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Contradictions in Class-Based Restrictions

It may seem from first glance the lower social classes are more equal in gender roles, especially when comparing first-hand accounts of working-class women such as from *A Woman's Labour* by Mary Collier to stories and poems of the upper classes. This is due to the kind of work women and men do in the working classes being similar while in the upper classes, women are restricted from performing the same kind of tasks. A foundational difference between the tasks delegated to the upper class and the working-class people in the eighteenth century is how they are rewarded. The kind of things ruling, or at least upper class, people have to worry about are matters such as wars, as mentioned in *Man the Monarch* by Mary Leapor, and marriages, as mentioned in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* by Susanna Centlivre, are all matters in which the rewards are related to power, lineage or legacy. In this context, these concepts refer to how much power a person can potentially have over others or how a person's last name or bloodline can increase in prestige. These are matters in which people in the working classes have no control over, none the tasks they are delegated to will give them any power. This means just by being born into the working class, a woman will be restricted from gaining power or prestige by default. However, as simply being a member of the ruling class is not enough to create these kinds of limitations for women, additionally restrictions over matters such as who one can be married to are created to ensure no matter what class a woman is a member of, she has no control over her name and legacy. Matilda Betham said in *Power of Women*, "[women] have the substance, [men] may keep the name," while it is inarguable, from the other works, women are

capable of the same tasks through substance, the difference in class is set up in a way the name will always be out of reach, no matter whether or not it actually means anything (32).

It must first be established men and women in the working class both do more or less the same kind of tasks. This is shown in the line “reap the wheat as well as you” in *A Woman’s Labour* (9.18). However, the later lines show, within the confines of the working class, women do all the work men do while having additional tasks specific to their gender such as caring for their children during the night and working after harvest (Collier, 10.19-22). Though, when not concerned with whether it is men’s work being shown or women’s work being shown, the rewards or results for all these kinds of labour being presented is the same, for despite the year round labour, “their sordid Owners always reap the Gains, And poorly recompose their Toil and Pain” (Collier, 17.9-10). So, doing what men does, for working class women, means receiving nothing. Doing more then what men does still means receiving nothing.

With this knowledge in mind, the argument or theory of women’s incapability compared to men is already refuted by practical happenings. Yet, in a work such as *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, Anne Lovely is limited from choosing a suitor through guardians viewing her as incapable in every kind of decision. For example, Obadiah Prim, one of the guardians, see her as incapable when it comes to matters concerning morality. In the line, “Hark thee, dost thou call good counsel tyranny” his view of her moral limitations has already extended to his seeing her is incapable of performing a task such as dressing herself and he now explains it as his superior judgement (Centlivre, 2.2.59). Beyond this specific guardian, the entire reason there are four guardians at all is her original family patriarch seeing her as incapable of decisions related to finance and inheritance. The lines “He died wroth thirty thousand pounds, which he left to his daughter, provided she married with the consent of her guardians” imply the money was

technically going to eventually belong to Anne (1.1.78-79). However, the four guardians were assigned so they will be the ones deciding who the inheritance will go to instead of Anne.

Furthermore, the fact it is going to Anne's suitor at all means, firstly, there is no point at which the money belongs to Anne. So, by her father and by the guardians by proxy, Anne Lovely is viewed as incapable of both owning a family's money and deciding who it can go to instead, which develops into her being viewed as incapable of figuring out who to marry which somehow managed to lead to her also being seen as unable to decide how to dress.

With these differences in mind, at which point does being forced to have men do everything for a woman become the same as a woman being forced to do more than men do? It is at the end, when results of labour are counted and becomes apparent. In *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, the goal of having all the guardians and choosing who to marry is a giant pile of money. All of the work put in, which the woman character was prevented from taking part in, by either the guardians or Colonel Fainwell was related to control over said money. However, none of the actions taken by any working-class characters in either *A Woman's Labour* or *A Thresher's Labour*, which it was responding to, had any possibility of resulting in anyone gaining any more than what they already had. Thus, it appears work with reward cannot be given to women while work without reward can, with men and women of the working classes doing similar work simply being a result of the social class itself already being a limiting factor in terms of rewards of labour.

Rewards are not limited to matters or objects as concrete and physical as a specific amount of money though. They can often be completely abstract, such as reputation or legacy, though the abstract and concrete in this context are not necessarily unrelated. Mary Leapor in *Man the Monarch* calls the way in which men continually hold power generation after generation

as a “long Succession of Domestic Kings” (67). While on its own it relates only to the power difference within on household, when combined with the line “The regal Blood to distant Ages run,” it can also be perceived in a way related to how European cultures count bloodline and lineage by patriarchal family lines (Leapor, 64). This means whatever belongs to a family, whether it be concrete or abstract, does not even necessarily belong to a female member of the family because she can become a part of a different family, even changing her last name. Though Leapor was directly referring to the way a woman is valued by appearance and the ephemeral nature of said appearance in the line “thus wretched Woman’s short-liv’d Merit dies,” if matters like marriage, lineage and inheritance are also restricted from women, then women are not allowed to own any merit of any long-lived short at all (47).

The same concept of honours only being winnable by men are also referenced in *The Power of Women* but women not having it is seen in a positive light. It is because Betham saw the concept of gaining honour as a limiting factor because the reputation of men depends on it. It is seen as a way in which women have power over men, as women need not care about these matters while men care what women think. However, even is heroism “hold[s] the laurelled conqueror a slave” according to Betham, women’s reputation, as told by Leapor, depends on their looks (6). This means the reputation of both genders are restricted to one specific thing. So the kind of power difference Betham refers to by “[f]or wealth and honours they can only prize ... As making them more worthy in our eyes” is mutual in a way (11-12). While it certainly wouldn’t matter if people do not care about their reputation, the difference in how reputation is gained still stands and still affects the people who do.

The difference between these is the same as the difference mentioned previously about social class. The honour and legacy a man needs to gain to uphold his reputation is a concept

which is long-lasting and tied to lineage, while women's reputations are restricted to being controlled by factors which disappear with time. Even if honour isn't real or a concept with substance, it still shows how the reputation of men are capable of lasting beyond a few years. What this means is men are allowed to be remembered while women are not. Its noticeability is only different between the lower and upper social classes because people in the working class aren't allowed to be remembered in general.

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