

March 1694

THE AMBITIOUS SLAVE; or, A Generous Revenge. [By Elkanah Settle.] Wednesday 21
DL
Edition of 1694: Prologue, Spoken by Mrs Knight. King of Persia – Bowman; Tygranes – Verbruggen; Orontes – Powell; Briomar – Freeman; Mirvan – Mrs Rogers; Amarin – Sybars [Cibber]; Herminia – Mrs Knight; Clarismunda – Mrs Bracegirdle; Celestina – Mrs Barry; Rosalin – Mrs Leigh. Epilogue, Spoken by Mrs Rogers.

COMMENT. The United Company. The date of this production is determined by a letter (see below). For a discussion of the origin and development of this play, see Hotson, *Commonwealth and Restoration Stage*, pp. 274–76. A song, “Why shou’d the world mistake,” the music composed by John Eccles and sung by Mrs Hudson, is in *Thesaurus Musicus*, 1695.

An unidentified letter, 22 March 1693/4: We had another new play yesterday, called *The Ambitious Slave, or a Generous Revenge*. Elkanah Settle is the author of it, and the success is answerable to his reputation. I never saw a piece so wretched, nor worse contrived. He pretends ’tis a Persian story, but not one body in the whole audience could make any thing of it; ’tis a mere babel, and will sink for ever. The poor poet, seeing the house would not act it for him, and give him the benefit of the third day, made a present of it to the women in the house, who act it, but without profit or encouragement (Edmond Malone, *An Historical Account of the Stage in Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* [London, 1821], III, 163–64).

Gentleman’s Journal, March 1694: ’Tis not altogether strange for a Play to be less kindly receiv’d, immediately after one that has deservedly ingross’d all the Applause which the Town can well bestow in some time on new Dramatic Entertainments. Perhaps Mr Settle may partly impute to this, the want of success of a new Tragedy of his which was lately acted, ’tis called, *The Ambitious Slave: or, The Generous Revenge*. [This play followed Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage*.]

COMMENT. An unidentified letter, 22 March 1693/4: There is hardly anything now to make it acceptable to you, but an account of our winter diversions, and chiefly of the new plays which have been the entertainment of the town. Thursday 22

The first that was acted was Mr Congreve’s, called *The Double Dealer* [see October 1693]. It has fared with that play, as it generally does with beauties officiously cried up: the mighty expectation which was raised of it made it sink, even beneath its own merit. The character of *The Double Dealer* is artfully writt, but the action being but single, and confined within the rules of true comedy, it could not please the generality of our audience, who relish nothing but variety, and think any thing dull and heavy which does not border upon farce.—The criticks were severe upon this play, which gave the author occasion to lash ’em in his Epistle Dedicatory, in so defying or hectoring a style, that it was counted rude even by his best friends; so that ’tis generally thought he has done his business, and lost himself: a thing he owes to Mr Dryden’s treacherous friendship, who being jealous of the applause he had gott by his *Old Batchelour*, deluded him into a foolish imitation of his own way of writing angry prefaces.

The 2d play is Mr Dryden’s, called *Love Triumphant, or Nature will prevail* [see mid-January 1694]. It is a tragi-comedy, but in my opinion one of the worst he ever writt, if not the very worst: the comical part descends beneath the style and shew of a Bartholomew-fair droll. It was damn’d by the universal cry of the town, *nemine contradicente*, but the conceited poet. He says in his prologue, that this is the last the town must expect from him; he had done himself a kindness had he taken his leave before.

Thursday 22

The 3d is Mr Southern's, call'd *The Fatal Marriage, or the Innocent Adultery* [see February 1693/4]. It is not only the best that author ever writt, but is generally admired for one of the greatest ornaments of the stage, and the most entertaining play has appeared upon it these 7 years. The plot is taken from Mrs Behn's novel, called the *Unhappy Vow-Breaker*. I never saw Mrs Barry act with so much passion as she does in it; I could not forbear being moved even to tears to see her act. Never was poet better rewarded or encouraged by the town; for besides an extraordinary full house, which brought him about 140 £. 50 noblemen, among whom my lord Winchelsea, was one, give him guineas apiece, and the printer 36 £. for his copy.

This kind usage will encourage desponding minor poets, and vex huffing Dryden and Congreve to madness. [For the fourth play, see 21 March 1693/4; Edmond Malone, *Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (London, 1821), III, 162–64.]

April 1694

Monday 2–Saturday 7

PASSION WEEK

Mid-April
DL

HAVE AT ALL; or, The Midnight Adventure. [By Joseph Williams.] *Cast not known.*

COMMENT. The United Company. This play was never published, and the date of its first performance is not known. It is referred to, however, in the *Gentleman's Journal*, May 1694, with the implication that it preceded *The Married Beau* and that both had appeared since the previous issue of the *Gentleman's Journal*.

Monday 16
At Court (?)

COMMENT. In L. C. 151/ p. 352, is an order, dated 16 April 1694, to pay Mrs Barry £25 for *The Old Bachelor*. The date of the performance is not specified.

Monday 30
At Court

CONCERT.

COMMENT. The Queen's Birthday Ode, "Come, Ye Sons of Art," the music by Henry Purcell, the author of the words not known; and "Strike the Viol," sung by [Alexander(?)] Damascene, are in *Gentleman's Journal*, May 1694. See also Purcell's *Works*, Purcell Society, xxiv (1926), ii.

Late April
DL

THE MARRIED BEAU; or, The Curious Impertinent. [By John Crowne.] Edition of 1694. The Prologue. No actors' names, but see Epilogue. The Epilogue, Spoken by Mr Dogget, who Acts Thorneback. A copy of the 1694 quarto in the Folger Shakespeare Library has a manuscript cast which appears to be the original one: Loveley – Powell; Polidor – Betterton; Thorneback – Dogget; Sir John – Bowen; Mrs Loveley – Mrs Barry; Cecilia – Mrs Bowman; Camilla – Mrs Bracegirdle; Lionell – Mrs Verbruggen. Prologue, Spoken by Mr Pow[ell].

COMMENT. The United Company. The date of the first performance is not known, but according to the *Gentleman's Journal*, May 1694, it followed *Have at All*: the other call'd *The married Beau, or the Curious Impertinent*, by Mr Crown, already acted many times (p. 134). The manuscript of a song composed by John Eccles and sung by Doggett is in Bodleian, School of Music Collection, c. 95, f 102. One by Henry Purcell, "Sec, where repenting Celia lyes," sung by Mrs Ayliff, is in *Thesaurus Musicus*, 1695. See also Purcell's *Works*, Purcell Society, xx (1916), xvii–xviii.