern was repeated, as Elizabeth Mignon claims, after 1660 "traditional hostility towards crabbed age reached in these comedies the points of violence" (Mignon 1947: 4). The eighteenth-century offered its more sentimentalised response to the elderly in both comedies and tragedies because 'the cult of sensibility' complicated the relationship between the young and the old characters, most of the times adding a layer of affection and aura of respect to the intergenerational interactions. And yet there are still quite a few examples of plays where the elderly are punished for their inability to accept their ageing or old age, and nowhere more than in the comic repertoire. The following analysis of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century comedies, namely Thomas Betterton's *The Amorous Widow: Or, the Wanton Wife* (1670), Thomas D'Urfey's *Madam Fickle, or the Witty False One* (1677) and Susanna Centlivre's *The Busy Body* (1709)[1], will present three selected examples of elders who refuse to step aside to let the younger generations design their futures for themselves.

Earl Milner, in one of the early studies, or apologetics, concerning Restoration drama, explains that "the age was like our own in possessing an irresistible urge to talk about matters that frightened and fascinated it" (Milner 1966: 3). While he offers this as the reason for a seeming sexual obsession observed in the comedies, and therefore centuries-long vilification of late seventeenth-century drama as immoral, his argument can be interpreted in much wider terms. If there is a common theme that reappears in the comic genre of both Restoration and the eighteenth century it is unfulfilled appetites of all sorts, with monetary and sexual ones as the favourites. Generically, comedies usually endorse the desires of the younger generations, cheering the sons'/daughters' actions over those of the fathers'/guardians', and chastise the unrestrained appetites of the older characters whose passions should be progressively suppressed. In the comic worlds of the rogues, wits and lovers, there is little understanding for the processes of ageing or its, in a sense, trauma. With female

characters, quite often already widowed, the stigma of ageing seems more devastating because in a 'dog-eat-dog' and libertine world of comedy they carry even more visibly the signs of 'out-of-dateness' on their bodies than the comic men. The latter, however, are the more frequent butts of joke in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century as their patriarchal status, and with that their wealth, makes them a bigger boon in the wars of generations than the elderly dames. However, in a truly Hobbesian manner, both men and women seem to be engaged in the same constant rivalry because both sexes want the same "in a world in which the desire for possession is infinite and the rewards limited" (Chernaik 2008: 35) – they want to live their lives to the fullest.

The unwillingness to accept the ravages of time is a feature of both sexes but comedies depict women spending much more time on trying to match the way they feel with how they look, usually, with society seeing through the façade. *The Amorous Widow* by Thomas Betterton features old(er) characters of both sexes, but there is no one so insistent on fighting against time and the diminished prerogatives given to older people than Lady Laycock, "the antiquated Piece" of fifty who dares to pursue love, at any time, at any cost and with anyone really. Betterton "conducts the action as a rough sex farce" (Bevis 1988: 79), and a lot of this humour rests on the humiliation of the older woman. Jeffry, the haughty servant, supposes her desperation has already reached the very bottom, and she would probably even take him as a lover for a few compliments or shown interest and affection. Not that he would be interested, since, personally, he wonders how "any Woman can have the Impudence to live, and trouble Mankind after that Age" (Act I). While his opinion is yet another example of Restoration comedy's ageism, the idea that an elderly widow would be so desperate to cling to somebody's attention or immediately trap them in another marriage was a common occurrence in drama based on a not-necessarily-common necessity in actual life. While comedies since the Renaissance onward poked fun at such 'driven' and obsessive amorous projects by elderly widows, socio-feminist studies on widowhood prove that newly acquired singledom could be a blessing rather than a curse, as some of conduct writers suggested[2]. For example, Elizabeth Foyster claims that wealthy widows rarely remarried (Foyster 1999: 112). The stereotype, however, was stronger than the actuality, and so the merry widow seemed to be both the pursuer and the pursued within the comic repertoire. And so the humour, and quite nasty one, rests on Lady Laycock's not only wanting a spouse, but a young and lusty one in particular. As such, Betterton

presents one of a multitude of Restoration examples of elderly women who cannot extinguish their sexual desire as expected from a female of their age, becoming a post-menopausal monster in disguise, preying upon a victim of her insatiable desire. There is no room during Restoration theatre for any serious discussion of women's needs, not to mention sexual inclinations after the childbearing age, and so none of the characters, Betterton or the majority of spectators/readers would have had any other reactions to the lusty widow than scornful laughter. The pitiless reception of such a comic elderly woman is even more deserved in the context of the play because Lady Laycock disregards the warnings concerning inequality in ages, and she is perfectly conscious of her age and related expectations. And yet she keeps on wondering why she is denied the freedoms of her former days. She is, however, likewise aware of the fact that her dreams and desire were even then thwarted by the single thing of being a woman. Betterton allows her to voice some more serious opinions about the age's double standard, such as "When we are Young, they say we sell our selves; when Old, we are forc'd to hire, to buy our Lovers" (Act I).

In a conversation with one of her potential chosen ones, Lovemore, Lady Laycock pretends to initiate an honest discussion of her situation, while Lovemore keeps his charade of courting her to buy the other youth, Cunningham, more time with her young niece. Rather courageously asking Lovemore to assess her age, and probably expecting to hear a pleasant dose of lies, she 'admits' "I do not love to disguise my Age" (Act I), while everything else suggests she is trying to master the art. Her dishonesty towards others, and especially herself, is not only part and parcel of the comic focus, but also one of the reasons why she will not find a supporter and companion in her niece. Her jealousy of the twenty-five-year old, and, what is worse, her pushing herself between Philadelphia and Cunningham and offering her by-gone charms instead of the young niece's, make any form of female loyalty impossible. Pride and vanity in aged ones are social blunders, or 'crimes' that the younger generation will not forgive or understand. This war of ages is so frequent in the comedies of the final decades of the Restoration that Elizabeth Mignon suggests that after 1660 "traditional hostility towards crabbed age reached in these comedies the points of violence" (Mignon 1947: 4). While this is somewhat exaggerated in this particular instance, hostility reveals itself in the promise of a socially humiliating misalliance with the fake Viscount Sans-Terre. What makes it even crueler is the fact that the widow opts for the marriage to save the reputation, and perhaps even the life of her crush, Cunningham. One

should surmise, then, that Lady Laycock is punished for her non-reformed disregard for her age and ignorance of age-appropriate conduct. She needs to see herself as the young ones do – an elderly matron whose life has already happened. As Kirk Combe and Kenneth Schmader notice in the context of a different comedy during the Restoration, "…elder women in comedy are virtual pariahs on stage" (Combe and Schmander 2002: 194), and Lady Laycock's fate is no different. She can now only passively observe the shenanigans of the younger generations.

Being seen for what one really is and not what they want to be is one of the many lessons of the next comedy, by Thomas D'Urfey. As the title suggests, neither Sir Arthur Oldlove nor Old Jollyman are at the very center of *Madame Fickle, or the Witty False One*, but it is their public shaming that contributes to the comic moral of the play on social appearances and masks. It is no accident that D'Urfey makes Sir Oldlove an antiquary since the satire is grounded from the start on the specialist on artefacts, who claims to "redeem lost time from its Chaos of Confusion" and possesses knowledge of different ages (Act III.1), seems to so ignorant or purposefully blind to his own biological clock. Humour is strengthened when it rather quickly turns out that the relics and the artefacts Sir Arthur so cherishes must be fakes. And just as he cannot distinguish between genuine and phony items, he is blind to his own ridiculous exterior. One could blame Sir Arthur's "breeches of Pompey the Great" (Act III.1) on his gullibility, but it seems that this credulousness is part and parcel of his old age. What makes this symptom even worse is that he receives much encouragement and back-patting from his peers, Captain Tilbury and Old Jollyman. While the first one turns a blind eye to his friend's folly to marry his son off with Oldlove's daughter, Old Jollyman may actually be following the same regressive cognitive trajectory as Oldlove himself.

Jollyman is 55 or so, and he is still more than ready for amours, so both men are as conscious of their old(er) age as much as they wish to ignore and disregard it. Sir Oldlove himself concludes that "there is nothing so becoming as Gravity" (Act III.1), and such self-promotion is not new to comedies featuring old(er) men who do not self-assess or want to be judged on the basis of their age, and if it is necessary, then only to their advantage. This is most clearly presented in Act IV. Sir Oldlove, apart from his antiquary mission of "saving time", is busy trying to dispose of his daughter, Constantia, and his niece, the eponymous widow[3], "an approv'd Fortune" (Act III.2). Tilbury's son, Toby, and the Old Jollyman are the lucky candidates. While Toby is too much of a bumpkin in Restoration comedy's

terms to deserve Constantia, as well as the soon-to-be destroyer of the (fake) vial with St Jerome's tears, Old Jollyman's subsequent sexual pursuit of the young girl sparks the expected 'spring-winter' conflict.

When negotiating with Sir Oldlove the permission to marry his daughter, Old Jollyman does what he can to reinterpret, or even reverse, the meaning and value of old age:

> Sir Arth. Troth, Sir, Hope is very necessary in this affair; and if you can but hope my daughter will like your Person and Years, as well as I like your Estate, your Hope will have as ample a Field to range in, as any mans I know.
>
> Joll. My Person and Years—Why, Sir, 'tis impossible she shou'd dislike it; whatever my Years are, I assure you my Imagination is but One-and-twenty.
>
> Sir Arth. But, Sir, in the space of a Week, the strength of your Imagination will be worn away, and your Person will be left to the deliberate age of Eight-and-fifty a month or two over.
>
> Joll. No, 'tis three-months under by my faith, *Sir Arthur*, and what, then? With me 'tis an age of 21; Look in my face, Sir, observe how the blood mounts; here, here's your Complection, without art, *fucus*, or any thing— Then, Sir, peruse my Person—Hah—I think I am well set—Hem—And as found as another man—Besides, I can talk well, walk well, and make Water well—which, udsbores, is as provoking a quality as any man is Master of.
>
> Sir Arth. Sir, in a young man I confess these are additions; but a man that has the misfortune to decline into the vail of Years, were he really Master of all this, wou'd not get credit with the World, he would not be believ'd.
>
> Joll. Not believ'd! Sir, my actions shall give continual demonstration, I am not in the Catalogue of your infirm persons; my Back, Sir, is strong, by Body active; nor has my infirmity been so much my Foe, to abate any part of my vigour: But I can Run, Wrestle, Fight, or Play a Game at Tennis with any Spark i'th' City, and let the World rub. (Act IV.1)

This conversation is even more interesting when one remembers that it is two fifty-year-olds negotiating, meaning that both know what old age is, how it feels and what it might mean in the context of a marriage with a young woman. The fact that Old Jollyman needs to convince Sir Oldlove of the 'spark' left in him, and the latter not agreeing unconditionally, only proves the arbitrariness and relativity of ageing and old age. Oldlove sees

Jollyman as old, but not himself, and vice versa. If this comedy was primarily focused on Oldlove's or Jollyman's plots, then we would have been presented with a scene with the old man proposing himself to the young recipient and her refusing in a nice or impolite way. This, however, is a comedy oscillating around the fake young widow and her young and foolish courtiers, and so the topic of the old man is unresolved and no proper proposal occurs, leaving the audiences with the very joke of Old Jollyman thinking he could even stand a chance.

Despite the changes introduced to English theatre and drama after the 1680s, and with the increasingly advanced ways of thinking about ageing and the prolongation of life, the age-blind elders have remained the source of laughter. *The Busy Body*'s Sir Francis Gripe is yet another example of an old character who cannot see and therefore accept the fact that he is perceived as a ridiculous old fool who due to his age has lost all rights to sexual fulfillment as well as access to the wealth of the younger generation, especially that of his chosen Miranda. Gripe is the designated guardian of Miranda who is also courted by Sir George Airy. The new comedy pattern, as presented by Susanna Centlivre in 1709, requires Miranda to still fulfil the patriarchal duty of marriage, yet she may marry on her own terms, and only after Sir George's virtue is sufficiently tested. As such her body and her riches are to be given to Sir George, and not to Gripe, which further confirms that in this progressively developing new social unit, there is no place for the old, amorous and greedy Gripe. Centlivre further aggravates Gripe's condition/status as the scapegoat and the butt of a joke because of his insistence of marrying his son, Charles, to a tellingly named woman, namely Lady Wrinkle. Charles is particularly shocked by his father's choice as this is no ordinary marriage of convenience in eighteenth-century comedy. The comic sons regularly have their wives chosen by their fathers, but they are hardly ever one-eyed, toothless, hunchbacked, dirty and "wry-necked". In other words, in Charles' words, "a Piece of Deformity" (Act I). He makes a specific objection, suggesting that he will renounce the widow's money for a poor(er) *young* and beautiful girl. As such Charles then points to the core issue in his father's behaviour – while he condemns his son to an old and deformed wife, he breaks the rules of propriety by choosing a beautiful young lady for himself. As mentioned earlier, it is for this transgression that Gripe will need to be punished in Centlivre's comic world as well as for his avarice. And it is the latter, his greed, that allows the destined young lovers to carry out their intrigue. While avarice is a cross-gender and all-ages vice, culturally it became one of the negative

attributes specifically attached to the elderly, and quite often male ones. Hoarding money and craving more is the characteristic feature of blocking fathers and other elderly men in comedies at least since the Renaissance, so Centlivre utilises a very old, ageist stereotype to elicit laughter and scorn.

Thanks to Gripe's greed Sir George buys himself a meeting with the purposefully mute Miranda. In his courting he immediately alludes to the cultural, aesthetic, if not phenomenological impossibility of a young girl preferring an "old, dry, wither'd sapless Log of Sixty-five, to vigorous, gay and sprightly Love of Twenty-four" (Act I). Miranda is not responsive enough to take a stand or answer for herself, but there is a silent confirmation of her 'natural' interests in someone her own age. After the 'interview' the two men eventually part affirmed in their own convictions, with Sir George saying to Gripe later on "I'm positive she is not in Love with Age" (Act I), and warning him that spring-winter marriages inevitably lead to cuckoldry; and Gripe suggesting that contemporary women prefer older and experienced partners to the emotionally (and sexually) unstable youth. It is Gripe's fate, however, that has been sealed; he will be punished for his blindness, gullibility and vanity, and it is despite the fact that, as Melinda C. Findberg notes, he is "an unusually sympathetic character for an obstructing miser" (Findberg 2001: xxiv). His illicit passions guarantee his pathetic end at the mercy of the young lovers.

Out of the two lovers, Miranda and Sir George, it is the woman who has more wit and imagination. She likewise knows how to 'operate' a doting old man whose mind is set on sexual adventures and money, who admits to her "I'm all on fire" (Act III). While offering herself to Gripe as his wife, and lover, she demands of him a written permission to marry, which apparently will prove to all the world – which for both characters, but Gripe in particular, means all younger men – that she willingly chose a man "loaded with Years and Wisdom" (Act III). Even the very hint at Gripe's being of an advanced age makes him uncomfortable, and he refuses to make his age an issue: "Prithee, leave out age, Chargy, I am not so old, as you shall find: Adod, I'm young…" (Act III). It takes many more intrigues to finally remind Gripe were his place is in the social hierarchy, and what his true prerogatives are. In the end, when he is finally let in on the secret and joke, and then presented with the newly married couple, as well as informed about his son's retrieval of his deserved wealth, he cannot contain his anger and leaves. As Nancy Copeland (1995: 24) observes in the context of another play by Centlivre, her eccentric guardians "remain unreformed at the end of the play". No surprise then that even the amicable suggestions

from his age peer, Sir Jealous[4], that they both should accept the fact they have been cheated, or put in their rightful place by the young ones, are dismissed by Gripe. Ultimately, he learns two lessons: the first is that greed is a vice that will not go unpunished, in a rather 'what comes around goes around'-way; and the other that the roles available to a person of his age differ greatly from the function and positions offered to the younger generation. Acknowledging this biological, social and cultural fact is what characterises good ageing in eighteenth-century comedy.

In conclusion, then; while by definition a comedy's trajectory follows from disorder to restoration and affirmation of social concord and order, it does not mean that everyone has their wishes fulfilled. On the contrary, Restoration comedy in particular was known for letting its rogues go free from time to time, even though many witty gallants and libertines were to be eventually socialised into marriage. Ideally, however, social order was to be restored, which meant that each character was to return, or find themselves re-placed, in(to) their normative positions. For the younger generations this meant 'growing up' to assume the roles of wives and/or husbands, and adding their financial and reproductive potential to forward the country and the age. For the older characters the progressively more sentimentalised comedies designated the roles of memorialisers, guardians and supporters of the younger generations, who, however, were not to interfere too much and for too long into their affairs. As Miner (1966: 4) reminds, "youth challenged the forms and conventions inherited from age, wittily mocking those elders who … sought youth's freedom…". As such placing oneself above the younger generations was always doomed to failure and social and financial chastisement and a loud burst of laughter from the cheering audiences.

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Notes

1. The title has been variously spelt, either as one or two words.

2. See my forthcoming "'Next unto the Gods my life shall be spent in Contemplation of him': The close study of Margaret Cavendish's dramatised widowhood" for more on Juan Luis Vives' perception of widows.

3.As this play shows, not every comic widow is an 'antiquated dame' and as the Restoration repertoire proves, the young ones are the most 'dangerous'.

4. Sir Jealous is not the main focus of this analysis as his subplot is not so much focused on being an old man than being a controlling/blocking father. He wishes his daughter, Isabinda, to be more chaste than the English ladies whose passions and appetites run wild. He even employs a lady to guard or monitor Isabinda's morality and conduct, only to come to a conclusion that the old ways of assigning an older chaperone will not do. Isabinda will, of course, eventually marry Charles, Gripe's son. More on Sir Jealous see Findberg (2001: xxiv-xxv).

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