

## Dickens and the Eighteenth Century

### Farquhar, Gay, Goldsmith, Lillo, Richardson and Dickens

#### (1) Dickens's favourite authors

My father had left a small collection of books in a little room up-stairs to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and *Robinson Crusoe* came out, a glorious host, to keep me company.

John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*,  
(Vol.1, Ch. 1).

#### (2) Debtor's Prison

##### Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*

Just as he spoke they came in, and approaching the bed where I lay, after previously informing me of their employment and business, made me their prisoner, bidding me prepare to go with them to the county gaol, which was eleven miles off.

'My friends,' said I, 'this is severe weather on which you have come to take me to a prison; and it is particularly unfortunate at this time, as one of my arms has lately been burnt in a terrible manner, and it has thrown me into a slight fever, and I want cloaths to cover me, and I am now too weak and old to walk far in such deep snow: but if it must be so—' (Ch.24)

##### Henry Fielding, *Amelia*

At length he arrived at the bailiff's mansion, and was ushered into a room in which were several persons. Booth desired to be alone; upon which the bailiff waited on him up-stairs into an apartment, the windows of which were well fortified with iron bars, but the walls had not the least outwork raised before them; they were, indeed, what is generally called naked; the bricks having been only covered with a thin plaster, which in many places was mouldered away.

The first demand made upon Booth was for coach-hire, which amounted to two shillings, according to the bailiff's account; that being just double the

legal fare. He was then asked if he did not chuse a bowl of punch? to which he having answered in the negative, the bailiff replied, "Nay, sir, just as you please. I don't ask you to drink, if you don't chuse it; but certainly you know the custom; the house is full of prisoners, and I can't afford gentlemen a room to themselves for nothing." (Bk.VIII, Ch.i.)

##### Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*

LETTER LXVI. *Mr. Belford, To Robert Lovelace, Esq; Monday, July 17.*

A horrid hole of a house, in an Alley they call a Court; stairs wretchedly narrow, even to the first-floor rooms: And into a den they led me, with broken walls, which had been papered, as I saw by a multitude of tacks, and some torn bits held on by the rusty heads.

The floor indeed was clean, but the ceiling was smoked with variety of figures, and initials of names, that had been the woful employment of wretches who had no other way to amuse themselves.

A bed at one corner, with coarse curtains tacked up at the feet to the ceiling; because the curtain-rings were broken off; but a coverlid upon it with a cleanish look, tho' plaguily in tatters, and the corners tied up in tassels, that the rents in it might go no farther.

. . . .

To finish the shocking description, in a dark nook stood an old broken-bottomed cane couch, without a squab, or coverlid, sunk at one corner, and unmortified by the failing of one of its worm-eaten legs, which lay in two pieces under the wretched piece of furniture it could no longer support.

*And This, thou horrid Lovelace, was the bedchamber of the divine Clarissa!!!*

### (3) Criminal Underworld

John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728)

#### ACT I. SCENE I.

SCENE, Peachum's House.

Peachum sitting at a Table with a large Book of Accounts before him.

.....

A Lawyer is an honest Employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double Capacity, both against Rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage Cheats, since we live by them.

Enter Filch.

Filch. Sir, *Black Moll* hath sent word her Trial comes on in the Afternoon, and she hopes you will order Matters so as to bring her off.

Peachum. As the Wench is very active and industrious, you may satisfy her that I'll soften the Evidence.

Filch. *Tom Gagg*, Sir, is found guilty.

Peachum. A lazy Dog! When I took him the time before, I told him what he would come to if he did not mend his Hand. This is Death without Reprieve. I may venture to Book him [*writes*]. For *Tom Gagg*, forty Pounds. Let *Betty Sly* know that I'll save her from Transportation, for I can get more by her staying in *England*.

George Farquhar, *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707)

Enter Boniface and Cherry.

Bon. Well, daughter, as the saying is, have you brought Martin to confess? [59]

Cher. Pray, father, don't put me upon getting anything out of a man; I'm but young, you know, father, and I don't understand wheedling.

Bon. Young! why, you jade, as the saying is, can any woman wheedle that is not young? your mother was useless at five-and-twenty. Not wheedle! would you make your mother a whore, and me a cuckold, as the saying is? I tell you, his silence confesses it, and his master spends his money so freely, and is so much a gentleman every manner of way, that he must be a highwayman. [70]

Enter Gibbet, in a cloak.

Gib. Landlord, landlord, is the coast clear?

Bon. O Mr. Gibbet, what 's the news?

Gib. No matter, ask no questions, all fair and honourable.—Here, my dear Cherry.—[*Gives her a bag.*] Two hundred sterling pounds, as good as any that ever hanged or saved a rogue; lay 'em by with the rest; and here—three wedding or mourning rings, 'tis much the same you know—here, two silver-hilted swords; I took those from fellows that never show any part of their swords but the hilts—here is a diamond necklace which the lady hid in the privatest place in the coach, but I found it out— this gold watch I took from a pawnbroker's wife; it was left in her hands by a person of quality: there's the arms upon the case.

(Act II. Scene 2.)

### (4) Theatricality

In other words, literary scholarship has typically imagined “theatre” — a phenomenon, in the nineteenth century, only nominally literary but overwhelmingly vocal, gestural, spectacular—to be synonymous with “drama,” and has sought in it the narrative structures which underlie realist fiction, reading its relationships to the social and literary worlds as one reads novels, chronologically, sequentially; relying on literary interpretive strategies, on the existence of the signifying properties typically found in written text. This suggests, more than anything, that we, as readers and writers, are constituted narratively rather than theatrically; that our organizing apparatus “naturally” constructs our experience in linear, chronological sequence, presuming logical, “storied” relationships. In this we differ from the Victorians, who understood their theatre, their literature, even their social world, in terms of very explicit non-narrative sign (voices, postures) as well as the stories which tied those signs into narrative units. Still, the work of scholars like Nina Auerbach, Philip Collins, Michael Booth, George Rowell, Edwin Eigner, Robert Garis, and others has shown that the nineteenth-century English theatre is a legitimate and exciting topic of discussion, and the present study has profited from them.

Deborah Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). 5.

## (5) Passionate women in melodrama

### Rosa Dartle (1849–50)

‘It matters little to me her not being at home,’ said Rosa Dartle haughtily, ‘I know nothing of her. It is you I come to see.’

‘Me?’ replied a soft voice.

At the sound of it, a thrill went through my frame. For it was Emily’s!

‘Yes,’ returned Miss Dartle, ‘I have come to look at you. What? You are not ashamed of the face that has done so much?’

The resolute and unrelenting hatred of her tone, its cold stern sharpness, and its mastered rage, presented her before me, as if I had seen her standing in the light. I saw the flashing black eyes, and the passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke.

‘I have come to see,’ she said, ‘James Steerforth’s fancy; the girl who ran away with him, and is the town-talk of the commonest people of her native place; the bold, flaunting, practised companion of persons like James Steerforth. I want to know what such a thing is like.’

There was a rustle, as if the unhappy girl, on whom she heaped these taunts, ran towards the door, and the speaker swiftly interposed herself before it. It was succeeded by a moment’s pause.

When Miss Dartle spoke again, it was through her set teeth, and with a stamp upon the ground.

‘Stay there!’ she said, ‘or I’ll proclaim you to the house, and the whole street! If you try to evade me, I’ll stop you, if it’s by the hair, and raise the very stones against you!’ *David Copperfield*, Ch. 50.

### Miss Wade and Tattycoram (1855–57)

‘That is easily done,’ said she. ‘Come here, child.’ She had opened a door while saying this, and now led the girl in by the hand. It was very curious to see them standing together: the girl with her disengaged fingers plaiting the bosom of her dress, half irresolutely, half passionately; Miss Wade with her composed face attentively regarding her, and suggesting to an observer, with extraordinary force, in her composure itself (as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the unquenchable passion of her own nature.

‘See here,’ she said, in the same level way as before. ‘Here is your patron, your master. He is

willing to take you back, my dear, if you are sensible of the favour and choose to go. You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman’s daughter, Harriet, and kept before her, as a living reminder of her own superiority and her gracious condescension. You can recover all these advantages and many more of the same kind which I dare say start up in your memory while I speak, and which you lose in taking refuge with me—you can recover them all by telling these gentlemen how humbled and penitent you are, and by going back to them to be forgiven. What do you say, Harriet? Will you go?’ *Little Dorrit*, Ch. 27.

### Millwood in *The London Merchant* (1731)

[Enter] to them, Millwood with a pistol. Trueman secures her.

Trueman. Here thy power of doing mischief ends, deceitful, cruel, bloody woman!

Millwood. Fool, hypocrite, villain—man! Thou canst not call me that!

Trueman. To call thee woman were to wrong the sex, thou devil!

Millwood. That imaginary being is an emblem of thy cursed sex collected, a mirror wherein each particular man may see his own likeness and that of all mankind!

Trueman. Think not by aggravating the fault of others to extenuate thy own, of which the abuse of such uncommon perfections of mind and body is not the least.

Millwood. If such I had, well may I curse your barbarous sex who I robbed me of ’em, ere I knew their worth, then left me, too late, to count their value by their loss. Another and another spoiler came, and all my gain was poverty and reproach. My soul disdained, and yet disdains, dependence and contempt. Riches, no matter by what means obtained, I saw secured the worst of men from both. I found it, therefore, necessary to be rich and to that end I summoned all my arts. You call ’em wicked; be it so! They were such as my conversation with your sex had furnished me withal.

Thorowgood. Sure, none but the worst of men

conversed with thee!

.....

Millwood. I hate you all! I know you, and expect no mercy—nay, I ask for none. I have done nothing that I am sorry for. I followed my inclinations, and that the best of you does every day. All actions are alike natural and indifferent to man and beast who devour or are devoured as they meet with others weaker or stronger than themselves.

Thorowgood. What pity it is, a mind so comprehensive, daring, and inquisitive should be a stranger to religion's sweet but powerful charms.

Millwood. I am not fool enough to be an atheist, though I have known enough of men's hypocrisy to make a thousand simple women so. Whatever religion is in itself, as practiced by mankind it has caused the evils you say it was designed to cure. War, plague, and famine has not destroyed so many of the human race as this pretended piety has done, and with such barbarous cruelty as if the only way to honor Heaven were to turn the present world into Hell.

Thorowgood. Truth is truth, though from an enemy and spoke in malice. You bloody, blind, and superstitious bigots, how will you answer this ?

Millwood. What are your laws, of which you make your boast, but the fool's wisdom and the coward's valor, the instrument and screen of all your villainies by which you punish in others what you act yourselves or would have acted, had you been in their circumstances? The judge who condemns the poor man for being a thief had been a thief himself, had he been poor. Thus, you go on deceiving and being deceived, harassing, plaguing, and destroying one another, but women are your universal prey.

Women, by whom you are, the source of joy,  
With cruel arts you labor to destroy.  
A thousand ways our ruin you pursue,  
Yet blame in us those arts first taught by you.  
Oh, may, from hence, each violated maid,  
By flatt'ring, faithless, barb'rous man betray'd,  
When robb'd of innocence and virgin fame,  
From your destruction raise a nobler name:  
To right their sex's wrongs devote their mind,  
And future Millwoods prove, to plague mankind!

[*Exeunt.*]

George Lillo, *The London Merchant, or, The History of George Barnwell*. [IV.xviii]

### Calista in *The Fair Penitent* (1702)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

SCENE is a Room hung with Black; on one side, Lothario's Body on a Bier; on the other, a Table with a Skull and other Bones, a Book, and a Lamp on it.

Calista is discover'd on a Couch in Black, her Hair hanging loose and disordered: After Musick and a Song, she rises and comes forward.

Cal. 'tis well! these Solemn Sounds, this Pomp of Horror,

Are fit to feed the Frenzy in my Soul,  
Here's room for Meditation, ev'n to Madness,  
'Till the Mind burst with Thinking; this dull Flame  
Sleeps in the Socket; sure the Book was left  
To tell me something;—for Instruction then—  
He teaches holy Sorrow, and Contrition,  
And Penitence;—Is it become an Art then?  
A Trick that lazy, dull, luxurious Gown-men  
Can teach us to do over; I'll no more on't;

[*Throwing away the Book.*]

Nicholas Rowe, *The Fair Penitent*.

### Richardson on Calista in *Clarissa*

LETTER XLIV.

Mr. Bedford, To Robert Lovelace, Esq;  
Thursday, Aug. 17.

What a fine Subject for Tragedy would the injuries of this Lady, and her behaviour under them, both with regard to her implacable friends, and to her persecutor, make! ....

I have frequently thought, in my attendance on this Lady, That if Belton's admired author, Nic. Rowe, had had such a character before him, he would have drawn another sort of a Penitent than he has done, or given his Play, which he calls *The Fair Penitent*, a fitter Title. Miss Harlowe is a Penitent indeed! I think, if I am not guilty of a contradiction in terms; a Penitent without a fault; her Parents conduct towards her from the first considered.

The whole Story of the other is a pack of damned stuff. Lothario, 'tis true, seems such another wicked ungenerous varlet as thou knowest who: The author knew how to draw a Rake; but not to paint a Penitent. Calista is a desiring luscious wench, and her penitence is nothing else but rage, insolence, and scorn. Her passions are all storm and tumult; nothing of the finer passions of the Sex, which, if

naturally drawn, will distinguish themselves from the masculine passions, by a softness that will even shine thro' rage and despair. Her character is made up of deceit and disguise. She has no virtue; is all pride; and her devil is as much within her, as without her.

....

But here is Miss Clarissa Harlowe, a virtuous, noble, wise, and pious young Lady ; who being ill used by her friends, and unhappily ensnared by a vile libertine, whom she believes to be a man of honour, is in a manner forced to throw herself upon his protection. And he, in order to obtain her confidence, never scruples the deepest and most solemn protestations of honour.

....

This is penitence! This is piety! And hence a distress naturally arises, that must worthily affect every heart.

### Anna Howe in *Clarissa*

#### LETTER XI.

*Miss Howe, To Miss Clarissa Harlowe.  
Wednesday, May 10.*

I *will* write! No *man* shall write for me. No *woman* shall hinder me from writing. Surely I am of age to distinguish between reason and caprice. I am not writing to a man, am I? . . .

I hate the man—Most heartily do I hate him, for his teasing ways. The very reading of your account of them teazes me almost as much as they can you. May you have encouragement to fly the foolish wretch!

I have other reasons to wish you may: For I have just made an acquaintance with one who knows a vast deal of his private history. The man is really a villain, my dear! an execrable one! if all be true that I have heard: And yet I am promised other particulars.

I do assure you, my dear friend, that had he a dozen lives, he might have forfeited them all, and been dead *twenty crimes ago*.

If ever you condescend to talk familiarly with him again, ask him after Miss Betterton, and what became of her: And if he shuffle and prevaricate as to her, question him about Miss Lockyer. —O my dear, the man's a villain!

#### LETTER XXX.

*Miss Howe, To Miss Clarissa Harlowe.  
Saturday, May 20.*

I shewed Mr. Lovelace's proposals to Mr. Hickman, who had chambers once at Lincoln's-Inn, being designed for the Law, had his elder brother lived. He looked so wise, so proud, and so important, upon the occasion; and wanted to take so much consideration about them—Would take them home if I pleased—and weigh them well—and so forth—and the like—and all that—that I had no patience with him, and snatched them back with anger.

O dear!—to be so angry, an't please me, for his zeal—

Yes, zeal without knowledge, I said—like most other zeals—If there were no objections that struck him at once, there were none.

So *hasty*, dearest Madam!—

And so *slow*, un-dearest Sir, I could have said—But, Surely, said I, with a look which implied, *Would you rebel, Sir!*

### (6) Dickens on Richardson

Among the multitude of sights, we saw our pleasant little bud of a friend, Rose Cheri, play Clarissa Harlowe the other night. I believe she did it in London just now, and perhaps you may have seen it? A most charming, intelligent, modest, affecting piece of acting it is: with a Death, superior to anything I ever saw on the Stage, or can imagine, except Macready's in Lear.

*Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol.5. 14.*

Do you care for French news? I hope not, because I don't know any. There is a melodrama called the French Revolution, now playing at the Cirque, in the first act of which there is the most tremendous representation of a people that can well be imagined. There are wonderful battles and so forth in the piece but, there is a power and massiveness in the Mob, which is positively awful. At another Theatre, Clarissa Harlowe is still the rage. There are some things in it, rather calculated to astonish the Ghost of Richardson, but Clarissa is very admirably played, and dies better than the original to my thinking--**but Richardson is no great favorite of mine, and never seems to me to take his top-boots off, whatever he does.**

*Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol.5. 19–20.*

**(7) Sailor's Hornpipe Performed by Dickens***The Letters of Charles Dickens. Vol. 7. 496.*

(7)–1

Dickens, owing to his ebullient high spirits, was apt to indulge in practical jokes both at Furnival's Inn and at the Hogarth house in Chelsea. Once when the Hogarths were sitting quietly in their parlour, he, "dressed as a sailor, jumped in at the window, dance a hornpipe, whistling a tune, jumped out again, and a few minutes afterwards, walked gravely in at the door, as if nothing had happened, shook hands with all, and then at the sight of their puzzled faces burst into a roar of laughter."

Norman Page, ed. *Charles Dickens: Family History*. Vol. 5. 84.

(7)–2

In an account of one of the journeys we read of Wills and Dolby whistling in the train while Dickens danced the sailor's hornpipe; but the most ludicrous incident of all occurred at Southsea near Portsmouth Here, as Dickens, Wills and Dolby were passing through one of the streets, Dickens took upon himself to imitate the frolics of a clown of the Grimaldi type, and having mounted three steps leading to one of the houses, was proceeding to lie down, clown fashion, on the upper step, when the door opened and, to the intense amusement of Dolby and Wills, a stout woman appeared. While all three were running way like naughty schoolboys, the wind lifted Dickens's hat and the chase for it rendered the incident all the more ludicrous. A parting glance at the scene of action showed every doorstep and window occupied by amused onlookers.

Norman Page ed., *Charles Dickens: Family History*. Vol.5. London: Routledge, 1999. 323-24.

**(8) Oliver Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*****(8)–1 Dickens's favourite play**

Let me recommend to you, as a Brother reader of high distinction, two comedies, both Goldsmith's. She stoops to conquer, and The good-natured man [*The Vicar of Wakefield*]. Both are so admirable, and so delightfully written, that they read wonderfully. A friend of mine, Forster who wrote the life of Goldsmith, was very ill a year or so ago, and begged me to read to him one night as he lay in bed-- "something of Goldsmith's". I fell upon *She Stoops to Conquer*, and we enjoyed it with that wonderful intensity, that I believe he began to get better in the first scene, and was all right again in the Fifth Act.

**(8)–2 Tony Lumpkin, a trickster****Act I.**

TONY. You do, do you? then, let me see—what if you go on a mile further, to the Buck's Head; the old Buck's Head on the hill, one of the best inns in the whole county?

. . . .

LANDLORD. (*apart to TONY*). Sure, you ben't sending them to your father's as an inn, be you?

TONY. Mum, you fool you. Let THEM find that out. (*To them.*) You have only to keep on straight forward, till you come to a large old house by the road side. You'll see a pair of large horns over the door. That's the sign. Drive up the yard, and call stoutly about you.

HASTINGS. Sir, we are obliged to you.

. . . .

TONY. No, no; straight forward. I'll just step myself, and show you a piece of the way. (*To the Landlord.*) Mum!

LANDLORD. Ah, bless your heart, for a sweet, pleasant—damn'd mischievous son of a whore. [*Exeunt.*]

**Act II [Marlow being bashful]**

*Enter MISS HARDCASTLE, as returned from walking, a bonnet, etc.*

HASTINGS. (*Introducing them.*) Miss Hardcastle, Mr. Marlow. I'm proud of bringing two persons of such merit together, that only want to know, to esteem each other.

MISS HARDCASTLE. (*Aside.*) Now for meeting my modest gentleman with a demure face, and quite in his own manner. (*After a pause, in which he appears very uneasy and disconcerted.*) I'm glad of your safe arrival, sir. I'm told you had some accidents by the way.

MARLOW. Only a few, madam. Yes, we had some. Yes, madam, a good many accidents, but should be sorry—madam—or rather glad of any accidents—that are so agreeably concluded. Hem!

HASTINGS. (*To him.*) You never spoke better in your whole life. Keep it up, and I'll insure you the victory.

. . . .

MARLOW. It's— a disease— of the mind, madam. In the variety of tastes there must be

some who, wanting a relish— for— um— a—  
um.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I understand you, sir.

....

MARLOW. Yes, madam. In this age of hypocrisy  
there are few who upon strict inquiry do not—  
a—a—a—

MISS HARDCASTLE. I understand you perfectly,  
sir.

MARLOW. (*Aside.*) Egad! and that's more than I do  
myself.

### Act III [Marlow being bold]

MARLOW. What a bawling in every part of the  
house! I have scarce a moment's repose. . . .  
[*Walks and muses.*]

MISS HARDCASTLE. Did you call, sir? Did your  
honour call?

....

MARLOW. No, no, I tell you. (*Looks full in her  
face.*) Yes, child, I think I did call. I wanted—I  
wanted—I vow, child, you are vastly handsome.

MISS HARDCASTLE. O la, sir, you'll make one  
ashamed.

MARLOW. Never saw a more sprightly malicious  
eye. Yes, yes, my dear, I did call. Have you got  
any of your—a—what d'ye call it in the house?

MISS HARDCASTLE. No, sir, we have been out of  
that these ten days.

MARLOW. One may call in this house, I find, to  
very little purpose. Suppose I should call for a  
taste, just by way of a trial, of the nectar of your  
lips; perhaps I might be disappointed in that too.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Nectar! nectar! That's a  
liquor there's no call for in these parts. French, I  
suppose. We sell no French wines here, sir.

....

MARLOW. To guess at this distance, you can't be  
much above forty (approaching). Yet, nearer, I  
don't think so much (approaching). By coming  
close to some women they look younger still; but  
when we come very close indeed—(attempting to  
kiss her).

MISS HARDCASTLE. Pray, sir, keep your distance.  
One would think you wanted to know one's age,  
as they do horses, by mark of mouth.

### (9) Lovelace as a trickster

#### (9)–1 Lovelace disguised as an old man

LETTER VIII.

Mr. Lovelace, To John Belford, Esq; Hamstead,  
Friday Night, June 9.

. . . She started, and looked at me with terror. The  
truth of the compliment, as far as I know, had taken  
dissimulation from my accent.

I saw it was impossible to conceal myself longer  
from her, any more than (from the violent impulses  
of my passion) to forbear manifesting myself. I  
unbuttoned therefore my cape, I pulled off my slapt  
slouched hat . . . .

She no sooner saw who it was, than she gave three  
violent screams; and, before I could catch her in my  
arms (as I was about to do the moment I discovered  
myself) down she sunk at my feet, in a fit; which  
made me curse my indiscretion for so suddenly, and  
with so much emotion, revealing myself.

The gentlewoman, seeing so strange an alteration  
in my person, and features, and voice, and dress,  
cried out, Murder, help! Murder, help! by turns, for  
half a dozen times running. This alarmed the house,  
and up ran two servant-maids, and my servant after  
them. . . .

Up then came running a gentleman and his sister,  
fetched, and brought in by the maid, who had run  
down; and having let in a cursed crabbed old wretch,  
hobbling with his gout, and mumbling with his hoarse  
broken-toothed voice, who was metamorphosed all  
at once into a lively gay young fellow, with a clear  
accent, and all his teeth, she would have it, that I  
was neither more nor less than the devil, and could  
not keep her eye from my soot; expecting, no doubt,  
every minute to see it discover itself to be cloven.

#### (9)–2 Lovelace playing a practical joke

LETTER XLVII.

Mr. Lovelace, To John Belford, Esq; London, Aug.  
21. Monday.

....

When I came into the shop, seeing no chair or  
stool, I went behind the compter, and sat down under  
an arched kind of canopy of carved work, which  
these proud traders, emulating the royal nich-fillers,  
often give themselves, while a joint-stool, perhaps,  
serves those, by whom they get their bread: Such is  
the dignity of Trade in this mercantile nation!

....

I asked, What it was they sold?

Powder, and wash-balls, and snuff, they said; and gloves and stockens.

O come, I'll be your customer. Will. do I want wash-balls?

Yes, and please your Honour, you can dispense with one or two.

Give him half a dozen, dame Smith.

She told me she must come where I was, to serve them. Pray, Sir, walk from behind the compter.

Indeed but I won't. The shop shall be mine. Where are they, if a customer should come in?

....

A female customer, who had been gaping at the door, came in for some Scots snuff; and I would serve her. The wench was plaguy homely; and I told her so; or else, I said, I would have treated her. She in anger [No woman is homely in her own opinion] threw down her peny; and I put it in my pocket.

Just then, turning my eye to the door, I saw a pretty genteel Lady, with a footman after her, peeping in with a What's the matter, good folks? to the starers; and I ran to her from behind the compter,

and, as she was making off, took her hand, and drew her into the shop, begging that she would be my customer; for that I had but just begun trade.

....

I began to be out of countenance at the croud, which thickened apace; and bid Will. order the chair to the door.

....

And so, flinging down a Portugal Six-and-thirty, I took Mr. Smith by the hand, telling him, I was sorry we had not more time to be better acquainted; and bidding farewell to honest Joseph (who pursed up his mouth as I passed by him, as if he thought his teeth still in jeopardy) and Mrs. Smith adieu, and to recommend me to her fair lodger, hummed an air, and, the chair being come, whipt into it; the people about the door seeming to be in good humour with me; one crying, A pleasant gentleman, I warrant him! And away I was carried to White's according to direction.