

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **Wife, Whore, and/or Dutchwoman: Shifting Female Roles in *The London Prodigal***

Marianne Montgomery  
East California University  
[montgomerym@ecu.edu](mailto:montgomerym@ecu.edu)

Most critical attention to the figure of the Dutchwoman on the early modern English stage has focused on Franceschina, the titular Dutch courtesan of John Marston's play (1604). Franceschina is indeed a fascinating character, at once attractive and repellent. Jean Howard has influentially argued that she embodies a kind of monstrous cosmopolitanism, serving all nations and seeming a hybrid herself of Dutch language and Italian sexual arts. As such, she and other stage sex workers problematize and complicate gender roles in the rapidly-expanding metropolis.<sup>1</sup> Other critics attend to the ways in which Franceschina simultaneously reinforces and troubles Stuart patriarchy, sexual mores, and other categories.<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Rubright suggests that Franceschina reinforces the 'double vision' that yoked England and the Low Countries in proximate relation to one another. Resisting easy ethnic classification, the courtesan affiliates the English with Dutch appetite and belief.<sup>3</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Franceschina's mixed language makes audible her status as an outsider and a commodity as well as the futility of her revenge.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jean Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 152-4. See also Howard, 'Mastering Difference in *The Dutch Courtesan*', *Shakespeare Studies* 24 (1996), 105-117.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Mark Thornton Burnett, "'Calling 'things by their right names': Troping Prostitution, Politics, and *The Dutch Courtesan*", in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580-1690*, ed. by Gordon McMullan (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 171-88; Richard Horwich, 'Wives, Courtesans, and the Economics of Love in Jacobean City Comedy', in *Drama in the Renaissance: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1986), pp. 255-73; Theodore B. Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-1613* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 178-80; and Garrett A. Sullivan, "'All Things Come into Commerce": Women, Household Labor, and the Spaces of Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*', *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1996), 19-46.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp. 39-42.

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Montgomery, *Europe's Languages on England's Stages* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 57-61.

The critical focus on Franceschina and *The Dutch Courtesan*, however, has tended to obscure more benign images of Dutchwomen. The Dutch were the largest group of strangers in late sixteenth century London, with an established church in London and with households and businesses focused on trade and on manufacturing, especially the manufacture of luxury goods.<sup>5</sup> Early modern Londoners would certainly have encountered Dutch women who were not prostitutes, and travel writers emphasized the independence of Dutch women within their households.<sup>6</sup> This essay aims to supplement the critical discussion of the stage Dutchwoman as prostitute by examining an Englishwoman who pretends to be Dutch in a play nearly contemporaneous with *The Dutch Courtesan*, the anonymous *The London Prodigal* (1603-4).

Dogged for centuries by its label as marginal/apocryphal Shakespeare, *The London Prodigal* has been until recent years neglected as a work of dramatic interest in its own right and still does not appear in a published modern critical edition.<sup>7</sup> Generically, it is a city comedy, one of a set of urban plays preoccupied with new economic and social relations in the rapidly-growing and increasingly cosmopolitan city. It combines a satiric treatment of fashion and convention in the manner of Ben Jonson's plays with themes familiar from less satiric and more festive city comedies like Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*: an interest in London commerce, a fascination with commodities like cloth, and, significantly, foreign disguise as a key plot element.<sup>8</sup> *The London Prodigal* stages a city in which strangers mix easily with English characters and in which an abandoned wife, Luce, disguises herself as a Dutch servant to await the comic return of her prodigal husband.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 98-104, 114-121; Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 262-95.

<sup>6</sup> D. Christopher Gabbard, 'Gender Stereotyping in Early Modern Travel Writing on Holland', *SEL* 43.1 (2003), 83-100 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sel.2003.0004>>.

<sup>7</sup> A fine modern edition does exist as an unpublished dissertation. Paul Matthew Edmondson, 'A Critical Edition of *The London Prodigal*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2000) <<http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.366648>> [accessed 16 April 2016]. For the history of the critical debate over the play's authorship, see pp. 101-120. All references to the play are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text by scene and line number.

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Mehl, 'The London Prodigal as Jacobean City Comedy', in *Plotting Early Modern London: New Essays on Jacobean City Comedy*, ed. by Mehl, Angela Stock, and Anne-Julia Zweirlein (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 165-76 (pp. 166, 176); Howard, *Theater of a City*, pp. 2-4.

As with all women represented on the all-male stage, Luce's disguise comprises layers of identity beyond those acknowledged in the dramatic fiction.<sup>9</sup> 'She' is an English boy actor playing an Englishwoman playing a Dutchwoman. When she puts on a Dutch disguise, Luce does not just join Marston's Franceschina as one of the few Dutchwomen represented on the early Jacobean stage. She also joins an early modern stage tradition of English characters pretending to be Dutch. Her closest antecedent is Roland Lacey in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599). The profligate aristocrat Lacey goes abroad, acquires a skill, and returns to London in disguise as a Dutch shoemaker, Hans. In Dekker's plot, stage Dutch and a stage Dutchman enrich England economically and socially and contribute crucially to the comic resolution.<sup>10</sup> In *The London Prodigal*, Dutch disguise gives Luce a new role in service while she waits for the reform of her prodigal husband. She is repeatedly called 'outlandish'; by becoming an outlander in her own country, she retreats into the background of her own play. Though she speaks a hybridized version of stage Dutch similar to Franceschina's, her language is received very differently, and her Dutch disguise offers her a safe identity in which to reintroduce herself to her husband and effect his reform.

Fiona McNeill's term 'shifting' is useful for thinking about the intersecting identities that comprise Luce's disguise. McNeill notes that poor women in early modern English drama improvisationally 'traverse' an 'extensive range of provisional identities...these are women on the move'. They 'make shift' geographically, occupationally, and sexually, troubling easy categorization.<sup>11</sup> Though Luce is not a poor woman, when abandoned by her husband and left a 'wretched maid' she, like the similarly uncategorized Mariana in *Measure for Measure*, risks falling into a world of disorderly masterless women (9.267). Her 'strange disguise' reinscribes her in the safety of a new household (9.275).<sup>12</sup> When she shifts into the 'strange disguise', she shifts into a series of intersecting liminal states. She becomes neither Dutch nor English, neither married nor unmarried, neither whore nor maid, neither present nor absent. Her language, a hybrid of Dutch and English, makes audible her liminal positioning. Though Luce is a less disruptive figure than Marston's Dutch courtesan Franceschina – she is an Englishwoman in disguise, is not driven by revenge, and is welcomed as a valued maid – the threat of prostitution still haunts her

---

<sup>9</sup> Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 9; Fiona McNeill, *Poor Women in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery, pp. 67-76; David Scott Kastan, 'Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*', *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987), 324-37; Andrew Fleck, 'Marking Difference and National Identity in Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*', *SEL* 46.2 (Spring 2006), 349-70. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sel.2006.0015>>.

<sup>11</sup> McNeill, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.

situation and her Dutch disguise. The figure of the Dutchwoman thus defies easy categorization in *The London Prodigal*. Though her Dutch disguise allows Luce to wait safely for the return of her errant husband, becoming a Dutchwoman also means that the Englishwoman is always shadowed rhetorically by the possibility of sexual service.

The choice to shift into a Dutch disguise makes sense for Luce, given the relative size and visibility of the Dutch community in late sixteenth-century London. As Rubright has argued, Anglo-Dutch relations in the early modern period are defined by both difference and similitude.<sup>13</sup> A Dutch disguise separates Luce from her family and her shame at her husband's rejection without making her *too* strange. London's rapid growth and increasingly cosmopolitan demographics in the period preceding the turn of the seventeenth century have been well documented.<sup>14</sup> By 1593, there were over ten thousand continental immigrants living in London, about five percent of the city's total population. The majority were Dutch and French Protestant refugees fleeing Europe's religious wars. The growth of the Dutch populations from the mid-1580s can be attributed to the Spanish reconquest of the southern Netherlands; in 1593, 55% of the alien community in London were Dutch.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch church was established in London in 1550, making Dutch immigrants more visible and occasioning debates about their role in London's economy.<sup>16</sup> The supporters of these immigrants argued that they contributed new skills and methods to England's economy, though native English craftsmen often expressed fear of foreign competition in their trades.<sup>17</sup> By putting on a Dutch disguise, Luce chooses a national affiliation associated closely with skilled labor and turns herself, in effect, into a familiar other. As a Dutchwoman, she would not be out of place on the streets of London, but she is separated from her English identity, English family, and English husband and becomes a desirable household servant, as we will see. Shifting nationality helps her to shift her class position.

Even before her prodigal husband Flowerdale abandons her, Luce has already, like other early modern women, been displaced by marriage, unmoored from the stability of her

---

<sup>13</sup> Rubright, pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Lee Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 61-86; Roger Finlay and Beatrice Shearer, 'Population Growth and Suburban Expansion', in *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, ed. by A.L. Beier and Roger Finlay (New York: Longman, 1986), pp. 37-59.

<sup>15</sup> Luu, pp. 92-99.

<sup>16</sup> Pettegree, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Luu, p. 88; Siobhán Higgins, "'Let Us Not Grieve the Soul of the Stranger': Images and Imaginings of the Dutch and Flemish in Late Elizabethan London", *Dutch Crossing* 37.1 (2013), 20-40 (p. 21) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/0309656412Z.00000000023>>.

family's household. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford explain that upper class women especially experienced a violent 'sense of physical displacement' in the move from the father's household to the husband's.<sup>18</sup> When Flowerdale abandons his wife, then, he leaves her in a disorientingly and dangerously free position. McNeill reminds us that freedom was an uncomfortable and undesirable condition for early modern women; far preferable was being bound to a household, as daughter, wife, or servant.<sup>19</sup> Luce, already potentially disoriented by the shift from maid to wife, now finds herself distressingly masterless.

In her position, prostitution threatens. Flowerdale underlines the potential disorder awaiting the deserted wife by telling her to become a whore (9.261): 'Why, turn whore, that's a good trade. / And so, perhaps, I'll see thee now and then' (9.261-2). He in effect invites her to join one of the whore plots of the early modern stage discussed by Howard, leaving the household and entering the commercial sphere.<sup>20</sup> Though around ten percent of English marriages ended in desertion in this period, *The London Prodigal* treats Flowerdale's desertion of Luce as extraordinary, as he seems to have no redeeming qualities and abandons his wife while she tries to save him from prison, on the wedding day itself.<sup>21</sup> Luce bemoans her limited options when left with no husband and no familial support: 'My father and my friends they have despised me / And I, a wretched maid, thus cast away' (9.266-7). Luce, like the slandered Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, has few options. Also like Hero, she receives assistance from a crafty man. Alien disguises proliferate: Flowerdale's father, himself disguised as a Venetian sailor, suggests that Luce disguise herself as a Dutch servant. To save her from entering the ranks of disorderly women, he offers Luce an alternative identity as a 'Dutch frow,' from the Dutch *vrouw* and German *frau*, both denoting 'woman' or 'wife' (*OED*), a safer Dutch disguise that puts Luce in service, but not in sexual service.

Language, as we will see, is central to Luce's disguise, but even before she takes on the voice of the Dutchwoman, her agency as a woman is closely tied to her voice (or lack thereof). When she pleads to save Flowerdale from debtors' prison on their wedding day, she connects her language and her gender: 'Good sir, stop not your ears at my complaint, / My voice grows weak, for women's words are faint' (9.168-9). Here, Luce's voice is doubly weak. She fears that her pleas will be ineffective, but she figured this weakness as

---

<sup>18</sup> Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> McNeill, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Howard, *Theater of a City*, pp. 114-61.

<sup>21</sup> Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 54.

diminished volume. Her voice can't be heard, and so it won't be persuasive; this, she suggests, is a condition of being a woman. She does manage to persuade Flowerdale's uncle to release him, though, on her word and her bond. Luce's voice is mentioned again, insultingly, later in the scene, when Flowerdale calls his wife, who has just handed over more money to him, a 'rattle baby come to follow me' (9.225). As a rattle baby, Luce is either a young child or a doll, but in either case, she speaks words that Flowerdale hears only as noise, not as the caring pleadings of a loving wife (*OED*). He follows up on 'rattle baby' by calling her 'minikin', a young girl (9.257; *OED*). Like Morose in Jonson's *Epicene*, Flowerdale hears female speech as noise, signaling his anxiety about women and marriage.<sup>22</sup> Flowerdale's insults diminish Luce in gendered terms. He sees her as silly and childish and hears her voice as meaningless noise.

As the Dutch frow, Luce takes on a new voice, a new language, new clothes, and a new name, Tannakin, which rhymes with the insulting 'minikin'. She then becomes a maid in the home of her silly sister, Franck, and Franck's husband, Civet. Though her clothing is not described, she appears '*like a Dutch vrouw*' (12.0sd) and therefore presumably wears sober dress and the *hovetcleet*, the white hood typical of early modern Dutch costume, which would make her easily identifiable as a Dutchwoman to both the onstage and offstage audiences.<sup>23</sup> She introduces herself as Tannakin, a diminutive of 'Ann' or 'Anna' commonly used by the English for Dutchwomen (*OED*). She asserts that she can fix Franck's hair in the latest 'new fashion': 'Me sall do everyting about da head' (*OED*; 12.7-8). This sentence is typical of Luce's stage Dutch. The spelling of her lines indicates that she is meant to speak with a distinctive accent and in a kind of broken English that is mostly comprehensible yet clearly marked as other.<sup>24</sup>

Luce's stage Dutch prompts Civet to ask what country she comes from and to label her 'outlandish' while Franck expresses confidence that the Dutchwoman can 'help [her] to cheeks and ears', a fashionably elaborate hairstyle (12.11, 13). This 'mock face' hairstyle is also mentioned in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1604) as part of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 213, 219; Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 135-6.

<sup>23</sup> Karine Taylor and Clara van de Maes, 'The White Netherlandish Hood: Its History and Re-creation', 2014 <<https://dutchrenaissanceclothing.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/hovetcleet-paper.pdf>> [accessed 5 June 2016]; see also the illustration of 'A Hollander's Wife', in John Speed, *A Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (London, 1631), map between pp. 21-2.

<sup>24</sup> Rubright, p. 102; Andrew Fleck "'Ick verstaw you niet": Performing Foreign Tongues on the Early Modern English Stage', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007), 204-21 (pp. 209-13).

transformation of country wench into courtesan.<sup>25</sup> When Luce answers that she can do cheeks and ears ‘very vell’ (12.14), she unwittingly associates herself with courtesans like Franceschina and the Country Wench, who mastered fashionable hairstyles as part of their art. Like the male Dutch craftsmen working in London, this Dutchwoman has special skills and knowledge to offer in London. Franck then introduces Luce as Tannakin to their other sister, Delia, and specifically praises Tannakin’s language: ‘I have a new Dutch maid, and she speaks so fine it would do your heart good’ (12.45-6). Franck seems to value the status distinction of having a Dutch maid with expertise in Continental fashions. There is limited historical evidence of Dutch women in service to English households, but the play’s treatment of this employment suggests that such an arrangement would have been plausible and desirable to early modern London theater audiences.

As the Dutch maid, Luce shifts into two, mutually-reinforcing roles: Dutchwoman and servant. As David Evett points out, both servants and women occupied subordinate positions within the ‘normative paradigms of social relationship in early modern England’.<sup>26</sup> In the second half of the sixteenth century, poor girls increasingly worked in household service until they were financially able to marry in their mid-twenties, but service work also offered longer-term safety and security for unmarried women.<sup>27</sup> Mendelson and Crawford conceptualize service as a life-stage for early modern women between puberty and marriage that gave them ‘a safe haven to delay their entrée into adulthood’ and provided moral and physical restraint within an orderly household.<sup>28</sup> Household servants received room and board, some clothing, wages, and training in the skills of housewifery. Servants usually lived with their employers, so married women worked in service only if they had been abandoned by their husbands, like Luce. For example, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh cites the 1603 case of one Susan Wright, who entered service after her husband wasted her estate and left her destitute.<sup>29</sup> Wright’s contemporary case sounds very similar to Luce’s.

Adding a Dutch disguise, Luce further underlines her new role; she enters service in an alien identity that offers her further shelter and protection from the shame of abandonment

---

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Michaelmas Tearme*, ed. by Theodore B. Leinwand, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 3.1.20.

<sup>26</sup> David Evett, *Discourses of Service in Shakespeare’s England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 159; Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 46-7.

<sup>28</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> McIntosh, pp. 47-49.

and the risk of prostitution. At the same time, her disguise allows her to contribute to her own English family (albeit as a servant rather than sister) and reinforces her virtue and value as a good housewife. The role of servants in early modern English drama has received considerable critical attention and is largely beyond the scope of this essay, but R.C. Richardson sums up nicely the role that servants play on the stage: ‘Servants in drama provide links [...] between different theatres of action. Their presence extends the social and linguistic range of the plays’.<sup>30</sup> In Luce’s case, she moves between her father’s house and her sister’s (with her own marital home out of reach) and between the cosmopolitan city street and the English household. Her Dutch speech and service role broaden the play linguistically and socially. As she shifts temporarily into service and into Dutch, she makes audible on the stage the variety of nationalities and classes populating early modern London.

Luce’s new identity as an Englishwoman disguised as a Dutchwoman is defined in part by her only-partial speech disguise. She speaks stage Dutch with an inconsistent accent, using the occasional Dutch word. Paul Edmondson declined to regularize her language in his critical edition of the play, arguing that her speech disguise seems to be deliberately partial.<sup>31</sup> This imperfect language makes Luce herself audible, through her disguise, to the playhouse audience and also to her sister, Delia, who is more astute than the silly Franck. Delia asks Tannakin to stay behind for a word, and she replies, exaggerating her accented v’s: ‘Vat is your vill wit me?’ (12.52). Here, knowing that she must perform her disguise for her sister, she seems to lay on her Tannakin accent more thickly. This attempt to make her disguise louder, though, fails, as Delia recognizes the Dutchwoman as her sister: ‘Sister Luce, ’tis not your broken language, / Nor this same habit, can disguise your face / From that I know you’ (12.53-5). Breaking the comic convention that even the flimsiest disguise renders friend or relative unrecognizable, the witty Delia sees right through Luce’s costume (‘habit’) and speech disguise (‘broken language’).

Now recognized, Luce drops her Dutch accent and responds in her normal English. She summarizes the purpose of her Dutch disguise, which, as I have been arguing, shifts her temporarily away from her English familial and social networks while protecting her from the real threat of turning whore:

This borrowed shape that I have ta’en upon me  
Is but to keep myself a space unknown,

---

<sup>30</sup> R.C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Edmondson, p. 37.



Both from my father and my nearest friends,  
Until I see how time will bring to pass  
The desperate course of Master Flowerdale. (12.57-61)

Her language emphasizes delay. She is confident that her disguise is temporary, allowing her to preserve herself by becoming ‘unknown’ for a while. The primary sense of ‘space’ here is temporal, but ‘space’ also points to the liminality of her disguise. She moves into a new space – the Dutch frow space – for a space, a short time, in order to delay having to reckon with Flowerdale’s abandonment by, for example, choosing to leave him and return to her father. (Though she could not initiate a divorce, she could seek a legal separation.<sup>32</sup>) Luce delays instead, actively taking on her disguise and ‘keep[ing]’ herself, trusting that ‘time will bring to pass’ some change in her husband’s ‘course’.

In the next scene, though, the prodigal Flowerdale seems further from reform than ever. He attends a funeral only for the food, begs on the street, suffers the rejection of his whore, and offers his own sexual services to a citizen’s wife (13.3, 13, 39-42, 68-70). Ironically, he nearly becomes the whore that he tried to make Luce. He finally encounters his uncle and father (the latter still disguised), and they call forth Luce, likewise still in her Dutch disguise, to meet him. She emerges and asks, with her characteristic Dutch accent, who Flowerdale is: ‘Vat is de matter? Vat be you, younker?’ (13.122). Flowerdale, unlike Delia, does not recognize Luce as Luce, but he does recognize her as a Dutchwoman, and, in an aside, hopes to get money from her: ‘By this light, a Dutch vrouw. They say they are called kind. By this light, I’ll try her’ (13.123-4). Flowerdale comments on the reputation of Dutchwomen as kind, but his use of ‘kind’ is also ironic, as he fails to recognize the Dutchwoman as his own wife, his own kind. ‘Kind’’s sense of sexually available, more common later in the seventeenth century, may also be present here; as we have seen, the possibility of prostitution haunts Luce’s Dutch disguise (*OED*). Luce gives him money, but twice asks ‘Vere bin your vife?’ (13.131, 135). Flowerdale claims his wife is dead, to the horror of both his father and of Luce, who exclaims ‘dat was not schoon’ (‘That was not nice’) (13.143, 143n). Flowerdale falls even lower by planning to have the Dutchwoman steal her master’s plate and speculating that the Dutchwoman is in love with him (showing his assumption that any Dutchwoman is sexually available but also ironically stumbling upon the truth of her identity as his loving wife).

The reunion of Luce, maintaining her Dutch disguise, and Flowerdale spurs a recognition scene. When her father appears to accuse Flowerdale of murdering his daughter, Luce enters as the Dutch frow and hangs on her errant and unrecognizing husband: ‘Have me

---

<sup>32</sup> Mendelson and Crawford, pp. 141-2.

no ander way dan you have him. / He tell me dat he love me heartily' (13.214-15). Her father likewise fails to recognize her, though he accuses the Dutchwoman of being a 'counterfeit' sent in 'a plot' to rob Civet's household (13.220-1). Luce reveals herself, revealing at the same time that her father is both right (in recognizing her as a counterfeit Dutchwoman in league with Flowerdale) and wrong (in thinking her plot is to rob her employer). Her language switches abruptly as she adopts her own voice and own English: 'I am no trull, neither outlandish vrouw / Nor he, nor I, shall to the prison go. / Know you me now? Nay, never stand amazed' (13.224-26). Presumably, on stage Luce should remove her hood as she changes her language, doubly revealing herself. In her revelation, she parallels and rejects the two roles available to her, 'trull' and 'outlandish vrouw', showing these to be at once distinct (with outlandishness as an alternative to whoredom) and closely connected, as an outlandish vrouw might easily be taken for a trull.

Luce then returns to the motif of voice, asking Flowerdale to 'speak to her that is thy faithful wife' (13.235). Empowered by her time away as the Dutchwoman, she now speaks with a stronger voice and refuses to be ignored or dismissed by her husband. Miraculously, her goodness effects a sudden reformation in Flowerdale: 'Thy chastity and virtue hath infused / Another soul in me' (13.243-4). This transformation, implausible as it may seem, validates Luce's strategy of delay through disguise. She claimed that 'yet one hour's time' could change her husband, metatheatrically anticipating the quickness of the comic resolution. She indeed proves 'kind', as she shifts from a kind Dutchwoman to a finally appreciated kind wife who will be sexually available only within the marriage household. Standing apart from this comic resolution, though, is her sister Delia, who actively rejects all her suitors and embraces the very single life that seemed so ambiguous and dangerous to Luce: 'My vow is in heaven in earth to live alone / Husband, howsoever good, I will have none' (13.369-70).<sup>33</sup>

Though Luce's Dutch disguise is temporary and might even seem incidental, insofar as Flowerdale's sudden reform appears largely unmotivated, *The London Prodigal* stages a Dutchwoman who embodies sobriety, good judgment, and safe domestic service rather than prostitution. Though the alternative occupation of Dutch courtesan always hovers rhetorically just beyond the margins of her plot, Luce's outlandish disguise allows her to remain at home in London. Becoming a Dutchwoman in service, the scorned bride can temporarily shift into a liminal space between maidenhood and marriage, between wife and whore, between nationalities, and between languages. This shift, made audible by her hybrid speech and visible by her Dutch costume, ultimately allows Luce to wait for the

---

<sup>33</sup> Viviana Comensoli, *'Household Business': Domestic Plays of Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 134.

right moment to reveal herself and invite her husband's reform. In this sense, her foreign disguise, while not authentic or convincing, is highly effective in preserving her threatened virtue. *The London Prodigal* therefore shows one way in which the European woman in early modern London can be staged as a productive element of the cosmopolitan London of city comedy. The Dutch frow's gender, nation, and class intersect to offer the scorned English wife a safe new identity until the right moment to shift out of the disguise and prove herself and her husband kind.