Plebeianizing the Female Soldier: Radical Liberty and *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*

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Abstract

This article examines the work-related dimensions of *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* (1740). A rollicking account of a plebeian female soldier, the *Life* is a key document for the history of eighteenth-century working women and their representation in narrative. By portraying both the industriousness and the radical liberty associated with the lower-class milieu of real-life female soldiers, Davies's narrative challenges the depiction of plebeian identity in numerous early eighteenth-century fictions of low-born women, whether picaresque like Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* or sentimental like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Drawing on genres such as jest-books, criminal biography, and amatory fiction to break with heroic images of well-born women warriors (including those in popular ballads), it voices a resistant outlook on the regulation of women's labour and sexuality. And, with a social perspective springing as much from class status as sexual identity, Davies's *Life* marks a literary epoch in which female soldiering is plebeianized in plays and novels as diverse as John Gay's *Polly* and Tobias Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom.*

> Besyde the Lond of *Caldee*, is the Lond of *Amazoyne*. And in that Reme is alle Wõmen, and no man; noght, as sũme men seyn, that men mowe not lyve there, but for because that the Wõmen wil not suffre no men amonges hem, to ben here Sovereynes.—*Mandeville's Travels* (ca. 1357)[1]

The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies (1740) deserves to be much better known.[2] A rollicking account of a plebeian female soldier,

1 *The Voiage and Travaile of Sir John Maundevile, Kt.* (London, 1725), 185–86, Google Books. Research in Britain for this article was made possible in part by a SSHRC Standard Research Grant.

2 *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross*, 2 parts (London, 1740). References are to this edition, by part and page number. See n13 for additional bibliographic information.

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Davies's *Life* has much to offer the study of eighteenth-century fiction, life writing, and formations of gender and sexuality. This early scandalous memoir is distinctive for many reasons, including its account of Davies's real-life service as a dragoon, its rendering of the social world of the woman soldier, and its presentation of Davies's vibrant, unforgettable voice. But perhaps the most striking feature of Davies's *Life* is the space it grants to the description, enumeration, and celebration of her activities as a dedicated and industrious woman worker.

Generally speaking, the scholarship on Davies's *Life* has focused on matters of gender and sexuality. Feminist critics such as Julie Wheelwright have celebrated Davies's memoirs for providing an image of female power that was "available to *all* eighteenth-century women."[3] Others, beginning with Emma Donoghue, have traced specifically lesbian and transgender elements in the text, focusing on episodes of courtship and examples of female masculinity.[4] More recently, historians and literary scholars have drawn attention to the military and political valences of gender in the memoirs of women soldiers.[5] In a different vein, John A. Lynn II argues that scholarly attention to disguised female soldiers like Davies does a disservice to women's history by obscuring the role of *undisguised* women in the armies of the period.[6]

In this article, I take a different approach to this important text, investigating the meaning, shape, and significance of the work-related dimensions of Davies's *Life*. I argue that Davies's narrative gives a plebeian shape to the traditionally patrician figure of the literary female soldier (for example, Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser), embodies a social perspective that springs as much from class status as from gender or sexual identity, and inaugurates a new era in which the working-class background of real-life women who entered service as soldiers comes to

3 Julie Wheelwright, "'Amazons and Military Maids': An Examination of Female Military Heroines in British Literature and the Changing Construction of Gender," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10, no. 5 (1987): 495 (emphasis added), https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(87)90003-3.

4 Emma Donoghue, *Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668–1801* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 94–96.

5 See, for example, Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750–1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 57–76; and Scarlet Bowen, *The Politics of Custom in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 79–101.

6 John A. Lynn II, "Essential Women, Necessary Wives, and Exemplary Soldiers: The Military Reality and Cultural Representation of Women's Military Participation (1600–1815)," in *A Companion to Women's Military History*, ed. Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 94. Lynn discusses Davies at length: 113–18, 120–21, 125, 127–29.

the foreground in narrative (unlike the female soldier ballads). As I have shown elsewhere, passing as a man was both a socially tolerated way for a lower-class woman to earn a subsistence (as a chaste and industrious subordinate) and a way for her to escape some aspects of paternalistic control.[7] Soldiering, in particular, was a common occupational choice for plebeian women, and it constituted a well-recognized tradition, in Britain and several other European countries.[8] In press reports, female soldiers gave a variety of explanations for their decision to go to war, including patriotic and romantic ones, but in practice, their activities were closely connected to working-class subsistence and self-assertion.[9] Whereas working men generally feared recruitment, working women often saw military service as an escape from a range of confinements, such as poverty, family, service, and constrictive sex roles.[10] Hannah Whitney,

7 Fraser Easton, "Gender's Two Bodies: Women Warriors, Female Husbands and Plebeian Life," *Past and Present* 180 (August 2003): 142, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3600742. The present article traces a genealogy of the literary female soldier in relation to the ideas of social order and disorder that govern the regulation and representation of working people in the eighteenth century.

8 See Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989); Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Judy Marcure and Lotte C. Van de Pol (London: Macmillan, 1989); Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Suzanne J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996).

9 Easton, "Covering Sexual Disguise: Passing Women and Generic Constraint," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 35 (2006): 101–2, https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2010.0048. In contrast, the female warrior ballads subsume many of the mundane elements of the practice into stories of heroic valour and romantic perseverance: see Dugaw, *Warrior Women*. The wide range and popularity of the female soldier ballads meant that working women could draw on them to justify their decision to don men's garb and enlist. That ideologically useful justifications were commonplace is clear from the newspaper account of one such woman: "Whether her Motive was to serve the King, to play a Trick on the Officer, or to get off with a Sweetheart, is uncertain; perhaps her Apology was genuine in confessing the latter." *Daily Advertiser*, 10 August 1762, microfilm, Porter Library, University of Waterloo. As we will see, the female soldier narratives, often compared with the ballads, depart from them in this focus on work and in other key aspects.

10 The escape from constrictive sex roles was, for many of these individuals, at least partly tied to surpassing normative gender categories. Davies's *Life* presents her as an individual who received "Pleasure" from "manly Employments" (1:2) and "*contracted a masculine Air and Behaviour*" (1:iii) at war. It also records her love of living as a man: for example, when after an injury she is identified as a woman, she records that this "Discovery ... of my Sex ... was a greater Grief to me" than the "great Torture [of] this Wound" (1:75). Such moments attribute both a physical and a subjective masculinity to Davies. Yet, in tension with such attributions, Davies's *Life* (and the archival record

for example, claimed to have "been a marine on board different ships for upwards of five years" and only to have "discovered her sex" when, having been confined while impressed, the use of men's clothes conflicted with "her liberty."[11]

The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies gives novel and influential expression to these complex social forces, making it a key document in the history of eighteenth-century working women and their representation in narrative. On the one hand, Davies's narrative draws on and responds to prevailing forms of fiction and rogue biography to espouse a viewpoint centred on a woman's independent working life and the rejection of male authority. In this way, her memoir challenges the pictures of plebeian identity found in numerous early eighteenth-century fictions of low-born women, whether picaresque like Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) or sentimental like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). On the other hand, the publication of Davies's memoir coincides with a wide-ranging and long-lasting decline in the social status of the female soldier in polite literature. This plebeianization of the woman warrior—her identification in novels and plays with the status, mores, and activities of poor, labouring women—was both a cause and an effect of a rising awareness of the plebeian social standing of real-life women soldiers, an awareness created in part by the widely read prose narrative of Davies's life.[12]

about her) engender her as a woman with a stable female identity: she herself describes putting on men's clothes "to conceal my Sex" (1:19), specifies that her "Breasts ... were not large enough to betray my Sex" (1:20), and, when she is wounded at war, it is "by the Largeness of my Nipples" that the "Surgeons ... concluded I had given Suck" (1:75) and identify her as a woman. The *Life* does not adopt eighteenth-century concepts of gender variance (sex change and hermaphroditism) to explain Davies's masculinity; rather, it consistently frames her use of men's clothes as a "Disguise" (1:76), and reports without criticism claims that she is "*in Reality, a Woman*" (1:75). For an argument that, in narratives and records of individuals engaged in so-called sexual disguise, the motif of discovery serves to normalize "the sexual mutability of these individuals according to a scheme of sexual difference in which this mutability could be fixed ... to reveal one of two anatomical types, male or female," see Easton, "Covering Sexual Disguise," 103. For recent treatments of how historical figures traditionally understood as cross-dressing or passing fit into transgender history, see Caroline Derry, "'Female Husbands,' Community and Courts in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Legal History* 38, no. 1 (2017): 64–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/01440365.2017.1289674; and Marilyn Morris, "The Chevalière d'Eon, Transgender Autobiography and Identity," *Gender & History* 31, no. 1 (2019): 78–90, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12405.

11 *Annual Register* (1761), "Chronicle" section, 170, print, Porter Library, University of Waterloo.

12 For alternative approaches to the literary significance of *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, see John Campbell Major, *The Role of Personal Memoirs in English*

The Life and the "Life" of Christian Davies

First appearing in print in November 1739, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* quickly went through multiple editions, at least seven by 1744.[13] The number and nature of these editions demonstrate that Davies's narrative was popular (it maintained a sustained currency), widely disseminated (with provincial as well as London imprints, and competing formats, engravings, and publishers), and culturally impactful (because later editions sought to soften and domesticate certain aspects of Davies's character).[14]

Advertised as having been "Taken from her own Mouth," Davies's *Life* combines accounts of selected battles and campaigns from the Nine Years' War and, especially, the War of the Spanish Succession with an episodic narrative of its heroine's adventures as a soldier and sutler (one who sells provisions to soldiers). According to the first volume of the *Life*, Davies was born in 1667 to a Protestant family in Dublin; her father was a brewer, and her mother ran a farm outside the city. While a variety of "masculine" (1:4) activities fill Davies's childhood, her memoir gives special attention to hard manual labour, such as pitching hay and plowing the fields on her mother's

Biography and Novel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1935), 152–59; Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 68–70; and Catherine Craft-Fairchild, "The Politics of 'Passing': The Scandalous Memoir and the Novel," in *Illicit Sex: Identity Politics in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Thomas DiPiero and Pat Gill (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 53–56.

13 The first edition, (1) *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross*, 2 parts (London: R. Montagu, 1740), was advertised as published in the *Daily Advertiser*, 9 November 1739. The other editions I have seen are: (2) *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Called Mother Ross*, 1 part (London: C. Welch in Chelsea, 1740); (3) *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, the British Amazon, Commonly Called Mother Ross*, 2nd ed., 2 parts and appendix (London: R. Montagu, 1741); (4) J. Wilson, *The British Heroine: or, An Abridgment of the Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross* (London: T. Cooper, 1742); (5) J. Wilson, *The British Heroine: or, An Abridgment of the Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross* (Reading: J. Newbery and C. Micklewright, 1742); (6) *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross* (London, 1743); and (7) J. Wilson, *The British Heroine: or, An Abridgment of the Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davis, Commonly Call'd Mother Ross*, 2nd ed. (London, 1744). Davies's *Life* was still being advertised nine years after her death; see, for example, *General Evening Post* (1–3 December 1748), Burney Papers. For a modern facsimile reprint of the first edition, with an introduction and useful footnotes, see *Memoirs of Scandalous Women*, ed. Dianne Dugaw (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 5:1–202.

14 For an account of the domesticating force of a paratextual "Character" of Davies added to one of these later editions (item 4 in n13 above), see Craft-Fairchild, "The Politics of 'Passing,'" 53–54.

farm. This bucolic scene is broken up when Davies is sexually assaulted by a cousin named Thomas Howel. Refusing to marry him, she flees to Dublin, where she works at an aunt's tavern and waits to see if she is pregnant (she is not). With the death of her aunt, Davies inherits the tavern and marries her servant Richard Welsh, who promises to let her keep her property. Together they have three children.

One day, Richard disappears. When Davies learns that he has been impressed, she sets out to find him. She cuts her hair, puts on men's clothes "to conceal my Sex" (1:19), leaves her family, and enlists in a regiment of foot, where, as Christopher Welsh, she is accepted as "*a clever brisk young Fellow*" (1:21). Wounded at Landen in 1693, she maintains her disguise, recovers, enters as a dragoon, is captured and exchanged, courts other women, and has a prostitute claim that she is the father of a child. In 1702, after an incognito sojourn back in Dublin, she re-enlists, returns to the Continent, and discovers her husband, who has been unfaithful to her; wishing to continue her military service, she insists that Richard pose as her brother. Davies is publicly identified as a woman only after she suffers a severe head wound at the battle of Ramillies in 1706; even then, she stays at war, working in women's clothes as an under-cook in her husband's regiment and as a sutler on the front lines.

The second volume of Davies's *Life* focuses on her energetic and industrious working life. Her activities as a cook, forager, sutler, and tavern-keeper, both while at war on the Continent and after the war when in Britain, are described in detail, down to the size of her sutler's tent and its varying stock of food and drink. Davies actively defends the dignity of her work, using physical force to chastise the men who denigrate it or threaten her with sexual assault. Twice widowed, after the peace of 1712 she goes to London, living for a time in a brothel. Drawing on the support of Whig officers, she petitions for a pension, and records that she was granted £50 outright and a shilling a day by Queen Anne. After some further adventures, including running sutlering tents at military encampments in England and Ireland, and begging money from officers she served with, Davies settles in Chelsea with her third husband, dying there in July 1739, a few months before the publication of her *Life* that November.[15]

15 Davies's death on 7 July 1739 was reported in the *Daily Advertiser*, 10 July 1739. That she received a pension is confirmed in the entry for 19 November 1717 in the Chelsea Hospital Admission Book, where "Christian Welsh" (Davies served under this surname, which also appears in War Office documents as "Walsh" and "Welch") of "Stairs Dragoons" is described as "a fatt jolly woman [who] received Several wounds in the Service in ye habitt of a man" (War Office collection, National Archives, PRO WO 116/1). Note:

Formally, Davies's memoir is a captivating, energetic hodge-podge. It draws on picaresque and sentimental conventions, and adopts elements of military memoir, female soldier ballad, prostitute's tale, and jest-book anecdote. It incorporates public lore about her as well as factual material, such as accounts of military campaigns, information about her government pension, and details about her sutlering activities (apparently provided by Davies, her family, or an acquaintance). It also contains fictional and editorial elements, such as extended sequences of reported speech, instances of incongruously educated diction, and addresses to the reader. Holding it all together is the character of Davies, who is portrayed as both an insubordinate, witty rogue and an industrious servant.

Christian Davies in the Archive

The historical record of Davies's life, including her labouring life, is extensive and significant. Documentary evidence about her actions and character, and their public reception, will help us better assess the content and formal shape of her narrative. Three main independent sources of information predate the publication of the *Life*: (1) pension records in government archives, (2) obituaries in the London press, and (3) press reports indicative of the lore about her. The surviving pension documents for Davies are held in the War Office collection at the National Archives in Britain. These materials establish the veracity of some of the basic claims of the memoir. They confirm that she served at war in male disguise, as a dragoon, was wounded in the service, was well-connected to important people, and was renowned as a witty character.[16] Crucially, the pension records emphasize class elements such as her social station and industrious service, rather than gendered elements such as her masculine dress, physical strength, and sexual adventures.

in my article "Gender's Two Bodies," I introduced the word "breast" from a neighbouring entry in the Admission Book into the one for Davies; the correct text is given here.

16 The veracity of Davies's first-person narrative has often been questioned, most recently by Robert Folkenflik, who suggests that "this lively, literate, and highly detailed ostensible autobiography may be largely picaresque fiction." Folkenflik, "'Written by Herself': British Women's Autobiography in the Eighteenth Century," in *A History of English Autobiography*, ed. Adam Smyth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 123. I am grateful to the late Bob Folkenflik for alerting me to his essay, and for his feedback on an earlier version of this article. It is my sense, based on internal evidence, pension records, published lore, and the patrician circles in which she sometimes moved, that this "ostensible autobiography" is deeply indebted to Davies's personality, voice, and perspective, as well as to many of the facts of her life. To preserve this dimension of Davies's *Life*, I write as if Davies is the author or at least the dictator of her memoir, while fully accepting the fictional and editorial shaping of the text by its editor/redactor.

The first pension document is a letter from James Craggs, the Secretary at War, to the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, dated 19 July 1717, which grants Davies a pension of "Five Pence a Day for her future Support and Maintenance" because "she serv'd sevl. [several] Years in the late Warr in Flanders in the Royll. Regt. [Royall Regiment] of North British Drags. [Dragoons]" while "disguis'd in the habit of a man" and because she "suffer'd very much by divers Wounds she receiv'd in follg. [following] the said Regt. [Regiment]."[17] Davies was granted a pension in recognition of the wounds she suffered in what we would today call the line of duty, or, as the Secretary at War puts it, in the course of having "serv'd sevl. [several] Years in ... the said Regt. [Regiment]." Many years later, Davies memorialized "Mr. Craigs" (2:87) in her narrative, lauding his generosity for "undertaking my Affair" (2:88).

Craggs's letter, written on behalf of the British state, records that Davies received her pension under the paternalistic rubric of faithful service. This rubric was meant to govern relationships between (patrician) masters and (plebeian) men and women in eighteenth-century Britain.[18] Paternalism shapes all the main official records of her service. At her subsequent Chelsea Hospital examination on 19 November 1717, Davies was granted admission on the grounds of having "received Several wounds in the Service."[19] One implication of the use of the word "service" here is her industriousness as a soldier: she was wounded while being serviceable. In a 7 July 1720 follow-up letter to the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, another Secretary of War, George Treby, makes the point explicit, writing that "notwithstanding her being a Woman," Davies "serv'd many years very faithfully in the late Wars in Flanders." Treby is concerned with her meritorious attention to duty, which lies behind his order that her pension be increased to a shilling a day "as a further Reward for her Sufferings when in the Service."[20]

17 Letter from the Secretary at War to the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, 19 July 1717, PRO WO 4/20 fo. 182.

18 On the dynamic struggle within paternalism between a small, well-born (patrician) elite and a large, labouring (plebeian) population, see E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993). Thompson first developed his analysis in the 1970s; on the continuing relevance of his bipolar model of eighteenth-century society in the wake of studies focused on the middling ranks or on imperial/national identities, see Peter King, "Edward Thompson's Contribution to Eighteenth-Century Studies: The Patrician–Plebeian Model Re-Examined," *Social History* 21, no. 2 (1996): 215–28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4286341. For a study of the role of plebeian custom in the period novel that defends the use of the bipolar model, see Bowen.

19 Chelsea Hospital Admission Book, 19 November 1717 (PRO WO 116/1).

20 Letter from the Secretary at War to the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, 7 July 1720, PRO WO 4/23 fo. 17.

Davies's pension records are significant for several reasons: they support her claim to meritorious military service, demonstrate that she had supporters among Britain's most powerful individuals, and show that powerful people continued to exert themselves on her behalf for many years after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. Above all, the pension documents conceptualize Davies as a faithful subordinate, wounded in the line of duty, who has earned her right to elite attention and support—her status as a woman, masculine strength, and sexual disrepute are marginalized or passed over.[21] As we will see, the same paternalism undergirds Davies's *Life* in its account of both her faithful service at war and her resistance to gendered labour discipline.

Davies's obituaries constitute a second valuable source of information about her military service, and additionally laud her career as a sutler. These accounts detail her "great Bravery" at war and her receipt of a pension, and they make it explicit that she "was well respected by several Persons of Distinction, and General Officers" (*London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 10 July 1739) for her military service. They also extend her military "Intrepidity and Bravery" to her work as a camp follower after she was identified as a woman: one account notes that she was "so fond of a Military Life, that she attended as a Sutler in all the Wars in Flanders" (*London and Country Journal*, 17 July 1739). As another elaborates: "She behav'd with great Valour, was afterwards in Flanders, and was very useful in a Battle or a Siege to supply the Soldiers, &c. with Water and other Necessaries, even to the Mouth of a Cannon. She, for her courageous Behaviour, obtain'd his late Majesty [George I]'s Letter for an Allowance out of Chelsea College of one Shilling per Day" (*Daily Post*, 10 July 1739). The *Daily Post* account leaves it unclear if she received her pension for her military or her culinary labours; significantly, both kinds of labour occur at the front, and both are seen as "useful" and "courageous." Either way, the *Daily Post* obituary asserts that Davies received her pension in recognition of her industrious ("useful"), even extraordinary ("to the Mouth of a Cannon"), physical labours.[22]

In 1734, a very different record of Davies's life appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, one that linked her soldiering "in Men's Attire" to the male dress of a woman who worked as a "Drawer in a Tavern near

21 There is one exception: the reference to her as a "fatt jolly woman" in the Chelsea Hospital Admission Book, which I discuss below.

22 *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 10 July 1739; *London and Country Journal*, 17 July 1739; *Daily Post*, 10 July 1739, Burney Papers.

Temple-Bar." On one hand, the magazine report anticipates the obituary accounts of Davies's life, describing her as having "served as a Dragoon," as having been discovered because of "an unlucky Shot," and as receiving "a *Pension* from the Government." On the other hand, references here to plebeian labour introduce a discordant note: the barman is "a young Baggage," who only admits to being a woman when, out of wedlock, she is "brought to bed of a thumping Girl."[23] The barman's sexual disrepute casts a shadow on Davies's chastity and associates her soldiering, if only by contrast, with the illicit use of plebeian sexual disguise.[24]

The female barman anecdote likely drew on lore already circulating about Davies's sexual reputation. The Chelsea Hospital admission record describes Davies as a "fatt jolly woman," a wife of Bath figure.[25] The *Life* ratifies these details, referring to "the natural Gaity of [her] Temper" (1:26) and recording a fellow soldier's view that, on returning to England, she had "*grown fat*"

23 *Gentleman's Magazine* (August 1734): 426, Porter Library, University of Waterloo. Davies is called "*Sarah Ross*" in this piece; we know from her memoir that one of her pseudonyms was "Mother Ross." The *Gentleman's Magazine* report digests a much longer Grub Street essay, from a periodical called *The Craftsman*, that attacks a political writer named Francis Osborne (the nom de plume of James Pitt, a supporter of Walpole) by misogynistically satirizing him as an old woman in men's clothes. In *The Craftsman* piece, Osborne is compared unfavourably not only to the reputable Davies (a "famous Amazon … who served her Country with great Gallantry for several Years, as a Dragoon") but also to the unnamed, disreputable barman (a "*female Imposter* … who having truss'd Herself up in Breeches" and held her position as a drawer "for a considerable Time … had the Impudence to persist in her *Manhood*, after the whole Neighbourhood was convinced of the contrary, and would never give it up, till She was brought to Bed of a thumping Girl"; only then does she, like Davies after her injury, throw "off the Disguise"). The joke is based on demeaning Osborne as a disguised woman unwilling to admit her sex, in contrast to both the reputable Davies and the disreputable barman (the latter of whom at least admits her sex in the end, as Osborne does not). A secondary effect of the essay is to tie Davies to the barman (they are both "*young Wenches*" when they first adopt men's clothes). If after being "discover'd" Davies modestly takes up her pension, the barman abandons tavern life for what the essay calls "the proper Occupation of a *Washerwoman*"; thus the sexual denigration of Osborne has a social valence, too, identifying him with two labouring-class "*Wenches*." All quotations from *The Craftsman*, n. 422 (3 August 1734), reprinted in *The Craftsman*, v. 12 (London, 1737), 294–95, Google Books.

24 Davies is associated with taverns and the provision of food and drink throughout the *Life*, both in and out of male dress, so it is easy to see why associating her with the story of a pregnant barman would implicitly impugn her. Lynn discusses camp following prostitutes in "Essential Women, Necessary Wives, and Exemplary Soldiers." On criminal uses of sexual disguise, see Easton, "Gender's Two Bodies," 135.

25 Entry for 19 November 1717 in the Chelsea Hospital Admission Book (PRO WO 116/1). At this time, "jolly" could mean lustful or amorous as well as happy, fun-loving, or witty.

(1:83). The narrative also details how Davies frequented a brothel milieu and was seen by some as a "leud Woman" (2:82)—although this was a description she violently opposed.[26] The barman anecdote thus gives public expression to the flip side of Davies's use of cross-dressing, the radical liberty that it enabled (sexual or otherwise). Her association with such "disorderly" uses of disguise, both in real life and in popular representation, would also have been a narrative challenge for Davies's (or her editor's) navigation of patrician expectation in the composition of the *Life*.

Taken together, the archival and print records of Davies's life frame her soldiering in class terms and invite us to investigate the plebeian shape, meaning, and significance of her narrative adventures. This does not mean abandoning attention to the gendered or sexualized dimensions of her story; rather, it means examining these aspects as they are actualized within the plebeian social world that Davies inhabits. From this perspective, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* is revealed to be an artfully constructed memoir that integrates Davies's military cross-dressing with her experiences as a labourer to display how she both fulfils and evades paternalist expectation. Similar work-related patterns shape the narrative lives of other eighteenth-century female soldiers, particularly those of Hannah Snell and Mary Lacy.[27] By giving voice to a plebeian perspective, Davies's *Life* provides a unique window on the "picaresque-proletarian" world of eighteenth-century labouring women.[28]

Davies's Labouring "Life"

The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies presents its military heroine as a dedicated and industrious worker, and the author of the text goes to great lengths to describe and praise the kinds of hard, physical labour she undertakes. It is true that Davies claims to come from a relatively prosperous, albeit non-gentry, background: the *Life* records that her father was a maltster and brewer, with twenty servants, and that her mother managed a farm that they rented (1:1). Davies, a rather déclassé

26 Lynn discusses the sutler's tent as a sexual zone where soldiers could meet women (117).

27 *The Female Soldier; Or, The Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (London, 1750), 187pp. version, cited as *TFS*. Mary [Lacy] Slade, *The History of the Female Shipwright* (London, 1773).

28 The phrase "picaresque-proletarian" is from Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 119.

individual, manages a public house both before and after she goes to war. Yet, despite her natal claims to a middling social background and regardless of the precise social status of publicans and farmers, the *Life* devotes extensive attention to Davies's plebeian industriousness before, during, and after her time at war, in men's as well as women's garb.[29] This aspect of the memoir closely follows the portrait of Davies as a faithful servant exhibited in the pension documents and obituaries.

The tone of Davies's relationship to labour is set early in the *Life*. Work is an integral part of her childhood: for example, she asserts that, "employed to stack Wheat," she was "as active and strong in all the Labours of Husbandry, as any of our Servants" (1:3). Indeed, "I was never better pleased than when I was following the Plough, or had a Rake, Flail, or Pitchfork in my Hand, which Implements I could handle with as much Strength and Dexterity, if not with more, than any of my Mother's Servants" (1:2). The *Life* recounts these youthful labours not just to display her masculine propensities but to highlight Davies's general industriousness as a plebeian servant. Nor are her labours restricted to outside work that is typically gendered male: she also works indoors as a maidservant. It is while she is "busied in making the Beds" (1:9) in her mother's house that she is sexually assaulted by her cousin; she later lives with an aunt who keeps a public house in Dublin, and she works there too, serving as a maid or a barwoman.

In the account of Davies's time as a soldier, the *Life* offers numerous examples of the laborious, physical work that enlisted men were expected to perform and that Davies herself participated in. In Holland, she recounts the repair of a worm-eaten dike, which was leaking so much a nearby village flooded: "As the repairing the damaged Dykes required the utmost Expedition, the *English* Soldiers were commanded to assist the *Dutch*, and we were obliged to work Day and Night up to our Waists in Water, 'till they were repaired. Ensign *Gardener* and I staying, the last Time we were at the Work, somewhat too long, being resolved to see every thing secure, narrowly escaped drowning by the Tide coming upon us; however, we supported each other, and waded out Hand in Hand, long after the others had gone off" (1:25). Davies, the brewer's daughter, engages in heavy, dirty, dangerous tasks. She details the manual labour she undertook with other soldiers, its onerous nature, and the dutiful industriousness she and Gardener exhibited in making certain that "every thing [was] secure," to the extent of risking their own lives

29 Bowen discusses the intersections of plebeian and middling identity and social status (8–9).

to prevent another "drowned" village (1:25). Such onerous labours and the expectation of their dutiful execution are not merely incidental to eighteenth-century warcraft: Davies notes that trench digging required thousands of "Workmen" whose labours are "terribly hindered by the Rains" (2:39). Similar physical effort was necessitated by mine clearing, and often the workers are also soldiers, who might end up fighting with their work tools rather than proper weapons of war, as happens to Davies's soldier husband on at least one occasion. Davies, who accompanied her husband in women's garb, opines that "fighting with Pick-Axes and Spades, in my Opinion, was more dangerous than with Swords" (2:37). Here, labouring and soldiering bleed into one another, physically and conceptually.

When Davies is identified as a woman, her military pay is discontinued, and she needs to find another means of support. Her narrative does not end with the account of her discovery and its immediate aftermath, however, as many newspaper and periodical reports of female soldiers do. Rather, descriptions of and anecdotes about her activities as a worker in women's garb, both at war and in peacetime, span the entire second volume of her two-volume *Life*. Davies lists a variety of physical occupations she undertakes after leaving military service, including cook's assistant, sutler, and forager (a sort of informally licensed marauder). Most importantly, the *Life* frames her post-soldiering employment in terms of industriousness and plebeian female virtue: "An idle Life was what I could never [abide,] wherefore I undertook to cook for our Regiment, returning to my Husband's Quarters every Night" (1:77).

The frontispiece to the second edition of Davies's *Life* (see Figure 1) provides strong support for the interpretation of her narrative in terms of plebeian industry. The engraving is a vertical diptych that presents Davies as a dragoon in uniform in the top panel and as a sutler in women's clothes in the bottom one. While the viewer's eye will go first to the top of the engraving and the depiction of Davies in the stock pose of a mounted dragoon, it is the bottom panel that offers the more visually engaging image, showing Davies holding a tankard or cup and basket in a naturalistic front-line setting that includes her sutlering tent.[30] The worthy plebeian industry visually embodied in the image of Davies's sutlering in the second panel guides us to see the representation of her military service in similar terms. The same industrious service that unites the two parts of the engraving unites the two volumes of her narrative.

30 Lynn notes that a tankard was a common emblem for a sutler's tent (117).

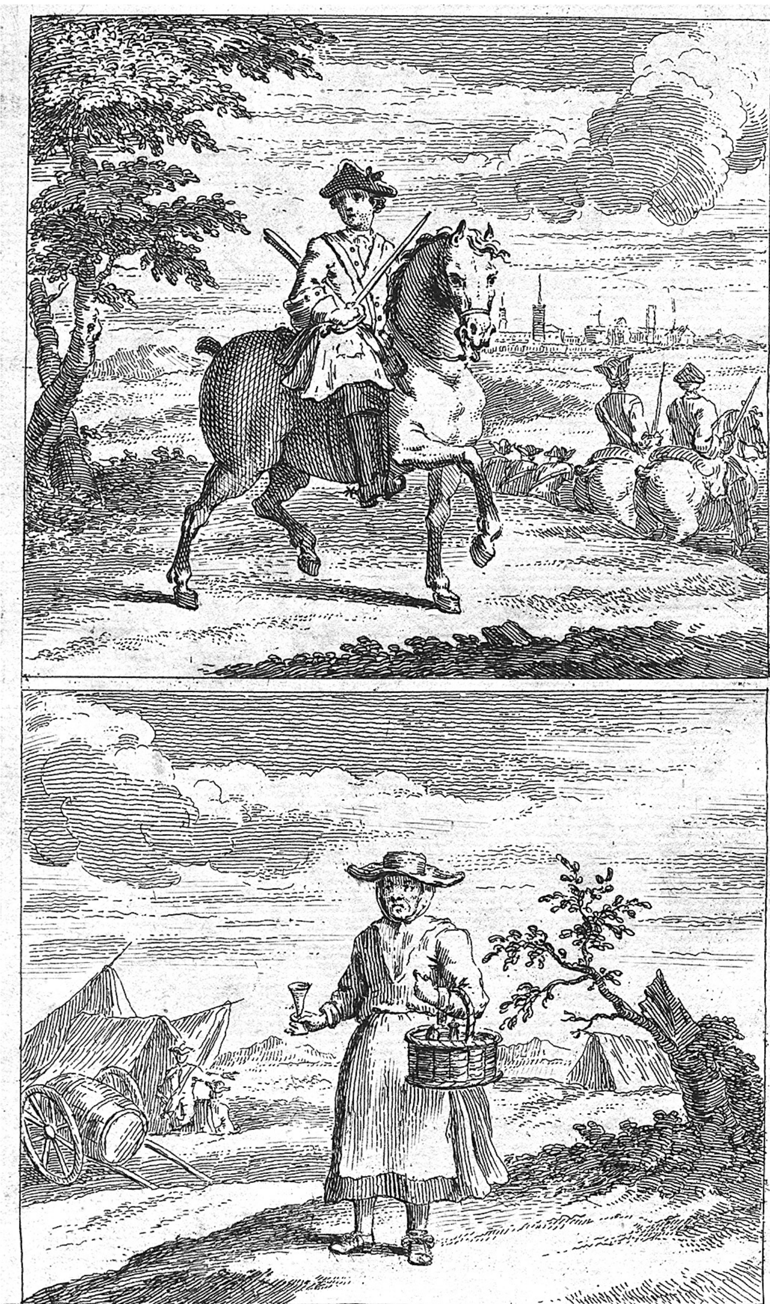

Figure 1. *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies: The British Amazon, Commonly Called Mother Ross; Who Served as a Foot-soldier and Dragoon, in Several Campaigns, under King William and the Late Duke of Marlborough; ... The Whole Taken from Her Own Mouth* (London: R. Montagu, 1741). The frontispiece to the second edition of the *Life* portrays both Davies's industrious labour as a sutler in women's clothes and her courageous military service in the uniform of a dragoon. Reproduction courtesy of the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University.

In this manner, the engraving's diptych both encapsulates the memoir's narrative trajectory and emblematizes its publication in two parts.

Davies's narrative goes into great detail about her activities in women's clothes. After cooking for her husband's regiment, Davies works "under the Cook" for a Mr Dupper, where she could be found in the "back Kitchen washing my Dishes"; after that, she spends some time making "a comfortable Living by Cooking for, and selling Beer to the Soldiers"; when her husband dies, she receives food in return for "assisting the Cook"; and, later still, she is "constantly employed in my Lord *Staire*'s Kitchen, under his cook" (1:82, 2:24, 2:62, 2:66). Working as a woman at the front is not without its dangers, and Davies actively defends her autonomy and sexual "Virtue" (2:67) as a working woman. For example, when one Colonel *K*—— enters Staire's kitchen with the intent to "have been rude," she successfully "disengag'd [her] self with a Case-knife" (2:67). She takes on a variety of other jobs, too, such as making beds and assisting a surgeon in lieu of his "Servants and Nurses" (2:15, 36). But her greatest success is as a sutler, an independent supplier of various necessities to the troops, an occupation whose dignity she stoutly defends.

Davies reveals her entrepreneurial side when she delineates her activities as a forager and a sutler. These labours are all important to her no matter how quotidian. Davies tells how once she "had filled my Tent with so many Potatoes, Carrots, Turnips, &c. that I left but just room enough to sit down close by the Door" (2:23). She does well at this trade, in this case making "fifty Shillings of the Roots" (2:23). The specificity with which Davies describes her work is striking. She goes into extensive detail about the butchering and cooking of a sheep by her "Tent": "I cut up my Mutton, laid by a Shoulder to roast, the Neck and Breast to make Broth; dug a Hole with a Hatchet to boil my Pot in, which, the Fire being made, I set on with the Mutton and Sweet-herbs" (2:41). We know that Davies herself undertakes all these labours because, once she has the mutton shoulder roasting, she gets "a Soldier's Wife to turn it" (2:41).

To supply her sutler's tent, Davies often goes foraging or marauding for supplies (sometimes even among the officers' tents of her own camp). Here, too, her pride of craft appears, even in a discussion of her foraging tools:

> I never lost an Opportunity of Maroding; to this End I was furnished with a Grapling Iron and a Sword, for I must acquaint my Reader, that on the approach of an Army, the Boors throw their Plate, Copper, &c. into Wells; their Linnen they bury in Chests ... With my Graple I searched all the

> Wells I met with, and got good Booty, some times Kitchen Utensils, Brass Pales, Pewter Dishes, &c. sometimes a Silver Spoon. With my Sword, which I carried to discover what was buried, I bored the Ground, where I found it had been lately stirred. (2:36)

The "Booty" that Davies gathers (not all of it used for sutlering) amounts to a licensed theft from the civilians among whom the opposing armies are at war, evocative of piracy and blurring the distinction between licit and illicit labour.

Davies expects others to respect her work, and uses depictions of practical joking to communicate this expectation. She makes clear that she can enjoy a joke: for example, when a colonel with a reputation as a "Wag" sets his stallion on her working mare and makes light of the damage he causes by joking that "*his Stone Horse had an Amour with* Kit Welch" (2:9), she takes the bawdy humour in good fun. Perhaps she indulges the colonel on the grounds of the military camaraderie and practical joking that she elsewhere so enthusiastically participates in: for example, when she deliberately throws up on a victim's clothes (2:77). But when a captain "began to ridicule my Habit"—"a Dress convenient for my Vocation"—as well as to mock her "poor Beast" of a horse, which she needed to conduct her business, she retaliates by challenging her tormentor to a horse-race and making "a furious Push at him, [flinging] Man and Horse into a Ditch" (2:9). The incident shows Davies to be self-aware about her status as a working woman, and capable of demanding respect for her way of life as a camp-following worker from a man nominally her superior. Davies's *Life* thus paints a clear picture not only of her working-class labours and milieu but also of her plebeian perspective and mores.

Picaresque and Proletarian

Davies's *Life* does more than narrate her industriousness; it also gives a contestatory shape to her concern with economic survival and personal mobility. Drawing on picaresque literary forms, it recounts her roguery and insubordination, while imbuing these incidents with the values of plebeian resistance and radical liberty. By filtering labouring-class mores through a celebration of deception, the narrative evokes the self-assertion and unrestrained individualism that John J. Richetti identifies as a key feature of the popular fiction and criminal biography of the early

eighteenth century.[31] As Richetti notes, picaresque individualism of this sort (and the pattern of comic roguery associated with it) embodies a social myth, not a complete or realistic view of plebeian life.[32] The identification of Davies's soldiering, her labour, and even her heroism (as a "British Amazon") as characteristic of an individual out for the main chance connects her story with the narrative patterns of the criminal and whore biographies popular in the 1730s.[33] The explicit frame of reference behind Davies's initial decision to dress as a man—her devotion to her husband (recognizable from the ballad tradition)—falls away over the course of her memoir, replaced as a narrative principle by "the rough humour of popular jest" (to borrow Richetti's phrase) and by her quest for military recognition.[34] When Davies jokes that "*my Pride shall never defraud my Belly*" (2:76), she has more in common with a low braggart soldier like Falstaff than with heroic warriors like Hal or Hotspur.[35]

For a good example of how Davies is presented as a picara, consider her role in a liquor-smuggling operation that takes place while she is sutlering. Using bladders to transport the liquid, she fills one with manure and, when challenged by an excise officer, discharges it in his face. When the irate "Excisemen" label Davies "*the Retailer of Soil*," she replies, "*They*

31 John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns, 1700–1739* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

32 For another perspective on this social myth, especially as related to the ultimate downfall of the criminal, see Hal Gladfelder, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 77.

33 And earlier: see, for example, *The Life of Long Meg of Westminster* (1635), in *Short Fiction of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Charles C. Mish (Norton: New York, 1963), 79–113. The phrase "British Amazon" is from the title page of the second edition of the *Life* (see n13, item 3).

34 Richetti, 47. Simon Dickie argues that these jests were popular with all ranks of authors and readers. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 20.

35 Davies's appetite and egotism contrast sharply with the noble heroism that Dugaw traces in the tradition of popular woman warrior ballads in *Warrior Women*. Davies's presentation as a braggart soldier and petty criminal reverberates in the narratives of Snell and Lacy. All three memoirs, to varying degrees, associate plebeian life and criminality. When Snell, like a counterfeit bridegroom, bilks several women of money in the course of her deceptive amours, the editor of her narrative excuses her with the observation that "Necessity ... has no law" (*TFS*, 131). On the period concept of the counterfeit bridegroom, see Easton, "Gender's Two Bodies," 151–53. Money is twice described in Snell's narrative, using thieves' cant, as "Cole" (*TFS*, 133, 154). Even Lacy, the most industrious of the three, is involved in some petty thefts and pranks before she runs away (*The Female Shipwright*, 3, 5, 8). Understood in Gladfelder's terms as examples of eighteenth-century "narratives of criminality," the memoirs of Davies, Snell, and Lacy are also "a locus for moral and ideological contestation" (xi–xii).

should find I dealt by Wholesale, if ever they offer'd to disturb me" again (2:26).[36] After this incident, she is able to pass into town unchallenged. Davies's roguery embodies both rough verbal humour and self-serving opportunism, as we see on other occasions: it does not matter if she is not a virgin, as long as her first husband is no wiser; it does not matter if she knocks over her competitor in a race, as long as she wins the prize; and it does not matter if she robs her own camp, as long as she lines her own pockets (1:9, 2:9, 2:41). In Davies's memoir, fraud, deception, and cheating are presented with élan and zest as a legitimate way of life, and they contribute to the tone of her adventures from early on. As we will see, Tobias Smollett picks up on Davies's avowed roguery in order to criminalize the female soldier figure in *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753).

Davies's memoir also ties her ethos of self-serving deceit to what she presents as her central act of deception, the act of passing as a man.[37] Survival as a soldier or sailor required a woman to do more than convincingly dress in male uniform: in a plebeian milieu, she also had to act as labouring-class men were expected to act in complex situations over long periods of time, in effect presenting a male sexed body.[38] Hannah Snell, for example, responded to accusations that she was a sodomitical molly by embracing the company of some Lisbon prostitutes (*TFS*, 73). Even simple things

36 In anecdotes like these, Davies or her redactor draws on the conventions of jest-book humour, too. As Dickie notes of the period, "Cruel and filthy humour was a profitable commodity ... enjoyed at all levels of society" (39). Dickie provides extensive evidence that jest-book humour was not limited to plebeian subjects or audiences; and, indeed at a cost of 3s. 6d. bound (*Daily Advertiser*, 9 November 1739), many readers of Davies's narrative would have been drawn from the gentry.

37 The *Life* clearly presents Davies as a woman who "passes" as a man by wearing men's clothes for strategic purposes. Despite her pleasure in being at war in military uniform, her narrative consistently offers her wearing of men's clothes as a trick or pose. It comes as no surprise to the reader of the memoir that, once "*Discover*[ed]," Davies agrees with a military superior that she can no longer "*pass under a Disguize*" as a man (1:76). Once identified as a woman, the social pressure to represent herself according to acceptable paternalistic codes of female devotion and deference would have been intense; yet in other ways she was clearly a free spirit prepared to challenge social norms, and, with "*a strong Inclination to the Army*" (1:76), her masculinity is certainly not "fake" in the sense of unreal. Morris suggests that it may be appropriate to consider cross-dressing as an eighteenth-century form of body modification (79). In her essay on legal cases against female husbands in the eighteenth century, Derry argues that even in those instances in which defendants "saw themselves as women in male disguise," we should exercise "caution" in our interpretation of "these defendants' subjectivities" because "the reports are so mediated by legal norms, journalistic licence, and the defendants' own strategic decisions" (65).

38 On the distinction between sexed and sexual bodies in this context, see Easton, "Gender's Two Bodies," 134–36.

could be a challenge: Mary Lacy writes of how, after completing an errand, "instead of pulling off my hat, I was ready to make a curtsy."[39] Davies, Snell, and Lacy were all women who successfully passed as soldiers and sailors, and, when they had their stories written up, they, or their editors/redactors, embraced the practice of social deception as both an occasion for their wit and an organizing principle for their narratives.

In Davies's case, the practice of deception goes beyond simple participation in what Olwen Hufton calls the "makeshift" economy, because Davies's cross-dressing is explicitly roguish and deceitful.[40] Davies revels in her virtuoso ability to play the suitor to other women, mimicking "all the tender Nonsense" (1:27) of the men who had formerly courted her. It is a cruel boast and one that seems far from the "*sapphic episteme*" of "woman + woman" that Susan S. Lanser describes.[41] This is not to say that these or similar courtships of women in the narratives of Snell and Lacy lack sapphic or transgender implications.[42] Like Snell and Lacy, Davies courts women for a variety of reasons both explicit (to cadge money, to avoid insinuations of sodomitical proclivities, and to brag about being the better man) and implicit (to pursue her sexual interest in other women, to figure her preference for a female household, and to challenge male authorities with her hyper-machismo). Yet, since the female objects of female-soldier affection are all described as ignorant of their suitor's "real" sex (as the memoirs uniformly present it), and since the courted women are ultimately abandoned by their disguised suitors, the female soldier's male impersonation testifies in these narratives to her picaresque self-concern.[43] The relevance of the courtships to Davies's working life resides in their interruption of the heterosexual basis of paternalistic social control, and in this anti-domestic sense, they conform to what Lanser calls the "sapphic picaresque."[44]

The picaresque form of Davies's narrative also aligns its representation of industrious labour with a tradition of working-class resistance to elite

39 Lacy, *The Female Shipwright*, 25.

40 Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500–1800* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 500.

41 Susan S. Lanser, *The Sexuality of History: Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565–1830* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 29.

42 See *TFS*, 121–31; and Lacy, *The Female Shipwright*, 115–21, 128–29.

43 For another perspective on these duped women, see Ula Lukszo Klein, "Eighteenth-Century Female Cross-Dressers and Their Beards," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 119–43, https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2016.0034.

44 See Lanser, 157–69.

law. Some of the evidence for Davies's resistant perspective is incidental: her description of a customary camp marriage (2:103–4), for example, or her reference to cannon fire as "rough Musick" (1:22). Other evidence is substantial: the fact that the main action of the narrative is set in motion when Davies's first husband is forcibly recruited, or her insubordination to her former military superiors once she is back in petticoats.[45] The liquor-smuggling operation (see above) is a good example of plebeian resistance: the woman that Davies aids is "poor," with three children depending on her practice of "Running Geneva" (2:25); Davies reshapes this information into "a lamentable Story of my Poverty" (2:26) so as to distract the officers from her fellow smugglers, and to test their commitment to the law. When the officers prove "inexorable," Davies describes them as "resolved to plunder me" (2:26). This is a convenient rationalization, of course, but it is also a refusal of the law's formal authority over the very poor, a redefinition of where the theft lies and who the criminal is.[46]

Davies is a picara who does not shun work. The historical work of Peter Linebaugh, Christopher Hill, and others on a working population for whom the mobility of the picaro/picara *and* the workplace resistance of the proletarian are both important illuminates the social significance of the picaresque elements of Davies's *Life*. Davies is not docile: she robs her own camp, begs, smuggles, and engages in a host of profitable frauds, just as a picara is expected to do. But nor is she idle: Davies treats soldiering as a form of work (referring to her "Pay" [1:77] and to her successful claim for a military pension), and, as we have seen, the *Life* characterizes an extensive range of her industrious labour, including husbandry, tavern-management, sutlering, dish-washing, cooking, and pie and liquor sales.[47]

The comparison, in terms of work, with the picaresque heroine of *Moll Flanders* is instructive: in Defoe's novel, there is no real portrait of the world of plebeian labour; indeed, Moll's brief adventures in men's clothes arise from her life as a thief. True to the form of a spiritual autobiography,

45 For a reading of Davies's interactions with her superiors, including lords and generals, as depicting "a romanticized picture of ... a shared culture of sociability," see Bowen, 97.

46 Smuggling in England had extensive popular support, and excise taxes were particularly hated, as seen in the anti-Walpole slogan of 1733: "Liberty and No Excise." For the plebeian perspective on the excise, see Linebaugh, 178–82; and on plebeian attitudes to smuggling in general, see Christopher Hill, *Liberty Against the Law: Some Seventeenth-Century Controversies* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 110–13.

47 Lynn notes that Davies's memoir is "our most complete account of the life of a camp wife," and he cites from it frequently (120). In the terms of my argument, the material about sutlering underscores Davies's agency as a subject of labour in her own right, whether in or out of formal military service or men's garb.

Moll ultimately repents her criminal ways and, whether or not the reader is convinced by her repentance (a matter that the fictional editor leaves open), it reinforces a patrician perspective on crimes of property. Davies, in contrast, repents nothing. In Davies's *Life*, the meaning of crime is considerably more ambivalent than in *Moll Flanders*, both because of the authorized "maroding" of war (1:77) and because Davies's critical perspective on class-based law is rooted, in part, in her industriousness.[48]

Property, Scandal, and Anti-Romance

The same desire for independence that leads Davies to resist the paternalistic regulation of her labour leads her to push back against the paternalistic regulation of her sexuality. The *Life* portrays Davies as in charge of her sexual decisions, independent of male control, and focused on her material well-being (for example, in her courtships of women). Far from reworking a "story of transgression to make it fit a domestic plot," as Catherine Craft-Fairchild puts it, and thereby creating a "novelistic" work that will be "palatable" to middle-class readers,[49] Davies's memoir is an anti-romance largely untouched by emergent domestic ideals and new norms of politeness. On the narrative level, Davies's *Life* fuses elements of secret history to rogue narrative, echoing the libertine feminism of writers like Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood in its images of plebeian resistance.[50] The resulting association of mobility and scandal,

48 What Craft-Fairchild asserts of Snell's narrative, that "sexual conflict replaces and thereby covers over class conflict," emphatically does not apply to Davies's *Life*. Craft-Fairchild, "Cross-Dressing and the Novel: Women Warriors and Domestic Femininity," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 2 (1998): 184, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1998.0007. For another view of the generic complexities of Snell's memoir, see Dianne Dugaw, "Women and Popular Culture: Gender, Cultural Dynamics, and Popular Prints," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700–1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 278–79.

49 The remarks cited here are from the introduction to Craft-Fairchild's argument about Davies's *Life*, as well as other eighteenth-century female soldier and sailor narratives, in "The Politics of 'Passing,'" 46. Craft-Fairchild bases her reading of Davies as a "good wife" figure on paratextual material in the 1742 London abridgement (n13, item 4 above): see "The Politics of Passing,'" 53–54. Arguably, however, the paratextual material speaks more to the reception and marketing of further editions of Davies's narrative than it does to matters of form or significance. In sharp contrast, and in line with Craft-Fairchild's argument, the compiler of Snell's narrative, written ten years after Davies's *Life* (and Richardson's *Pamela*), mixes the plebeian perspective of a narrative like Davies's together with new novelistic codes popularized by Richardson. For a sceptical treatment of the idea of an emerging literary politeness, see Dickie.

50 The *Life* touches on secret history with Davies's account of how, when "posted at the Bed Chamber Door of the Elector of *Hanover*" (the future George I), she observes the

excarceration and libertine speech, grounds plebeian female liberty in the control of labour and property, not romantic wish-fulfilment (as in the ballads).[51] This is the relevance to Davies's narrative of the parodic relationship between scandal fiction and heroic romance described by Catherine Gallagher.[52] When Gallagher details how the early novel renounced the party-political and libel-mongering vocation of the secret history, the implication is that domestic fiction drew on romance conventions to help establish its legitimacy.

Davies's narrative departs from the conventions of plebeian autobiography on similar grounds. The memoirs of members of subordinated social groups, such as labourers, women, and formerly enslaved people, frequently originated in a desire to record their spiritual progress. Methodist styles of self-narration held particular appeal for such individuals because the religious provenance of this rhetoric gave their writings an air of social and economic conformity even as it allowed them to break the silence urged upon them by those in positions of power over them.[53] As befits an account of precarious labour, Davies's memoir records her progress towards an economic goal (her military pension), not a spiritual one. It also provides an apology for that economic progress, ascribing it to events beyond her control (her husband's impressment), on the one hand, and to her own merit (her military industriousness), on the other. It singles out a key aspect of social paternalism—the male control of property (rather than female delicacy or domesticity)—as the underlying obstacle to female liberty.

These formal narrative co-ordinates are essential to the *Life*'s representation of Davies's sexual and romantic experiences with men; they tie those experiences to her quest for social autonomy. Whether she

introduction "to the Elector [of] a fine, handsome, jolly Lady, who was what we call a black Beauty" (1:21).

51 Linebaugh coins the word "excarceration" to refer to the pursuit of freedom from the confinements of law and labour by London's working people (3). Sometimes well-born female soldiers in prose romances also profess an "aversion" to marriage; one such romance records that its protagonist, Christina, so "lov'd her liberty" that "she would not put herself under a Master" by marrying. *The Heroine Musqueteer: Or, The Female Warrier* (London, 1678), 50, 42, Google Books. But the meaning of sexual liberty changes when its advocate is working class and without means.

52 On scandal and romance conventions in relation to the early novel, see Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 179–84.

53 See Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 83–86.

exposes her genitals to a passing lord, or refuses a respectable marriage with her cousin Howel, her behaviour is consistent with her concern to control her labour and her property: self-exposure is a lewd prank, but the money she makes for her "Performance" (1:3) is her own; and as for Howel, despite his seemingly sincere courtship, why marry into "certain Poverty" and financial "Ruin" (1:8)? Even after Howel forces himself on her, she continues to refuse his suit, preferring an uncertain autonomy to his impoverished protection. Like her successors among the scandalous memoirists, Davies fears economic precarity as much as sexual "Ruin."[54]

In order to guard her sexual character after her encounter with Howel, Davies leaves home to work for her aunt in Dublin. Escaping pregnancy, her gamble is rewarded when her aunt dies and leaves Davies as her sole beneficiary: "Never Woman was in a happier Situation; for I was at the Height of my Ambition, and had not a Wish to make" (1:10). The juxtaposition of this prosperity with her disdain for Howel's proposal effectively contrasts separate property with sexual subjection. The opposition was, of course, a fact of law, embodied in the distinction between feme sole and feme covert: by inheriting her aunt's public house, Davies became an economically independent single woman or feme sole. That Davies has yet to marry or fall in love, and has inherited her property from another woman, differentiates her tale from the motif of the woman warrior ballads and underlines her "Amazonian" independence in the strongest, because legal and material, terms.

The importance that Davies assigns to her economic independence is clear from her reflections on falling in love with her employee: "I was thoroughly content ... till Love, too often the Bane of our Sex ... envious of the Calm I enjoyed, came to imbitter my Peace" (1:10). Previously an external danger in the unwanted attentions and eventual violence of Howel, the threatening sexual passion is now her own: Davies is attracted to her servant Richard Welsh, a man "very well made in his Person" but without property (1:10). Believing it "indecent ... to make the first Overture," she gets a friend to offer him the chance "*to carry her, and be Master, instead of Servant, in the House*" (1:11, 12). It is hard to imagine plainer language for the economic and legal consequences of marriage for a plebeian woman's separate property. He responds by urging Davies to make her "*Man*" her "*Husband*" because "*for his Part, he should slight the*

54 Lynda M. Thompson categorizes Davies's narrative as a scandalous memoir in *The "Scandalous Memoirists": Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the Shame of "Publick Fame"* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 15n6.

Censure of the World, were he the Master, and I the Servant, and, consulting only his own Happiness, look upon what he possessed, no farther valuable than as it would prove the Sincerity of his Love, by making me Mistress of it all" (1:14–15). This is the fantasy of *Pamela*, in which a wealthy man rewards the lowly female object of his affection with property and social position. But Davies is already "Mistress of it all"—owner of her tavern and employer of her man. Why settle for a nominal, dependent authority when you can have the real thing? In the event, Richard leaves her as much "Mistress" of her own "Effects" as when single (1:15), exactly as he promised when he declared "*I will be still your Servant*" (1:14)—a situation that she is most happy with.[55]

Compared with a patrician woman impersonating a man, like Violetta in Haywood's *Love in Excess* (1719–20), Davies's story is more concerned with the socio-economic dangers of romance, less with the socio-psychological pitfalls of female sensibility.[56] The emphasis in her narrative falls on material relations—that is, on power, not feeling; on property, not psychology. Davies shares this emphasis with scandalous memoirists, such as Constantia Phillips and Laetitia Pilkington, who criticize the social and legal institution of marriage.[57] But, crucially, Davies comes at these matters with a plebeian perspective. Her redactor may want us to believe she has a rich emotional life (as suggested by the heightened

55 If it seems fanciful that Davies should negotiate her own marriage, contemporary evidence indicates that such negotiations occurred in cases where women had independent command of their marriage portion. See Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions and Broken Lives: Marriage and Divorce in England, 1660–1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99.

56 What Richetti has described as "the ideological pattern of male tyranny versus female virtue" in Delarivier Manley's writings (181) is carried in a diagnostic direction by Davies, who specifies the forms of male tyranny in property relations, and opposes this with an active female liberty (not passive suffering or innocence). Compare Snell's aim "resolutely ... to be Lord and Master of herself, and never more to entertain the least Thoughts of having a Husband to Rule and Govern her" after her experience as a soldier (*TFS*, 179).

57 The connection of female soldier narratives, scandalous memoirs, and secret histories comes to the surface in *The Scotch Marine*, which declares on its title page that it is "Printed from the Original MANUSCRIPT, for the Justification of her CHARACTER." See also this comment from the Scottish news in the *Daily Advertiser* (8 January 1754): "The Affair of Lady H—n, published in London under the Title of, The Scotch Marine, causes much Speculation in this Part of Britain, and is, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary Adventures that ever a young Woman of her Quality engaged in." The redactor of Snell's narrative also draws on this affinity when he describes the narration of her courtships of other women as the "secret Memoirs of our Heroine" (*TFS*, 121).

diction surrounding her courtship of Richard), but it pales next to her obvious relish for military adventure and household authority, as well as her immersion in the daily struggles of precarious labour and the delights of picaresque roguery.[58]

Davies's resolution to control her own desire (threatened by Howel's unwanted courtship and sexual assault) and property (threatened by marriage with Richard) continues after she goes to war and is reunited with her philandering husband. Richard responds badly to Davies's wish to continue soldiering: "*What, then*, said he, *will you be cruel enough to rob me of my Wife*?" (1:65). He wants to renew their intimacy, but he phrases his desire in economic terms, and treats her soldiering as a theft. Davies replies with similar language, arguing, "*He had forfeited his Right to* [her bed]*, by having taken another to his*" (1:65). Davies once again inhabits the male social role with great panache: "We sat together some little Time after this, then I paid the Reckoning and gave my Husband a Piece of Gold, telling him, *He would find me a kind and generous Brother; but that he must not think of enjoying his Wife, while I could remain concealed, and the War lasted*" (1:65). The "Piece of Gold" that Davies gives Richard is conventionally a male gesture of economic power over a woman's sexuality—Defoe uses it between Moll Flanders and the older brother. Like the unreformed Mr B, Davies expects Richard's submission as quid pro quo for raising him to a condition of property. Davies's *Life* cleverly reworks the exchange of money to signal that, unlike the often figural or temporary submission of male suitors in the heroic romance or domestic novel, Richard will remain dependent on Davies. Further, this critique of romance in terms of property relations ties her romantic experiences back to her plebeian hostility to elite law.

In pursuing social freedom through her romantic and erotic experiences with men, Davies both draws on and flouts the claims of women working in the guise of men: in her resistance to and anger over Howel's sexual assault, and in her decision to regularize her passion for Richard, Davies asserts the standard of chastity boasted of by dutiful cross-dressing women workers, while her ease in a brothel milieu and with the sexual life of camp undermines that standard with an anti-domestic, plebeian libertinism. Above all, Davies desires to control the fruits of her own labour, even the smallest measure of which was vulnerable to a husband's legal grasp. The

58 Lynda M. Thompson points out that the mixture of picaresque and sentimental modes was a rhetorical strategy for disreputable women memoirists at mid-century (*The "Scandalous Memoirists,"* 93).

exception proves the rule of her independence: it is only as a feme covert that anyone succeeds in appropriating Davies's property when, near the end of her life, her layabout third husband manages to sell off her sutler's tent and supplies, as he is legally entitled to do, when she is in bed with a fever (2:91–92).

Literature and the Plebeian Female Soldier

The appearance of Davies's *Life* inaugurates a new era in which the *plebeian* female soldier takes precedence in narrative. Starting around 1720 (when Davies is an established London personality), plays and novels increasingly present female soldiers as women of low birth or as well-born women whose cross-dressing serves to lower them socially.[59] Despite the variety of factors behind this development, including the role of newspapers and their reports of plebeian women living and working as men, the publication of Davies's *Life* usefully marks the moment at which this plebeianization is consolidated. (In contrast, the popular genre of the female soldier ballad sees no such development: its military heroines continue to be mostly well-born and their social standing largely patrician.) As we have seen, Davies's memoir embodies a comic, anti-romantic pattern of narrative development oriented towards the economic rewards of public recognition for military service. Its working-class protagonist is far from being an exemplary woman in the domestic sense. Indeed, Davies is closer to disreputable, low-born figures, like the cross-dressing pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny, than she is to genteel literary heroines like Spenser's Britomart, Shakespeare's Rosalind, or Farquhar's Sylvia.

In polite literature before mid-century, the paradigmatic cross-dressing woman was a well-born individual, seemingly derived from Shakespearean precedent. On the Restoration stage, for example, these roles frequently fuse aristocratic liberty and female self-determination. From John Dryden's Florimel to Aphra Behn's Hellena, the dramatic figure of the cross-dressing woman interlinked her access to masculine right with her elite status.[60] This connection of sexual disguise and patrician identity remains true even when military status and actions are

59 The jest-book heroine Long Meg is an exception. Although she does not go to war in male disguise, she does take up a martial challenge in male dress, and the picaresque and comic elements of her tale anticipate aspects of Davies's narrative.

60 See John Dryden, *Secret Love; Or, The Maiden Queen* (1668); and Aphra Behn, *The Rover; Or, The Banish'd Cavaliers* (1677).

explicitly referenced, as in Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* (1691). In that play, Southerne presents masculinity as analogous to elite status: that is, as a political entitlement or construction marked by the right to bear, and the ability to use, a sword. As the eponymous heroine explains to a male accomplice, "'tis only the Fashion of the World, that gives your Sex a better Title then we have, to the wearing a Sword" (I.i.17–18).[61] Female self-assertion is opposed to passivity, not to gentility: Sir Anthony is well-born (a "Lady" as the subtitle has it), and when she goes to war, she does so by going "a Collonelling" (I.i.47) disguised as "a Barronet, of twelve hundred pounds a year" (I.i.320–21).

In farces, too, women warriors were presented with a degree of gentility: Thomas Shadwell's Mrs Gripe masquerades as a captain in *The Woman-Captain* (1680). There are exceptions to this overall pattern: in John Lacy's play *The Old Troop, or Monsieur Raggou* (ca. 1664), the rank of Biddy, the cornet's boy, is not high. Yet most late seventeenth-century women warriors are well-born, including Celestina in William Killigrew's *The Seege of Urbin* (1666), Fidelia in William Wycherley's *The Plain Dealer* (1676), and Locris in Charles Hopkins's *Friendship Improv'd, or The Female Warriour* (1700). And the figure of the assertive female soldier remains a viable image of genteel female virtue in drama through the early 1700s, as seen in the Rosalind-like dedication of the heiress Sylvia in George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and the romantic reformation of the fashionable coquet Belvedera in Charles Shadwell's *The Humours of the Army* (1713).

By the 1720s, the routine association of assertive female soldiering with genteel female virtue begins to decline. That decade sees the emergence of a number of disreputable, plebeian cross-dressing women in literature, including Moll Flanders, the eponymous heroine of Defoe's 1722 novel, who adopts male dress at a key moment in her thieving life. In 1724, Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates* provided a popular account of Read and Bonny; he portrays these female pirates as springing from the same plebeian milieu as Davies, Snell, and Lacy.[62]

61 Thomas Southerne, *Sir Anthony Love; or, The Rambling Lady*, in *The Works of Thomas Southerne*, 2 vols., ed. Robert Jordan and Harold Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). References are to this edition.

62 Captain Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (London, 1724; facsimile reprint, New York: Garland, 1972), 117–34. The plebeian assertiveness of Read and Bonny is not limited to popular accounts: trial witnesses confirm that they wore "Men's Cloaths" and describe them as courageous and violent, working side-by-side with the male pirates they sailed with, crudely swearing, and willing, independent participants in this dangerous activity

In Johnson's account, Read, before turning to the illicit soldiering of piracy, dutifully served, like Davies, as a soldier in the War of the Spanish Succession.[63] With the appearance of John Gay's ballad opera *Polly* in 1729 (inspired in part by Johnson's account), the literary trend continues to develop. Polly's story follows the ballad pattern of romantic fidelity, but her parents exist on the avails of crime, her husband is a charismatic highwayman, and, while searching for him in the West Indies, she dons men's clothes and joins a gang of pirates. That is, although Polly's character and manner are genteel, her birth and domain of action are presented as plebeian and disreputable.

Even as the amount and quality of dramatic literature in England declines after the Stage Licensing Act (1737), new plays sustain the female soldier's downward social shift.[64] Richard Sheridan's *The Camp* (1778), for example, establishes the plebeian standing of Nancy, a well-behaved farmer's daughter, through her facility in military exercises, her receipt of charity from some ladies, and her association with such customary courtship rituals as plighting and marriage at the drum head. By 1801, *The Female Volunteer, or The Dawning of Peace*, shows the "unpolish'd Peasant" Jeanette loyally supporting the patriotism of her betrothed—an enlisted valet—by accompanying him to war.[65] Jeanette and Nancy are, unlike Polly, both reputable individuals, but, like Gay's heroine, their birth and domain of action is entirely plebeian.

The female soldier is also plebeianized, and occasionally criminalized, in the early novel, a development that reflects both a new realism in narrative presentation (patrician female soldiers are a feature of romance forms),[66] and a new view of the figure as low-born and disreputable.

who were neither "kept" nor "detain'd by Force." *The Tryals of Captain John Rackam, and Other Pirates* (Jamaica, 1721), 18, (Colonial Office collection, National Archives, PRO CO 137/14/1).

63 Johnson, 119–21. Indeed, Davies's repute from the time she received her pension and its increase, 1717–20, may have made her a model for parts of Read's life.

64 The occasional work of prose romance kept the image of the well-born female soldier in circulation. For a mid-century example, see "The Generous Rival: or, The Female Volunteer," in *The Gallant Companion; Or, An Antidote for the Hyp and Vapours* (London, 1746), 56–90, British Library. Adaptations of existing comedies also kept the image in circulation: see, for example, *The Female Officer, or The Humours of the Army* (Dublin, 1763), a reworking of Charles Shadwell's *The Humours of the Army* (1713).

65 Laurence Hynes Halloran, *The Female Volunteer, or The Dawning of Peace: A Drama in Three Acts, by Philo-nauticus* (London, 1801), 28, microfilm, Porter Library.

66 For an example of the patrician female soldier to be found in romance forms, see *The Heroine Musqueteer*, which presents its heroine's desire to have "credit in the service" as a soldier to be "a resolution worthy a noble Soul" (67, 68). This work was reprinted as part 1 of *The Heroine Musqueteer: Or, The Female Warriour* (London, 1700).

For example, in Smollett's *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, Ferdinand's camp-following mother is a plebeian sutler, marauder, and "undaunted she-campaigner" closely modelled on Christian Davies.[67] Like Davies, she displays a masculine courage at war: in one battle she "exposed her person to the enemy's fire, with the indifference and deliberation of a veteran" and "atchieved a very conspicuous exploit by the prowess of her single arm," overcoming an enemy cavalry officer (55). Smollett, however, seems inspired more by Davies's picaresque ethos and low social standing than by her martial achievements and industrious labour, and he makes Mrs Fathom a grotesque caricature of Davies's petty criminality and self-serving opportunism. Smollett places her among "the obscene objects of low life" (47) as a venal and crafty whore, and he discredits her valour and industry by portraying her murdering injured soldiers for their valuables. By thus criminalizing Fathom's mother, Smollett implicitly attacks the plebeian virtue and industrious self-understanding of female soldiers seen in prose narratives such as Davies's memoir.

The Scotch Marine, or Memoirs of the Life of Celestina (1753), published in the same year as Smollett's novel, provides another, particularly striking example of the literary framing of female soldiering as a plebeian activity.[68] Like Fidelia in *The Plain Dealer*, Celestina seeks to follow the impressed Castor, who is ignorant of her love, to sea; but, unlike Wycherley's heroine (who serves in a capacity suitable to her social position), Celestina finds her high rank conflicting with the plebeian nature of enlisted life for common soldiers. To enter as a marine, Celestina must disguise not only her sex, like the real-life marine Hannah Snell (and the fictional Fidelia), but also her rank: she adopts the plebeian name Sam Taylor (1:94), dons the garb of a "meanly habited" young man "who went out to Day-Labour" (1:59), and effaces the bodily signs of leisure by covering her hands and face with dirt (1:63). The narrator makes the conflict explicit by contrasting the "Life of Ease and Prosperity" to which she has been bred with "the Hardships which Persons of meaner Ranks" (1:69), such as common marines, must face. However, what the ballads present as a routine aspect of sexual disguise—hiding one's rank—*The Scotch Marine*

67 Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (1753; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 55. References are to this edition. Boucé discusses the evidence for identifying Christian Davies as a source for Ferdinand's mother (454n7).

68 *The Scotch Marine* is an undated, anonymous, two-volume work, published in London (British Library). It was first advertised as published in the *Daily Advertiser*, 6 December 1753; I am grateful to the late Betty Rizzo for this reference.

presents as a significant difficulty for the successful sexual disguise of a patrician woman in a plebeian milieu.[69] Fittingly, Celestina both returns to women's dress and regains her patrician rank. In this novel, military masculinity, at least in a plebeian milieu, no longer reads as something straightforwardly "noble" for patrician women to adopt.

After the 1750s, novels continued to portray the female soldier in plebeian terms, or as a patrician fish out of water. In Phebe Gibbes's *The Life and Adventure of Mr. Francis Clive* (1764), the heroine and her female servant use male disguise to win her husband back from an illicit affair.[70] Even though Mrs Clive adopts "the regimentals of an officer" (unlike the plebeian habit of Celestina in *The Scotch Marine*), she is uncomfortable in the role, dressing "with a heavy heart in this masculine habit, which agreed but ill with either her delicate mind or person" (2:107, 111). Her story evokes plebeian female soldiers like Davies with her offhand remark that, "If I succeed, I shall be almost tempted to publish my adventures" (2:102), and through the realism with which the unsuitability of her manners to such disguise is portrayed.[71] In a similar vein, the eponymous heroine in Samuel Pratt's *Emma Corbett* (1780) condemns herself for "impropriety" and for providing "an irregular example" when she follows her lover in male disguise and travels to a war zone (albeit as a well-to-do "cabin passenger," not as an enlisted soldier).[72] By keeping her cross-dressing almost entirely offstage, Pratt conveys Emma's indecorous actions in largely abstract terms and protects her from the direct plebeian associations of the parade ground or battlefield.

In contrast, a later novel, *Filial Indiscretions: or, The Female Chevalier* (1799), turns on a narrative reassertion of the plebeian nature of female soldiering. The plot of this anonymously authored three-volume novel adopts the ballad motif of a disguised woman following her lover, but

69 For example, the heroine of *The Female Lieutenant* easily covers "Her soft hands and milk white fingers ... with pitch and tar" (quoted in Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 74).

70 Phebe Gibbes, *The Life and Adventure of Mr. Francis Clive* (1764; facsimile reprint, New York: Garland, 1975). References are to this edition. I would like to thank April London for this reference.

71 Gibbes has some fun with the new plebeian paradigm, dubbing her heroine—who only reluctantly undertakes the "detestable dissimulation" (2:128) of impersonating a man—"Capt. Pain" (2:111). The "pain," of course, is the well-born Emma's, tarred as she is with the shame of military disguise. Davies, in contrast, revels in telling her noble patrons "the Story of my Adventures" (2:79).

72 Samuel Jackson Pratt, *Emma Corbett, or The Miseries of Civil War*, ed. Eve Tavor Bannet (Peterborough: Broadview, 2011), 170, 169, 173,

rather than going to war, the heroine Harriett's adventures take her to a turbulent and militarized Ireland immediately after the Rebellion of 1798. At first, although well-born, Harriett happily disguises herself in servant clothes and works as a valet. However, after her discovery, her perspective changes, and she comes to view her cross-dressing as a disreputable activity. All three of these novels portray female soldiering as socially stigmatizing for a patrician woman, and seek to protect their well-born or would-be patrician heroines from its plebeian taint.

As this brief survey shows, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the plebeian milieu of actual female soldiering, and its formalization in the narratives of women like Christian Davies, was transmitted to polite literature and provided a near omnipresent interpretive framework for the representation of the literary woman warrior. Post-Davies, literary female soldiers might be praised for their industrious service as dutiful subordinates or attacked as camp-following petty thieves and prostitutes, but in either case they were routinely viewed as poor and low-born individuals (or as well-born women acting in conflict with their class status). Framed in plebeian terms, female soldiering threatened the social standing of a well-born woman regardless of her dutifulness. This interpretive frame shaped critical as well as literary responses to the figure. Thus, after mid-century, when male observers take a dim view of the gender-bending autonomy of female soldiers, they single out, like Smollett, the plebeian milieu of these women for derogatory treatment. The author of an essay in the *British Magazine* in 1762, attributed to Oliver Goldsmith, links lower-class prostitutes and female soldiers when he proposes to draft "thirty new amazonian regiments" from among various groups of low-born working women, including "the bunters who swagger in the streets of London."[73] Goldsmith makes his proposal based on class assumptions about female physical assertiveness and "strength of body," which by the 1760s have come to be viewed increasingly in lower-class terms, and which he associates with such disreputable plebeian women as "the fishwomen of Billingsgate," "the indefatigable trulls who follow the camp," other "female drudges," and female soldiers such as "Moll Davis" (also known as Christian Davies).[74]

73 "A Letter to the Authors of the British Magazine, Containing an Humble Proposal for Augmenting the Forces of Great-Britain," *British Magazine* (January 1762), 35, 34, Google Books. Reprinted as "Female Warriors," in *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Peter Cunningham (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), 6:44.

74 "A Letter," 34. For evidence of the generally virtuous behaviour of real-life plebeian women warriors, see Easton, "Gender's Two Bodies," 135, 144–45, 159–60.

The Plebeianized Female Soldier

Between 1720 and 1750, the representation of the literary female soldier changes, and that change is significant, extensive, and persistent, lasting in Britain until at least the early nineteenth century. Significantly, the tide of cultural prestige turns against the image of the female soldier a good half century before the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century gender shifts posited by historians and literary critics such as Dror Wahrman and Terry Castle.[75] While the plebeianization of the female soldier is certainly influenced by external factors such as the rise of newspapers and their reports of plebeian women living and working as men, close scrutiny of Davies's *Life* shows that female soldier narratives such as hers provide an internal, literary vector that is also crucial to this development.

A comparison with the tradition of the female soldier ballads that Dianne Dugaw has recovered underscores what is distinct, and contestatory, about the ways that prose narratives like *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* shape the lives of their female soldier heroines. In general, the ballads deal in romantic wish-fulfilment, the prose narratives in radical liberty. The typical ballad heroine leaves to pursue a lover who has courted her and been separated from her by external forces, usually her parents. Her goal is marriage, and her motive is true love. Her story is a fable of female faithfulness and she is usually well-born, a merchant's daughter, if not a member of the gentry.[76] The story of Davies, in contrast,

75 Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

76 Mary Ambree rejects a prince's offer of marriage and impersonates a "knight Sir of England" while at war (Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 37–39). The heroine of *The Valiant Virgin* is "a Lady" and of *The Bristol Bridegroom* a merchant's daughter; the heroine of *The Woman Warrier* [*sic*] is believed to be "A Gentleman's So—n or a Squire; / With a hand white and fair," while *The Female Lieutenant* makes sure that "Her soft hands and milk white fingers / All were smear'd with pitch and tar" (Dugaw, *Warrior Women*, 57, 96, 115, 74). Despite such evidence, Dugaw describes the ballad women as "lower-class" and insists that the ballads take as their heroines "a lower-class girl" (*Warrior Women*, 171, 180). Dugaw repeats this view in relation to the "indelicate heroism" of Snell's narrative in "'Rambling Female Sailors': The Rise and Fall of the Seafaring Heroine," *International Journal of Maritime History* 4, no. 1 (1992): 185, https://doi.org/10.1177%2F084387149200400113. Craft-Fairchild also treats the "heroines of the female warrior ballads" as "lower-class," and links them to Davies's narrative in this way ("The Politics of 'Passing,'" 53). But, if it is correct to speak of the plebeian origin, milieu, and audience of the ballads, it does not seem quite right to describe the ballad heroine, in her archetype, as labouring class.

begins and ends with her life as a worker. In the prose memoirs, a sexual relation, usually marriage, is broken up from within by male abuse. Davies discovers an unfaithful husband; Snell chases a cruel one; Lacy flees a jilting lover.[77] The narratives start, rather than end, with the state of marriage (or its romantic analogue), and they explore its costs rather than assume its value. In place of the romantic concept of marriage found in the ballads, the narratives characterize a plebeian world of paternalistic sexual and property relations and an associated dialectic of repute and disrepute. Compared with fantasies about female soldiers authored by some eighteenth-century men, the ballads do present positive and compelling images of these women, as Dugaw argues; but only in the prose narratives is the rejection of male authority implied by the ballad images made so emphatically and explicitly.

Because they also resist male authority, several early ballad heroines embody a perspective closer to that of Davies's narrative. The character Morose in Ben Jonson's play *Epicoene* (1609) complains of the ballad heroine Mary Ambree that her "examples are dangerous," presumably because of her command of men at war.[78] But even Ambree is no "roaring girl": unlike the narrative heroines, she is a captain (not a plebeian recruit), and she fights for a dead lover (not herself). Typically, the ballads do not challenge male authority over women or male control of women's property; nor do they endorse female liberty, except in pursuit of a worthy future husband. Their interest in property arises indirectly, through the misalliance of a well-off genteel female soldier and her lower-class lover (surely a form of plebeian male wish-fulfilment). It is hard to imagine even the prickly Morose being disturbed by the "examples" of most ballad heroines. Challenging the law of coverture as Davies does, however, directly confronts the legal justification of the masculine government of plebeian women.

Today we can read the prose narratives of Davies, Snell, and Lacy because, regardless of the contributions of fictionalizing editors and authors, these women boldly sought public recognition for their military adventures and industrious service. Davies died before her memoir was

77 For first-hand evidence that romantic problems *and* a love of soldiering could go hand in hand as motivations for a lower-class female soldier, see the MS letters of Rosetta Wakeman, in *An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, alias Pvt. Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers, 1862–1864*, ed. Lauren Cook Burgess (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

78 Ben Jonson, *Epicoene; Or, The Silent Woman*, ed. R.V. Holdsworth (1609; London: A&C Black, 1993), 101. Dugaw provides the text of a mid-seventeenth-century version of *Mary Ambree*, and discusses its literary reception (*Warrior Women*, 31–42).

published, although it nevertheless claims to be wholly "taken from her own Mouth," and an early edition exists that was "Printed for C. WELCH in *Chelsea*."[79] As her narrative was appearing in 1750, Snell participated in a popular stage show wearing marine regimentals and went through the musket drill; she was also portrayed in numerous engravings.[80] In 1778, James Woodforde records buying some buttons from an itinerant, cross-dressing Snell. Dugaw rightly calls attention to Woodforde's "overseeing posture" in her comments on the encounter.[81] But Woodforde also notes that Snell "has a Pension from the Crown now of 18. 5. 0 per annum and the liberty of wearing Men's Cloaths and also a Cockade in her Hat, which she still wears."[82] Far from being a passive object of charity or discipline, Snell proudly displays the badges of her personal "liberty," won nearly thirty years earlier. Women like Snell and Davies used their access to the public arena to pursue economic rewards, such as their pensions and the sale of their memoirs, but in addition they actively represented themselves through their public "lives and adventures." It is this, their participation in the public domain of emulation, in competition with male soldiers and workers, that constitutes their greatest liberty, whether they use this publicity for personal gain, to amuse the reader, or to challenge the status quo.[83] Strikingly, Snell's encounter with Woodforde also indicates that, among members of the gentry there was a continuing interest in, and market for, images of the plebeian female soldier and her social independence.

79 The claim that she dictated the narrative is quoted from the title page of the *Life*. The publication information for item 2 in n13 above reads, in full: "LONDON: / Printed for C. WELCH in *Chelsea*, and Sold at the / Printing-Office in *Baldwin's-Gardens*, 1740."

80 Georgina Lock and David Worrall, "Cross-Dressed Performance at the Theatrical Margins: Hannah Snell, the Manual Exercise, and the New Wells Spa Theater, 1750," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (2014): 17–36, https://doi.org/10.1525/hlq.2014.77.1.17.

81 Dugaw, "Female Sailors Bold: Transvestite Heroines and the Markers of Gender and Class," in *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700–1920*, ed. Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 41.

82 See the entry for 21 May 1778 in James Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson*, ed. John Beresford (London: Oxford University Press, 1924–31), 1:224–25. The quotation is from 225.

83 Evidence suggests that even Lacy, despite ending her memoir with her marriage to a fellow sailor, went on to work as an independent builder and to cohabit with another woman. See Peter Guillery, "The Further Adventures of Mary Lacy: 'Seaman,' Shipwright, Builder," *History Workshop Journal* 49, no. 1 (2000): 212–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/2000.49.212.

Before the prose memoirs appeared, the assertive female soldier and her access to violence was a viable image of genteel female virtue, and her masculinity was a sign of her nobility. Thus, in Margaret Cavendish's story "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (1656), the cross-dressing heroine can state that "*a sword becomes a woman when it is used against the enemies of her honour*."[84] But in the wake of Davies's narrative, in drama and fiction the assertive female soldier becomes a plebeian icon and her masculinity a sign of her low social station. Thus, in Maria Edgeworth's novel *Belinda* (1801), the decision to don men's clothes and fight a duel serves to dishonour the patrician Lady Delacour.[85] The "dishonouring" of the female soldier is the legacy of Davies and her sisters. Both as women and as men, they are plebs without patrician honour. Nevertheless, despite detractors, the appeal as well as disrepute of the female soldier resides in these same plebeian qualities: grit and industry, of course, but also impropriety, mobility, and the assertion, against paternalistic control, of a radical liberty.

84 Margaret Cavendish, "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (1656), in *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 115.

85 Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, ed. Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick (1801; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54–58. I would like to thank Camie Kim for her comments on an earlier version of this article.