Feminist Comedy:
The Professionalization of Women Playwrights in London, 1750-1800

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ABSTRACT

"Feminist Comedy" explores the crucial link between the professionalization of women playwrights and stage comedy in the patent theatres of eighteenth-century London. Nearly one hundred women produced plays between 1660 and 1800, and most of their plays can be categorized within one of the many comic subgenres of the period. I demonstrate that women playwrights were drawn to comedy because it was in greater commercial demand and therefore offered the best chance for a woman to have her work accepted for production by the managers and celebrated by audiences. As a dramatic genre devoted to interrogations of contemporary society, comedy also provided women with an opportunity to publicly, and subversively, foreground their experiences and issues of oppression based on gender. Thus, throughout the century, women experimented aggressively with comic form, structure, and genre as a key means of navigating the male-dominated theatre industry. Through careful analysis of various comedies, I highlight the ways women relied on the comic genre to achieve optimal professional success, financial reward, and creative expression.

I draw on five case studies of women playwrights who wrote comedies between 1750 and 1800: Catherine Clive, Frances Brooke, Frances Burney, Hannah Cowley, and Elizabeth Inchbald. By focusing on playwrights of the second half of the century, this dissertation explores a flourishing period of theatrical output by women following their near disappearance after the implementation of the 1737 Stage Licensing Act. I connect Clive's mid-century comic playwriting to the resurgence of women playwrights in the 1760s to the prolific careers of Cowley and Inchbald at the end of century. I challenge previous theories that women thrived on the London stage because of the benevolence of male managers like David Garrick, and instead focus on women's creative choices and professional savvy.

RÉSUMÉ

"Comédie féministe" explore le lien crucial entre la professionnalisation des femmes dramaturges et la comédie dans les théâtres de brevets de Londres au XVIIIe siècle. Près d'une centaine de femmes ont produit des pièces de théâtre entre 1660 et 1800, dont la plupart étaient des comédies. Je démontre que les femmes dramaturges étaient attirées par la comédie parce que ce genre était plus en demande sur le plan commercial. Il offrait donc la meilleure chance aux femmes de voir leur travail passer en production et être célébré par le public. De plus, alors que le genre dramatique est consacré aux interrogations sur la société contemporaine, la comédie offre aux femmes l'occasion de mettre de l'avant publiquement et de manière subversive les expériences et les problèmes d'oppression sexistes envers les femmes. Tout au long du siècle, les femmes ont expérimenté de manière agressive la forme, la structure et le genre de la comédie comme moyen clef de naviguer dans cette industrie dominée par les hommes. Je souligne les façons dont elles se sont appuyées sur la comédie pour atteindre un succès professionnel optimal et une expression créative.

Je m'appuie sur cinq études de cas de femmes dramaturges de comédie au cours de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, 1750-1800: Catherine Clive, Frances Brooke, Frances Burney, Hannah Cowley et Elizabeth Inchbald. Mon intérêt pour les dramaturges de la seconde moitié du siècle me permet d'explorer une période florissante de la production théâtrale des femmes après leur quasi-disparition suivant la mise en œuvre de la loi de 1737 sur les licences de scène. Je trace une ligne à part entre les post-pièces comiques du milieu du siècle de Clive et la résurgence des femmes dramaturges dans les années 1760. Je conteste les théories précédentes selon lesquelles les femmes sont revenues sur la scène londonienne grâce à de la bienveillance de gérants masculins comme David Garrick. Je me concentre plutôt sur l'intérêt créatif et

professionnel des femmes pour la dramaturgie comique à travers une analyse minutieuse des carrières et des pièces de théâtre de chacune de ces femmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The seeds of this dissertation took root in 2008 in an undergraduate course on eighteenth-century drama at MacEwan University. Since that time, I have been captivated by the fierce, funny, and feminist women playwrights of the period.

Completing my dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, McGill's Department of English and Faculty of Arts, and the Literary Encyclopedia. The first of these also supported a two-month archival research trip to England in 2019. While there, I was generously advised by Prof. David Taylor, my host supervisor at Oxford University. I am indebted to several libraries for giving me access to their archives while on this research trip, and to many others that provided me access over the past five years: the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Chawton House Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Houghton Library, the Huntington Library, and McGill Rare Books and Special Collections.

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I thank *Women's Writing* for allowing me to reproduce my article "Comic Collusion: Frances Burney's *The Witlings* and the Mentorship of Arthur Murphy," in the third chapter of this dissertation, and to *Eighteenth-Century Studies* for allowing me to reproduce my forthcoming article "Negotiating Feminism in 1790s London: The Feud of Elizabeth Inchbald and Mary Wollstonecraft" in the fifth chapter of this project.

McGill sits on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the of the Kanien'kehà:ka and is home to many Indigenous peoples. I thank all the Indigenous peoples of Tiohtià:ke/Montreal for welcoming me, a Métis citizen from Alberta, to live and work on their land as I completed my PhD.

INTRODUCTION

"I here and there o'heard a Coxcomb cry, Ah, rot—'tis a Woman's Comedy."

-Aphra Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy*, 1678.

In 1695, playwright William Congreve wrote a treatise on stage comedy, stating: "I have never made any observation of what I Apprehend to be true Humour in Women […] Humour cannot Exert itself to that extravagant Degree, which it often does in the Male Sex. For if ever anything does appear Comical or Ridiculous in a Woman, I think it is little more than an acquir'd Folly, or an Affectation."[1] Congreve's complaint about women and comedy is not evidence of eighteenth-century women's inability to write and perform comedy, but of men's displeasure when they did. His scolding was written the same year that an unprecedented number of women wrote and staged plays in the London theatres. During the 1695-96 theatre season, Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter managed to stage four plays between them including two successful comedies: Pix's *The Spanish Wives* and Manley's *The Lost Lover.* The perceived professional danger posed by these women—that is, their potential to eclipse, financially and critically, their male counterparts—is apparent in the anxious responses of men like Congreve and the coxcombs Aphra Behn complains of in the epigraph above. Comedy, these men say, is simply not a woman's genre.

[1] William Congreve, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," in *The Works of William Congreve*, ed. D. F. McKenzie, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3: 70.

In the following dissertation, I explore the crucial but neglected relationship between professional women playwrights and stage comedy in eighteenth-century London.[2] Despite Congreve's claim that women had no comic potential, women wrote and produced hundreds of plays in London between 1660 and 1800, and the vast majority of their works were comedies.[3] Many of these women were working actresses, like Susanna Centlivre and Eliza Haywood, and others were members of theatrical families, like Frances Sheridan and Charlotte Charke. Still others had few, or no, connections to the theatre, like Hannah Cowley and Mariana Starke, but were middle-class women who saw the possibility of financial, creative, and critical gain in writing for the theatre. All of these women were white. While many Black women and women of colour lived and worked in London during the eighteenth century as writers, activists, servants, sex workers, business owners, and more, I have found no examples of women of colour working as professional playwrights, indicating that race, even more so than gender, played a role in determining who could write for the stage.[4] Women playwrights made up only a small percentage of dramatists of the period, roughly seven percent, yet their plays contain valuable

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[2] For the most part, I use "women/woman" as an adjective, rather than "female" to centre a social and cultural, rather than biological, understanding of gender. For more on this grammatical issue, see Mary Norris, "Female Trouble: The Debate Over "Woman" as an Adjective," *The New Yorker*, 30 May 2019. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/comma-queen/female-trouble-the-debate-over-woman-as-an-adjective.

[3] For a complete list of plays written by women and produced on London's patent stages between 1750 and 1800, the span of this study, see the appendix, 222-225.

[4] It is possible, even likely, that Black women and women of colour worked in the theatre in other capacities, but virtually no research has been done on the topic. Much recovery work remains to be done on these women's lives in eighteenth-century England. See Gretchen H. Gerzina, ed. *Britain's Black Past* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020) and Gretchen H. Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

stores of commentary on eighteenth-century gender and professional identity.[5] Women seized the rare opportunity afforded them by playwriting—and denied to them in other male-dominated venues of public dissemination such as coffeehouses, newspapers, and Parliament—to make money, express themselves creatively, and influence culture and politics. As Hester Thrale advised a young Frances Burney in 1778, writing a stage comedy was "the Road both to Honour & Profit."[6]

Despite the impressive contributions of women playwrights of the eighteenth century, a long scholarly legacy stretching to the present has emphasized the voices of major male playwrights over the contributions of women playwrights. Fiona Ritchie observes that "the attention afforded to male figures" has often been "at the expense of women who contributed to the eighteenth-century theatre," resulting in women's erasure from this vibrant period of theatre history.[7] While feminist scholarship of the late twentieth century—including David D. Mann and Susan Garland Mann's crucial survey of women's plays between 1660-1823 and Nancy Cotton's sweeping study of early women dramatists—did much to counter the disregard of women playwrights, such studies were largely invested in recovering women's "serious" contributions, referring to full-length dramas and tragedies.[8] A scholarly inclination for studying novels over

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[5] Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

[6] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 3 September 1778 in *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, eds. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 133.

[7] Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 177.

[8] David D. Mann and Susan Garland Mann, *Women Playwrights in England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1660-1823* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5; Nancy Cotton, *Women Playwrights in England, c. 1363-1750* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980).

drama has also clouded women's contributions to stage comedy, though recent studies by Emily H. Anderson, Paula Byrne, Nora Nachumi, and Francesca Saggini have highlighted the centrality of comedy within women's novels of the period.[9] Recently, studies by Lisa Freeman and Gillian Russell have drawn much need attention to the connections between gender identity and genre on the eighteenth-century stage.[10] A related body of scholarship, including foundational studies by Betsy Bolton, Anne K. Mellor, and Daniel O'Quinn, has identified the radical political and social commentary within many women's comedies of the century.[11]

However, as of 2021, only Misty Anderson's *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* focuses on the lineage of women's comedy across the century, as she traces women's treatment of marriage law on the stage.[12]

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[9] See Emily H. Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theater*, *Haywood to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002); Nora Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater* (New York: AMS Press, 2008); and Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2012).

[10] See Lisa Freeman, *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) and Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[11] See Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Daniel O'Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[12] Misty Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). For other studies that explore historical women playwrights and comedy, see Nancy Copeland, *Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women's Comedy and the Theatre* (Cornwall: Ashgate, 2004), and Susan Carlson, *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

Anderson's work is crucial in demonstrating that the marriage plot is not one dimensional and that a tradition of female dissent exists in the comedies of women from the Restoration through the end of the century. Alongside Anderson's work, my study additionally owes a great debt to Ellen Donkin's *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829*, one of the first studies to focus on the interconnected social and professional barriers faced by eighteenth-century women playwrights in the latter half of the century. Donkin highlights the great degree of institutional sexism within the theatre industry that worked against women who sought careers as playwrights.[13] Building on both Anderson's and Donkin's studies, I identify a distinct feminist voice within women's comedies defined by the playwrights' self-awareness as women working in a male-dominated industry and their consistent advocacy for both themselves and other women.

As Donkin shows, women's professional identities and negotiations with theatrical management are key to understanding their theatrical output from this period. However, I disagree with Donkin's assertion that the tolerance of managers like Garrick is to thank for the flourishing of women playwrights in the latter half of the century.[14] Donkin claims that the women playwrights who succeeded were "*designated* survivors of the system, the ones chosen to succeed."[15] My study deviates from Donkin's emphasis on male gatekeeping as I instead highlight women's agency in their own success. Women playwrights were not "lucky," as

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[13] Though not a term coined until the nineteenth century, by using the term 'sexism,' I seek to connect the prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination on the basis of gender that professional women writers faced in the past to the experiences of women in the present.

[14] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 21.

[15] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 3.

Michael Caines describes them, they were ambitious, fiercely persistent, and tough.[16] That said, I remain attuned to the formidable, gendered barriers professional women playwrights faced from the male managers of the patent theatres. Between 1750 and 1800, the period of this study, Drury Lane was managed by Garrick and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Covent Garden by John Rich, John Beard, and Thomas Harris, and the Haymarket, which became London's third patent theatre in 1767, by Samuel Foote, George Colman the Elder, and his son George Colman the Younger. This small group of men held total control over whose plays were produced and when, and they did not always operate in good faith. Thus, while my study of women playwrights of the period foregrounds their agency, it is also alert to the entrenched gendered hierarchy of the eighteenth-century theatrical institution, one in which men held the highest positions of power, and women went to extraordinary lengths to stage their work.

Writing stage comedy was appealing to women for a variety of reasons. First, comedy was in greater commercial demand, and it offered women the best financial renumeration, a key concern for women who had fewer means than men to earn money in eighteenth-century London. Additionally, while loved by the public, comedy was considered less artistically significant than tragedy and it was therefore less threatening to the male-dominated establishment and less likely to attract sexist gatekeeping. Finally, as the dramatic genre devoted to interrogating contemporary society, comedy allowed women to foreground women's experiences and issues of oppression based on gender. Thus, this dissertation demonstrates that the comic genre was essential to women's circumvention of the gendered barriers of the

[16] Michael Caines, introduction in *Major Voices: 18th Century Women Playwrights* (London: Toby Press, 2004), vii.

theatrical institution. Furthermore, these professional negotiations imbued women's comedies with meaning that is central to understanding the feminist impulses within their plays.

While some scholars are reticent to apply the label of feminist to historical women writers or prefer to use the term proto-feminist for women prior to Mary Wollstonecraft, I argue that women's stage comedy in the eighteenth century is best illuminated by foregrounding the feminist tradition that shaped these women from Aphra Behn onward. I take up Sarah Apetrei's call to expand the boundaries of feminism to include the work of historical women whose writing shares the following traits: "a call for women's equal moral, intellectual and spiritual status to be acknowledged; the critique of strategies employed by men to dominate women and keep them in subjection; and the claim that the sexual inequalities that existed in society were constructed by custom and convention and bore no relationship to a state of nature."[17] While feminism and comedy have an undeniably vexed relationship, by focusing on a body of women's comedies in the eighteenth century, I identify a clear feminist vein that runs through their works.

Women Playwrights in London, 1660-1800

When Charles II decreed in 1662 that women should perform on stage, he effectively overthrew England's all-male theatrical tradition and, unintentionally, transformed the English theatre into a space of women's professional opportunity. While many scholars have demonstrated how the theatre became an important professional space for actresses, I extend this idea to show that the same is true for women playwrights.[18] Katherine Philips' 1663 translation

[17] Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 32.

[18] For discussion of the first English actresses see Helen Brooks, *Actresses, Gender, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Playing Women* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Elizabeth

of Pierre Corneille's *La Mort de Pompeé* (1643), marked the first production of a play written by a woman to be staged in London.[19] It was followed by Frances Boothby's *Marcelia; or, The Treacherous Friend* in 1669. However, it was the prolific career of Aphra Behn that truly marked women's entrance into the world of commercial playwriting. Behn was blunt about her desire to achieve financial gain, writing that she "was forced to write for bread and not ashamed to owne it."[20] This statement, included in an address to the reader of *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), further reveals one of Behn's favourite and most influential tactics—using prefaces, prologues, and epilogues to defend her work and identity herself as equal to her male colleagues. In her preface to *The Lucky Chance* (1687), for example, Behn begs for equal treatment from audiences, critics, and other playwrights, writing:

> All I ask, is the Privilege for my Masculine Part the Poet in me, (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in. If I must not, because of my Sex, have this Freedom, but that you will usurp all to your selves

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Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Jean I. Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Katharine Eisaman Maus, "'Playhouse Flesh and Blood': Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress," *ELH* 46, no. 4 (1979): 595-617; Deborah Payne Fisk, "The Restoration Actress," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 69-91; and Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[19] I am indebted to William Van Lannep, Emmett L. Avery, Arthur H. Scouten, George Winchester Stone, Jr., and Charles Beecher Hogan, eds. *The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces*. 5 parts in 11 vols. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-68. Unless otherwise noted, I have relied on a digitized version of this text. See *Eighteenth Century Drama: Censorship, Society and the Stage.* (Marlborough: Adam Matthew, 2016), https://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/.

[20] Aphra Behn, "Sir Patient Fancy," in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, vol. 6 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 5.

> I lay down my Quill, and you shall hear no more of me, no not so much as to make Comparisons, because I will be kinder to my brothers of the Pen, than they have been to a defenceless Woman; for I am not content to write for a Third day only. I value Fame as much as if I had been born a Hero; and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful World, and scorn its sickle Favours.[21]

Alongside her feminist prologues, Behn also incorporated overt gender commentary within the fictional worlds of her plays. Her most popular comedy, *The Rover* (1677), for example, foregrounds the patriarchal oppression of female characters in the first scene and displays their desire to overthrow that oppression. As the first professional woman playwright, Behn established a technique, what Susan Carlson identifies as a "countertradition," of distinguishing herself from male playwrights through her focus on women's experiences, both her own and her characters'.[22]

Following Behn's death in 1689, she was succeeded by a group of women playwrights, Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter, known as the Female Wits, who mimicked Behn's demand that their plays be accorded the same treatment as men's.[23] Their success was exceeded by the appearance of Susanna Centlivre who wrote nineteen plays, mostly comedies, between 1700-22. Like the Wits, Centlivre modelled Behn's professional strategy. Her dedication to *The Platonick Lady* (1707) is similar to Behn's advocation for women writers in

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[21] Aphra Behn. "The Lucky Chance; Or, An Alderman's Bargain," in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, vol. 7 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 217.

[22] Carlson, *Women and Comedy*, 128.

[23] Marta Straznicky, "Restoration Women Playwrights and the Limits of Professionalism," *ELH* 64, no. 3 (1997): 715.

The Lucky Chance: "why this Wrath against the Womens Works? Perhaps you'll answer, because they meddle with things out of their Sphere: But I say, no; for since the Poet is born, why not a Woman as well as a Man?"[24] Centlivre's comedies became part of the standard eighteenth-century repertoire and she earned the status of "the most popular woman dramatist" of the century in terms of the number of plays she produced and the number of years they were performed.[25]

The meteoric rise of the professional woman playwright, however, did not last. As Judith Stanton has shown in her important quantitative analysis of women playwrights from 1660-1800, following the highly successful playwriting career of Centlivre, there was a sudden decline in women writing drama during the mid-eighteenth century.[26] The reason for this decline remains somewhat mysterious, though many scholars have drawn attention to the 1737 Stage Licensing Act, which gave the office of the Lord Chamberlain sole responsibility to vet all new plays and ban any deemed too politically sensitive, while strictly limiting performances to only a few venues.[27] This system, as opposed to that of the early modern theatre with its proliferation of venues, gave immense power to the managers of the playhouses and to the Crown, which maintained control over the theatrical works produced in London.[28] Ambitious playwrights of

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[24] Susanna Centlivre, *The Platonick Lady* (London: Printed for James Knapton, 1707), n.p.

[25] Judith Stanton, "This New Found Path Attempting': Women Dramatists in England, 1660-1800" in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women in the Theatre*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 326.

[26] Ibid., 327.

[27] Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), 103-4.

[28] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 4.

spoken drama were limited to Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and, as of the 1760s, the Haymarket during the summer season—though, as Jane Moody has shown in her important study of performance culture outside the patent theatres, a rich illegitimate performance culture thrived following the implementation of the Act.[29] For women, the passing of the Act increased the sexist gatekeeping of the patent stages. The managers who ran these houses, all men, were often playwrights themselves who tended to reserve spots for their own plays and were not inclined to take a risk on a new woman playwright.[30] Additionally, the women who had found a welcoming venue at Henry Fielding's Haymarket in the 1730s—Eliza Haywood, Charlotte Charke, Elizabeth Cooper, and others—found themselves without a home following the passing of the Act.

Jaqueline Pearson writes that the early eighteenth century saw a "decline in the female tradition of playwriting and in the importance of women as dramatists," but this is not quite the case.[31] There was indeed a mid-century lull, but women survived the Stage Licensing Act and carried on the tradition of playwriting until a new critical mass of women dramatists emerged in the 1760s. Donkin argues that David Garrick played a major role in this phenomenon while manager of Drury Lane from 1747 to 1776. Indeed, during these years, Drury Lane produced the majority of new plays written by woman playwrights, including works by Catherine Clive, Frances Sheridan, Elizabeth Griffith, Jane Pope, Jael-Henrietta Pye, Dorothy Celesia, Charlotte

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[29] See Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[30] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 6.

[31] Jaqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women Dramatists 1642-1737* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 251.

Lennox, and Hannah Cowley. Garrick also helped usher Hannah More's first play *Percy* (1777) to production at Covent Garden the year after his retirement. The success of these women snowballed, and by the 1780s and '90s the number of new plays by women finally eclipsed the totals from the late Restoration period, thanks in large part to the prolific writing of Hannah Cowley and Elizabeth Inchbald, as evidenced in Table 1.[32]

Table 1

Plays by Women Staged in London, 1660-1800

Decade	**Number of Plays**
1660	3
1670	12
1680	10
1690	14
1700	22
1710	9
1720	7
1730	10
1740	6
1750	2
1760	13
1770	19
1780	33
1790	29

Source: Data from Judith Stanton, "This New Found Path Attempting': Women Dramatists in England, 1660-1800" in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women in the Theatre*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 327.

Of further statistical note is Drury Lane's staging of nearly three hundred plays written by women of both the past and present day under Garrick's tenure, while Covent Garden staged just

[32] For details on the number of women writing plays in the Restoration and later in the century see Stanton, "Women Dramatists," Table 1, 327.

over one hundred.[33] Bluntly put, Garrick staged far more plays by women, both living and deceased, than any other manager of the century. He was more willing than his colleagues, as Donkin puts it, to take "chances on unknown women playwrights."[34] But Garrick also acted as a powerful gatekeeper, supporting women only when it suited him. As I describe in chapter two, Garrick actively sought to destroy Frances Brooke's theatrical career because he did not like her, and, as chapters two and four demonstrate, both Brooke and Cowley suspected Garrick of stealing ideas from their play manuscripts to augment the work of their rivals. Garrick retired in 1776, and his successor, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was hardly a champion of women: he barred his own wife Elizabeth Ann Linley, who had a successful singing career, from performing publicly after they married.[35] Yet, women continued to produce marketable new plays without Garrick's supposed advocacy, suggesting a more complex narrative surrounding women's professional success than the benevolent manager theory proposes.

Alternatively, "Feminist Comedy" argues that the resurgence of women playwrights can be illuminated by centering a women's theatrical tradition demarcated by fierce professional negotiation, advocation for women by women, and a strong preference for writing comedy. A pattern of momentum emerges after 1750 as the success of one woman playwright leads to the emergence of others: Clive was followed by Sheridan and Griffith in the 1760s, who in turn were followed by Pope, Pye, Celesia, Lennox, More, Burney Sarah Cheyney Gardner, Elizabeth

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[33] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 60.

[34] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 61.

[35] A. Norman Jeffares, "Sheridan, Richard Brinsley (1751-1816)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 20 April 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/25367.

Craven, Ursula Booth, and Elizabeth Richardson in the 1770s. Cowley and Inchbald dominated the theatre of the 1780s and '90s, each producing more than a dozen plays that appeared alongside the works of many other minor women playwrights including Mariana Starke, Catherine Metcalfe, Charlotte Smith, and dozens of others.[36]

Women's Comedy

The comedies of eighteenth-century women playwrights consistently display a fundamental investment in centering women's lives, agency, and desires. Pearson's foundational study of women playwrights in the first part of the eighteenth century reveals that companionate marriage, sexual attraction, access to education, and the subversion of patriarchal authority are reoccurring themes in women's comedies. In fact, according to Pearson's analysis, "comedy gives its female characters a more emphatic visibility, usually having a higher proportion of female characters to male, and allowing women to appear in more scenes, especially in more women-only scenes, to speak a higher proportion of the lines, and to open plays more often, thus presenting the play world through their eyes."[37] The same holds true for women's comedies throughout the century. In Cowley's *A Day in Turkey; or, the Russian Slaves* (1791), for example, women, not men, orchestrate the play's sexual and political plots as they work to free themselves from imprisonment. Frances Burney's *The Witlings* (1771), like Behn's *The Rover*, unconventionally opens on a group of women, in this case working-class women operating a milliner's shop. Catherine Clive's *The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats* (1750), features a woman playwright instead of a man.

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[36] Stanton, "Women Dramatists," 325-36.

[37] Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 42.

Notably, women's comedies continued to be presented to the public as *women's* comedies. Aphra Behn set the precedent that women identify themselves as the authors of their own plays, and the theatrical establishment capitalized on the apparent peculiarity of women's playwriting by marketing their gender in advertisements and playbills. As Anderson writes, "the bodies, or at least the gendered identities, of the first female playwrights became a part of their comedies."[38] This remained the case throughout the century, as women playwrights of the second wave adopted the techniques of the first. The melding of a woman playwright's gendered identity and her creative product invited audiences to interpret their plays through a woman's point of view and offered the playwrights a chance to comment on womanhood in a fictional setting with real-world implications. Hannah Cowley's comedies, for example, repeatedly feature women who insist on their own choice for a marital and sexual partner.

In Judith Stanton's statistical account of women playwrights between 1660-1800, she estimates that forty-two percent of plays written by women were comedies, while only twenty-four percent were tragedies.[39] The remaining thirty-four percent she has categorized as "miscellaneous" modes such as pastorals, afterpieces, interludes, farces, and opera.[40] These numbers align with Gwenn Davis and Beverly A. Joyce's estimate that comedy made up forty to forty-five percent of plays written by women in the century.[41] However, these numbers may vary drastically depending on how genres are categorized; most miscellaneous works can still be

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[38] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 23.

[39] Stanton "Women Dramatists," 330.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Gwenn Davis and Beverly A. Joyce, *Drama by Women to 1900: A Bibliography of American and British Writers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), xv.

broadly defined as comedy. Indeed, women's overwhelming preference for writing comedy has been masked by theatre historians' tendency to define comedy strictly as a five-act mainpiece. Yet, much of the eighteenth-century playwriting energy went toward writing afterpieces—short plays, usually comic, that followed the mainpiece. Performance records show that afterpieces drew audiences and made good profits for the house and the playwright.[42] While audiences today are accustomed to a night at the theatre involving a single performance of one genre, a night at the eighteenth-century theatre involved various performances that mixed multiple genres. The mainpiece, usually a comedy or tragedy, was followed by one or two afterpieces. Dances and musical interludes were also regularly interwoven throughout the evening. Prologues and epilogues, as Diana Solomon has demonstrated, were not mere addenda, but central components of the evening's entertainment.[43] To appreciate women's playwriting of the eighteenth century fully, then, we need to move beyond the conventional definition of stage comedy as a five-act spoken drama ending in marriage and embrace a more expansive definition that includes the plethora of funny modes in which women regularly wrote. Therefore, this dissertation considers all comic theatrical entertainment that sought to provoke humour, amusement, and laughter in its audience.

While a handful of women playwrights also wrote and staged tragedies in the second part of the century, these works tended not to achieve the same commercial success as their comedies. According to my calculations, women staged only twelve tragic plays in London's

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[42] See Robert D. Hume, "Before the Bard: "Shakespeare" in Early Eighteenth-Century London," *ELH* 64, no. 1 (1997): 58.

[43] See Diana Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues of Restoration Theater: Gender, Performance and Print* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013).

patent theatres between 1750-1800, in comparison to seventy-five comedies.[44] Performance records show that women's tragedies often floundered—with the exception of Hannah More's *Percy* (1777), which was a major commercial success—while their comedies prospered. For example, Frances Brooke spent decades attempting to produce a tragedy, only to achieve success as a playwright when she switched to comedy. Similarly, Hannah Cowley's two tragedies received mixed reviews, while her comedies made her famous. The only play Frances Burney ever staged was a tragedy, though her contemporaries believed that comedy was her forte, and the staging of this tragedy was so disastrous it was cancelled after a single performance. Inchbald pulled her tragedy *The Massacre* from publication on the advice of her friend and confidant William Godwin. These examples demonstrate that while tragedy appealed to women playwrights creatively, it was not an effective genre for them. Tragedy was closely associated with its classical roots, and it was deemed that women, without formal education, were unnatural authors of the genre—an attitude that persisted well into the nineteenth century.[45]

Writing comedy was not without its pitfalls for women, of course. Aphra Behn, who had set a critical precedent for women playwrights—both in terms of her preference for comedy and in her outspoken defense of her ability to write great plays—was increasingly viewed as morally degenerate as the century progressed. While the Female Wits and Centlivre had openly acknowledged their debt to Behn, it became increasingly hazardous for other women to do so; when a reviewer criticized Hannah Cowley's *The World as it Goes* in 1781, he used Behn's legacy to attack her, writing, "it exceeds in gross ribaldry, the productions of the notorious Mrs.

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[44] See appendix, 222-225.

[45] Angela Escott, *The Celebrated Mrs Cowley*: *Experiments in Dramatic Genre, 1776-1794* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 19.

Behn."[46] This attack did not stop Cowley from continuing to draw on Behn's comedies for inspiration, but when she later adapted Behn's *The Lucky Chance* for her own *The School for Greybeards* in 1786, she avoided naming Behn in her preface and instead referred to her as "a poet of the drama, once highly celebrated."[47] Though many more women wrote plays in the second half of the century than the first, the belief that playwriting was unfeminine persisted, as Donkin summarizes:

> Playwriting, as a profession, violated all the rules of conduct. It conferred on women a public voice. It gave them some control over how women were represented on stage. It required that they mingle freely with people of both sexes in a place of work that was not the home. It made ambition a prerequisite, and, perhaps most importantly, it offered the possibility of acquiring capital."[48]

While many aspects of playwriting were appealing to women, not the least of which was the desire to earn money, it was also a risky profession. As Frances Burney's father told her when she wanted to produce her first stage comedy in 1779, "in the Novel way, there is no danger," suggesting that in the drama way there was plenty.[49]

Following the debut of Elizabeth Inchbald's last play in 1805, no one arrived to take her place as resident woman playwright of London's commercial theatres. Donkin has described this

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[46] *Morning Herald,* 26 February 1781.

[47] Hannah Cowley, "A School for Greybeards; or, the Mourning Bride (1786)," in *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2, ed. Frederick M. Link (New York: Garland, 1979), vii. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

[48] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 18.

[49] Charles Burney to Frances Burney, 29 August 1779, *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, vol 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 281.

phenomenon as the disappearance of women playwrights, observing bleakly that, for women, "this 140-year period is marked by struggle and eventual defeat."[50] However, while women of the nineteenth century struggled to achieve the same commercial success on the patent stages as their foremothers, they did continue to write plays. Notably, Joanna Baillie wrote twenty-seven plays in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and though only a minority were ever produced, she achieved high critical regard as a playwright: Sir Walter Scott wrote that she was "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare."[51] Following Donkin's study, a number of scholars have demonstrated that the so-called disappearance of the woman playwright was not really a disappearance at all, but a shift in status and visibility.[52] This shift has been linked to the public's increased demand for melodrama and spectacle over spoken drama, the financial and managerial disarray of the patent houses, and a growing social conservativism that relegated women to the home and shifted their efforts to less public forms of writing including the novel.[53] There was also a broad movement in the early nineteenth century to promote a "national" drama, implicitly excluding women who were

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[50] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 39.

[51] Sir Walter Scott, letter to Miss Smith, 4 March 1808, in *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. David Douglas (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1894) 1: 99.

[52] For important discussion of nineteenth-century woman playwrights, see Jacky Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Catherine B. Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Catherine B. Burroughs, ed. *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Katherine Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

[53] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 34-36; Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing,* 34-35.

considered unsuitable for representing the nation.[54] By focusing on professional women playwrights' reliance on comedy in the later half of the eighteenth century, this dissertation links the changing conditions for women playwrights at the turn of the century to the major changes occurring within London's theatrical scene.

Chapter Summaries

In the following chapters, I consider five professional women playwrights of comedy between 1750-1800: Catherine Clive, Frances Burney, Frances Brooke, Hannah Cowley, and Elizabeth Inchbald. My focus on women of the second half of the century allows me to explore the flourishing period of theatrical output by women following the mid-century lull. Attuned to the comic variation of the period and women's experimentation with comedy, I have chosen plays that represent a wide range of form and genre: burlesque, musical comedy, farce, sentimental and laughing comedy, and combinations thereof. To avoid an oversimplified portrait of women's professional trajectories, I have chosen subjects that achieved varying degrees of commercial success, from Burney, whose comedies were never published or performed, to Brooke, whose musical comedies *Rosina* and *Marian* were extraordinarily popular. I attend to the material conditions of each woman's life as it pertains to her career in the theatre, and I read their plays through this lens.

While Catherine Clive's remarkable acting career is well documented in historical biography and has been illuminated by modern feminist theatre scholars, very little has been

[54] In 1832, the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature convened in the House of Commons to discuss the state of the National Drama, supposedly in decline as illegitimate theatre—melodrama, pantomime, spectacle—thrived. For further discussion of the intersection between national drama and gender see Bolton, *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage*, 9-44.

written about her identity as a playwright. Yet, in the later half of her career, between 1749 and 1769, Clive wrote four comic afterpieces for her benefit performances making her the most prolific woman dramatist of the mid-eighteenth century. Clive's first play *The Rehearsal* is remarkable for its explicit critique of the misogynistic erasure of women playwrights from the theatrical establishment. While Clive's contribution to playwriting in the latter half of the eighteenth century has been overshadowed by the role of her manager, colleague, and sometimes rival, Garrick, I show how Clive built on the comic techniques of her predecessors to claw back space for women playwrights that resulted in their sustained resurgence.

The second chapter continues to deconstruct the portrait of Garrick as female advocate by turning to the theatrical career of Frances Brooke. Brooke fostered a dream of becoming a dramatist and struggled throughout her life to achieve this goal. She attempted to stage her tragedy, *Virginia*, in the early 1750s, but after being led on and, eventually, rejected by Garrick, she published the play in 1756. In the same year, she wrote a critical review of Garrick who, in turn, was so angered by Brooke's criticism that for the remainder of his career he actively sought to bar her from writing for the stage. Only after Garrick's death in 1779 was Brooke finally able to launch her career as a playwright, but not as a tragedienne. Instead, she harnessed her knowledge of managing the London Opera House and wrote two commercially successful comic operas, *Rosina* (1782) and *Marian* (1784). Comic opera was seen as a lower form of entertainment than spoken drama, but Brooke, following her struggles with the patent system, used the popular form to propel her own professional success while simultaneously resisting the misogynist conventions of the pastoral genre.

Transitioning to consider other types of comedy, the following chapter takes up one woman's entanglement in the eighteenth-century debate over laughing and sentimental comedy.

Focusing on the well-researched suppression of Frances Burney's first comedy *The Witlings* (1779) by her father Charles Burney and Samuel Crisp, I turn my attention to Burney's relationship with popular comic playwright Arthur Murphy, one of the most ardent proponents of laughing comedy. While Burney clearly wrote *The Witlings* in the style of her mentor Murphy, her journals and letters reveal that Crisp, a family friend, believed writing comedy to be fundamentally unfeminine. It was this sexist sentiment, I argue, that was at the root of his censorship of the play.

Turning to the production of women's comedy in the post-Garrick era, the fourth chapter offers an analysis of Hannah Cowley's career-long criticism of the sexist theatrical institution through the lens of her anti-imperial farce, *A Day in Turkey*. Cowley's penultimate comedy, I argue, is undergirded by decades of her frustration with the patent system and dealings with sexist male managers and critics. After a promising reception of her first play *The Runaway* in 1776, Cowley struggled to get her plays produced by Richard Brinsley Sheridan at Drury Lane or Thomas Harris at Covent Garden. *A Day in Turkey* launches a complex metatheatrical critique of the theatrical institution by drawing on a tradition of English women writers using stereotypes of the East to leverage their own concerns about gender and power. Cowley depicts white, female characters as powerful theatrical agents who use the harem as a stage from which to manipulate the voyeuristic gaze of the male characters/audience.

In the final decades of the century, comic trends shifted toward a strong embrace of affect and sensibility, a precursor to nineteenth-century melodrama.[55] I consider this late-century sentimental shift, which emphasized subservient daughters and benevolent patriarchs, in Elizabeth Inchbald's 1798 play *Lovers' Vows*, an adaptation of August von Kotzebue's *Das Kind*

[55] See Freeman, *Character's Theater,* 193-234.

der Liebe (1790). Inchbald embraced sentimental comedy and harnessed the genre to maintain her virtuous reputation and propel her career, which was on par with that of the greatest male playwrights of the day including Colman the Younger and Sheridan. However, in reviews of her plays and novels, Mary Wollstonecraft identified Inchbald's sentimental treatment of female characters and her reliance on patriarchal benevolence as a betrayal of women. While Inchbald never wrote a public rebuttal to Wollstonecraft's criticism, I argue that *Lovers' Vows*, written the year following Wollstonecraft's death, can be read as a defense against Wollstonecraft's critique and an articulation of Inchbald's own feminism, founded on sentimental bonds.

Together, these five case studies reveal the comic strategies that women adopted in order to achieve professional success in the London theatres between 1750 and 1800. Through close readings of plays by Clive, Brooke, Burney, Cowley, and Inchbald, I demonstrate that women's comedies were deeply informed by the professional and gender identities of their authors. My attention to the crucial link between women playwrights and comedy therefore reveals a fundamental truth that has been overlooked in theatrical history—women, it turns out, have always been funny. Though detractors like Congreve continued to deny women's comic and theatrical power throughout the century, this dissertation will show that women were, in fact, leaders in stage comedy of the period and that their work had significant cultural and social influence.

CHAPTER ONE

Catherine Clive: The Resurgence of the Comic Woman Playwright in London

On 15 December 1774, retired London actress Catherine "Kitty" Clive (née Raftor, 1711-85) offered encouraging advice in a letter to her protégée Jane Pope. The young actress had recently been cast in the minor role of Lucy in Richard Cumberland's comedy *The Choleric Man*, which was to debut on 19 December 1774 at Drury Lane. Pope was frustrated by the casting, but Clive soothed her anxieties, writing:

> I am sorry to hear you have an indifferent part in the new Comedy, but I don't at all wonder when you tell me the author. [H]e is a wretch of wretches, however I charge you to make a good part of it[.] Let it be never so bad, I have often done so myself therefore I know it is to be done[:] turn it & wind it & play it in a different manner to his intention and as hundred to one but you succeed.[1]

In this remarkable letter, Clive proposes a model of women's theatrical agency that subverts the male-dominated theatrical establishment. Acknowledging that Pope has been given a meagre part by a boorish male playwright—Cumberland was famously disliked by other theatre professionals—Clive explains that she can still "turn," "wind," and "play" the part in a manner that will win audiences and improve her career as Clive herself had "often done."[2] Indeed, an

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[1] Catherine Clive, letter to Jane Pope, 15 December 1774, Copies of letters to Jane Pope from various people, 1769-1808, in the hand of James Winston [manuscript], ca. 1840, Folger Shakespeare Library, W.b. 73. Quoted in Berta Joncus, *Kitty Clive, or the Fair Songster (1728-1765)* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), 8.

[2] Ibid. For more information on Richard Cumberland's conflicts with theatrical personnel, including Garrick and Sheridan, see Arthur Sherbo, "Cumberland, Richard (1732-1811), playwright and novelist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 2 April 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/6888.

overview of Clive's career in the theatre reveals her impressive and unrelenting effort to manipulate and circumvent fickle playwright-managers, sexist critics, and demanding audiences for her own professional gain.

This chapter considers Clive's playwriting as an important extension of her efforts to claim professional agency as a woman within the male-dominated theatrical industry of mid-century London. During the final two decades of her career, 1750-70, Clive wrote four comic afterpieces, short plays that followed the full-length mainpieces: *The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats* (1750), *Every Woman in Her Humour* (1760), *The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout* (1763), and *The Faithful Irish Woman* (1765).[3] Unfortunately, Clive's afterpieces have been largely neglected, and sometimes even disparaged, by modern theatre scholars. One modern biography refers to Clive's plays as "clever, but clearly not work[s] of comic art," and another writes damningly that, "for all [Clive's] sensitivity in interpreting other people's humour, and for all her own possession of much impromptu wit, she could not write farces."[4] In fact, Clive's plays were well-liked and helped advance both her own career and that of other woman playwrights in London following the implementation of the 1737 Stage Licensing Act, which

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[3] All of Clive's plays survive in manuscript at the Huntington Library in the John Larpent Collection: *The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats* (1750), LA 86; *Every Woman in Her Humour* (1760), LA 174; *The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout* (1763), LA 220; and *The Faithful Irish Woman* (1765), LA 247. Two additional farces are sometimes attributed to Clive: *The Island of Slaves* (1761), LA 190 and a lost play titled *The London 'Prentice* (1743), but the authorship of these two pieces remains unconfirmed. See Joncus, *Songster*, f.n. 378-79.

[4] Sallie M. Strange, "Clive, Catherine," in *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers*, ed. Janet Todd (New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 86; Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, editors, "Clive, Catherine," in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, vol. 3, 341-62 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 353.

had a devastating impact on the number of new women playwrights able to access the London stage.

Through an analysis of her playwriting, this chapter argues that Clive played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the first and second waves of women writing for the London stage by cementing the identity of the woman playwright as savvy negotiator, female advocate, and comedienne. I begin by describing the ways in which Clive sought to professionalize her identity as a theatrical woman through two major clashes with management known as the Polly Row and the Drury Lane Rebellion. I then turn to Clive's foray into playwriting in the mid-century, which I read as an extension of her effort to circumvent sexist barriers within the industry and sustain her own career and celebrity. I focus especially on Clive's first play, *The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats*, which features a feisty woman playwright named Mrs. Hazard who tries, and fails, to produce her work in the face of much sexist antagonism. In the play, Clive confronts the barriers facing women playwrights as she purposefully re-appropriates the familiar misogynist comedy used against women playwrights since the Restoration. Unlike Clive's other plays, which received only one or two performances and were never published, *Bayes in Petticoats* was well received and had a sustained influence; it was performed at least thirteen times between 1750-62 at Drury Lane and was published in London and Dublin in 1753.[5] I argue that Clive's foray into playwriting, combined with her feminist theatrical commentary in *Bayes in Petticoats*, reminded audiences that women could write funny plays,

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[5] *Bayes in Petticoats* was performed on 15 March 1750, 3 April 1750, 26 April 1750, 27 April 1750, 12 March 1751, 19 March 1751, 3 May 1751, 22 March 1753, 3 April 1753, 4 May 1753, 31 October 1753, 19 April 1755, 22 March 1762, 10 May 1762. Harry William Pedicord lists a fourteenth performance on 27 March 1750, but this appears to be an error as the afterpiece at Drury Lane that evening was Garrick's *Lethe*. See Pedicord, *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 208-9.

while also exposing the absurdity of a misogynist culture that kept women away from the stage in the first place. Though it is Drury Lane manager David Garrick who is generally given credit for reintroducing women playwrights to London in the second half of the century, I end my chapter by reorienting attention to Clive's role in this shift. I demonstrate that Clive played a crucial part in supporting the next generation of women playwrights, beginning with Frances Sheridan and Elizabeth Griffith in the early 1760s.

This chapter owes a great debt to two recent feminist studies that have drawn much needed attention to Clive's importance within the eighteenth-century theatrical marketplace: Felicity Nussbaum's study of Clive in *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (2010) and Berta Joncus' *Kitty Clive, or The Fair Songster* (2019). These studies mark an important scholarly shift in evaluating Clive beyond her role as a popular actress of the mid-eighteenth century and toward her multifaceted identity as an actress, singer, celebrity, and playwright who had an iconoclastic influence on the theatre industry. Joncus is chiefly interested in Clive's contributions to music and English opera, and Nussbaum focuses primarily on Clive's identity as a celebrity actress. In turn, my study will focus on illuminating Clive's identity and influence as the most prolific woman playwright of the mid-eighteenth century.[6]

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[6] There is a small but valuable body of twentieth-century scholarship on Clive's plays, beginning with Patrick J. Crean's doctoral dissertation "The Life and Times of Kitty Clive" (University of London, 1933). Crean's research was expanded upon by Richard Frushell who wrote a dissertation and a handful of articles on the topic. See his "Kitty Clive as Dramatist," *Durham University Journal* 32, no. 2 (1971): 125-132; "The Textual Relationship and Biographical Significance of Two Petite Pieces by Mrs. Catherine (Kitty) Clive," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 9, no. 1 (1970): 51-58; and "An Edition of the Afterpieces of Kitty Clive" (doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University, 1968). See also Matthew J. Kinservik, "Garrick's Unpublished Epilogue for Catherine Clive's *The Rehearsal: or, Bays in Petticoats* (1750)," Appendix, *Études Anglaises* 49, no. 3 (1996): 320-26.

The Polly Row and the Drury Lane Rebellion

Throughout her career, Clive worked to transform her identity as a theatrical woman into that of a respected and skilled professional, setting an important precedent for the women, both actresses and playwrights, who followed her.[7] In the following section, I focus on two incidents, the Polly Row and the Drury Lane Rebellion, that best exemplify Clive's efforts. Clive began performing in London in 1728 at the age of 17 in minor roles and singing parts at Drury Lane.[8] William Chetwood, prompter at the time of Clive's debut, recalled that the young actress "had a facetious Turn of Humour, and infinite Spirits, with a Voice and Manner in singing Songs of Pleasantry peculiar to herself."[9] She gained increasingly significant roles and, by 1732, Henry Fielding began to write parts specifically for her including Isabel in *The Old Debauchees*, Kissinda in *The Covent Garden Tragedy,* and Lappet in *The Miser.*[10] But it was the role of Polly in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) that would become the most important of Clive's early career. When Gay's new ballad opera opened in 1728 at Covent Garden, it "shattered theatrical conventions and box-office records," and became part of the repertoire for the remainder of the century.[11] The part of Polly, a young ingenue, was initially performed by

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[7] Fiona Ritchie has argued that Clive, alongside actresses like Hannah Pritchard, played an enormous role in "strengthen[ing] the social standing of theatre performers," especially women. See Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare*, 43.

[8] Biographical information on Clive is taken from Joncus' biography and Clive's entry in the *Biographical Dictionary*. See also K. A. Crouch, "Clive [née Raftor], Catherine [Kitty] (1711-1785), actress," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 17 Apr. 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/5694.

[9] William Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage: From its Origin in Greece Down to the Present Time* (London: Printed for W. Owen, 1766)*,* 127.

[10] Highfill et al., "Clive," 344.

[11] Joncus, *Songster*, 34.

seventeen-year-old Lavinia Fenton who stirred much public sensation due to her "unschooled singing" and her off-stage relationships.[12] As Joncus summarizes, "factions formed over whether Fenton was a notorious slut or a beguiling innocent [and] debates unfurled across an unprecedented volume and variety of media: prints, ballads, broadsides, and an avalanche of commentary."[13] Fenton left the stage suddenly when she began a relationship with the Duke of Bolton (the two later married following the death of Bolton's first wife), leaving the role open to other actresses. Clive's successful debut as Polly at Drury Lane on 1 August 1732 fortified her identity as one of London's top singers and actresses.

There are various aspects of Clive's portrayal of Polly that illuminate her early professionalization efforts. First, Clive managed to navigate the infamous role—sexualized both because of Polly's plot line and the sensation surrounding Fenton's initial portrayal—without garnering the same notoriety that had dogged Fenton, by resisting the association between actress and sexual impropriety. This was no easy task, as Nussbaum points out, since the actress appeared on stage for the public's entertainment but had to appear "sufficiently distant from [the] commercial transactions" upon which her very livelihood relied.[14] While playing the role of Polly, Clive decided to marry in early October 1733. Though her union with George Clive was not a love match—the couple were totally estranged for most of their lives—the arrangement allowed Clive to claim the respectability of a married woman, while her absentee husband did

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[12] Ibid., 36.

[13] Ibid., 38.

[14] Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 153.

not interfere in her business arrangements.[15] Evidence of Clive's efforts to portray herself as a faithful young wife can be seen in Henry Fielding's dedicatory epistle to Clive in *The Intriguing Chambermaid* (1734):

> Great favourite as you are with your audience, you would be much more so were they acquainted with your private character […] did they see you, who can charm them on the stage with personating the foolish and vicious characters of your sex, acting in real life the part of the best wife, the best daughter, the best sister, and the best friend.[16]

Clive's efforts to combine a certain feminine virtuosity with her identity as an actress appear to have been an effective strategy. Her unusually long career as an actress, forty-one years, was notably free of sexual scandals.

Though free from accusations that she might be another Fenton, Clive soon faced a different professional crisis in playing Polly. It was the convention of the eighteenth-century stage for performers to "own" parts, that is, play a role until they retired or agreed to pass it on to someone else.[17] Thus, after Fenton left the stage, Clive was free to assume the part of Polly. However, in 1736, Theophilus Cibber, then manager of Drury Lane, attempted to give his wife, actress Susannah Cibber, the role of Polly and downgrade Clive to the smaller role of Lucy. Seeing this move as a clear threat to her livelihood and professional prospects, Clive turned to the public, publishing a complaint in the *Daily Post* on 19 November 1736:

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[15] Joncus convincingly argues that the marriage may have been a sham, obscuring Catherine's and George's homosexuality. See Joncus, *Songster*, 153-57.

[16] Henry Fielding, Epistle to *The Intriguing Chambermaid*, in *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding*, ed. Thomas Lockwood, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 582.

[17] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 161.

> Not only the Part of Polly, but likewise other Parts (as could be made appear) have been demanded of me for Mrs. Cibber, which made me conclude, (and, I think with Reason) that there was a Design form'd against me, to deprive by degrees of every Part in which I have had the Happiness to appear with any Reputation; and, at length, by this Method, to make me so little useful to the Stage, as not to deserve the Sallary I now have, which is much inferior to that of several other Performers.[18]

Clive not only stakes her claim to the role of Polly, but she states her own professional rights and well-deserved financial renumeration. Drawing attention to her finances was an unusual and potentially dangerous move for an actress to make, but Clive carefully paired her complaint with a heartfelt appeal to her fans.

Though Clive's grievance was primarily with the conduct of Theophilus Cibber, her petition incited the press to suppose a sensationalized rivalry between herself and Susannah Cibber: Henry Woodward's pantomimic farce, *The Beggar's Pantomime; or, the Contending Columbines* (1736), capitalized on the dispute and portrayed both Clive and Cibber as prima donnas profiting from, and enjoying, the public attention the row received.[19] In a dramatic ultimatum, Clive was allowed to perform Polly again on 31 December 1736 and the audience was permitted to make a final decision on who should play the part. According to a review in the *London Evening Post,* Clive won the audience over with a masterful speech:

> Mrs. Clive, who play'd the part of Polly, when she came forward, address'd herself to the House, saying Gentlemen, I am very sorry it should be thought I have in any Manner

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[18] *Daily Post*, 19 November 1736.

[19] *The Beggars' Pantomime* ran for three months and was published in three editions.

> been the Occasion of the least Disturbance; and then cry'd in so moving a Manner, that even Butchers wept. Then she told them, She was almost ready with her Part of Lucy, and at all Times shou'd be willing to play such Parts as the Town should direct, and desir'd to know if they were willing she should go on with the part of Polly; she behaving in so humble a Manner, the House approv'd of her Behaviour by a general Clap.[20]

Clive countered the press' depiction of her as demanding and mercantile, with a performance of feminine subservience and self-effacement. Her skillful maneuvering of the audience, both on stage and in the papers, proved effective. She, not Cibber, kept the part. Though the matter of two actresses quarreling over a part may seem inconsequential, Joncus explains that the results of the Polly Row were "a benchmark in the history of actresses, and of the industry of eighteenth-century theatrical celebrity."[21] The incident not only drew attention to the precarity of actors' rights and compensation at that time, but it exposed the immense power that a canny performer like Clive could have over theatrical politics. For a woman, whose professional and financial gain always bordered on the indecorous, this was a powerful revelation.

Clive faced another professional conflict with theatrical management in 1743, when manager Charles Fleetwood refused to compensate fully the Drury Lane actors. As Judith Milhous and Robert Hume have shown, Fleetwood claimed that the theatre was losing money because of the high salary of star performers like Clive, while the actors claimed that Fleetwood was stealing from the company.[22] The actors were, in fact, correct. According to Milhous and

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[20] *London Evening Post*, 1 January 1737.

[21] Berta Joncus, "'In Wit Superior, as in Fighting': Kitty Clive and the Conquest of a Rival Queen," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2011): 24.

[22] See Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "The Drury Lane Actors' Rebellion of 1743," *Theatre Journal* 42, no. 1 (1990): 57-80.

Hume, in order to pay his exorbitant gambling debts, "Fleetwood and his creditors were milking the theatre of every penny of cash they could squeeze out of it."[23] A group of actors including Clive, Garrick (who had joined the company in 1742 after his debut season at Goodman's Fields Theatre), Charles Macklin, and Hannah Pritchard joined forces to stop performing until they received proper compensation. They simultaneously petitioned the Lord Chamberlain to intercede and allow them a license to perform their own plays.

At the beginning of the dispute, known as the Drury Lane Rebellion, Clive's position was strong. Since the Polly Row, she had managed to maintain her virtuous reputation and celebrity authority. This new dispute, however, proved to be more jeopardizing. As she had in 1736, Clive once again turned directly to her fan base, explaining why she was refusing to perform in a letter published in the *Daily Gazetteer* on 23 September 1743:

> I think it incumbent on me to let the Publick know (to whom I am alone obliged for all the Advantages I have reciev'd in my Profession) the true Reason for my not performing as usual.
>
> It is said, that I have quitted the stage, intending to Act no more; it is also reported, that my Demands on the Manager are so exorbitant, that it is impossible for him to comply with them.
>
> In answer to these Insinuations, or Assertions, (which I suppose are intended to injure me) they being false; I am obliged to say, that I have not a Fortune that can support me independent of the Stage; and so far from making extravagant Demands, that I have not made any. My Reason for not performing, is, That I have a very great Sum due to me

[23] Milhous and Hume, "Actors' Rebellion," 66.

> from the Manager, for which I have often apply'd to him to no Purpose; therefore I hope, I shall be justified in not entering into fresh Agreements with one, who has broke through his Bonds and Promises of paying me, what is justly my Due.[24]

Here, Clive makes a reasonable argument, stating that she will not work for free, but Fleetwood fought back by publishing an account of the actors' salaries in the papers, exaggerating Clive's income.[25] Only Garrick's earnings topped Clive's £525 wage per annum.[26] Both audiences and the Lord Chamberlain were disturbed by these numbers and, in a major blow to the revolting actors, the Lord Chamberlain sided with management and refused to allow the actors to perform elsewhere. Without the ability to perform, the actors were forced to scramble for positions at the patent theatres. Some, like Garrick, returned to Drury Lane, while Clive went to Covent Garden.

With the matter of the actors' pay left largely unresolved, Clive managed to survive the remainder of the 1743-44 season at Covent Garden until manager John Rich dismissed her. Clive addressed this indignity with the public in the form of a short pamphlet titled *The Case of Mrs Clive* (1744). She once again accused Fleetwood of stealing from her and other actors, defended the salary she had been paid, and chastised Rich for firing her without notice. She presents herself directly, clearly, and humbly to the readers, writing:

> I am sorry I am reduced to say any thing in favour of myself; but, as I think I merit as much as another Performer, and the Managers are so desirous to convince me of the contrary, I hope I shall be excused; especially when I declare, that at this time, I am not

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[24] *Daily Gazetteer,* 23 September 1743.

[25] Joncus, *Songster*, 286.

[26] *Daily Advertiser*, 15 October 1743.

the least vain of my Profession.[27]

Clive's pamphlet was effective. Powerful fans, specifically the Prince and Princess of Wales, attended an impromptu benefit concert which resulted in Rich re-hiring her for the 1744-45 season at Covent Garden.[28] She returned to Drury Lane for the 1744-45 season by which point Fleetwood had sold his shares and left.[29] As Joncus emphasizes the historical significance of the Polly Row, so Nussbaum draws attention to the importance of Clive's role in the Drury Lane Rebellion: "Clive's polemical pamphlet marked a historical moment when an actress first made an extended public plea to be treated as a respected professional, and to be granted appropriate commercial reward."[30] However, Clive did not escape unscathed from standing up to Fleetwood and Rich. Her second highly publicized battle with management had cemented her reputation as a temperamental diva. Years later, Tate Wilkinson would summarize Clive's personality in his memoirs as "passionate, cross, [and] vulgar."[31] Exacerbating matters was the fact that Clive was getting older. By the mid-century, Clive was nearly forty and still playing the parts of young ingenues like Polly in *The Beggar's Opera* and Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Other actresses might have retired and passed on their roles to younger counterparts, but Clive was not one to bow to yet another sexist barrier of the theatrical institution—Garrick, after all, played

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[27] Catherine Clive, *The Case of Mrs. Clive: Submitted to the Publick* (London: Printed for B. Dod, 1744), 18-19.

[28] Highfill et al., "Clive," 349.

[29] *Daily Post*, 26 November 1744.

[30] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 166.

[31] Tate Wilkinson, *Memoirs of His Own Life*, 3 vols. (York: Wilson, Spence, and Mawman), 3: 42.

Hamlet until he was fifty-nine. Instead, Clive cunningly shifted the trajectory of her career, writing her own plays to display her enduring talent at its best.

An Actress Turned Playwright

Over a fifteen-year period between 1750 and 1765, Clive wrote and staged four comic afterpieces at Drury Lane. All four plays were written and produced for her benefit performances, a convention of the eighteenth-century theatrical contract in which an actor was allocated the proceeds from one evening's performances after house expenses. Matthew J. Kinservik has demonstrated that benefit performances made up a large percentage of Clive's annual earnings, sometimes as much as half. [32] It is unsurprising, then, that Clive identified a financial and professional opportunity in writing her own afterpieces which she could tailor to promote her renowned comic acting, singing, and, for the first time in dramatic form, her writing.

As I explained in the introduction, the mid-century was a particularly difficult period for women playwrights following the vacuum left by the death of prolific playwright Susanna Centlivre in 1723 and the implementation of the Stage Licensing Act in 1737. The Act gave the office of the Lord Chamberlain the power to prohibit any play deemed too political or disruptive, and strictly limited performances to London's patent venues, though plenty of non-patent, illegal, theatrical activity continued to occur.[33] Exacerbating matters, the men who managed the patent houses were often playwrights themselves and therefore reserved spots for their own work.[34]

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[32] Matthew J. Kinservik, "Benefit Play Selection at Drury Lane 1729-1769; the Cases of Mrs Cibber, Mrs Clive, and Mrs Pritchard," *Theatre Notebook* 50, no. 1 (1996): 19.

[33] Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 103-4.

[34] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 6.

Thus, the Act drastically limited access to the stage for aspiring playwrights, men and women alike; Kinservik explains that following the implementation of the Act premieres of new mainpieces dropped by a staggering two thirds.[35] For women playwrights, the gatekeeping of the theatrical market was only further entrenched by the Act. While a handful of women continued to write plays, the number of productions dwindled. Standouts include Charlotte Charke, daughter of Colley Cibber, who managed to stage a number of original productions in illegitimate venues, and Mrs. Hoper, of whom almost nothing is known except that she staged three short productions at the Haymarket in the 1740s: *The Battle of Poinctiers; or, The English Prince* (1747), *The Cyclopedia* (1748), and *Queen Tragedy Restor'd* (1749).[36] Poet Letitia Pilkington also managed to stage a comedy, *The Turkish Court, or The London 'Prentice*, in Dublin in 1748. When Clive's first afterpiece, *Bayes in Petticoats*, debuted on 15 March 1750, it became the first of only two plays by a woman to be staged during the 1750s. The other play was Susannah Cibber's afterpiece *The Oracle*, an adaptation of Germain François Poullain de Saint-Foix's *L'oracle* (1740), which debuted at Covent Garden on 17 March 1752. Like Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats*, *The Oracle* was a comic afterpiece written and performed for Cibber's benefit, suggesting that Cibber may have been inspired by Clive's success with the experiment.

Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats* is a timely and topical interrogation of the identity of a woman playwright, Mrs. Hazard, who tries and fails to produce her first play. According to Drury Lane prompter Richard Cross, the debut performance on 15 March 1750 "went off well,"

[35] Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 99.

[36] The mysterious Mrs. Hoper earns the title of most prolific woman playwright of the 1740s with her three afterpieces.

earning Clive £240 for her benefit that year, £34 more than the previous year.[37] Clive revived the piece more than a dozen times after its debut through 1762, both for her own benefit and for other minor actors.[38] Audiences of the 1750s, therefore, would have been familiar with *Bayes in Petticoats*, revived year after year, and, as of 1753, they could purchase a copy of the text published in London and Dublin. Capitalizing on the financial and critical success of *Bayes in Petticoats*, in 1760 Clive wrote another afterpiece, *Every Woman in her Humour* (the title appears to be a gendered inversion of Ben Jonson's 1598 play *Every Man in His Humour*). Though *Every Woman* was only performed once, on 20 March 1760, Nussbaum deems it "the best of [her] small corpus," and Frushell agrees, writing that it is "the play upon which [Clive's] reputation as a minor playwright primarily should rest."[39] *Every Woman* features a more complex plot and a larger cast of characters than *Bayes in Petticoats* as a group of partygoers gather at the country home of Lord and Lady Byfield. Mrs. Croston, played by Clive, is a cantankerous widower who badgers her brother-in-law Sir John Byfield about his new wife's spending and parties:

MRS. CROSTON. Dear, Dear Brother, let's have no more on't, you really make me sick

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[37] Kinservik, "Benefit Play Selection," 18. According to the *London Stage*, for Clive's benefit of the previous year, 13 March 1749, she chose *The Suspicious Husband* as the mainpiece and *The Intriguing Chambermaid* as the afterpiece.

[38] See the entry for 15 March 1750 in the *London Stage. Bayes in Petticoats* was performed for the benefit of Miss Norris (3 April 1750, Clive's brother, James "Jemmy" Raftor (26 April 1750, 3 May 1751, 4 May 1753, 19 April 1755), Charles Leviez (27 April 1750), Sarah Ward (19 March 1751), and Mr. Dexter (3 April 1753). Sometimes these benefit performances were shared with other performers. Joncus lists an additional performance that took place without Clive on 21 May 1753, but this performance appears to have been a production of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, not Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats.*

[39] Nussbaum, *Rivals Queens*, 178; Frushell, "Dramatist," 126.

> to Death to hear you talk so. What cou'd you expect when you married such a woman
>
> SIR JOHN. Such a Woman!
>
> MRS. CROSTON. Look ye there! ay I say such a Woman, you are always complaining and teazing me with her usage of you, and then if I speak, or attempt to advise you how to prevent your ruin (for that she must bring about if she goes on at this rate) then I am snapped and interrupted.[40]

At the end of the play, Mrs. Croston is banished from Sir James' house. A group of bluestockings—Miss Gibberish, Lady Di Clatter, and Mrs. Goodfellow—add further entertainment to the play by debating the merits of science and philosophy.

Clive's next play, *The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout* (first performed on 21 March 1763), is more self-referential than *Every Woman.* Clive played Lady Jenkings, a would-be fine lady who loves to gamble at fancy parties—Clive herself was well-known for loving cards. Lady Jenkings' husband, Sir Jeremy, finds her frittering of funds infuriating, and she in turn finds him obtuse and uninteresting:

> SIR JEREMY. So Deary what are you up and dress'd already?
>
> LADY JENKINGS. Up, why I am but just come in.
>
> SIR JEREMY. Ha, ha, ha, ain't you, ain't you; well, that's a very good joke I protest; but just come in. You must know Deary, I was so fatigue'd with business yesterday that I went to bed early, I was fast asleep by ten o'clock upon my credit Deary. I never miss'd you; 'tis a very good Joke tho, that you shou'd be out all night & I never miss you, ha, ha, ha, a very good joke indeed.

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[40] Catherine Clive, *Every Woman in Her Humour* (1760), The Huntington Library, John Larpent Collection, LA 174, 5-6.

LADY JENKINGS. Ha, ha, ha! a prodigious fine Joke to be sure; why, Sir Jeremy, you might be out of the House for ten years and I shou'd never miss you, ha, ha, ha![41]

After Lady Jenkings cleverly wins back her losses, she and her husband make amends. Clive later adapted this play into two acts and re-titled it *The Faithful Irish Woman*, which debuted for her benefit on 18 March 1765. *The Faithful Irish Woman* has a similar plot and characters to *The Sketch,* but Clive played a new character, Mrs. O'Conner, who loves the English Captain Truman. In the play, Clive parodies her own Irish heritage by adopting a heavy accent and incorporating new dialogue defending Irish culture. The play is no cheap mockery of Irishness; rather, Clive rejects English prejudice as Mrs. O'Conner presents herself as a proud dual citizen of "Irish English" identity.[42] Nussbaum observes that in the play Clive "personifies Ireland as a wealthy, propertied woman who generously assumes the debts of her lover, a suddenly destitute Englishman"—a refreshing alternative to the anti-Irish stereotypes that pervaded the English stage at the time.[43]

Together, all four of Clive's afterpieces are woman-centric and highly self-referential: *Bayes in Petticoats* highlights Clive's identity as an ambitious theatre professional, *Every Woman in her Humour* and *A Fine Lady's Return From a Rout* display her in the persona she had cultivated off-stage, that of a witty and learned gentlewoman, and *The Faithful Irish Woman* rests

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[41] Catherine Clive, *The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout* (1763), The Huntington Library, John Larpent Collection, LA 220, 7-8.

[42] Catherine Clive, *The Faithful Irish Woman* (1765), The Huntington Library, John Larpent Collection, LA 247, n.p.

[43] Felicity Nussbaum, "Straddling: London-Irish Actresses in Performance," *in Ireland, Enlightenment and the English Stage, 1740-1820*, ed. David O'Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 35.

on references to Clive's Irish heritage.[44] Clive invites her adoring audience to laugh with her at the antics of Mrs. Hazard, Mrs. Croston, Lady Jenkings, and Mrs. O'Connor, but underneath their absurdity, all of Clive's characters are witty, gritty, learned women who seek their own desires and manipulate events for their own gain.

Bayes in Petticoats and the Rehearsal Tradition

While each of Clive's afterpieces is worthy of further scholarly attention, *Bayes in Petticoats* is particularly relevant to my larger study because of its dramatization of a woman playwright, and its interrogation of sexism within the theatrical establishment. *Bayes in Petticoats* is a parody of a famous rehearsal play—a comic play about a group of actors preparing for a performance—by the Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers.[45] First performed in 1671 and published in 1672, Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* features an inept playwright named Bayes who imitates the work of others to create a pastiche of heroic dramas. He openly brags about his imitation of the classics, not realizing that such a technique is passé:

> Why, Sir, when I have any thing to invent, I never trouble my head about it, as other men do; but presently turn o'er this Book, and there I have, at one view, all that *Perseus, Montaigne, Seneca's Tragedies, Horace, Juvenal, Claudian, Pliny, Plutarch's lives*, and

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[44] For a discussion of Clive's efforts to frame herself as a gentlewoman, see JoAllen Bradham, "A Good Country Gentlewoman: Catherine Clive's Epistolary Autobiography," *Biography* 19, no. 3 (1996): 259-82.

[45] See Robert D. Hume and Harold Love, Introduction to *The Rehearsal,* in *Plays, Poems, and Miscellaneous Writings associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, eds. Robert D. Hume and Harold Love, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 336-41. While the play was published anonymously, it is certain that Buckingham wrote the text. Others may have contributed as well.

> the rest, have ever thought, upon this subject: and so, in a trice, by leaving out a few words, or putting in others of my own, the business is done.[46]

Buckingham wrote the character Bayes to lampoon poet laureate John Dryden and his heroic dramas, especially *The Conquest of Granada* (first performed in 1670), but the first rehearsal plays can be traced to ancient times: Aristophanes' *The Frogs* features playwrights Euripides and Aeschylus debating the merits of their tragic poetry. During the English Renaissance, many major playwrights experimented with the form. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/6) features actors preparing for a performance of Pyramus and Thisbe; Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* (1601) mocks incompetent playwrights; and Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1610) depicts actors passing as audience members—a grocer, his wife, and his apprentice—who interrupt the performance in order to perform a heroic drama of their own. Though Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* offered a highly specific parody of Dryden, its formula was timeless, and the piece remained popular long after both Buckingham's and Dryden's deaths. The broader themes of the rehearsal play—authorship, theatrical politics, and dramatic genre—proved to have enduring interest for audiences. *The Rehearsal* was performed more than three hundred times throughout the century and its popularity helped usher in a series of new rehearsal plays by major eighteenth-century playwrights, including Colley Cibber's *The Rival Queens With the Humors of Alexander the Great* (1699), Thomas Durfey's *The Two Queens of Brentford; or, Bayes no Poetaster* (1721), Henry Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730) and *The Covent-Garden Tragedy* (1732), John Gay's *The Rehearsal at Gotham* (1730), Henry Carey and

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[46] George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham, "The Rehearsal," in *Plays, Poems, and Miscellaneous Writings associated with George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham*, eds. Robert D. Hume and Harold Love, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 401.

John Lampe's *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737), Garrick's *A Peep Behind the Curtain; or, the New Rehearsal* (1767), and, late in the century, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic; or, a Tragedy Rehearsed* (1779).[47]

Theatre historian Richard Frushell observes that when Clive wrote her own rehearsal play, she joined "a grand English theatrical tradition." [48] However, Frushell misses the most crucial element of Clive's contribution: in writing her own rehearsal play, Clive joined a grand, *male* English theatrical tradition. Women had generally avoided writing in the rehearsal genre—Charlotte Charke's *The Art of Management* (1735) is a rare exception—as it had been famously used to attack women.[49] In 1696, *The Female Wits; or, the Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal* (published anonymously in 1704) framed three women playwrights as incompetent frauds and sexually debased. The three-act play is modelled after the style of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal,* but with the satiric attack aimed at Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix, and Catherine Trotter. Likely written by a group of male actor-playwrights at Drury Lane, the play was a sexist response to the unprecedented increase of works staged by these women in the 1695-96 season.[50] That year, Manley, Pix, and Trotter staged five plays between them. The perceived professional threat posed by these women—that is, their potential to compete with the commercial and critical

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[47] Hume and Love, Introduction to *The Rehearsal*, 363.

[48] Richard C. Frushell, "An Edition of the Afterpieces of Kitty Clive" (Dissertation, Duquesne University, 1968), xxxviii.

[49] Charke's rehearsal play, *The Art of Management*, was performed at the York Buildings in 1735 and featured an inept manager, Brainless, who berates a group of actors including Mrs. Tragic, played by Charke.

[50] See Lucyle Hook, Introduction to *The Female Wits* (1704), facsimile edn. (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1967), xii.

success of their male counterparts—is apparent in the anxious and vicious attack against them in *The Female Wits.* In the play, Marsilia parodies Manley and is described as "A Poetess, that admires her own Works, and a great Lover of Flattery."[51] In reference to her weight, Pix is parodied as Mrs. Wellfed, "[o]ne that represents a fat Female Author."[52] Finally, Trotter is portrayed as Calista, "A Lady that pretends to the learned Languages."[53] The misogynistic agenda of the play is made clear in the prologue: "Thanks to the Strumpets that would mask'd appear, / We now in their True Colours see 'em here."[54] In the Restoration theatre, it was common practice for women in the audience to wear masks as an act of modesty, but masks were also worn by sex workers.[55] Thus, *The Female Wits* promises to expose women playwrights who pretend at virtue while being sexually corrupted.

Claudine van Hensbergen has recently attempted to recover *The Female Wits* as a broader satire on theatrical conventions, rather than an antifeminist attack, writing: "we should be careful not to read a satire like *The Female Wits* solely through the lens of gender politics" as the play "speaks to [women playwrights'] commercial popularity" and suggests that male playwrights

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[51] W.M., *The Female Wits* (1704)*,* introduction by Lucyle Hook, facsimile edn. Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1967, n.p.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] For more on the trend of wearing masks at the theatre, both on and off the stage, see Will Pritchard, *Outward Appearances: The Female Exterior in Restoration London* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 106-11.

were "equally […] condemned by contemporary satires." [56] However, this reading is not attuned to the power imbalance that existed between men and women playwrights during the Restoration, nor the fact that women were writing popular plays while simultaneously experiencing gender discrimination. As Laurie Fink writes "[t]he play does not merely satirize women playwrights: it seeks to deny them the authority to write."[57] Laura J. Rosenthal agrees, pointing out that the play "had real effects on the careers of these women."[58] Following its production in 1696, Manley, who bore the brunt of the satire, would not produce another play for a decade, and Pix and Trotter were forced to take their plays to different theatres. It is impossible to truly measure the detrimental impact of *The Female Wits* on women writers who might have tried writing drama at the time, but who abandoned their efforts following such highly publicized sexual harassment.

Clive, an experienced actress and theatrical insider, would have been familiar with the legacy of *The Female Wits* and, as Nussbaum writes, the "history of the rehearsal genre when it was earlier exploited to satirize women playwrights."[59] Indeed, at first glance, Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats* seems to be reviving much of the same antifeminist satire at work in *The Female Wits* through Clive's portrayal of Mrs. Hazard as an incompetent woman playwright. However, in

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[56] Claudine van Hensbergen. "The Female Wits: Gender, Satire, and Drama," In *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire*, ed. Paddy Bullard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 85.

[57] Laurie A. Finke, "The Satire of Women Writers in The Female Wits," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture* 8, no. 2 (1984): 66.

[58] Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 173.

[59] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 179.

Clive's play, the satirical attack has the opposite effect. The humour of *Bayes in Petticoats* is not rooted in laughing at women who think they can write but laughing at men who think they cannot. By titling her play *Bayes in Petticoats*, and casting herself as a female Bayes, Clive presents her play as a gendered inversion of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* and of the rehearsal tradition more broadly, causing Nussbaum to deem the play a "feminist parody."[60]

A Woman's Rehearsal

In *Bayes in Petticoats*, Clive plays Mrs. Hazard, a female Bayes who imitates the work of others. Her servant, Gatty, reveals Mrs. Hazard's connection to Bayes as a plagiarist at the outset of the play:

> Why, do you know 'tis none of her own? A Gentleman only lent it to her to read; he has been ill a great while at *Bath;* so she has taken the Advantage of that, made some little Alterations, had it set to Music, and has introduced it to the Stage as a Performance of her own.[61]

Mrs. Hazard's borrowing might be read as a joke about women's ineptitude in playwriting if it were not for the obvious parody of Bayes. However, beyond their shared characteristics of being arrogant and unskilled, Mrs. Hazard is quite different from Buckingham's Bayes. Instead, Mrs. Hazard parodies Clive herself and her reputation for being temperamental, self-important, and ambitious. Even at the slightest of annoyances, Mrs. Hazard falls into an abusive rage:

> MRS. HAZARD. Why, what is the Meaning I must ring for an Hour, and none of ye will

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[60] Ibid., 178.

[61] Catherine Clive, "The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats," in *The Clandestine Marriage By David Garrick & George Coleman the elder Together with Two Short Plays*, ed. Noel Chevalier, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995), 1.1.19-24. All quotations from *Bayes in Petticoats* are taken from this modern critical edition of the play, which is based on the 1753 published text.

come near me, ye Animals?—

GATTY. I was coming as fast as I could.

MRS. HAZARD. As fast as you could! Why, you move like a Snail that has been trod upon, you creeping Creature.—Let me die, but she has provoked me into a fine Simile. Come, get the Things to dress me instantaneously. [Tom *with Tea and Coffee. She repeats Recitative,* Oh Corydon, &c.] You, *Tom*, I'm at home to no human Being this Morning but Mr. *Witling.* I've promised to carry him to the *Rehearsal* with me. [*Repeats Recitative,* Gatty *waiting with her Cap*.]

GATTY. Madam, will you have your Cap on?

MRS. HAZARD. No! You Ideot; how durst you interrupt me, when you saw me so engaged? As I am a Critic, this Creature will distract me! — Give me my Bottle of Salts. —She has ruined one of the finest Conclusions.[62]

In parodying her celebrity persona, Clive reclaims the nasty publicized assessments of her personality for her own advantage. Her comic technique is not self-derogatory, however. Rather, she mocks the ridiculous antics of Mrs. Hazard and invites the audience to laugh with her.

Making self-parody even more central to the plot, Mrs. Hazard casts Mrs. Clive in the lead role of her upcoming musical entertainment. In a dizzying display of meta-theatre, Mr. Witling, a false friend, and Mrs. Hazard discuss Clive's upcoming role in the play:

WITLING. Pray how many Characters have you in this thing?

MRS. HAZARD. Why I have but three; for as I was observing, there's so few of them that can sing: nay I have but two indeed that are rational, for I have made one of them

[62] Ibid., 1.1.35-49.

mad.

WITLING. And who is to act that, pray?

MRS. HAZARD. Why Mrs. *Clive* to be sure; tho' I wish she don't spoil it; for she's so conceited, and insolent, that she won't let me teach it her. You must know when I told her I had a Part for her in a Performance of mine, in the prettiest manner I was able, (for one must be civil to these sort of People when one wants them) says she, Indeed, Madam, I must see the whole Piece for I shall take no part in a new thing, without causing that which I think I can act best. I have been a great Sufferer already, by the Manager's not doing justice to my Genius; but I hope I shall next Year convince the Town, what fine judgement they have: for I intend to play a capital Tragedy Part for my own Benefit.[63]

In this passage, Clive's self-parody becomes comically explicit as Mrs. Hazard claims that there are few performers who can sing, highlighting that she herself is one of the few. Of course, the character Mrs. Clive can never appear on stage since the real Clive is already performing as Mrs. Hazard. This absence becomes part of the larger joke:

MR. CROSS. Madam, Mrs. *Clive* has sent word, that she can't possibly wait on you this Morning, as she's obliged to go to some Ladies about her Benefit. But you may depend on her being very perfect, and ready to perform it whenever you please.

MRS. HAZARD. Mr. *Cross*, what did you say? I can't believe what I have heard! Mrs. *Clive* sent me word she can't come to my *Rehearsal*, and is gone to Ladies about her Benefit! Sir, she shall have no benefit. Mr. *Witling*, did you ever hear of a Parallel to this Insolence?[64]

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[63] Ibid., 1.1.154-70.

[64] Ibid., 2.1.25-33.

In response to Mrs. Clive's tardiness, Mrs. Hazard decides to rehearse Mrs. Clive's part herself, that of the shepherdess Marcella in William Boyce's English pastoral *Corydon and Miranda* (1740). Emphasizing the irony of Mrs. Hazard taking Mrs. Clive's part, Mr. Cross, the prompter, jokes that Mrs. Clive's costume will fit Mrs. Hazard well since Clive is "much of her Size."[65]

In the musical interlude that follows, Clive neither remains in character as Mrs. Hazard, nor slips fully into character as the love-struck Marcella; instead, she shifts fluidly between both.[66] On the one hand, the musical interlude served the important purpose of displaying Clive's singing abilities, but it also heightens the self-parodic effect. For example, at one point during the performance, Mrs. Hazard interrupts the singing to correct the actress rehearsing Miranda: "That's pretty well, Madam, but I think you sing it too much; you should consider *Recitative* should be spoken as plain as possible; or else you'll lose the Expression."[67] Joncus argues that the song offers a clever extension of Clive's burlesque as Marcella is "wealthy, vain, tyrannical, jealous, [and] volatile," the same features Clive lampoons in Mrs. Hazard.[68] Thus, in her performance of Mrs. Hazard performing Marcella, Clive engages in a clever layered parody of herself, no doubt delighting audiences.

While the original staging of *Bayes in Petticoats* in 1750 ended with the musical rendition of *Corydon and Miranda*, an additional scene was later approved by the Lord

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[65] Ibid., 2.1.46.

[66] See Joncus, *Songster*, 387. Though Mrs. Hazard initially describes her musical as an Italian Burletta, Joncus explains that the musical interlude is actually a performance of William Boyce's c. 1740 English pastoral *Corydon and Miranda*.

[67] Clive, "Bayes in Petticoats," 2.1.74-5.

[68] Joncus, *Songster,* 398.

Chamberlain for 12 March 1751.[69] The additional scene introduces a new series of characters, Mrs. Giggle, Sir Albany Odelove, Mrs. Sidell, and Miss Daudle, and cements Clive's feminist intervention. The group interrupts the performance and mocks Mrs. Hazard, egged on by Mr. Witling who seeks to ruin Mrs. Hazard's play: "If you'll join with me, we shall have the finest Scene in the World.— She has made me sick to death with her Stuff, and I will be revenged."[70] Initially, Mr. Witling asks the group to laugh loudly at Mrs. Hazard, but Miss Giggle has the better idea of encouraging the odious Sir Albany to offer Mrs. Hazard criticism: "Oh, I'll tell you what; let's set *Odelove* upon her to enquire into the Plot of her Play.—He'll plague her to death, for he's immensely foolish."[71] In turn, Sir Albany, who embodies the conventional misogynist belief that playwriting is unsuitable for women, torments Mrs. Hazard:

> I say, Madam, will you give me leave, as you're going to entertain the Town, (that is, I mean, to endeavour, or to attempt to entertain them) for let me tell you, fair Lady, 'tis not an easy thing to bring about. If Men, who are properly graduated in Learning, who have swallowed the Tincture of a polite Education, who, as I may say, are hand and glove with the Classics, if such Geniuses as I'm describing, fail of Success in Dramatical Occurrences, or Performances, ('tis the same Sense in the Latin) what must a poor Lady to expect, who is ignorant as the Dirt.[72]

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[69] The additional scene is appended to the original manuscript of the play in the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library (LA 86) and was published in the 1753 edition of the play. The *London Stage* notes that this additional scene was added to the production as of 12 March 1751.

[70] Clive, "Bayes in Petticoats," 2.1.191-94.

[71] Ibid., 2.1.200-2.

[72] Ibid., 2.1.258-67.

Sir Albany disregards women writers on the grounds that they lack formal education, and he goes on to suggest that Mrs. Hazard get advice from her "Male Acquaintance," perhaps intended to reference Garrick, who can coach her on the classical unities. [73] Of course, Clive's physical presence on stage serves as a constant reminder that a woman authored this play, inviting audiences to laugh, not at women playwrights, but at Sir Albany and the attitudes he represents.

Ultimately, in *Bayes in Petticoats*, Clive harnesses Buckingham's stock rehearsal play to promote herself through a complex exploration of her own identity as a professional theatrical woman, complete with her exposure of powerful men who disparage her contributions. Clive displays her multi-faceted talent as an actress, comic playwright, and singer as she mocks the notion that theatrical women are in any way inferior to their male colleagues.

Clive and the Resurgence of Women Playwrights

By the time Clive staged *The Faithful Irish Woman* in 1765, two other women playwrights had established themselves in London: Frances Sheridan and Elizabeth Griffith. As I described in the introduction, the resurgence of women playwrights in London following the lean years of the mid-century has generally been attributed to Garrick, as Donkin writes:

> Garrick took pride in his reputation for helping new playwrights, but he took particular pride in having helped new female playwrights. He took pleasure in their public demonstrations of gratitude, usually in prefaces, and occasionally indulged himself by reflecting on the women he had helped in letters to friends.[74]

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[73] Ibid., 2.1.269-70.

[74] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 20.

There is no doubt that Garrick played a major role in the reintroduction of women playwrights in the mid-century by accepting their plays for production. Of the eight new plays by women staged during Clive's playwriting tenure, 1750 to 1765, Garrick produced seven of them at Drury Lane. Not only did he produce all four of Clive's plays, but in 1763 he produced Sheridan's *The Discovery* and *The Dupe*, and, a few years later in 1765, he produced Elizabeth Griffith's debut play *The Platonic Wife.* He also later staged Griffith's *The School for Rakes* in 1769, by which time other women had entered the market. These mid-century plays by Clive, Sheridan, and Griffith mark a major shift in women's access to the London stage, as evidenced by Table 2.

Table 2

New Plays by Women Staged During Clive's Playwriting Tenure, 1750-1765

Debut	**Play**	**Playwright**	**Venue**	**Manager**	**Genre/Form**
15 March 1750	*The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats*	Catherine Clive	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic afterpiece
17 March 1752	*The Oracle*	Susannah Cibber	Covent Garden	John Rich	Comic afterpiece
20 March 1760	*Every Woman in Her Humour*	Catherine Clive	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic afterpiece
3 February 1763	*The Discovery*	Frances Sheridan	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic mainpiece
21 March 1763	*The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout*	Catherine Clive	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic mainpiece
10 December 1763	*The Dupe*	Frances Sheridan	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic mainpiece
24 January 1765	*The Platonic Wife*	Elizabeth Griffith	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic mainpiece
18 March 1765	*The Faithful Irish Woman*	Catherine Clive	Drury Lane	David Garrick	Comic afterpiece

Source: Data from Matthew J. Kinservik "Garrick's Unpublished Epilogue for Catherine Clive's *The Rehearsal: or, Bays in Petticoats* (1750)," *Études Anglaises* 49, no. 3 (1996): 326.

Garrick's motivation for staging women's comedies, however, was likely not rooted in

altruism, but in profit—he was running a business after all. The success of Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats* proved that there was still a market for plays by women, specifically women's comedies. In fact, we can see evidence of Garrick's realization that a woman's gender could be harnessed as a selling point for a comedy in the epilogue he wrote for *Bayes in Petticoats,* added to the revival of the play on 19 March 1751 and delivered by Clive:[75]

> A woman write! Hey-day! Cry one and all!
> No wonder truly, Bedlam, is too small,
> Should this whim circulate & grow a fashion,
> Each House would be a Mad one thro' the Nation—
> But pray, Sirs, why must we not write, nor think?
> Have we not Heads and hands, and Pen and Ink?
> Can you boast more, that are so wondrous wise?
> Have Women then no weapons but their Eyes?
> Were we, like you, to let our Genius loose
> We'd top your wit, and Match you for abuse.[76]

Garrick's epilogue reflects a common marketing strategy of a woman's comedy, framing the play as having a female-friendly message, while also capitalizing on a sort of misogynist surprise

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[75] See *The London Stage,* 19 March 1751.

[76] David Garrick, Epilogue to *The Rehearsal*, in Kinservik, "Unpublished Epilogue," 322-23. Two manuscript copies of Garrick's epilogue are housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library, but Kinservik's article contains the only publication of the epilogue.

that a woman has written a play at all.[77] The misogyny, of course, is undercut by Clive's delivery of the prologue and the foregrounding of her own authorship. Similar epilogues were used to market women's plays for the remainder of the century, long past the point that it was an oddity to see a new play by a woman.

While Garrick supported many women in his role as manager, he also, as I discuss further in the following chapter, was a powerful gatekeeper. Garrick regularly undervalued the women he worked with, as evidenced in his financial negotiations with Clive herself. In 1768, for example, Garrick attempted to reschedule Clive's benefit performance, a major source of her annual income, to follow that of other actresses. Clive rightly felt this was a slight to her standing in the company that would have a negative effect on the financial gains of her own benefit, which she explained to Garrick bluntly:

> Any one who sees your letter wou'd suppose I was kept at your Theatre out of Charitey; if you still look over the number of Times I have play'd this season—you must think I have desarvd the monney you give me. You say you give me the best day in the week; I am sorry to say I cannot be of your opinion […] you say that you have fixt the day and have drawn a line under it that I may be sure that I can have no other: therefore, I must take it—But I must think it (and so will every impartial person) very hard that Mrs. Dancer should have her Benefit before Mrs Clive.[78]

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[77] Diana Solomon explains that prologues and epilogues that foregrounded the woman playwright, as Garrick's does for Clive's *Bayes in Petticoats*, "offered possibilities for female self-expression yet often reinforced misogyny." See Solomon, *Prologues and Epilogues*, 49.

[78] Catherine Clive to David Garrick, 19 February 1768, in Percy Fitzgerald, *The Life of Mrs. Catherine Clive* (London: A. Reader, 1888), 72-73. Fitzgerald retains Clive's original spelling.

Clive's unwavering defense of her own professional rights—as evidenced by this letter and her numerous other negotiations with theatrical management—may have encouraged Garrick to take other women playwrights more seriously. Though some scholars have framed Clive's career as benefiting from Garrick's "friend[ship]," the truth is that she had a strong sway over him too.[79] As Nussbaum points out, in 1767 Garrick wrote his own Buckingham-style rehearsal play, *A Peep Behind the Curtain; or, The New Rehearsal,* suggesting "Clive's influence on Garrick rather than the reverse."[80]

Thus, while Garrick was pivotal to the reintroduction of women playwrights, both during the lean years of the mid-century and the decades that followed, I want to reorient our attention to Clive's role in this shift. Clive's plays set a precedent for Frances Sheridan and Elizabeth Griffith, both actresses, to claim playwriting once again as a legitimate profession for women. When Sheridan staged her comedy *The Dupe* in 1763, Clive not only performed in the play as Mrs. Friendly—a part that Sheridan wrote especially for her—but she also delivered the epilogue. Yet, Clive's role in supporting *The Dupe* has been almost entirely overlooked and even misrepresented. A claim made by Sheridan's daughter, Alicia Le Fanu, in her 1824 biography of her mother—and repeated in the current entry on Sheridan in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*—places blame for the play's failure (it was performed only three times) on Clive who, Le Fanu argues, "vowed immortal hatred" on Sheridan's husband and ruined his wife's play to take revenge.[81] The play's anonymous epilogue, clearly written by, or in collaboration

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[79] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 42.

[80] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens,* 171.

[81] Alicia Le Fanu, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Frances Sheridan*, London: G. and W.B. Whittaker, 1824), 235-36.

with, Clive, contradicts Le Fanu's account. The epilogue offers a feminist interrogation of the theatrical establishment as Clive addresses the women in the audience, explaining that no man was willing to write an epilogue for Sheridan's play, so she did:

> Not Mrs. Friendly now, I'm Mrs. Clive;
>
> No character from fiction will I borrow,
>
> But if you please, I'll talk again to-morrow.
>
> Then, you conclude, from custom long in vogue,
>
> That I come here to speak an Epilogue,
>
> With satyr, humour, spirit, quite refin'd,
>
> Double-entendre too, with wit combin'd
>
> Not for the ladies—but to please the men
>
> All this you guess—and now you're out again;
>
> For to be brief, our author bid me say
>
> She tried, but cou'dn't get one to her play.
>
> No Epilogue! why, Ma'am, you'll spoil your treat,
>
> An Epilogue's the cordial after meat;
>
> […]
>
> She took the hint—Will *you*, good Sir? or *you*, Sir?
>
> A sister scribbler! sure you can't refuse her!
>
> […]
>
> What's to be done, she cry'd? can't *you* enndeavor

To say some pretty thing?—I know you're clever.[82]

Though Clive ends her epilogue with a note that she was "unable to succeed" in helping Sheridan, she explains that she has "finely dup'd" the audience into listening to her recount the interaction.[83]

Clive similarly supported the work of Elizabeth Griffith by delivering an epilogue advocating for the woman playwright in *The Platonic Wife*. Griffith wrote a role for Clive in her first comedy, which debuted on 24 January 1765 at Drury Lane. As she had done for *The Dupe*, Clive performed the epilogue for *The Platonic Wife* (also by an anonymous writer that could have been Clive, or at the very least, someone with whom Clive collaborated) in which she gives a similar defense of the playwright. This elaborate epilogue involves Clive marching on stage with a piece of paper in hand. In the satirical style of the bombastic Mrs. Hazard, Clive is displeased with the male-authored epilogue and says that she will "write an air, myself, to't—then you'll roar/ Bravo! bravissimo! divine! encore!"[84] In mock air-headedness, Clive gets flustered, saying: "Dear me! What is't that I was going to say?/ Lord, I'm so flounder'd! so confused!"[85] While the humour in this epilogue appears to lie in the sexist notion that women cannot write, the joke is inverted by Griffith's authorship of the play and Clive's delivery of the epilogue. Indeed, Clive employs the same comic feminist technique that she used in *Bayes in*

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[82] Clive, epilogue to Frances Sheridan's *The Dupe, a Comedy* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1764), 69-70.

[83] Sheridan, *The Dupe*, 70.

[84] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Platonic Wife* (London: Printed for W. Johnston in Ludgate Street, 1765), 98.

[85] Ibid.

Petticoats. As she bungles her lines and becomes increasingly hysterical, the joke is not on women writers, but the tired stereotypes about them. In a reciprocal display of solidarity, Griffith addressed Clive in her preface to her 1769 play *The School for Rakes*, in which Clive played Mrs. Winifred and delivered another epilogue. Griffith thanks Clive for her "study of a new part," the last new role of Clive's career, and for her "kindness to the author."[86]

Clive's epilogues set a crucial precedent for women playwrights to find professional legitimacy in their connections to one another, and to see their gender not as a detriment but a marketable strength. In 1767, Clive's friend Jane Pope followed in her mentor's footsteps and wrote her own benefit afterpiece, *The Young Couple,* based on Sheridan's first play *The Discovery* (1763). No doubt inspired by Clive, Pope did not wait for a man to write her a good part, but created her own.

Following her retirement from the stage in 1769, Clive moved to the countryside. In a 1771 study of Twickenham country homes, Jael-Henrietta Pye describes Clive's house as "a little cottage of plain appearance" with gardens "laid out in excellent taste" culminating in a "charming Retirement."[87] Clive wrote to Pope describing her contented life in retirement:

> I have ten times more business now than I had when I playd the Fool as you do, I have engagements every day of my life. Routs either at home or abroad every night all the nonsense of having my hair not done time enough for my parties as I used to do for my parts with the difference that I am losing money instead of getting some but I dont mind

[86] Elizabeth Griffith, *The School for Rakes, a Comedy* (London: W. & W. Smith, 1769), 4.

[87] Jael-Henrietta Pye, *A Short View of the Principal Seats and Gardens in and About Twickenham* (London: n.p, 1771), 15-16.

> that for I am in such good health, and such fine spirits that it is impossible for any one to be happyer.[88]

Clive passed away at seventy-four years of age on 6 December 1785. Her will was executed by her good friend and neighbor, writer Horace Walpole.

While Clive's influence as a playwright has been long overlooked, she played an important role in the resurgence of women writing for the London stage. Her fierce defense of her professional rights, her quick-witted feminist comedies, and her advocation for other women in the theatre provided a model that other women playwrights could, and did, repeat. Though Clive wrote her last play in 1765, the traits she exemplified as a playwright can be identified in the careers of many women who succeeded her in the later half of the century. In the following chapter I turn to the playwriting career of Frances Brooke who, despite Garrick's decades-long efforts to sabotage her career, managed to become one of the first woman managers of a London patent theatre and staged two immensely successful comic operas.

[88] Catherine Clive to Jane Pope on 3 November 1770, Copies of letters to Jane Pope from various people, 1769-1808, in the hand of James Winston [manuscript], ca. 1840, Folger Shakespeare Library, W.b. 73. Quoted in Clive's entry in the *Biographical Dictionary.*

CHAPTER TWO

Frances Brooke: Circumventing London's Theatrical Boy's Club with Comic Opera

While Frances Brooke (1724-89) is remembered primarily as a novelist, she long harboured a dream of becoming a professional playwright and, over a span of more than three decades, she wrote at least six plays, four of which were published, and three of which were produced on the London stage. Brooke may have experienced more success as a playwright had it not been for her longtime feud with David Garrick, who, after rejecting her first play, *Virginia*, in 1754, blocked her access to the London stage during his lifetime. Unlike many other women in the latter half of the eighteenth-century who strategically ingratiated themselves to Garrick to stage their works, Brooke refused to grovel, and her relationship with Garrick soured because of it. After realizing that she was being blacklisted, Brooke decided to challenge the all-male theatrical administration head on and, in 1773, she became the part owner and manager of the King's Theatre, London's Italian opera house, which she ran successfully until 1778. After Garrick's death in 1779, Brooke harnessed her newfound knowledge as a manager to stage one of her own plays, *The Siege of Sinope*, which debuted at Covent Garden in 1781, more than a quarter of a century after she had written *Virginia. Sinope* was a moderately successful tragedy; it ran for ten performances but was not revived in later seasons. However, the following year, Brooke wrote a massive commercial success, a two-act comic opera, or burletta, titled *Rosina* (1782). *Rosina* became the second most performed afterpiece of the late-eighteenth century, performed more than two hundred times by 1800, and was followed by another successful comic

opera, *Marian*, in 1788.[1] Although not a record-breaking hit like *Rosina*, *Marian* was performed an impressive forty times between 1788 and 1800. Thus, Brooke's long and storied theatrical career ended on a high note; she died less than a year after *Marian* debuted on 23 January 1789.

This chapter explores Brooke's commercially successful, but critically overlooked, *Rosina* and *Marian.* Despite the immense popularity of these two plays, they have generally been treated as less important than Brooke's other works, deemed to lack the seriousness and complexity of her novels, poetry, translations, and her tragedies: in 1986, prominent musicologist Roger Fiske assessed both of Brooke's librettos as "insipid."[2] Even feminist theatre historians have fallen prey to the same diminishing narrative. Ellen Donkin misrepresents the final stages of Brooke's career as "stalemated," when, in fact, *Rosina* and *Marian* marked an enormous critical and financial boon for Brooke, and Jodi L. Wyett, who applies a feminist lens to Brooke's *Sinope*, refers to *Rosina* and *Marian* as mere "puff pieces."[3] However, a small body of recent scholarship has sought to counter the dismissive assessments of Brooke's comic operas. Leslie Ritchie has contextualized *Rosina* and *Marian* within a larger body of late-eighteenth century pastorals—comic musical afterpieces depicting rural life—pointing out that *Rosina* became the "pastoral to which all others were compared."[4] Betty Schellenberg reads *Rosina* and

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[1] Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 412.

[2] Fiske, *Theatre Music*, 456, 468.

[3] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 43; Jodi L. Wyett, "Frances Brooke on (the) Stage," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 28, no. 2 (2013): 36.

[4] Leslie Ritchie, *Women Writing Music in Late Eighteenth-Century England: Social Harmony in Literature and Performance* (London: Routledge, 2016), 160.

Marian as an extension of Brooke's participation in "the political public realm."[5] Finally, an important recent article by Paula R. Backscheider demonstrates how Brooke harnessed her expertise as a manager to create her plays, although her study focuses primarily on *Sinope.*[6]

Building on the efforts to redeem *Rosina* and *Marian* and recover the significance of Brooke's playwriting, the following chapter analyzes the two plays through the lens of Brooke's professional career, and demonstrates that Brooke, like other women playwrights, drew on a comic genre to maximize her professional success. I trace Brooke's professional development from the 1750s, when she arrived in London hoping to stage her first play, through her ensuing battles with Garrick—the most powerful figure in London's theatre industry—to her eventual success as a manager and playwright. At first glance, *Rosina* and *Marian* appear to be conventional pastoral afterpieces, shoring up nationalistic and patriarchal values: the eponymous heroines of both plays are young, virtuous women who fall in love against the background of rural beauty where farmers labour happily under the benevolent gaze of aristocratic overlords. However, in my reading of *Rosina* and *Marian*, I demonstrate that Brooke makes daring critiques of gender, class, and power and—deviating from previous studies that have highlighted Brooke's contributions to opera and pastoral—I place her work within the tradition of women's comedy.

This chapter relies on the only existing biography of Brooke published by Lorraine McMullen in 1983. I also reference surviving correspondence between Brooke and her friend,

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[5] Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 73.

[6] Paula R. Backscheider, "Frances Brooke: Becoming a Playwright," *Women's Writing* 23, no. 3 (2016): 325-38.

poet Richard Gifford, held by the Houghton Library at Harvard University.[7] Brooke and Gifford shared an interest in music and theatre and discussed the creation of Brooke's plays, including *Rosina.* Her unpublished letters to Gifford offer critical insight into Brooke's determination to become a professional playwright and her remarkable resourcefulness in pursuing this goal despite the entrenched sexism of London's theatre industry.

The Feud of Frances Brooke and David Garrick

Like most women writers of the eighteenth century, Brooke (née Moore) received her education at home. Her father, the Reverend Thomas Moore, was rector at Claypole, Lincolnshire, but died in 1727, leaving his three young daughters, Frances, Catherine (who died in childhood), and Sarah, to be raised and educated by their mother, Mary.[8] The small family initially lived with Mary's widowed mother, but both mother and grandmother died by the time Frances was a teenager. The Moore sisters then moved in with their aunt, Sarah Steevens, and her husband, the Reverend Roger Steevens, rector of Tydd St Mary, Lincolnshire. McMullen observes that Brooke's education was likely augmented by her upbringing in these various rectories where she was influenced by highly educated men, and unusually well-educated

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[7] The Houghton Library has now digitized Brooke and Gifford's correspondence and made it publicly available online. See Frances Brooke Letters to Richard Gifford, 1756-72 and undated, MS Eng 1310, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/hou00646/catalog.

[8] There is only a brief entry on Brooke in the *Biographical Dictionary.* Thus, unless otherwise noted, all biographical details are drawn from the only existing biography of Brooke, Lorraine McMullen's *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* (Vancouver: University Of British Columbia Press, 1983). A short but thorough biography of Brooke can also be found in the *ODNB*. See Mary Jane Edwards, "Brooke [née Moore], Frances (bap. 1724, d. 1789), writer and playwright," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 17 March 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/3540.

women, with consistent access to a home library. She developed a strong knowledge of French and Italian, and she was well read in both English literature and English translations of classical Greek and Roman literature.[9] Her classical education—the norm for English schoolboys but unusual for a young woman—had an important influence on her later dramatic works; her two tragedies were based on Roman history, and her comedies were written in the pastoral tradition that can be traced back to ancient Greece. Additionally, all her plays are marked by an adherence to the classical unities of action, time, and place.

As a young adult, Brooke was in the unique position of being a single woman with financial independence. She received £500 from her father's will when she and her surviving sister Sarah reached the age of majority, and possibly had more funds left to her by her mother. Combining her creative talent, professional ambition, and financial freedom, Brooke moved to London in the late 1740s to pursue a career as a playwright. During this period, she married Reverend John Brooke, made friends in London's literary and theatrical circles, and pursued the production of her first play, a full-length tragedy titled *Virginia.* It was bad luck that the story on which Brooke based her play, Livy's tale of Appius Claudius' abduction of Virginia, had also been dramatized by two other playwrights at the same time. All three dramatists—Brooke, Samuel Crisp, and John Moncrief—were possibly inspired by the same edition of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* prepared by the French author Jean-Baptiste Louis Crevier in the late 1740s.[10] Though Brooke submitted her play to David Garrick at Drury Lane before the two men had submitted theirs, her play was rejected. Samuel Crisp's *Virginia* beat out Brooke's for the spot at

[9] McMullen, *Odd Attempt*, 2.

[10] Backscheider, "Becoming a Playwright," 326.

Drury Lane in 1754, and John Moncrief's version, titled *Appius*, was staged at Covent Garden in 1755 under the auspices of manager John Rich. It was not the first time that the Roman tale had been dramatized: John Webster wrote *Appius and Virginia* in the early seventeenth century and it was published in 1654. With such an esteemed male lineage, from ancient Rome through the early modern stage, it is highly possible that the classical subject matter, "overwhelmingly associated with masculine freedom and authority," was deemed inappropriate for a woman's pen by the managers.[11]

With both playhouses staging a version of the tragedy by her male rivals, Brooke realized that her play would never be staged. Instead, she published *Virginia* in 1756, alongside a selection of original and translated poetry, and appended a preface defending her play:

> The Author of these poetical Attempts, begs Leave to say, that she should not have printed them, but that she is precluded from all Hopes of ever seeing the Tragedy brought upon the Stage, by there having been two so lately on the same Subject. If her's should be found to have any greater Resemblance to the two represented, than the Sameness of the Story made unavoidable, of which she is not conscious, it must have been accidental on her side, as there are as many Persons, of very distinguished rank, and unquestionable Veracity, who saw her's in Manuscript before the others appeared, and will witness for her, that she has taken no advantage of having seen them.[12]

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[11] Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4; A revival of the culture of the classical period swept across Europe from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.

[12] Frances Brooke, *Virginia* (London: T. Cadell, 1781), vii-viii. Brooke does not identity by name the people she says could testify to the veracity of her claim that her manuscript was submitted first. However, she was well connected in London and possible readers include Richard Gifford, Mary Cholmondeley (sister of actress Peg Woffington), and perhaps even Samuel Johnson.

By drawing attention to the timeline of her manuscript submission to Garrick, Brooke refutes any possibility that she plagiarized Crisp's or Moncrief's plays. She also draws attention to her gender as a possible reason for her play's rejection and alludes to the possibility that Garrick *could* have read her manuscript while working on her rival's play. The small number of women playwrights producing work in the 1750s also adds important context to Garrick's rejection of *Virginia.* As demonstrated in the first chapter, the mid-century was a difficult decade for women playwrights. Only actresses Catherine Clive and Susannah Cibber were able to stage plays during the 1750s, and both plays were comic afterpieces. While Garrick later became known for producing work by women, at the time that Brooke submitted *Virginia* he had only ever produced the work of one woman, Clive. It was not until the 1760s that he seems to have fully realized the marketability of women's plays, and even then, he primarily produced women's comedies.[13]

Frustrated by her fruitless efforts to stage *Virginia,* in 1755, Brooke took on an entirely new project, a periodical titled *The Old Maid.* The satirical journal was published under Brooke's pseudonym, Mary Singleton, and promised, tongue in cheek, "a little court of female criticism, consisting of myself and six virgins of my own age, to take into consideration all stage offences against sense and scenery."[14] Not all of Brooke's theatrical criticism was accepted as satiric, however. In an essay on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Brooke criticized Garrick's choice to stage Nahum Tate's adaptation rather than the original, writing on 13 March 1756: "Mr. *Garrick,* who

[13] Garrick produced Dorothea Celesia's tragedy *Almida*, an adaptation of Voltaire's *Tancrède* (1760), in 1771 at Drury Lane. He also supported Hannah More with her tragedy *Percy*, but he was retired when it debuted in 1777.

[14] Frances Brooke [Mary Singleton, pseud.], *The Old Maid* (London: A. Miller, 1764), 24.

professes himself so warm an idolater of this inimitable poet, and who is determined, if I may use his own words, in the prologue to the *Winter's Tale, 'To lose no drop of this immortal man,'* should yet prefer the vile adulterated cup of Tate."[15] Making matters even more personal, Brooke went on to praise Spranger Barry, Garrick's rival, as the better Lear. Garrick, who prided himself on his affinity to Shakespeare and was famous for playing Lear, was deeply offended by Brooke's criticism, jest or no. Less than a year later, in October 1756, he produced a new version of Tate's *Lear* that included more of Shakespeare's original text, though he mainly restored Lear's lines to showcase himself in the role.[16]

There is concrete evidence that Garrick spoke negatively about Brooke amongst the literary and theatrical community following her article in *The Old Maid*, and that he sought to sabotage her career. In January 1757, six months after the final publication of *The Old Maid*, Brooke began writing a new play. Perhaps realizing that the masculine perception of Latin literature had contributed to her play being passed over in favor of adaptations by two men, Brooke changed tactics with her next project and wrote a comic pastoral afterpiece titled *The Shepherd's Wedding*. In a letter to her friend Gifford, she explains that the piece will be produced by Rich at Covent Garden:

> You must know, I am about a pastoral piece of two Acts, I think Rich will play it; we are gracious; he came to see me Sunday last sennight: it, the piece, is to be call'd *The Shepherd's Wedding*: send the Songs in a few days, & I'll love you for ever: I shou'd like

[15] Ibid., 18.

[16] See Leigh Woods, "Garrick's King Lear and the English Malady," *Theatre Survey* 27, no. 1-2 (1986): 17-35.

> a Duet between the two Lovers, who are parted, because the Shepherdess is found out to be of superior Rank.[17]

Though Brooke's letter indicates that Rich expressed sincere interest in the play, for unknown reasons *The Shepherd's Wedding* was not staged (although it shares similarities with *Rosina* and *Marian*, produced decades later). In 1761, Brooke wrote and tried to produce another, unnamed, farce. But Garrick declined to read it: "he refus'd to take it [the manuscript], saying he had one on the same plan in his hands of Frances's [Sheridan]."[18] Garrick would later hold up his support of other women playwrights like Sheridan as proof that he did not reject Brooke's plays out of sexism.

Further evidence of Garrick's efforts to derail Brooke's career can be found in his correspondence with Marie Jeanne Riccoboni in 1765, ten years after the publication of *The Old Maid.* Riccoboni asked Garrick's opinion of Brooke and whether she should agree to let Brooke translate one of her novels. Brooke had already translated a novel by Riccoboni into English, *Lettres de milady Juliette Catesby à milady Henriette Campley, son amie* (1759). Her translation, first published in 1760 under the title *Letters from Juliet, Lady Catesby, to Her Friend, Lady Henrietta Campley,* was in its fourth edition by 1765 and Brooke wanted to repeat the success. Riccoboni sought Garrick's advice, and he responded unequivocally:

> I am not acquainted with Mrs. Brooke: she once wrote a play, which I did not like, & would not act, for which heinous offence she vented her female Spite upon Me, in a paper she publish'd call'd *The Old Maid*, but I forgive her as thoroughly as her Work is

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[17] Frances Brooke to Richard Gifford, [c. January 1757], MS Eng 1310, 1. Gifford's response to Brooke is dated 31 January 1757, MS Eng 1310, 27.

[18] Brooke to Gifford, [c. 1761], MS Eng 1319, 2.

> forgotten—I am told she has merit & is very capable of a good translation, tho not of an Original—*five hundred* of her will not make half a Riccoboni. You will be civil to her & no more, all this is Entre nous [between us].[19]

Riccoboni trusted Garrick, and gave the translation to his friend Thomas Becket, even though Becket had done a poor job translating another of her novels as *The History of Miss Jenny Salisbury* (1764).[20] Becket continued to translate Riccoboni's novels at Garrick's behest, but none were as successful as Brooke's *Letters from Juliet*. Donkin argues that Garrick's advice to Riccoboni cost both Riccoboni and Brooke financial and professional gain.[21] Garrick's disingenuous advice to Riccoboni reveals that he continued to hold a grudge against Brooke even a decade after the publication of *The Old Maid.*

Brooke's theatrical endeavors were put on pause when, between 1763 and 1768, she moved from London to Quebec, Canada where her husband had been appointed garrison chaplain.[22] While in Quebec, Brooke focused primarily on novel writing, but on her return to London in 1768, she once again set her gaze on the theatre. She reconnected with the literary and

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[19] Garrick, David. *The Letters of David Garrick*, eds. David Little and George Kahrl, 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1963), 2: 461.

[20] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 37.

[21] Ibid., 38.

[22] On 6 July 1763, Brooke began the three-month journey from England to Canada with her young son, also named John, and her unmarried sister, Sarah. She had published her first novel *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763) the same year she moved to Quebec, and she spent her years living in the colony working on another, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). Set in Quebec, the novel was published a year after the Brookes returned to England in 1768 and is sometimes called the first Canadian novel. She wrote two more novels: *The Excursion* (1777) and *The History of Charles Mandeville* (1790, published posthumously).

theatrical community, no longer a new member of London's *literati*, but a respected author of two successful novels: *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763) and *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). Frances Burney, who was not yet a published author herself, praised Brooke in her journal around this time, writing that Brooke was "very well bred, and expresses herself with much modesty upon all subjects; which in an *authoress,* a woman of *known* understanding*,* is extremely pleasing."[23] Yet, despite the high regard that London's literary community held for Brooke, she continued to struggle with the theatrical establishment.

In the early 1770s, Brooke wrote the first draft of a play she titled *Rosina*, a comic opera like *The Shepherd's Wedding.* She collaborated closely on the project with Gifford who, according to their letters, wrote some of the songs and provided her with unceasing encouragement. But Brooke's letters to Gifford also reveal her ongoing difficulty getting her work accepted by the managers at any of the patent theatres. She first approached George Colman the Elder, new manager at Covent Garden, about staging *Rosina*, but he was not accommodating. She feared that Garrick had poisoned Colman against her, writing to Gifford:

> Colman has not yet sent an answer. I have a very bad opinion of all of these gentry [the managers], & my greatest hope is that as neither of the installations [the patent theatres] seem to please violently, one of them will have a vacancy & take it for their own sakes. I know neither will for mine. […] There is nothing so astonishing to me as that Colman should be another Garrick, which I am told he is. [24]

[23] Frances Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 273. Hereafter referred to as *EJL.*

[24] Brooke to Gifford, 15 November [17??], MS Eng 1310, 12.

Brooke was determined that her play would be staged one way or another, and she explained to Gifford her plan if Colman remained unsupportive:

> My design is, if he refuses, to apply to G. [Garrick] & if he refuses[,] to apply to the Ld Chamberlain, for leave to act it at my own hazard, for twenty nights at Foote's, which if *thot* about, will probably pave the way for a third theatre, which is in agitation. I know the Lord Ch. is very angry at some instances of theatrical tyranny, & I think I can refer my story back up & back it with friends that will carry my point, & the best female singer we have, Miss Catley, is in town, & not engaged at either house, & as ready to take such a revenge as I can be; but if I hint my design, they will engage her, and prevent it.[25]

This letter reveals Brooke's resolve to circumvent the managerial boys' club by lobbying the Lord Chamberlain for a third patent for spoken drama to be performed in London. She even enlisted the support of another woman, singer Ann Catley, in her scheme. According to the *London Stage*, Catley had not performed at Covent Garden between March 1771 and September 1772 for unknown reasons. Though the *Biographical Dictionary* suggests this absence was Catley's choice, Brooke's letter reveals that Catley was, in fact, being blocked by the managers.[26] Considering Garrick's dislike for Brooke and the close relationship he had with Colman (the two co-authored a popular comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage*, in 1768), it is unsurprising that *Rosina* was not accepted by either theatre. Brooke, facing the seemingly impossible barrier of convincing any of the London managers to stage her work, did not move forward with her plan to produce the play at the Haymarket, perhaps because, as performance

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[25] Ibid.

[26] The dates of Catley's absence from the patent theatres help date Brooke's efforts to stage *Rosina* as sometime between March 1771 and September 1772.

records show, Catley was re-hired by Colman at Covent Garden. Instead, she made the audacious decision to become the manager of a London theatre herself.

Managing the Opera House

After *Rosina* was refused in 1773, Brooke and a small group of partners purchased the King's Theatre, London's Italian opera house, colloquially known, and hereafter referred to, as the Opera House. Brooke, her husband, and her brother-in-law, along with the acting couple, Richard and Mary Ann Yates, took over management of the Opera House in late 1773.[27] Like Brooke, Mary Ann Yates had reason to resent London's theatrical management. She performed at Drury Lane from her debut in the 1750s through 1767, becoming once of the most highly celebrated actresses of her day, especially in tragedy. Following the deaths of two other great actresses, Susannah Cibber in 1766 and Hannah Pritchard 1768, and the retirement of Catherine Clive in 1769, Yates demanded to be paid a sum appropriate for her standing as London's top actress.[28] Like Clive, Yates used the press to stake her claim for adequate remuneration in letters to the public. Garrick was unmoved, however, and chose not to reengage her, so she and her husband moved to Covent Garden. But in 1772-73, Yates left Covent Garden after quarrelling with Colman over the same issue; the manager consistently refused to pay her requested salary.[29]

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[27] For a meticulously detailed description of the Brookes-Yates partnership, see Ian Woodfield, *Opera and Drama in Eighteenth-Century London: The King's Theatre, Garrick, and the Business of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[28] See *Daily Gazetteer*, 5 October 1767.

[29] See Peter Thomson, "Yates [née Graham], Mary Ann (1728-1787), actress and theatre manager," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 29 April 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/30196.

Yates was limited in her ability to negotiate because of the duopoly of London's patent system. By joining ranks to run the London Opera House, Brooke and Yates hoped that they could provide competition to Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and they planned to appeal to the Lord Chamberlain for a license to perform spoken drama and English opera alongside Italian opera.[30] If their patent was granted, Brooke could write plays, and Yates could perform in them.

Brooke and Yates' status as women theatre managers was not entirely unprecedented by the late-eighteenth century, but it was extremely unusual.[31] A handful of women had ventured into the business of theatre before them, including Ann Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Barry who, in 1695, became the first women managers of a London theatre company following their petition for a license to form the United Company along with six male collaborators.[32] Other women worked in theatre administration beyond the patent stages. For example, in the 1730s and '40s, Charlotte Chark successfully acquired a license to perform her own puppet shows and other theatricals at the Old Tennis Court, St James' and later Turnbridge Wells.[33] Teresa Cornelys established Carlisle House, a fashionable gathering place where patrons could purchase annual subscriptions for access to entertainments including masquerades, and, in the late-eighteenth

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[30] Woodfield, *The King's Theatre*, 119.

[31] See Tracy C. Davis, "Female Managers, Lessees and Proprietors of the British Stage (to 1914)," *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 28, no. 2 (2000): 115-44. Davis' list of English women in theatre business up to 1914 reveals only a handful of women working in this field in the eighteenth century, but hundreds in the nineteenth, confirming that Brooke and Yates' management of the Opera House was indeed ground-breaking.

[32] See Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late Stuart Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 95-96.

[33] Thomas C. Crochunis, "Women in Theatre Management," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, eds. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 568-69.

century, Elizabeth Craven organized private theatricals at her mansion, Brandenburgh House.[34] Still other women managed theatres outside the metropolis, such as Sarah Baker who operated a travelling performance troupe and later opened four theatres in the provinces.[35] Practically speaking, however, women's access to theatrical management in London was extremely limited due both to the highly regulated nature of the industry, and women's unequal legal standing. In 1745, actress Susannah Cibber harboured dreams of becoming a manager and tried to convince then-actor Garrick to go into business with her and purchase the patent at Drury Lane. Garrick was interested, but because Cibber was a woman, he questioned her ability to run the business effectively and independently. In December 1745, he explained his concerns to a friend, writing: "how can she be a joint patentee? Her husband will interfere, or somebody must act for her, which would be equally disagreeable."[36] Cibber's husband, Theophilus, was a notorious scoundrel who, as Fiona Ritchie observes, "would take any opportunity of exploiting his wife's success."[37] Garrick, pragmatically, did not want to deal with such complications, so he did not partner with Cibber. The issue of coverture also applied to Frances Brooke and Mary Ann Yates, whose management roles were only possible because their husbands were amenable co-

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[34] Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre*, 12; Judith Hawley, "Elizabeth and Keppel Craven and the Domestic Drama of Mother-Son Relations," in *Stage Mothers : Women, Work, and the Theater, 1660-1830*, eds. Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 199-215.

[35] See Jean Baker, *Sarah Baker and Her Kentish Theatres, 1737-1816: Challenging the Status Quo* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2019).

[36] Garrick to Somerset Draper, [c. 26 December] 1745, *Letters of David Garrick*, 1: 74.

[37] Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare*, 49. For more detail on Susannah Cibber's efforts to become a manager, see Helen Brooks, '"Your Sincere Friend and Humble Servant": Evidence of Managerial Aspirations in Susannah Cibber's Letters," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 28 (2008): 147-59.

conspirators. John Brooke and Richard Yates supported their wives' desire to purchase the theatre and were willing to take a less prominent role in the business.

Brooke and Yates made their first application for a license to perform spoken drama at the Opera House on four nights of the week shortly after their takeover in 1773, but they were refused.[38] Consequently, the two women, who had no expertise in either management or Italian opera, were now in charge of curating London's opera season. According to Ian Woodfield, Yates played "the part of glamorous society hostess, holding court like a queen" while the "all-important responsibility of artistic policy […] was assumed by Brooke."[39] Richard Yates served as front-of-house manager while Brooke's husband and her brother-in-law were silent partners. A journal entry by Frances Burney from 1774 gives some indication of how this unusual managerial arrangement functioned:

> The first Opera [of the season] was performed last Tuesday. The morning before, Mrs Brooke, who lives in Market Lane, Called here, & very civilly invited my mother, Susy & me to go with her to the Opera the next Day. […] Accordingly we went. Her House in Market Lane, by means of divers turnings & windings, has a passage to the Opera House. We intended to have sat in her Box, & have seen only her, but when we went, we found she was up stairs with Mrs Yates, & when she came down, she immediately asked us to go up stairs with her. This we declined, but she would not be refused, & we were obliged to follow her. […] We were led up a noble stair case, that brought us to a most

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[38] James T. Kirkman, *Memoirs of the Life of Charles Macklin*, 3 vols. (London: Lackington, Allen, and Co., 1799), 2: 57. Macklin records that actor William Smith left Covent Garden in order to perform at the Opera House under the new patent. Unfortunately for Smith and all involved, the patent was not granted.

[39] Woodfield, *The King's Theatre,* 37.

> magnificent Apartment […] Here we saw Mrs Yates, seated like a stage Queen surrounded with gay Courtiers, & dressed with the utmost elegance & brilliancy. […] With an *over done* civility, as soon as our Names were spoken, she rose from her seat hastily, & rather *rushed* towards us, than meerly advanced to meet us. But I doubt not it was meant as the very *pink of politeness*. As to poor *Mr* Yates, he presumed not to take the liberty, in his own House, to act any other part than that of Waiter, in which capacity he arranged the Chairs.[40]

Though Burney, and the public, may have raised their brows at women managing a theatre while their husbands acted in subservience to them, by all accounts this managerial arrangement was a great success. Woodfield observes that during her tenure at the helm of the Opera House, Brooke "demonstrated so sound a grasp of artistic planning and financial control that the King's Theatre began to prosper to a hitherto unprecedented degree."[41] Backscheider confirms this, writing that Brooke "learned from failures, experiments and innovative talent acquisition to make King's profitable, and, once again, a centre of London cultural life."[42] Though their application to perform spoken drama was denied (they once again applied, and were rejected, in 1775), Brookes and Yates made the best of the situation. Yates began performing once again at Drury Lane in 1774, splitting her time between her two professions as actor and manager, and leaving Brooke with foremost responsibility of managing the Opera House.

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[40] Burney, Journal, 1774, *EJL*, 1: 54-56.

[41] Woodfield, *The King's Theatre*, 3.

[42] Backscheider, "Becoming a Playwright," 327.

Notably, one of Brooke's main contributions in revitalizing the Opera House was to expand the comic opera program. In the year before her takeover, the season of 1772-73, the Opera House had staged only three comic operas compared to fifty-nine serious or tragic operas.[43] This disparity was unusual: according to performance records from 1766-72, comic opera had dominated the repertoire at the Opera House under the reign of celebrated singer Giovanni Lovattini who was known for his comic roles, but when Lovattini left the Opera House in 1772, there was no one to replace him, resulting in a critical imbalance in the repertoire.[44] Under Brooke's tenure, her main concern became restoring comic opera in London. On September 8, 1775, she wrote to her friend Ozias Humphrey: "[a]t present the balance is terribly against us."[45] Humphrey, a London painter who happened to be in Italy, offered his services to the Opera House, and Brooke was quick to tell him what she needed:

> I had the pleasure of your letter from Florence a few days ago, & we are all extremely oblig'd to you for your polite remembrance of us, & your very kind offer of doing anything for us in Italy.
>
> We cannot show a sense of your kindness so strongly as by accepting it, & therefore I make no scruple to say that if there is any very good comic opera play'd this autumn at Florence set by a capital master, you will greatly oblige us by sending us the whole score & the book; I shou'd particularly wish it [Niccolò] Piccinni's or [Giovanni] Paesiello's,

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[43] See Frederick C. Petty, *Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 376, and Woodfield, *The King's Theatre*, 79.

[44] See Woodfield, *The King's Theatre,* 77-79.

[45] Frances Brooke to Ozias Humphrey, 8 September 1775, MSS Montagu d. 6, f. 239, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University.

> & if we cou'd have it directly I mean *instantly* it wou'd be of great service to us. If you can do this for us, & will be so obliging to draw on Mr Yates or my brother for the amount, you will lay us under a great Obligation. I am not sure there is a comic opera at Florence but I write on that supposition.[46]

Brooke's dogged efforts to import more comic opera resulted in a more diverse repertoire at the Opera House and significant commercial growth under her tenure.[47] That said, Brooke's interest in comic opera was not purely commercial. In 1756, Brooke had praised Catherine Clive's opera singing in *Lethe*:

> I was particularly diverted by her *Italian Song* in which this truly humorous actress parodies the air of the Opera, and takes off the action of the present favourite female at the Haymarket [Regina Mingotti], with such exquisite ridicule, that the most zealous partisans of both, I think, must have applauded the comic genius of *Mrs. Clive* […] I am a lover of music, and no enemy to the Opera, have seen and heard this performer with pleasure, but have still been a good deal surprized, to hear persons not deficient in understanding, so lavish, as I have sometimes found them, in their praises of this Foreigner's action, of which by the way, not understanding the language, they can be but indifferent judges, when we have more than one actress on our own stage, so infinitely superior to her.[48]

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Woodfield, *The King's Theatre,* 219.

[48] Brooke, *The Old Maid*, 219-20.

In this passage, Brooke identifies a love for comic opera, and a belief that London has the talent and resources necessary to develop its own English-language opera that could compete with the Italian. Her praise of Clive also indicates her interest in highlighting female performers and singers, decades before she became manager of the Opera House.

As a manager, Brooke displayed a natural inclination for theatre administration demonstrated by her curation of a balanced program, her ability to charm subscribers, and her financial savvy. However, not all were impressed by the Brooke-Yates management team, especially the women's efforts to acquire a license to perform spoken drama. The managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden had much to lose if another theatre could break up their duopoly. As manager of one of these patent theatres, Garrick had more reason than ever to clash with Brooke. Their relationship further deteriorated after Yates chose to split her responsibilities as actress and manager. A letter from Garrick to Richard Yates regarding his wife's availability illuminates Garrick's frustration with the arrangement and his desire to bypass the two women altogether:

> I shall beg leave to discuss our Theatrical Matters with You, in order to prevent their being discuss'd any where else […] You left word with Mr. Hopkins *that we are to think no more of Mrs. Yates, 'till She will let us know her pleasure*, or words to that Effect. Do You & Mrs Yates imagine that the Proprietors will submit to this manner of going on, or that they will pay such a large Sum of Money for having their Busines[s] so destroy'd, as it was in great part of the last Season and has been wholly this, by waiting for Mrs. Yates's pleasure to perform?—She play'd but Thirty times last Season, and as She goes

> on, in the proportion of four times in Six weeks, she will play Twenty times in this Season.[49]

This particular dispute was resolved when Mary Ann Yates agreed to accommodate Garrick's demands to perform, but as McMullen points out, Yates mailed her acquiescence from the manager's apartment at the Opera House, perhaps as a reminder to Garrick, who had consistently undervalued and underpaid her, that she was his equal not his inferior.[50]

Other letters reveal that Garrick's already bitter relationship with Brooke became even worse during these years. In April 1776, Brooke asked Garrick to return a book lent to her that she had, in turn, lent to Garrick "at his request."[51] Garrick's response to Brooke's innocuous request is striking:

> From the great hurry and Multiplicity of Business in which I am engag'd, the misplacing or Mistaking a book belonging to no set, and there not of the greatest Value, may be a fault, but surely not of that Magnitude to merit so harsh a Letter.—Mr. Highmore whom I have not the honour to know, has been so obliging to give me my own time to find the lost Sheep, and to assure You that he is perfectly satisfy'd. This great & kind Civility has reliev'd my Mind from a most disagreeable concern, as it at once excuses you from the unpleasing task of writing Angry Letters, & me from the mortification of receiving them.[52]

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[49] Garrick, *Letters of David Garrick*, 3: 1041.

[50] McMullen, *Odd Attempt*, 160.

[51] Frances Brooke to David Garrick, 17 April 1776. Qtd. in K.J.H. Berland, "Frances Brooke and David Garrick," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20 (1990): 224.

[52] Garrick to Brooke, 17 April 1776, *Letters of David Garrick*, 3: 1006.

Garrick's angry response to Brooke is peppered with gendered stereotypes: he accuses Brooke of overreacting and showing inappropriate anger. Though Garrick is obviously at fault for failing to return the book, his defensive response clearly demonstrates his ongoing dislike of Brooke.

Brooke and Garrick's feud reached new heights in 1777 following the publication of Brooke's next novel, *The Excursion* (1777). Wyett describes the novel as revealing "the reality of brutal and often gendered politics of the theatre world," and Katherine Charles similarly summarizes the novel as "interested in critiquing corrupt theatrical politics."[53] The semi-autobiographical narrative features a young, female protagonist named Maria Villiers, who travels to London with a small inheritance and dreams of becoming a playwright as Brooke did in the 1750s. Like Brooke, Maria submits a tragedy to be staged at Drury Lane theatre, but Garrick—who is named in the novel and portrayed as an arrogant and mercenary figure—dismisses it: "[t]hese authors—and after all, what do they do? They bring the meat indeed, but who instructs them how to cook it? […] 'Tis amazing the pains I am forced to take with these people, in order to give relish to their insipid productions."[54] The scene appears to reference the rejection of Brooke's *Virginia* by Garrick in the 1750s.

If Garrick still felt lingering bitterness over Brooke's article about him in *The Old Maid*, he was now enraged over her treatment of him in *The Excursion.* He had retired in 1776 and considered the lampoon a low blow. He had also recently supported Brooke and Yates' most recent application for a theatre patent, this time in Birmingham, by lobbying his friend, MP

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[53] Wyett, "Frances Brooke on (the) Stage", 32; Katherine Charles, "Staging Sociability in *The Excursion*: Frances Brooke, David Garrick, and the King's Theatre Coterie," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 27, no. 2 (2014-15): 259.

[54] Frances Brooke, *The Excursion* (1777), ed. Paula R. Backscheider and Hope D. Cotton (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 1997), 82.

Edmund Burke, to support the patent.[55] Garrick felt personally betrayed by Brooke's satire of him in the novel and believed she had delayed publication until the matter of the patent was decided. Of course, while Garrick claimed that his support of the Birmingham patent was altruistic, it also would have benefited him by conveniently removing two women competitors whom he disliked and who had challenged his authority. He vented his frustration in a letter to Frances Cadogan on 17 July 1777:

> You have seen how much I am abus'd in yr Friend Mre Brook's new Novel?—she is pleas'd to insinuate that [I am] an Excellent Actor, a so so author, an Execrable Manager & a Worse Man […] She has invented a Tale about a Tragedy, which is all a Lie, from beginning to ye End— she Even says, that I should reject a Play, if it should be a Woman's— there's brutal Malignity for You— have not ye Ladies—Mesdames, *Griffith*, *Cowley* & *Cilesia* spoke of me before their Plays with an Over-Enthusiastick Encomium?— what says divine Hannah More? […] What a Couple of wretches are ye *Yateses Brookes's* partners—I work'd with Zeal for their Patent—wrote a 100 Letters, & they were Stimulating Crumpling all ye while to Mischief, & they deferr'd ye publication till this time, that I might not cool in their Cause—there are Devils for You."[56]

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[55] See Edmund Burke to David Garrick (29 April 1777), in *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick, with the Most Celebrated Persons of His Time*, ed. James Boaden (London: H. Colburn and Bentley, 1831-32), 331.

[56] Garrick to Frances Cadogan, *Letters of David Garrick*, 3:1172.

As Anderson observes, Garrick hated being called out as sexist and his "emotionally complex outburst echoes Lear's need for daughterly approval."[57] He prided himself on being seen as a champion of women, but his letter to Cadogan also reveals "his demand for absolute gratitude."[58]

Garrick did not limit himself to disparaging Brooke amongst his literary and theatrical network, he also published a deeply misogynist, anonymous five-page review of the novel in which he staunchly defended his own greatness and condemned Brooke: "Nothing can be more ungenerous than to attack a man, after he has quitted the field, and has retired, not only crowned with the laurel of genius, as Mrs. Brooke herself allows, but with the palm of virtue also, and […] with the good wishes and warm esteem of an admiring public."[59] Backscheider points out that he made a "mean-spirited" attack on Brooke's appearance in his anonymous review; Brooke was not an attractive woman, and Garrick used this against her to refute the biographical allusions in her book in which the heroine is described as a "great *beauty*."[60]

Brooke's tenure as a manager of the Opera House ended shortly after the publication of *The Excursion*, though not because Garrick had succeeded in bullying her away from the theatre. Rather, Brooke and her partners decided to sell the Opera House, the building and the patent, at a significant profit of £14,600.[61] It was purchased by the new manager of Covent Garden, Thomas Harris, and of Drury Lane, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had succeeded Garrick following his

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[57] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 140.

[58] Ibid.

[59] *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal* 57 (1777), 41-145.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Backscheider, "Becoming a Playwright," 328.

retirement in 1776. The purchase of the Opera House by the other London managers suggests that, under the Brooke-Yates partnership, it had begun to contend with spoken drama, even drawing customers who might otherwise have attended Drury Lane or Covent Garden. Perhaps Harris and Sheridan also feared that Brooke's applications for a license might eventually be approved, destroying their own duopoly over London's drama. As Backscheider points out, the two men took on significant debt to purchase the Opera House.[62] In testament to the success of the Brooke-Yates tenure, Garrick himself purchased shares in the Opera House directly after Sheridan and Harris took over, noting that the investment was "a mine of gold."[63]

The Stage at Last

No longer a manager, Brooke was free once again to pursue the staging of her own plays. She began writing a new tragedy shortly after her retirement as manager, but other projects and ongoing illness slowed her progress. She wrote to her publisher, Thomas Cadell, about these matters on 5 January 1779: "my health has been so bad since the beginning of July, that I have not been able to do anything to any purpose, not even finish my tragedy […] I had every reason to believe it wou'd have come out this year if it had."[64] Despite these setbacks, Brooke finally staged her first play, *The Siege of Sinope,* at Covent Garden on 31 January 1781. It cannot be overlooked that Brooke's first produced play appeared only after Garrick's death in 1779,

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Qtd. in Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 57.

[64] Frances Brooke to Thomas Cadell, 5 January [1779]. The Hyde Collection, Four Oaks Farm. MS file. Qtd. In McMullen, *Odd Attempt*, 187.

supporting the theory that Garrick had been blocking Brooke's work from the patent theatres for decades. Harris, the manager at Covent Garden, did not share Garrick's disdain for Brooke and was willing to take a risk on a new play, especially one by a playwright whose name was well known.

Like her first unperformed play *Virginia,* Brooke's *Sinope* was also a Roman tragedy, based on Giuseppe Sarti's opera *Mitridate a Sinope* (1779), which, in turn, is based on Appian's *Roman History* and the story of Pharnaces, King of Pontus. Years before the action of the play begins, Thamyris, daughter of Athridates, had been promised in marriage to Pharnaces. However, when Athridates rescinded this promise, Pharnaces kidnapped Thamyris and married her anyway. The play opens with Pharnaces and Athridates appearing to make peace after years of war over the matter, but Athridates betrays the accord and attacks the city. He eventually loses the battle and commits suicide, and Pharnaces and Thamyris are reunited with their young son. Though the play appears to focus on masculine subject matter—featuring two male characters who battle for territory, women, and power—much of *Sinope* is devoted to Thamyris and her negotiation of duty, love, and motherhood. Thamyris is torn between competing patriarchal loyalties to her husband, her father, and her son, and her suffering becomes the emotional center of the play. However, unlike other iconic tragic heroines of the century, such as Elwina in Hannah More's *Percy* (1779)—the most popular tragedy written by a woman in the eighteenth century—and Belvidira in Thomas Otway's perennially popular *Venice Preserv'd* (1682), Thamyris' suffering does not result in her madness and death. Instead, she is reunited with her family.

Brooke's experience managing the opera house, and her insider knowledge of theatrical production, factored greatly into her creation of *Sinope*. Unlike *Virginia,* which Brooke had

written when she had no theatrical experience, *Sinope* was written with performance and production in mind. Not only did Brooke capitalize on Yates' celebrity status by writing the part of Thamyris for her, but she also took advantage of other marketing factors. As Backscheider explains, when *Sinope* debuted, the Opera House was staging a related work, Antonio Sacchini's *Mithridates,* the plot of which focuses on Pharnaces' father.[65] Audiences of both houses could experience a double-feature effect as they "follow[ed] two generations of the royal family of Pontus."[66] Brooke was also particularly attuned to the spectacular design of her play, adding elaborate stage techniques popular at the Opera House. For example, when Thamyris first enters in act 1, scene 2, the stage directions read:

> *Scene draws to solemn music, and discovers the Inside of the Temple—the Pillars adorned with festoons of flowers—an Alter burning, crowned with Wreathes of Olive—* Orontes, *Priests, and Virgins in white, ranged on each side—*Thamyris *standing by the Alter.*[67]

Brooke is clearly aware of the powerful effect of sound, lighting, and music as the directions for the conclusion of the same scene demonstrate:

> *As* Orontes *approaches the alter, and the orchestra begin the accompaniment, loud thunder is heard on the left—the temple shakes—the flames on the altar are suddenly extinguished, and the whole scene darkened.*[68]

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[65] Backscheider, "Becoming a Playwright," 329.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Frances Brooke*, The Siege of Sinope* (London: T. Cadell, 1781), 10.

[68] Ibid., 11.

Building on her knowledge of producing opera, Brooke took advantage of the playhouse's potential for spectacular entertainment. She wove together a large ensemble cast, glamorous costumes, powerful music and sound, and beautiful set design as key elements of the play. Her strategy appears to have been successful as the *Morning Chronicle* wrote: "the scenery and decorations were various, and splendid, more so than those of any play lately presented at the theatre."[69]

Apart from consistent praise of the play's scenography, however, reviews of *Sinope* were mixed. Some felt that the play too obviously revolved around Yates: the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* wrote, "Thamyris is the only character of importance among the Dramatic Personae; all the rest […] are very insignificant, and have little to do."[70] Another reviewer disliked the play's similarity to opera: "we expected something of more importance than a meagre imitation of an Italian opera."[71] Still others were dissatisfied by the relatively light action in the play: "the language and sentiments being admirable, the plot is too barren of incidents and variety for theatrical exhibition."[72] Despite these tepid reviews, *Sinope* ran for a respectable ten performances from 31 January to 19 February 1781. Brooke received the standard author's benefit on the third, sixth, and ninth night, and receipts from the production

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[69] *Morning Chronicle*, 1 February 1781.

[70] *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 68 (February 1781), 86.

[71] *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal* 64 (1781), 153. Interestingly, this anonymous review was written by George Colman, previous manager of Covent Garden. Perhaps he was bitter about Brooke's success as manager of the Opera House.

[72] *London Magazine* 50 (1781), 63.

suggest that she made a good profit.[73] The play was not revived in consequent seasons, but it was published during its performance run by Brooke's publisher, Thomas Cadell, on 8 February 1781.

Rosina and *Marian*

Following the moderate success of *Sinope*, Brooke finally achieved mass critical and financial success with her next play *Rosina*, which the *Lady's Magazine* called "one of the best pastoral operas in possession of the stage."[74] Musical pastoral plays were popular on the eighteenth-century stage, often as afterpieces, and, as Leslie Ritchie writes, "[t]he pastoral, as a poetic mode, a musical style and as a comic theatrical form, was highly favoured by women."[75] Terry Gifford defines the pastoral as "any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" and "[a] delight in the natural."[76] Though the pastoral genre is often thought of as strictly generic—featuring rural utopia, peaceful shepherds, and happy young couples—Ritchie argues that the genre appealed to women because of "its potential for generating ironic, parodic, or allegorical meanings; its involvement (or lack thereof) in rural social change; and its contributions and debts to literary and musical pastorals' critical

[73] McMullen, *Odd Attempt*, 194. For more on playwrights' remuneration see Robert D. Hume, "The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power—and Some Problems in Cultural Economics," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2014): 395. After a play's debut, the playwright often chose to sell the publication rights for a fee.

[74] *Lady's Magazine* 14 (1783), 28.

[75] Ritchie, *Women Writing Music*, 133. For a record of women's comic operas, see the appendix, 222-225.

[76] Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 2.

heritage."[77] Overlooked by scholars in terms of their dramatic value, Brooke's *Rosina* and *Marian* contain layered critiques of gender and power.

The draft of *Rosina* that Brooke had begun in the early 1770s had lain neglected until Harris agreed to stage the play at Covent Garden following the production of *Sinope*. Harris' faith in Brooke was proved to be a savvy financial decision as *Rosina* became an instant sensation. After its debut on 31 December 1782*, Rosina* became one of the most popular afterpieces of the century, performed at least two hundred and one times by 1800 according to the *London Stage.* In fact, the only afterpiece to receive more performances than *Rosina* in the final quarter of the century was John Dalton and Thomas Arne's *Comus* (1738), based on John Milton's 1634 masque of the same name, which was performed two hundred and fifteen times in the years 1775-1800.[78] In print, *Rosina* reached its fourteenth edition before the end of the century, suggesting that it was widely read as well as performed. While *Rosina*'s success was credited to a combination of factors—its romantic plot, musical accompaniment by William Shield, and theatrical effects—Brooke's comic libretto was warmly embraced by audiences. The *Public Advertiser* wrote, "[n]o Piece on the Stage can boast a more beautiful Picture of Nature and Simplicity, and the Audience with the warmest Applause acknowledged its Merit," and correctly predicted that the play would have "a very long Run."[79] *Rosina* also raised Brooke's critical standing as a playwright. Shortly after the debut, *The British Magazine and Review* published a biography of Brooke in February 1783, placing the author in "the very first class of

[77] Ibid., 138.

[78] Fiske, *Theatre Music*, 412.

[79] *Public Advertiser*, 1 January 1783.

female literature."[80] Decades later, in 1806, actress Anna Crouch wrote that *Rosina* "went off *then* amidst universal plaudits, and *still* maintains a powerful influence over the public whenever it is performed."[81]

Rosina is set in an English village and, like *Sinope*, the events of the plot span a single day. The protagonist, Rosina, an orphan, is cared for by the elderly Dorcas and her granddaughter Phoebe. This family of women survive by gleaning corn during the harvest season on an estate belonging to the Belville brothers. Phoebe is in love with a labourer named William, and Rosina has fallen in love with the landowner Belville, but she hides her true feelings from him. In turn, Belville notices Rosina's beauty and lets her glean extra wheat. Unfortunately, Belville's rakish brother, Captain Belville, has also noticed Rosina and wants to take her as his mistress. He attempts to negotiate with Dorcus to allow him to take Rosina to London. When Dorcus refuses his offer, the Captain leaves a purse of gold for Rosina in exchange for sexual favors. The Captain then hides in Dorcus' cottage and tries to rape Rosina who manages to escape and finds solace in the arms of Belville. The Captain arranges to have his men kidnap Rosina who is rescued just in time by a band of Irish farmhands. The Captain's villainy is revealed—and quickly forgiven—and Belville and Rosina confess their love for each other. They plan to marry, as do Phoebe and William, and the play ends in a celebratory dance.

Rosina is a simple moral tale in which virtue reaps reward: Rosina and Belville are rewarded in marriage, the farmhands receive financial gain for their heroism, Dorcus finds protection in her old age, and a penitent Captain Belville is reformed and forgiven. However, the

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[80] "Mrs. Brooke," *The British Magazine and Review*, February 1783, 101.

[81] M.J. Young, *Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch: Including a Retrospect of the Stage, During the Years She Performed*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for James Asperne, 1806), 1:157.

play also contains surprisingly complex characters, layered intrigue, and action with two romantic plot lines, an attempted rape, a kidnap, and rescue mission. Indeed, *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* wrote that their only complaint was that the play was "cooped in an after piece, when it might have been with propriety, and, we think, with success, extended to a full piece."[82] Perhaps, in creating *Rosina*, Brooke was responding to the criticism that her play of the previous year, *Sinope*, had lacked action.

Though the 1772 draft of *Rosina* that Garrick and Colman had rejected no longer survives, we can confidently assume that Brooke made significant changes to the piece following her tenure as a manager of the Opera House. As in *Sinope*, Brooke incorporated three paragraphs of highly detailed directions for the opening scene of *Rosina* that indicate her in-depth knowledge of stage design:

> *SCENE opens and discovers a rural prospect: on the left side a little hill with trees at the top; a spring of water rushes from the side, and falls into a natural basin below: on the right side a cottage, at the door of which is a bench of stone. At a distance a chain of mountains. The manor-house in view. A field of corn fills up the scene.*
>
> *In the first act the sky clears by degrees, the morning vapour disperses, the sun rises, and at the end of the act is above the horizon: at the beginning of the second he is past the height, and declines till the end of the day. This progressive motion should be made imperceptibly, but its effect should be visible through the two acts.*[83]

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[82] *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer,* 1 January 1783.

[83] Frances Brooke, *Rosina: A Comic Opera* (London: T. Cadell, 1783), 5.

Though no new scenery appears to have been designed or painted for the debut, Brooke's directions reveal that she knew how to take full advantage of the theatrical effects that Covent Garden had to offer. In testament to the unique detail of Brooke's stage directions, John Dalton's libretto for *Comus*, the only afterpiece to eclipse *Rosina* in popularity in the late eighteenth century, contains brief opening scene directions: "*The first scene discovers a wild Wood*."[84] Audiences were understandably entranced by the sound, lighting, and set design of *Rosina*, as well as the musical accompaniment.

Though the papers praised the set design and Shield's music alongside Brooke's libretto, in an advertisement appended to the first published edition of the play, Brooke is careful to claim *Rosina*'s success for herself. She begins by complimenting the performers and music, but positions Shield as a secondary, not equal, collaborator, writing that his music is "admirably adapted to the words."[85] Brooke also acknowledges that the plot of *Rosina* is adapted from three different sources, the biblical story of Ruth, James Thomson's four-part poem *The Seasons* (1726-30), and Charles Simon Favart's opera *Les Moissonneurs*; however, she also makes a point of distinguishing her own interpretation from her source texts, writing:

> [W]e are not, however extraordinary as it may appear, so easily satisfied with mere sentiment as our sprightly neighbours the French, I found it necessary to diversify the story by adding the comic characters of William and Phoebe, which I hop'd might at once relieve, and heighten, the sentimental cast of the other personages of the drama.[86]

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[84] John Dalton, *Comus* (London: J. Hughs, 1738), 9.

[85] Brooke, *Rosina*, v.

[86] Ibid.

By adding an additional comic subplot featuring lower class characters to *Rosina*, a distinctly Shakespearean feature, Brooke seeks to elevate her role as librettist, and distinguish English opera from the French. She ends the advertisement by noting that sections of her original libretto were cut from the performance text to make the opera an appropriate length for an afterpiece. Therefore, she takes advantage of the printed edition of the play to reinstate her abridged text using inverted commas to note the dialogue missing from the production. According to Ritchie, in publishing her complete play in this manner, Brooke "distinguishes her libretto as an independent artwork, complete prior to staging."[87] After years of Garrick painting her as unworthy of the stage, Brooke was determined to claim sole responsibility for her success.

Five years after the smash success of *Rosina*, Brooke released a similar comic opera, *Marian.* The music was once again by Shield, and this time new scenes were painted specifically for the debut.[88] The first scene featured "*a River; beyond which is a Road winding up the side of a Hill*," and the second, "[*a*] *different and more distant view of the River, with the Bridge over.*"[89] Like *Rosina*, *Marian* is a pastoral that follows the classical unities in spanning a single day in a rural village. Marian, the daughter of local farmer Oliver Meadow, is saddened because her father will no longer allow her to marry the poor labourer Edward since she received an unexpected inheritance from her godmother. Instead, her father wants her to marry Robin, a landowner. Sir Henry, the local squire, inquires after Marian's sadness and decides to help the

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[87] Ritchie, *Women Writing Music*, 160.

[88] Like many of the newspaper reviews of *Marian*, the *Public Advertiser* makes special note of the lovely "two new scenes […] painted by Mr. Richards." See *Public Advertiser*, 23 May 1788. Such a review contrasts with those of *Rosina*, which did not have new scenery.

[89] Frances Brooke, *Marian: A Comic Opera* (London: A. Strahan, 1800), 3, 17.

couple. Sir Henry flirts with the local village girls, who find his attention discomfiting and encourage him to marry a woman of his own status. The scene changes to a country fair where Robin flirts with Patty, and Jamie—a Scottish peddler—flirts with Peggy. Oliver arrives to tell his daughter that he has seen Edward kissing the picture of another woman to whom he has sent money. Furious, Edward defends himself, explaining that it is a picture of his mother, a gentlewoman, who was wrongfully disinherited by a relative. Sir Henry offers to give Edward a small farm so that he may make a suitable match for Marian and sooth Oliver's concerns. However, Jamie the Scotsman reveals that he has been sent to find Edward to tell him that his mother has inherited her estate and one thousand acres of land. Edward and Marian decide to marry and live with Edward's mother. Sir Henry gives the farm to Oliver.

Marian did not receive the same unreserved adulation as *Rosina* following its debut at Covent Garden on 22 May 1788. The music by Shield was praised unreservedly, but the libretto by Brooke was widely deemed lacking. The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* assessed *Marian* as a "a simple representation of pastoral manners, without plot and almost without dialogue" and the *London Chronicle* similarly wrote that the libretto was "so light and so thin of incident that it scarcely contains business enough to entitle it to the character of dramatic action."[90] These reviews must have been frustrating for Brooke who had been criticized for including too much action in *Rosina*, and now too little in *Marian.* Despite these negative assessments of the libretto, *Marian* was, in fact, popular and remained so for many years. Shield's music was deemed "excellent" by the *Morning Post*, and the stage design considered superb by the *Morning Chronicle*: "the stage presents one of the most picturesque landscapes we

[90] *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 23 May 1788; *London Chronicle*, 23 May 1788.

ever saw exhibited by scenery."[91] *The World* praised *Marian* and predicted that the piece would "repay the pains that have been given to it," suggesting that the manager was certain the play would succeed and spared no expense in production.[92] *Marian* was performed at least forty times by the end of the century according to the *London Stage.* Though not comparable to the overwhelming success of *Rosina*, *Marian* had impressive longevity. The libretto was not published until 1800, twelve years after the play's debut and eleven years after Brooke's death in 1789. Perhaps it was deemed that the libretto would not sell well at the time of the play's opening; however, its late publication indicates that the play had enduring marketability. *Marian* was revived for the Turkish ambassador, Ismail Ferrouh Effendi, in 1800, coinciding with the publication of the libretto.[93]

Both *Marian* and *Rosina* are best contextualized within their historical moment, namely the theatre's efforts to mediate public grief following the disruption caused by Britain's recent loss of the American colonies. *Rosina* was performed at the beginning of 1783, after the British surrender at Yorktown, Virginia that effectively ended the Revolutionary War, and before the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 3 September 1783. Though *Marian* was produced five years after the end of the American Revolution, Britain was still navigating these devastating imperial losses and, as Daniel O'Quinn has shown, the theatre played a key role in affirming British imperial identity.[94] While *Rosina* and *Marian* make no mention of the disruption the war

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[91] *Morning Post*, 23 May 1788; *Morning Chronicle*, 23 May 1788.

[92] *World*, 23 May 1788.

[93] See the *London Stage* entry for 17 May 1800.

[94] Daniel O'Quinn, *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 265.

wreaked on English life, both plays depict the English working-class labouring happily on the farms belonging to the benevolent aristocracy. In each play, peace is made with the Scottish and the Irish as English characters overcome their prejudice. While there is a suggestion that cross-class relations may disrupt the utopias presented, each play ultimately reveals that the couples—Rosina and Belville, and Marian and Edward—were equal in status all along. Both plays soothe the battle wounds of defeat by celebrating a nation whose people are content and whose hierarchical social structure apparently pleases everyone. On the surface, the plays are conventional and appealing, easily grouped with pastorals like Garrick's *Florizel and Perdita* (1756) and Macnamara Morgan's *The Sheep-Shearing* (1754), which similarly feature women's rags-to-riches narratives.

Yet, within this construction of an English paradise, *Rosina* and *Marian* contain surprisingly blunt critiques of the challenges women face within England's social and economic systems. Similarly to Mariana in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Rosina was meant to have inherited a fortune, but it was lost in the shipwreck that killed her parents. Without family or fortune, she is taken in by the generous, but poverty stricken, Dorcus and her granddaughter Phoebe. Like Clive's gendered inversion of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* in *Bayes in Petticoats*, Brooke inverts the pastoral elements of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, in which Perdita is raised by a shepherd and his son. The small family of women, Rosina, Dorcus, and Phoebe, face gendered challenges in surviving without the support of a husband, father, or son to offer them legal status, financial stability, and physical protection. The women have no means of earning a living and survive on Belville's charity during the harvest. Dorcus is ashamed that Rosina has joined her in poverty and wants to ask Belville to provide for Rosina, but Rosina resists: "[n]ot

for worlds, Dorcas, I want nothing: you have been a mother to me."[95] In another echo of *The Winter's Tale*, in which Florizel's father suggests that his son take the supposedly low-born Perdita as a mistress rather than a wife, the Captain suggests that Rosina come to London with him and be his paramour. The Captain even attempts to negotiate this arrangement with Dorcus:

> CAPT. BELVILLE. You have a charming daughter—
>
> DORCUS. [*aside*] I thought as much. A vile, wicked man!
>
> CAPT. BELVILLE. Beauty like hers might find a thousand resources in London: the moment she appears there, she will turn every head.
>
> DORCUS. And is your honour sure her own won't turn at the same time?
>
> CAPT. BELVILLE. She shall live in influence, and take care of you too, Dorcus.[96]

Dorcus rejects the Captain's offer, saying "If I must be a trouble to the dear child, I shall rather owe my bread to her labour than her shame," but, without the protection of a male family member, Dorcus and Rosina have little power to deny the Captain's desires.[97] Indeed, in the following scenes the Captain attempts, and fails, to rape Rosina. Rosina's problems are resolved when she marries Belville, and, in doing so, attains status, safety from sexual violence, and financial security. The play both celebrates Rosina's marriage while simultaneously drawing attention to the extreme precarity of women's lives within a patriarchal society.

The complex gendered politics of class, marriage, and economy are also overt in *Marian.* Peaceful rural life is disrupted when Marian inherits money from her godmother, but instead of

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[95] Brooke, *Rosina*, 7.

[96] Ibid., 18.

[97] Ibid., 18.

establishing her independence, the money causes her father to want to improve his own social status. As Marian explains to Edward, "[m]y father wants me to marry Robin, because he has ten acres of land, besides the ferry, and a cot in the country, and milks four cows; but I won't marry Robin, nor anybody but Edward."[98] Edward, in a show of masculine virtue, argues that he will not allow Marian to lower herself for him, saying, "[h]ow could I be so unjust, Marian?"[99] Marian loves Edward and wants to marry him, but her father's and Edward's pride obstruct her autonomy. Notably, it is another woman's inheritance that ultimately resolves Marian's problem. When Edward's mother is restored to her estate that was wrongfully withheld from her, Oliver is appeased that his daughter is marrying upwardly, and Edward is content that he can appropriately provide for Marian. Though Marian's position never changes, male pride must be soothed before she can make her own decisions. The original manuscript of *Marian* submitted for licensing to the Lord Chamberlain's Office includes a line that clarifies the injustice of Marian's situation. In act 2, Sir Robert (whose name was changed to Sir Henry in the performance and printed versions of the play) is trying to convince Marian's father to allow her and Henry (whose name was later changed to Edward) to marry:

> OLIVER. It's very hard, your Honor, if a freeborn Englishman may not dispose of his own Daughter.—
>
> SIR ROBERT. It would be much harder if a freeborn Englishwoman might not dispose of herself.[100]

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[98] Brooke, *Marian*, 11.

[99] Ibid., 11.

[100] Frances Brooke, *Marian of the Grange*, The Huntington Library, John Larpent Plays, MS LA 805, 40.

Though this line is cut from the printed edition of the play (it may have been performed as it is not excised on the licensing copy), it illuminates Brooke's critical intervention. She emphasizes English women's lack of autonomy by comparing their condition to slavery—Elizabeth Inchbald does something similar in *The Mogul Tale* (1784) as does Hannah Cowley in *A Day in Turkey* (1791). Thus, like *Rosina*, the play demonstrates that women ought to have better access to their own self-determination.

As in *Rosina*, *Marian* offers a critique of the sexual threat that aristocratic men pose to working-class women. The Captain in *Rosina* is openly predatory toward the women who work for him and his brother. When he first appears in the play, he decides to eat in the field with the labourers to watch the women, saying: "pray let me be of your party, your plan is an admirable one, especially if your girls are handsome."[101] His predatory gaze becomes fixated on Rosina. A similar threat is embodied by Sir Henry in *Marian.* Like Captain Belville, Sir Henry is unmarried, and he likes to watch and flirt with the women of the village. An Irish woman named Peggy, confronts him about his behavior:

> SIR HENRY. Why do you fly me my pretty lassie? I mean you no harm.
>
> PEGGY. I donna know that—I donna laike when great lairds are sa free wi' poor lassies; I wonna be woo'd; I'se Jamie's bride, and my gude will is a' for him—I ha' lov'd him lang; he's a neighbour's bairn, and I ken his bringing up.
>
> SIR HENRY. Only take this ribbon, my pretty lassie, to tie on your bosom.
>
> PEGGY. I'se none o' your gear, gude Sir.[102]

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[101] Brooke, *Rosina*, 14.

[102] Brooke, *Marian*, 24. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in the Scottish and northern dialect, "gear" refers to property. Peggy is telling Sir Henry that he does not own her.

Peggy is not the only character who finds Sir Henry's behavior alarming. Other characters encourage him to marry, including Edward, who says, "your tenants have but one wish, that you wou'd bring down a lady to replace your honor'd mother."[103] But Sir Henry has no interest in marrying, and responds:

> I shall marry the moment I am tired of being a bachelor: in the meantime, my tenants may be perfectly easy:—pleasure without remorse, the rose without the thorn, is my pursuit.—Yet I cannot convince the girls of this; even the lively Patty, whom I shou'd think less apprehensive, if she meets me alone, darts from me with the swiftness of a lapwing.[104]

Sir Henry's plotline is never resolved in *Marian*; he does not marry, nor does he reform his behavior. Though Ritchie argues that Sir Henry is not a real threat and merely "an effeminate fop who only poses as a rake," I contend that there is a darker element to his character. [105] Though he never acts on his flirtations, there is nothing to stop Sir Henry from harassing or coercing the women who work on his property, just as the Captain does in *Rosina.* Both men's sexual power is juxtaposed against the female characters' sexual precarity.

Performance records show that Thomas Harris regularly produced both *Rosina* and *Marian* alongside full-length comic plays by other women, suggesting that he identified the feminist politics at the heart of Brooke's plays and realized a marketing opportunity. For example, on 29 May 1784, Harris paired *Rosina* with Susanna Centlivre's *The Busy Body* and, on 21 December 1784, with Hannah Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem*. Over the years he continued

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[103] Ibid., 13.

[104] Ibid., 14.

[105] Ritchie, *Women Writing Music*, 164.

to stage *Rosina* with other comedies by Centlivre, Cowley, and Inchbald. When *Marian* debuted in 1788, Harris chose to have it performed with Inchbald's *Animal Magnetism* (1788). *Marian* continued to be paired with other Inchbald comedies including *The Child of Nature*, *Such Things Are*, and *The Midnight Hour.* Backscheider has shown that when Harris staged *Rosina* and *Marian* with other women's comedies, the house made more money than when he paired the works with plays by men, indicating the significant popularity and influence of women's comedies.[106]

Brooke's remarkable theatrical career and contributions as a playwright are far more significant than has been previously acknowledged by scholars. Her perseverance in staging her work despite Garrick's blacklisting, her pioneering experience as a woman manager of the London Opera House, and the consequent commercial success of her comic operas, make her one of the most influential theatrical women of the century. The narrative of her career reveals both the entrenched sexism of the theatre industry during the period, and her own extraordinary grit in navigating, scheming, and circumventing that sexism. As a manager, she laboured for years to bring more comic opera to London, and as a playwright, she capitalized on the demand for comic opera to optimize her own playwriting career. The extent to which Brooke encouraged other women playwrights of the period is difficult to ascertain precisely, but the fact that Brooke's comic operas were staged for decades alongside the comedies of other women indicates her important influence on the growing number of women playwrights in the 1780s, including her young friend, Frances Burney.

[106] Backscheider, "Becoming a Playwright," 333.

CHAPTER THREE

Frances Burney: Laughing Comedy and the Issue of Femininity

Since the rediscovery of eighteenth-century novelist Frances Burney's plays in the mid-twentieth century, considerable critical attention has been directed to the vicious suppression of her first comedy *The Witlings* (1779) by her father, Dr. Charles Burney (hereafter referred to as Dr. Burney), and father figure, Samuel Crisp, whom Burney regularly referred to as her second "Daddy."[1] The suppression of *The Witlings* has fascinated scholars both because of the sexism surrounding Dr. Burney and Crisp's censorship—the two men found the play improper—and the devasting effect on Burney's identity as a playwright. Though Burney abandoned *The Witlings* in manuscript, modern critics agree that the play probably would have been a success if staged. Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill write that had Burney ignored her father and Crisp, "she might have made her name as a playwright in the same decade as Goldsmith and Sheridan," and Barbara Darby writes that Burney's scripts "reveal a thorough awareness of the conventions of the theatre of her day and of the ingredients of a potentially successful production."[2]

This chapter revisits the well-researched demise of *The Witlings* and draws attention to an overlooked aspect of the play's creation, the influence of laughing comedy and mentorship of Arthur Murphy. Following the surprise success of her first novel *Evelina* in 1778, Burney was

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[1] Burney wrote four comedies and four tragedies during her life: *The Witlings* (1779), *Love and Fashion* (1799), *The Woman-Hater* (c.1802), *A Busy Day* (1802), *Edwy and Elgiva* (1795), *Hubert De Vere* (1790-97), *The Siege of Pevensey* (1790-91), and *Elberta* (1791-1814).

[2] Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill, introduction to *The Witlings* and *The Woman-Hater*, by Frances Burney (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 15; Barbara Darby, *Frances Burney Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late-Eighteenth-Century Stage* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 165.

befriended by one of her father's patrons, Hester Thrale, who ran a literary salon at her estate, Streatham Park. Murphy was a frequent visitor at Streatham and, according to Burney's journals and letters, an encouraging advisor. He read the first two acts of *The Witlings*, and possibly others, while offering Burney critical advice about comedy, stagecraft, and live performance. Perhaps if *The Witlings* had been published or performed, Murphy's mentorship of Burney would be better known today, but his relationship with Burney devolved following the suppression of the piece, and the connection between these two famous eighteenth-century writers is generally overlooked. In Jesse Foot's *The Life of Arthur Murphy* (1811), for example, the relationship is not once mentioned.[3] Modern biographers of Burney generally gloss over Murphy as one of a "bevy of consultants" who encouraged Burney to write for the stage.[4] For example, Margaret Anne Doody notes Murphy's encouragement and writes that he "thought well" of *The Witlings*, and Kate Chisholm states that Murphy "was impressed" by the play.[5]

This chapter turns to a hitherto unexamined manuscript held by the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library that offers new evidence of the significance of Murphy's influence on Burney's playwriting. The manuscript, to my knowledge not previously studied by scholars, comprises adapted scenes written by Burney of Murphy's play *All in the Wrong* (1761). As

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[3] See Jesse Foot, *The Life of Arthur Murphy* (London: John Nichols and Son, 1811). Unlike some of his male colleagues, Murphy was supportive of women in the theatre industry. His most famous protégée was actress Anne Elliot for whom he wrote parts and, with whom, for a time, he was romantically involved, but he also had many platonic friendships with theatrical women. For example, he was a close friend of playwright Frances Brooke and wrote the epilogue to her first staged play, *The Siege of Sinope*, in 1780.

[4] Darby, *Frances Burney Dramatist*, 23.

[5] Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 91; Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life, 1752-1840* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 87.

nearly all of Burney's extant correspondence, journals, and manuscripts are now published, this neglected manuscript provides an exciting new perspective on Burney's identity as a playwright and her interest in comic trends of the 1770s. The following chapter will draw on this manuscript, evidence from Burney's journals and letters, and a comparative analysis of *All in the Wrong* and *The Witlings* to demonstrate that Murphy had a more considerable influence on the creation of *The Witlings* and the development of Burney's comic voice than has been previously considered. I argue that while Burney was attracted to Murphy's preferred comic style of laughing comedy, especially elements of satire and wit, she also harnessed the style for her own purposes, avoiding sexual intrigue and focusing instead on the experiences and relationships of female characters. Sadly, Burney's foray into comic playwriting provoked the ire of Crisp, who was a failed playwright himself. The final parts of this chapter revisit Crisp's correspondence with Burney during 1778-79, and demonstrate that Crisp identified comedy, particularly laughing comedy, as antithetical to femininity, which motivated his suppression of the play.

Burney is unique amongst the other women playwrights of this study because none of her comedies ever appeared on the stage. Nonetheless, she aspired to become a professional playwright and the creation of *The Witlings* reveals that she identified comedy as the best genre to break into the industry. She made strides toward negotiating the staging of her play, and she took part in a women's tradition of comic playwriting by writing a self-referential, women-centric play. *The Witlings* is a fascinating social satire that displays all the features of a professional production; Murphy believed it would be a commercial success. This chapter, then, serves as an important reminder that the gendered barriers women faced in writing and producing plays not only came from within the theatrical institution, but from the patriarchal family

structure. Thus, the events surrounding the suppression of *The Witlings* offer valuable insight into the vexed gendered politics of women's comic playwriting.

Burney and Murphy at Streatham Park, 1779

Burney's father's career as a musician, musicologist, and music tutor provided Burney with formative exposure to the theatre. As a child she met various figures from the London theatre scene including musicians, playwrights, and performers. Dr. Burney himself worked in the theatres: he performed in the orchestra at Drury Lane and wrote commissioned scores for David Garrick. As a friend and colleague of Garrick, Dr. Burney and his family attended many performances in Garrick's own box.[6] Evidence of Burney's love of the theatre is scattered throughout her journals and correspondence in detailed descriptions of plays that she either saw or read. She even tried writing her own plays as a child, amongst other literary experiments. She wrote "Elegies, Odes, Plays, Songs, Stories, Farces—nay Tragedies and Epic Poems," which she later burned in a fit of adolescent passion at the age of fifteen in 1768.[7] Ten years later, Burney published her first novel. With the clandestine assistance of her brother and her cousin, Charles Burney and Edward Francesco Burney, she secretly wrote and anonymously published *Evelina*. Despite her best efforts to keep her authorship a secret—even writing the manuscript in a disguised hand—*Evelina* was an instant critical success, and her identity soon became public

[6] Charles Burney also wrote original songs for Garrick's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1763 and his own play, *The Cunning Man*, in 1766. See John Wagstaff, "Burney, Charles (1726-1814), musician and author," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 10 May 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/4078.

[7] Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 1: 124.

knowledge. Thus, at the age of twenty-five, Burney was catapulted into literary fame with "remarkable speed."[8]

After taking the young novelist under her wing, *salonnière* Hester Thrale was quick to advise Burney that her next project ought to be a stage comedy as this would be her best route to professionalization: "the Road both to Honour & Profit."[9] (Thrale had been disturbed to learn that Burney had been paid only £21 for *Evelina*). During her first sojourn at Streatham in August 1778, Burney records Thrale's advice in a letter to her sister Susanna: "she proceeded to give me her serious advice to actually set about [a Comedy]; she said it was her opinion I ought to do it the moment she had finished the Book; she stated the advantages attending Theatrical writing, & promised to ensure me success."[10] Thrale enlisted the help of her house guests to further encourage Burney in the direction of playwriting. At a dinner party at Streatham in January 1779, Burney was introduced to Richard Brinsley Sheridan, manager of Drury Lane: "He is Tall & very upright, & his appearance & address are at once manly & fashionable, without the smallest tincture of foppery or modish graces."[11] At this dinner, Sheridan and Sir Joshua Reynolds, a famous painter, flirted with Burney about becoming a playwright—an encounter which she records in her journal as a theatrical dialogue:

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[8] Chisholm, *Fanny Burney,* 216.

[9] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 3 September 1778 in *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, eds. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 133.

[10] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 23-[30] August [1778], *EJL*, 3: 94.

[11] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 11 January [1779], *EJL*, 3: 229.

> *Sir Joshua. Any* thing in the *Dialogue* way, I think, she *must* succeed in, —& I am sure *invention* will not be wanting,— *Mr. Sheridan* No, indeed; —I think, & say, she should write a *Comedy*.
>
> Lord, Susy, I could not believe my own Ears! *This* from Mr. *Sheridan!*
>
> *Sir Joshua*. I am sure *I* think so; & I hope she *will*.
>
> I could only answer by *incredulous* exclamations.
>
> 'Consider, continued Sir Joshua, you have already had all the applause & fame you *can* have given you in the *Clozet,*—but the Acclamation of a *Theatre* will be *new* to you.'
>
> And then he put down his Trumpet, & began a violent clapping of his Hands.
>
> I actually shook from Head to foot! I felt myself already in Drury Lane, amidst the *Hub bub* of a first Night.[12]

Sheridan delighted Burney by offering to stage any comedy she wrote "*sight unseen*," a stunning promise considering her lack of experience and the number of new playwrights regularly seeking to have their work produced.[13] Ellen Donkin observes that Sheridan's interest was shrewd, considering that Burney's name was now a "valuable commodity."[14] Thrale, realizing that Burney would need the support of an insider to succeed in this new venture, enlisted her husband's best friend, Murphy, for assistance.

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[12] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 11 January 1779, *EJL*, 3: 234.

[13] Ibid., 3: 235.

[14] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 140.

Burney's journals and letters confirm that she was already familiar with Murphy's large oeuvre of farces and comedies—including *The Upholsterer* (1757), *The Way to Keep Him* (1760), *All in the Wrong* (1761), *The Citizen* (1761), and *Know Your Own Mind* (1777)—long before the two ever met, causing Francesca Saggini to assert that Murphy was "one of Burney's favourite playwrights."[15] In December 1775, Burney had even copied the part of the Widow Belmour from Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him* for her friend, actress Jane Barsanti, to prepare for the role.[16] The following year, in 1777, the Burney family staged the same play in a private performance at Burney's uncle's estate, Barborne Lodge, with Burney playing the role of Mrs. Lovemore.[17] Thus, when Murphy and Burney first met at Streatham on 11 February 1779, Burney was excited to meet her favourite playwright, writing to her sister that he was "the man of all other *strangers* to me whom I most longed to see."[18]

Upon meeting Murphy, Burney was starstruck, and Thrale had to pull her aside and instruct her to "*make myself agreeable* to Mr. Murphy,—He may be, of *use* to you, she said,—he knows stage Business so well,—& if you will but take a fancy to one another, he may be more able to serve you than all of us put together."[19] Murphy was kind, complimentary, and immediately offered his support to the young playwright. Though he knew that Burney was the

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[15] Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel*, 263 n.16.

[16] Jane Barsanti (?-1795) was a pupil of Dr. Burney who befriended his young daughter. See Frances Burney, Journal for 30 December 1775, in *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 198.

[17] Frances Burney, Journal for 1777, in *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 235-50.

[18] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, [Streatham, *post* 16] February [1779], *EJL* 3: 243.

[19] Ibid., 3: 244.

anonymous author of *Evelina*, he soothed her discomfort at being named its creator by feigning ignorance:

> I speak what I really think;—*Comedy* is the *forte* of that Book,—I Laughed over it most violently;—I lent it to two young ladies, very sensible Girls, of my acquaintance, & they could not go to Bed while it was in reading, *that* seems to me as good a testimony as a Book can have. And if the Author—I won't say *who*.— (all the Time looking away from me) will write a *Comedy*, I will most readily, & with great pleasure, give any advice or assistance in my power.[20]

At this initial meeting, Burney and Murphy solidified their mentorship arrangement. Murphy agreed to examine the "*Plan*" for Burney's comedy, suggesting that she already had an outline of the play in mind, and he provided her with "several *rules*" about writing a comedy.[21] His knowledge of comedy and the theatre business, and his willingness to advise Burney on matters of performance made him an exceptional mentor. He assured her, saying, "I have had so much experience in this sort of Work, that I believe I can always tell what will be *Hissed* at least."[22] Murphy's offer to support her was so momentous that Burney later gushed to her sister Susanna, "[t]hink but of encouragement like this from so experienced a Judge as Mr. Murphy! how *amazing*, that this idea of a *Comedy* should strike so many! And how very kind is this offer of service!"[23]

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[20] Ibid., 3: 246.

[21] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, [?23] February 1779, *EJL*, 3: 252.

[22] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, [Streatham, *post* 16] February [1779], *EJL*, 3: 246.

[23] Ibid.

Over the next several months, Murphy kept his promise to mentor Burney. On 21 May 1779, he returned to Streatham to read the first act of *The Witlings* and Burney wrote that "he was pleased to commend it very liberally; he has pointed out 2 places where he thinks I might enlarge, but has not criticised one *Word*, on the contrary; the Dialogue he has honoured with high praise."[24] On 27 May, Murphy again visited Streatham and read the second act: "He made me many very flattering speeches of his eagerness to go on with my Play,—to know what became of the several Characters, —& to what place I should next conduct them, assuring me that the first Act had run in his Head ever since he had read it."[25] After one of these visits, Thrale told Burney that "[Murphy] calls you a *sly, designing body*,—& says you look all the people through most wickedly. He watches You—& Vows he has caught you in the act:—nobody and nothing, he says, escapes you, & you keep looking round for Characters all Day long."[26] Though Burney does not provide any further detail regarding the advice Murphy gave her during their tête-à-têtes, following their May meetings she went on to significantly revise the play, writing on 30 July 1779 that the play was "an enormous length, though half as short again as the original."[27]

The Debate over Laughing and Sentimental Comedy

Even without more detail from Burney's own journals and letters, the nature of Murphy's advice to her can be confidently deduced. Murphy held strong beliefs about the nature and

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[24] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, [21-27] May [1779], *EJL*, 3: 268.

[25] Ibid., 3: 278.

[26] Frances Burney to Susanna Burney, 28 May 1779, *EJL*, 3: 286-87.

[27] Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 30 July [1779], *EJL*, 3: 342.

purpose of comedy and was an outspoken proponent of Restoration-style comedy, which was characterized by a reliance on wit, mockery, and sexual intrigue, and known in the eighteenth century as laughing comedy.[28] Following the emergence of sentimental comedy in the early eighteenth century, which "highlighted sentiment, exemplary displays of virtue, and […] the more emotive forms of sensibility," debate erupted over the fundamental purpose of comedy: ought comedy provide moral instruction amplified by displays of affect, or should comedy seek to incite laughter and amusement through satire, mockery, and intrigue? [29] Robert D. Hume and other scholars have argued that, in practice, the dichotomy between laughing and sentimental comedy was not as definitive as those debating the topic made it seem, and plays from the period often contained elements of both subgenres mixed with others.[30] But, as Lisa Freeman writes, "two distinct strains in comedy did emerge in this period" and playwrights, critics, and audiences regularly positioned themselves in one of the two camps.[31] Murphy himself was a major voice in these debates.

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[28] According to Richard Bevis, the term "laughing comedy" was coined in 1773 in the *Westminster Magazine* by Oliver Goldsmith, though the features of laughing comedy had been debated for decades beforehand. See Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition: Stage Comedy in Garrick's Day* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 83.

[29] Lisa Freeman "The Social Life of Eighteenth-Century Comedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, eds. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 73.

[30] See Misty Anderson, "Genealogies of Comedy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, eds. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 352; Freeman, *Character's Theater*, 145-46; and Robert D. Hume, "Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution in 'Laughing' Against 'Sentimental' Comedy," in *Studies in Change and Revolution: Aspects of English Intellectual History 1640-1800*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Menston: Scolar Press, 1972), 237-76.

[31] Freeman, *Character's Theatre*, 146.

Over his quarter-century long career in the theatre, Murphy established himself as a strict proponent of laughing comedy, and his oeuvre contributed to a so-called revival of the style in the 1770s, famously marked by Oliver Goldsmith's essay *A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy* (1773). While Goldsmith is often credited with spearheading the campaign against sentimental comedy in his essay, Murphy had already been writing sustained criticism on the topic for decades. He wrote multiple essays on comedy in his periodical *The Gray's-Inn Journal* (1752-54) under the pseudonym Charles Ranger, a character from Benjamin Hoadly's *The Suspicious Husband* (1747) famously played by Garrick.[32] In his theatrical criticism, Murphy praised the plays of Plautus and Terence whose clever satires had inspired Restoration comic playwrights like William Congreve and William Wycherley; on 29 September 1753 he wrote, "the last Century was remarkable for a comic Genius, which sometimes run out into unwarrantable Luxuriancies, and a Breach of Manners; the present Times have a politer taste but cannot produce any Work of Theatrical Humour."[33] Nostalgic for Restoration comedy and contemptuous of the more sentimental comedy, Murphy argued that the ultimate purpose of comedy must be, at all costs, to induce laughter: "[I]t is not enough to display Foibles and Oddities; a fine Vein of Ridicule must run through the whole, to urge the Mind to frequent Emotions of Laughter; other wise there will be danger of exhibiting disagreeable Characters without affording the proper Entertainment."[34]

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[32] See Roy E. Aycock, "Arthur Murphy, the *Gray's-Inn Journal*, and the *Craftsman*: Some Publication Mysteries," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 67, no. 3 (1973): 255-62. Aycock provides a detailed explanation of the complicated publication history of *The Gray's Inn Journal*.

[33] Arthur Murphy [Charles Ranger, pseud.], *The Gray's-Inn Journal, 1753-4*, 2 vols. (London: W. Faden, 1756), 1: 248.

[34] Ibid., 2: 315.

When Murphy finally began to write his own comedies, they reflected the values laid out in his essays. J. Homer Caskey confirms that Murphy was "as unsentimental in his practice as in his theory," and Robert Spector describes Murphy's first farce, *The Apprentice* (1756), as a "blend of Restoration comedy of manners and Augustan satire."[35] Murphy's first full-length comedy, *The Way to Keep Him,* staged at Drury Lane in 1760, was a great critical and commercial success, and was followed by similarly popular productions of *All in The Wrong* (1761) and *Know Your Own Mind* (1778).

Burney's journals and letters confirm that she enjoyed the laughing comedies of Goldsmith, George Colman the Elder, Samuel Foote, David Garrick, and, of course, Murphy himself.[36] Moreover, Sheridan, who had promised to stage *The Witlings* at Drury Lane, was the author of one of the most iconic laughing comedies of the century, *The School for Scandal* (1777), and she was eager to please him. Thus, when Burney began writing *The Witlings* in the late 1770s, laughing comedy was in high demand and she was being mentored by its greatest advocate.

Burney's Interest in Murphy's Laughing Comedy

An overlooked manuscript reveals Burney's particular interest in one of Murphy's most popular laughing comedies, *All in the Wrong*. The manuscript, which was unavailable to scholars in the private collection of Paula Peyraud until 2009 when it was acquired by the Beinecke

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[35] J. Homer Caskey, "Arthur Murphy and the War on Sentimental Comedy," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 30, no. 4 (1931): 571; Robert D. Spector, *Arthur Murphy* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), 61.

[36] See Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel*, 223-43.

Library, comprises a series of adapted scenes featuring Lady Restless and her maid Tattle from acts 1, 2, and 3 of *All in the Wrong* and an additional original scene. Though there are no legible watermarks or dates on the four-page bifolium manuscript, both Peyraud and the Beinecke tentatively date it to 1779, aligning the manuscript's creation with Burney and Murphy's meeting at Streatham and his promise to assist her in writing a comedy. On the fourth leaf of Burney's adaptation, the dialogue ends abruptly at the foot of the page with no markings to indicate the scene's completion. Since the scenes are arranged chronologically and include all of Lady Restless and Tattle's scenes from the original play, except for their final scene together in act 4, it follows that Burney's adaptation likely continued onto additional pages that are now lost. The top right corner of the first page bears a note written in different ink, "The Writing of Madame D'Arblay, late Miss Burney."[37] This inscription was possibly added by a previous owner of the manuscript. Notably, the formatting of the manuscript is quite like Burney's only surviving copy of *The Witlings*, held in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. The lines of dialogue are written in neat, uncrowded rows, stage directions are centered and underlined, and each character's departure is marked by a right justified "Exit."

The result of Burney's adaptation of scenes from *All in the Wrong* is a series of comic vignettes between Lady Restless and Tattle evocative of a Vaudevillian double act. The two characters are perfect foils to one another. Lady Restless is mistakenly convinced that Tattle's friend Marmalet, maid to Lady Conquest, is having an affair with her husband, Sir John Restless. She constantly harasses Tattle to reveal Sir John's whereabouts and liaisons. In fact, Tattle has

[37] Frances Burney, Adaptation of scenes from *All in the Wrong*, [c. 1779?], General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, MSS. File 459. All subsequent quotations are from this unpaginated manuscript.

no knowledge of such escapades because Sir John is entirely faithful to Lady Restless and is himself convinced that his wife is having an affair. Burney does not alter the overall plot of the scenes that take place between Lady Restless and Tattle, but she quickens the comic pacing by removing unnecessary characters—apart from a single line from Sir John—and altering the dialogue. Indeed, Burney's scenes are roughly half the length of Murphy's and characters that appear in Murphy's scenes—Marmalet, a valet named Robert, and another servant—are cut entirely from Burney's adaptation. Burney uses the new two-hander scenes to emphasize the differences between the women: Lady Restless' irrationality becomes more farcical when paired exclusively with Tattle's bewilderment. For example, in Murphy's original, Lady Restless directs her anger at both Tattle and Marmalet, dispersing her rage on multiple characters, but in Burney's adaptation the weary Tattle must bear the brunt of Lady Restless' tyranny as she is accused of assisting Marmalet and Sir John's liaison: "You favoured her escape, I find." Tattle, justifiably perplexed, replies, "I favoured her escape, Madam?" Tattle's confusion seems only to ignite Lady Restless' suspicions. In Burney's original scene—placed last in the manuscript and marked by the subheading "Scene"—she further emphasizes Lady Restless and Tattle's dispute. Tattle comes running at Lady Restless' call, apologizing for her delay as she was putting on her cap. Lady Restless has become so crazed that she accuses Tattle of wanting Sir John for herself and threatens to dismiss the long-suffering maid. Tattle cries: "as I hope to live and breath, ma'am, I had not such a thought." Lady Restless' unfounded accusation in Burney's version functions to highlight her absurdity, as does Tattle's bafflement about why an act so mundane as putting on her cap would cause such outrage.

Though it is unclear why Burney adapted these scenes, it is possible that the adaptation was meant for a private theatrical like the Burney family's performance of *Know Your Own*

Mind in 1777. The manuscript, at times, appears to be a cue script for the part of Tattle as Lady Restless' dialogue is more heavily altered than Tattle's, and often includes only the final line of her speech. Take, for example, a scene in act 2 in which Lady Restless accuses Tattle of orchestrating Sir John's affair. In Murphy's play, the scene reads:

> LADY RESTLESS. Oh! very well, Mrs. Busy-Body—you have been there, have you?—You have been to frame a story among yourselves, have you, and to hinder me from discovering?—But I'll go to my Lady Conquest myself—I have had no answer to my letter, and 'tis you have occasioned it—
>
> TATTLE. Dear, my lady, if you will but give me leave—I have been doing you the greatest piece of service —I believe, in my conscience, there is something in what you suspect about Sir John.[38]

Alternatively, in Burney's version only the final line of Lady Restless' dialogue is provided but Tattle's response is intact with slight alterations:

> Ly. Rest: = 'tis you have occasioned it.
>
> Tattle: = Dear my lady, if you will but give me leave to speak!—I have been doing your ladyship the greatest piece of service: —I believe in my conscience there is something in what you suspect about Sir John![39]

Whatever the intended purpose of Burney's adaptation, she was clearly attracted to the play's bright dialogue and the dynamic between the weary servant and her tyrannical mistress. Her

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[38] Arthur Murphy, *All in the Wrong* (London: P. Vaillant, 1761), 46. There is no modern critical edition of this play. Citations are by page number in the original publication.

[39] Burney, Adaptation of *All in the Wrong*, MSS. File 459.

adaptation, though brief, displays many of the features that reoccur in her plays and novels: lively comic dialogue, relationships between women, and social satire.

The Witlings and *All in the Wrong*

Comparing Burney's *The Witlings* to Murphy's *All in the Wrong* reveals many structural and stylistic similarities, including traits of laughing comedy undergirding both plays, as well as meaningful ways in which Burney deviates from the conventions of the style. As is standard in laughing comedies, characters' names in both plays are references to their personalities and foibles—a practice that harkens back to Restoration comedies. In *All in the Wrong*, Sir John and Lady Restless are an aristocratic couple each obsessed with the other's perceived infidelity, Tippet and Tattle are clever and gossipy servants, and Bellmont is the handsome lover besotted with his best friend's sister. The characters in *The Witlings* are similarly named: Lady Smatter has a scattered knowledge of literature, Codger is old and longwinded, Mrs. Sapient pretends to be wise, and Beaufort is the handsome, romantic lead. The plots of both plays focus on a young couple who must overcome parental resistance and their own miscommunication to be married. In *All in the Wrong*, Bellmont's father opposes his son's marriage to Clarissa; in *The Witlings*, Lady Smatter stands in the way of the marriage of her nephew Beaufort to Cecilia. However, Burney's play, unlike Murphy's, is entirely female-centric. Not only is the rivalry between Lady Smatter and Cecilia at the heart of the plot, but Burney also pays unusual attention to the lives of working women. The first act of *The Witlings* takes place in a milliner's shop run by Mrs. Wheedle as shop girls, Miss Jenny, Miss Sally, and Miss Polly, gossip about the upcoming marriage of Beaufort and Cecilia. The final act of the play takes place in the boarding house of Mrs. Voluble, another working woman.

While Burney's *The Witlings* adopts many features commonplace in laughing comedies of the period, these elements are not necessarily indicative of the specific influence of Murphy's *All in the Wrong*; though, the similar female antagonists of both plays, Lady Restless and Lady Smatter, do suggest a more direct line of influence, especially considering Burney's demonstrated interest in Lady Restless in her adaptation of Murphy's play. Both characters are elitist, narcissistic, and controlling, and both function to comically destabilize the idea that class indicates moral superiority. In *All in The Wrong*, Lady Restless is consumed by jealousy. She terrorizes Tattle with questions about her own husband's infidelity and is constantly monitoring her husband's activities: "I'll follow him thro' the world, or I'll find him out […] The cruel, false, deceitful man!"[40] Likewise, Burney's Lady Smatter carefully monitors and controls the behaviour of her nephew, but her narcissism takes a different form. Lady Smatter is a pseudo-intellectual. She professes to be an expert on Shakespeare, Pope, and Swift, and she hosts a literary club, the Esprit party, from her home. Her key flaw is not that she reads literature, but that she only does so to receive admiration from others: "I declare, if my pursuits were not made public, I should not have any at all, for where can be the pleasure of reading Books, and studying authors, if one is not to have the credit of talking of them"?[41] Like Lady Restless, Lady Smatter is entirely selfish and emotionally shallow. No sooner has Jack announced to the Esprit club that Cecilia's guardian and banker has gone bankrupt than Lady Smatter cries: "I can't think what the poor Girl will do! for here is an End of our marrying her!"[42]

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[40] Murphy, *All in the Wrong*, 20.

[41] Frances Burney, "The Witlings," in *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), 2.22-25. Citations are by act and line number.

[42] Ibid., 2.494-95.

Eventually, both Lady Restless of *All in the Wrong* and Lady Smatter of *The Witlings* receive their comeuppance in the final scenes of each play through the deployment of a screen scene, a comic device popular in laughing comedies in which characters conceal themselves behind a set piece to hide from, or to spy on, another character. The attempt is often unsuccessful and results in the hidden character's true identity being revealed to the other characters and the audience. A screen is famously deployed in the fourth act of William Wycherley's Restoration comedy *The Country Wife* (1675), when Horner tells the Quack doctor to hide behind a screen while he demonstrates the success of his sexual ploys. The most famous eighteenth-century screen scene takes place in Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* when Lady Teazle hides from her husband behind a screen, who in turn hides in a cupboard. Lady Teazle has grown tired of her older husband, Sir Peter Teazle, and she confides her feelings in a young rake, Joseph, at his home. The two are flirting when Sir Peter arrives at the house and Lady Teazle screams: "Oh, I'm quite undone! What will become of me now, Mr Logic? Oh, he's on the stairs. I'll get behind here—and if ever I'm so imprudent again— (*Goes behind the screen*)."[43] Joseph hides Lady Teazle and pretends to read a book as Sir Peter walks in the door:

> JOSEPH. Oh, my dear Sir Peter, I beg your pardon. (*Gaping, and throws away the book*) I have been dozing over a stupid book. Well, I am much obliged to you for this call. You haven't been here, I believe, since I fitted up this room. Books, you know, are the only things I am a coxcomb in.
>
> SIR PETER. 'Tis very neat indeed. Well, well, that's proper; and you make even your screen a source of knowledge—hung, I perceive, with maps.

[43] Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, ed. Anne Blake (London: Methuen Drama, 2004), 4.3.100-3. Citations are by act, scene, and line number.

JOSEPH. Oh, yes, I find great use in that screen.

SIR PETER. I dare say you must. Certainly when you want to find anything in a hurry.

JOSEPH. (*Aside*) Aye, or to hide anything in a hurry either.[44]

Sir Peter confesses to Joseph that he loves his young wife, but he believes that she is having an affair with Joseph's brother Charles. When Charles also arrives at the house, Sir Peter tries to hide behind the same screen that his wife currently occupies so that he might overhear Charles confess to the affair. Eventually, both Sir Peter and Lady Teazle are revealed and must acknowledge one another's absurdity.

Similarly, the screen scene in Murphy's *All in the Wrong* is used to mock the misplaced jealousy of a married couple and force a resolution to the play. The maid Tattle allows a young man, Beverley, to hide in a closet as he suspects that his love, Belinda, is having an affair with Sir John. While Beverley hides, Sir John allows a distressed, masked woman to take shelter in his home. The masked woman reveals herself to be his wife, Lady Restless, seeking to trap him in an act of infidelity. Thinking herself successful, she cries: "Oh, Sir John! Sir John!—what evasion have you now, Sir?—Can you deny your guilt any longer"?[45] Lady Restless' triumph is cut short when Beverley is then revealed in the closet and Sir John believes that he has found proof of her infidelity: "Oh madam! you know his business—and I know his business—and the gentleman knows his business—There he is […] waiting for you."[46] The tables are turned and Lady Restless becomes the subject of false accusation and suspicion.

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[44] Sheridan, *Scandal*, 4.3.106-16.

[45] Murphy, *All in the Wrong*, 75.

[46] Ibid., 78.

Burney's screen scene in *The Witlings* is more like Murphy's in *All in the Wrong* than Sheridan's in *The School for Scandal*, as both Burney and Murphy use the device to bring their female antagonists, Lady Smatter and Lady Restless, to task. Unlike Lady Teazle, neither woman is actually the character in hiding. Rather, Burney uses the premise of a screen to reveal Lady Smatter's hypocrisy. At the end of *The Witlings*, Mrs. Sapient, a member of Lady Smatter's Esprit Club, arrives at the home of the poet Dabler, with whom she is infatuated. On finding that Dabler is away, Mrs. Sapient jumps at the opportunity to go through his room and "discover whether any of his private papers contain [her] name."[47] Mrs. Voluable is eager to assist, but when Dabler arrives home Mrs. Sapient must hide in the nearest cupboard. Dabler confronts Mrs. Voluble about his missing papers, and Mrs. Voluble quickly betrays Mrs. Sapient's secret, whispering:

> She came to me, and—and—and begged just to look at your Study, Sir—So, Sir, never supposing such a lady as that would think of looking at your papers, I was persuaded to agree to it,—but, Sir, as soon as ever we got into the Room, she fell to Reading them without so much as Saying a Word!—while I, all the Time, stood in this manner!—staring with stupefaction. So, Sir, when you knocked at the Door, she ran down to the closet.[48]

Dabler, secretly thrilled by Mrs. Sapient's devotion, leaves her in the cupboard undiscovered as other characters in the play congregate at the house. First, Mrs. Wheedle arrives to offer a servant's job to Cecilia. Just as she is about to accept the offer Beaufort arrives on scene to

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[47] Burney, *The Witlings*, 5.294-96.

[48] Ibid., 5.458-65.

proclaim his undying love for his "adored Cecilia!"[49] He is soon interrupted by the arrival of a horrified Lady Smatter: "How, Beaufort here—and kneeling, too?"[50] Finally, Censor arrives to blackmail Lady Smatter into condoning her nephew's marriage, threatening to reveal her as a literary fraud. It is only in the concluding moments of the play that Mrs. Sapient finally bursts forth from the closet to interrupt Lady Smatter who has been gossiping about her. Mrs. Sapient is comically indignant, exclaiming, "those who speak ill of people in their absence, give no proof of a Sincere Friendship."[51] Mrs. Sapient looks ridiculous, and Lady Smatter's insincerity and false kindness is exposed to all.

Notably, Burney's screen scene differs from Sheridan's and Murphy's in one obvious way: it is completely defanged of sexual intrigue. Both Sheridan and Murphy rely heavily on sexual innuendo and double entendre to heighten the comic potential of their screen scenes. In *All in the Wrong*, Lady Restless and Sir John are consumed by sexual jealousy and, in *The School for Scandal*, Lady Teazle nearly cheats on her suspicious husband. Alternatively, in *The Witlings*, Burney uses the screen scene to relay a moral message about female friendship unrelated to sexual behaviour. While Mrs. Sapient does display illicit desire when she breaks into Dabler's rooms to go through his papers, her behaviour breaks social rules more so than sexual ones. Burney's play ends by mocking upper-class women who behave cruelly to those with less power.

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[49] Ibid., 5.545.

[50] Ibid., 5.599.

[51] Ibid., 5.941-42.

The lack of sexual intrigue in Burney's screen scene, and in *The Witlings* more generally, is the single most significant difference between Burney's play and other laughing comedies of the period. It points both to Burney's preference in portraying relationships between women, rather than between women and men, but it also alludes to the limitations she faced as a woman writing a laughing comedy. The lack of sexual content cannot be explained by Burney's own sexual inexperience as she had, in *Evelina*, proved that she could write a joke about sex. In one risqué scene, Evelina is accosted by a rapacious soldier at Marybone Gardens (also known as Marylebone) and is rescued by two cheerful prostitutes who tell her she "should not want for friends, whilst [she] was with them."[52] Burney's reluctance to make similar sexual jokes in *The Witlings* speaks to the public nature of playwriting and the fact that the playwright could not remain anonymous. Samuel Crisp's letters to Burney in the months leading to her completion of *The Witlings* support such a theory. He identified Burney's play as a laughing comedy and deemed it unfeminine, pressuring the young playwright not to compromise her reputation and, eventually, censoring the play altogether.

Crisp's Gendered Censorship

The Streatham set, including Murphy, agreed that *The Witlings* would be a success on the stage, but they failed to predict the negative reception of the play by her family. Earlier manifestations of *The Witlings* had been warmly approved by Murphy, Thrale, Johnson, and,

[52] Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody (New York: Penguin, 1994), 260-61.

according to Thrale's journal of 1 May 1779, Dr. Burney himself who "like[d] it vastly."[53] Yet, to Burney's complete surprise, in August 1779, she received a resounding damnation of the final manuscript from her Father and Crisp who ordered her to abandon the work. Dr. Burney and Crisp's sudden and total opposition toward the comedy shocked Burney, who wrote: "I expected many Objections to be raised, a thousand errors to be pointed out, & a million of alterations to be proposed;—but—the suppression of the piece were words I did not expect ,—indeed after the warm approbation of Mrs. Thrale, & the repeated commendations & flattery of Mr. Murphy, how could I?"[54] Though Burney found the Daddies' condemnation surprising, Crisp had been hinting at his displeasure with Burney's theatrical ambition and her interest in laughing comedy for months leading up to the play's completion.

After learning of the Streatham group's desire that Burney write a comedy, Crisp deployed various strategies to deter her from following their advice. In a letter of 8 December 1778, he warns her about the trauma of a public failure, writing: "The Moment the Scene ceases to move on briskly, & business seems to hang, Sighs & Groans are the Consequence!— Oh dreadful Sound!"[55] Public disapproval was already a great concern for Burney who had gone to such pains to hide her authorship of *Evelina*, and Crisp elevated these fears. He wrote that writing a comic play would reflect badly on Burney's character:

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[53] Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs. Piozzi), 1776-1809*, ed. Katharine C. Balderston, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 1: 381.

[54] Frances Burney to Charles Burney, c. 13 August 1779, *EJL*, 3: 347.

[55] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, December 8, 1778, *EJL*, 3: 189-90.

> I think You Capable, highly Capable of it; but in the Attempt there are great difficulties in the way; some more particularly, & individually in the way of a Fanny than of most people […] I need not Observe to You, that in most of Our successful comedies, there are frequent lively Freedoms (& waggeries that cannot be called licentious, neither) that give a strange animation, & Vig[our] to the same, & of which, if it were to be depriv'd, it would lose wonderfully of its Salt, & Spirit—I mean such Freedoms as Ladies of the strictest Character would make no scruple, openly, to laugh at, but at the same time, especially if they were Prudes, (And You know You are one) perhaps would Shy at being known to be the Authors of.[56]

This underhanded threat, that Burney ought to be ashamed to consider writing a comedy with sexual intrigue, is quickly followed by Crisp's warning that she must also steer away from sentimental comedy:

> Of late Years (I can't tell why, unless from the great Purity of the Age) some very fine-Spun, all-delicate, Sentimental Comedies have been brought forth, on the English, & more particularly on the French Stage which, (in my Coarse way of thinking, at least,) are such sick things so Void Of blood & Spirits! that they may well be call'd *Comedies Larmoyantes!—and* I don't find that they have been greatly relished by the public in general, any more than by *my* vulgar Soul—moral, sublime to a degree![57]

Ultimately, Crisp presents Burney with an impossible dilemma: if she writes a laughing comedy she will sacrifice her femininity and morality, but if she writes a sentimental comedy she will fail

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[56] Ibid., 3: 187.

[57] Ibid, 3: 188.

as a true comedian. Though Crisp claims that he is not "discouraging" Burney from writing a comedy, he presents her with a situation in which she cannot succeed.[58]

Crisp ends his letter with one final blow, cruelly suggesting that, as a novelist, Burney might be incapable of writing stage comedy at all:

> 'Tis certain, different Talents are requisite for the two species of Writing, tho' they are by no means incompatible;—I fear, however, the labouring oar lies on the Comic Author […] The exquisite touches such a Work [a novel] is capable of (of which, Evelina is, without flattery, a glaring instance) are truly charming.—But of these great advantages, these resources, YOU are strangely curtailed, the Moment You begin a Comedy: *There* every thing passes in Dialogue, all goes on rapidly;—Narration, & description, if not extremely Short, become intolerable.—The detail, which, in Fielding, Marivaux, Crebillon, is so delightful, on the *Stage* would bear down all patience.[59]

Instead of plays, Crisp encourages Burney to continue writing novels, which he patronizingly refers to as "little entertaining, elegant Histories".[60]

Over a span of many months, Crisp continued his relentless, multi-pronged attack on Burney's comic playwriting, always under the guise of care and support. In a letter of 11 January 1779, Crisp threatens to stop Burney from producing the play:

> I have been ruminating a good deal on the Obstacles & difficulties I mention'd in my last, that lye directly across *YOUR* Path (as a Prude): in the Walk of Comedy—on the most

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 3: 189.

[60] Ibid.

> mature Consideration, I do by no means retract the general Principle that produc'd those observations; I will never allow You to sacrifice a *Grain* of female delicacy, for all the Wit of Congreve & Vanbrugh put together.[61]

By comparing her to male, Restoration-era wits, Crisp emphasizes the masculine quality of laughing comedy. But either Burney did not fully comprehend the depth of Crisp's disapproval, or she chose to ignore it, because she continued to work on the play.

Beyond the obviously sexist and paternalistic nature of Crisp's attitude, he had personal reasons to deter Burney from playwriting. He himself was a failed playwright, and his efforts to steer Burney away from the profession may have been rooted in an attempt to save his protégée from similar embarrassment—or, more insidiously, to stop her from eclipsing him. In 1754, Crisp had published and staged a tragedy, *Virginia* at Drury Lane. Garrick thought poorly of the play but was encouraged by Crisp's patrons the Count and Countess of Coventry to stage the work.[62] As discussed in the previous chapter, Frances Brooke's play of the same title was consequently shelved. Crisp's production received a damning description in the *Monthly Review*:

> There appears great want of invention, and little knowledge of the stage, in this author; the scenes are so uncemented, and so uninteresting, that, for four acts, we are hardly ever awakened to any feelings that employ our minds, or repay our patient waiting for the only affecting scene, that of *Virginius* with his daughter in the last act.[63]

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[61] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, 11 January [1779], *EJL*, 3:238.

[62] James Sambrook, "Crisp, Samuel (1707-1783), playwright," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; Accessed 10 May 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/6706.

[63] *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal* 10 (1754), 226.

The anonymous critic holds back no reproach for Crisp and the six-page condemnation must have haunted him, for he never wrote for the stage again.

Crisp was also jealous of Burney's new literary friends and her growing fame. Burney even wrote to Crisp that "Dr. Johnson [was] another Daddy Crisp to [her]."[64] His feelings of abandonment are made clear in a letter to his sister, Sarah Gast, on March 28, 1779:

> As to Fanny Burney, she now in a manner lives at Streatham; and she was, not long ago, at home for a week, Mrs. Thrale wrote to her to *come home.* As you say, she is so taken up with these fine Folks, I imagine we shall see but little of her now. She is become so much the fashion, is so carried about, so fetéd from one fine house to another, that if she wished it, it is now really almost out of her power to see her old Friends […] I know Dr. Johnson, Mrs. Thrale, Mrs. Montagu and some of the Wits are driving hard at her to write a Comedy; and […] I have reason to think she is actually at work.[65]

Burney never seemed to realize that Crisp's personal feelings toward her and toward the theatre might bias his attitude toward *The Witlings*. In the end, it likely would not have mattered if Burney had tried to alter her play to appease Crisp. He was never going to approve.

In August 1779, Crisp made good on his threat to "never allow" Burney to sacrifice her delicacy by writing a comedy.[66] To her complete surprise, she received a resounding damnation of the final manuscript signed jointly by Crisp and her father who ordered her to abandon the

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[64] Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 11 March 1779, *EJL*, 3: 255.

[65] Samuel Crisp to Sarah Crisp, 28 March 1779, *Burford papers; being letters of Samuel Crisp to his sister at Burford; and other studies of a century (1745-1845)*, ed. William Holden Hutton (London: A. Constable & Co, 1905), 29.

[66] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, 11 January [1779], *EJL*, 3: 238.

play. This letter of suppression is now lost, but Burney's response gives some sense of its content:

> You *have* finished it, now,—in *every* sense of the Word,— *partial* faults may be corrected, but what I most wished was to know the general effect of the Whole,—& as *that* has so terribly failed, all petty criticisms would be needless. I shall wipe it all from my memory, & endeavour never to recollect that I ever writ it.[67]

Like Crisp, Dr. Burney seemed to identify something shameful about the play and told his daughter that "not only the Whole Piece, but the plot had best be kept secret, from every body."[68] Of course, Dr. Burney himself was no great champion of women comedians. He wrote, for example, multiple demeaning descriptions of Catherine Clive as an unfeminine, comic hack as recorded in *A General History of Music* (1789), Abraham Rees' *Cyclopaedia* (1802-20), and in *The Memoirs of Charles Burney* (1832).[69]

Though the two men had myriad reasons for suppressing *The Witlings*, a main source of their concern seems to have been Burney's perceived mockery of Elizabeth Montagu, the illustrious leader of a literary group of bluestockings. As Doody suggests, Dr. Burney was disturbed that the play was "satiric," and Chisholm agrees that the men were concerned that the play "would insult the very literary ladies on whom Fanny depended for her reputation as a writer," and, of course, on whom Dr. Burney relied on for patronage.[70] Though Burney refuted

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[67] Frances Burney to Charles Burney, c.13 August 1779, *EJL*, 3: 347.

[68] Charles Burney to Frances Burney, 29 August 1779, *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney* vol. 1, ed. Alvaro Ribeiro, S.J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1991), 280.

[69] Charles Burney's various attacks on Clive are quoted in Berta Joncus, *Kitty Clive, or The Fair Songster* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), 327-30.

[70] Doody, *Frances Burney*, 96; Chisholm, *Fanny Burney*, 88.

any connection between Montagu and Lady Smatter, the similarities are striking: like the character, Montagu had adopted her nephew and heir, and she was well known for her literary salon and her analysis of Shakespeare. In January 1780, Burney proposed altering the play to address her father and Crisp's concerns about Montagu:

> *My* Notions I will also tell you; they are:— in case I *must* produce this piece to the manager—
>
> To entirely omit all mention of the *Club*;—
>
> To curtail the parts of Smatter & Dabler as much as possible;—
>
> To restore to Censor his £5000—& not trouble him even to *offer* it;—
>
> To give a *new* friend to Cecilia, by whom her affairs shall be retrieved, & through whose means the Catastrophe shall be brought to [a] happy;—
>
> And to change the Nature of Beaufort's connections with Lady Smatter, in order to obviate the unlucky resemblance the *adopted Nephew* bears to our *Female Pride of Literature.*[71]

In response, Crisp deemed the proposal of major revisions "impossible," and Burney finally abandoned the play.[72]

Following the suppression of *The Witlings*, Crisp sought to pacify Burney by suggesting that she try writing a new comedy, but one that steered clear of the traits of laughing comedy. He writes that his "Fannikin" should trying writing a "witty, Moral, Useful Comedy without descending to the invidious, & cruel Practice of pointing out Individual Characters, & holding

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[71] Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 22 January [1780], in *The Early Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Betty Rizzo, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

[72] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, 23 February 1780, *EJL*, 4: 17.

them up to public Ridicule."[73] He offers Burney a new comic topic instead, one that leans toward farce—considered a less significant genre—and away from laughing comedy:

> Your Daddy Doctor related to me something of an Account You had given him of a most ridiculous Family in your present Neighbourhood, which even in the imperfect manner he describ'd it, struck me most forcibly—the *Pitches*—he says You gave it him with so much humour, such painting, such description, such fun, that in your Mouth it was a perfect Comedy—he describ'd (from You) some of the Characters, & a general Idea of the act—I was quite animated—there seem'd to me an inexhaustible Fund of Matter for You to worke on […] Nothing can be more general than the reciprocal Follies of Parents & Children—few Subjects more Striking—they, if well drawn, will seize the attention, & Interest the feelings of all Sorts, high & low—in Short I was delighted with the Idea.[74]

Crisp's proposed farce about the domestic life of a working-class family is completely out of touch with Burney's own biting satirical voice, interest in female characters, and current comic trends; while it would not offend, it could hardly have entertained. The proposed comedy would, however, fulfill Crisp's paternalistic desire to protect Burney's reputation and his jealous desire to corral her theatrical career. Burney wisely ignored Crisp's advice and there is no evidence that she ever tried writing his alarmingly ill-advised comedy, *The Pitches*.

Following the suppression of *The Witlings*, Burney and Murphy's mentoring relationship, so closely tied to the creation and production of the comedy, deteriorated. During their last recorded meeting on 22 January 1780, exactly one year after Murphy had initially agreed to

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[73] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, 29 August 1779, *EJL*, 3: 351-53.

[74] Samuel Crisp to Frances Burney, 29 August 1779, *EJL*, 3:351.

mentor her, Burney told him that she had decided to abandon the play: "I told him I had quite given it up,—that I did not like it now it was done, & would not venture to try it."[75] Murphy, convinced the play would be a success on the stage, was horrified:

> He quite *flew* at this,—vowed I *should* not be it's judge;—'What! cried he, condemn in *this* manner!—give up such writing!—such Dialogue! such Character!—No; it *must not* be,—shew it *me*, you *shall* shew it me,—if it wants a few Stage Tricks, trust it with me, & I will put them in,—I have had a long experience in these matters, I know what the Galleries will & will *not* bear—I will promise not to let it go out of my Hands without *engaging* for it's success'.[76]

Interestingly, Burney chose not to tell Murphy about her father and Crisp's opposition to the play. Instead, she insisted the distaste for *The Witlings* was purely her own, a claim that undoubtedly confused Murphy who had been prepared to accept Burney as a colleague. Eight years later, while Burney was living at court as Queen Charlotte's Keeper of the Robes, Murphy tried to arrange a meeting with her, but she declined. In an oddly cruel summation of Murphy's character at that time, Burney wrote in her journal:

> He is an extremely agreeable & entertaining man, but of so light a character, in morals, that I do not wish his *separate notice*, though, when I met with him at Streatham, as associates of the same friends, I could not but receive much advantage from his notice: amusement, rather, I should perhaps say:—though there was enough for the higher word *improvement*, in all but a *serious* way. However, where, in that serious way, I have

[75] Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 22 January [1780], *EJL*, 4:13.

[76] Ibid.

> no opinion, I wish not to cultivate,—but rather to avoid, even Characters in other respects the most captivating. It is not from fearing contagion,—they would none of them attack me; it is simply from an internal draw back to all pleasure in their society, while I am considering their talents *at best* as useless.[77]

In this passage, Burney's negative assessment of Murphy must be contextualized by her own "wretched" life at court rather than her true feelings toward him, and her intense wariness about his morality seems to be a reference to his infamous affair with actress Ann Elliot.[78] However, in later recollections of Murphy, written intermittently throughout her life, she remembers him fondly. The two never met again after their last encounter in 1780.

Lady Smatter Returns

While Burney and Murphy did not maintain a relationship following the suppression of *The Witlings*, Murphy's mentorship in 1779 continued to influence Burney throughout her career. Twenty years after Dr. Burney and Crisp suppressed *The Witlings*, Burney renewed her efforts to become a comic dramatist. During this period, Burney wrote three new comedies: *Love and Fashion* (1799), *A Busy Day* (1802), and *The Woman-Hater* (1802). *Love and Fashion* was even arranged for production by manager Thomas Harris at Covent Garden Theatre in early 1800.[79] This time, Burney kept the writing process a secret from her father. Her brother Charles

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[77] Frances Burney, Journal for June 1788, in *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney,* ed. Lorna J. Clark, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 242.

[78] Doody, *Frances Burney*, 173.

[79] See Frances Burney to Charles Burney, [3 February 1800], *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 392, n.4.

acted as her emissary, as he had when she published *Evelina*, and he exchanged letters with Harris on her behalf. Burney and her siblings even adopted a code when discussing *Love and Fashion*, referring to Harris as the "Upholsterer."[80] Tara Ghoshal Wallace has posited that this code was a reference to Murphy's play of the same name, *The Upholsterer* (1758), suggesting that, unsurprisingly, Murphy was on Burney's mind as she wrote her second comedy.[81]

In a painfully ironic turn of events, Dr. Burney once again suppressed Burney's comic play, arguing that Burney should withdraw *Love and Fashion* from production out of respect following the sudden death of her sister Susanna. Burney acquiesced, entreating Harris to stop preparations for the production at Covent Garden. Now a celebrated and independent author, she had the confidence to confront her father about his censorship, writing:

> This release gives me present repose which indeed I much wanted—for to combat your—to me—unaccountable but most afflicting displeasure, in the midst of my own panics & disturbance, would have been ample punishment to me, had I been guilty of a crime in doing what I have all my life been urged to, & all my life intended, writing a Comedy. Your goodness, your kindness, your regard for my fame, I know have caused both your trepidation, which doomed me to *certain* failure; & your displeasure that I ran, what you thought, a wanton risk. But it is *not* wanton, my dearest Father. My imagination is not at my own controll, or I would always have continued in the walk you approuved. The combinations for another long work did not occur to me. Incidents & effects for a

[80] Frances Burney to Esther Burney, 19 November 1799, *JL*, 4: 361.

[81] Tara Ghoshal Wallace, "Fanny Burney and the Theatre," in *A Busy Day* by Frances Burney, edited by Tara Ghoshal Wallace (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 197.

> Dramma did. I thought the field more than open—inviting to me. The chance held out golden dreams.[82]

This passage reveals the depth of Burney's desire to become a comic playwright and her realization that Crisp and her father had done her a disservice by suppressing that instinct. She challenges her father's characterization of her playwriting as a "wanton risk," his gendered language harkening back to Crisp's fears about *The Witlings*.[83] Burney now saw those fears for what they were, sexist and manipulative.[84]

Following this second suppression, Burney went on to resurrect parts of *The Witlings* in a new comedy titled *The Woman-Hater* (c.1802). *The Woman-Hater* maintains aspects of the laughing comedy at work in *The Witlings*, especially through its characterization. The most overt connection is the reintroduction of Lady Smatter who maintains her original iteration's habit of misquotation and literary pretension: "My soul, as Parnel somewhere says, is the soul of poetry."[85] Of all the characters in *The Witlings*, Dr. Burney and Crisp had found Lady Smatter to be the most offensive. It is notable, therefore, that this is the only original character name that Burney maintains. Hints of other characters endure, however: Bob Voluble becomes Bob Sapling, an illiterate bumpkin dominated by his sister Henny, and Codger becomes Old Waverly, the well-intentioned but doddering father. Cecilia and Beaufort are replaced by a slightly more

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[82] Frances Burney to Charles Burney, [10] February 1800, *JL*, 4: 394-95.

[83] Ibid., 395.

[84] Ibid., 395.

[85] Frances Burney, *The Woman-Hater*, in *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), 1.11.21. Citations are by act, scene, and line number.

dynamic couple, Sophia and Young Waverly. New, farcical characters are introduced. Sir Rodrick—the woman-hater—who has never recovered from being jilted by Lady Smatter twenty years prior, turns his anger on those around him. He lectures his servants at length about the ills of women and, during one particularly extreme tantrum, pelts them with pieces of his Back-Gammon board whilst screaming, "I'll teach you to throw dice! There! There! There!"[86] Young Waverly, Sir Rodrick's heir, also takes on a farcical quality. Barred by Sir Rodrick from marrying, Young Waverly finds himself obsessed with women: "he has kept me at such an unnatural distance from the Women, that I have hardly ever seen a laundress, but I have become enamoured of her."[87] Consequently, Young Waverly decides to cast off Sir Rodrick's yoke and tells his servant Stephanus that he will "Search out some pliant old Dowager, worth fifty thousand pounds—and invite Sir Rodrick to my wedding."[88]

Though many of the characters in *The Woman-Hater* are conceived in the tradition of laughing comedy, overall the plot of *The Woman-Hater* is far more sentimental than that of *The Witlings.* Shortly after their marriage, Eleonora and Wilmot separate in the West Indies after Wilmot mistakenly accuses Eleonora of having an affair. In fear for her safety, Eleonora takes their young daughter Sophia and leaves him. Succumbing to the ruse of a crafty nurse, Wilmot believes that a different young woman, whose real name is Joyce, is his own daughter. Two decades later, both Wilmot and Eleonora travel to England with the real Sophia and the fake Sophia to beg favor of the girl's wealthy uncle, Sir Rodrick. As the plot unfolds, various characters make sincere and impassioned soliloquies, indicative of sentimental comedy, meant to

[86] Burney, *The Woman-Hater*, 1.7.60

[87] Ibid., 1.3.21-3.

[88] Ibid., 1.3.59-60.

induce the sympathy of other characters and the audience. At one point, terrified that her estranged husband will take Sophia away from her, Eleonora exclaims:

> She comes not! My poor Sophia! What can thus detain thee? I tremble at every step; yet can rest inactive no longer.—Should accident make her known—or Me!—I must not proceed, —I dare not!—He will demand his daughter—he will unbraid my carrying her off—All the courage that rises when I think upon what I have suffered, dies away when I meditate upon what I may have inflicted.[89]

Eleonora's fears are soon proved unfounded when she confronts Wilmot and the two are reconciled. Young Waverly falls in love with Sophia, Joyce reveals her true identity, and Sir Roderick recognizes his own foolishness.

Sabor and Sill write that in creating *The Woman-Hater*, Burney displays her knowledge of current comic trends.[90] As the eighteenth century ended, a "flood of sentimental drama" swept London. [91] Burney was clearly attuned to this and adapted her comic techniques appropriately. It follows that *The Woman-Hater* likely would have succeeded alongside sentimental comedies like Elizabeth Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (1798)—which similarly features a couple reunited after many decades as I discuss in chapter five—just as *The Witlings* likely would have succeeded amongst the laughing comedies of the 1770s. Burney even wrote a cast list of actors from Drury

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[89] Ibid., 5.14.1-6.

[90] Sabor and Sill, introduction to *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*, 32.

[91] Matthew S. Buckley, "The Formation of Melodrama," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, eds. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 462.

Lane for *The Woman-Hater*, suggesting that she hoped the play would be produced.[92] Sadly, *The Woman-Hater* was never staged as Burney departed for France in 1802 with her husband and young son where they would remain for the next decade.

While there are surprisingly no mentions of *The Woman-Hater* in Burney's journals or letters, there is one rare mention of Murphy written during the period that she was working on the comedy, suggesting that Murphy continued to be a creative influence on her. In her French exercise book, Burney copied out an entry from April 1802, likely around the time she was finishing *The Woman-Hater*. She reminisces fondly about her time spent at Streatham and about Murphy specifically. She even praises a handful of his plays, including *All in the Wrong*:

> Il se donna alors à écrire pour le théatre, et il avoit un succès le plus flatteur possible. Un de ses pièces, Comment il faut le garder, est toujours jouée encore toutes les fois où il y a des acteurs qui meritent de jouer les roles celebres et distingués qui en composent la dramatis personae. […] All in the Wrong, Know your own mind, (pris de l'Irresolu de Destouches,) et d'autres pieces, ont aussi été reçues à merveille. [He gave himself up to writing for the theatre, and he had the most flattering success possible. One of his plays, The Way to Keep Him, is always played whenever there are actors who deserve to play the famous and distinguished roles that make up the dramatis personae. […] All in the Wrong, Know your own mind, (taken from Destouches's *L'Irresolu*,) and other pieces, have also been received wonderfully].[93]

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[92] Sabor and Sill, introduction to *The Witlings and The Woman-Hater*, 322. Burney envisioned celebrity siblings Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble playing the lead roles, as they had in the failed production of *Edwy and Elgiva.*

[93] Frances Burney, Recollections, c. 12 April 1802, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay)* ed. Joyce Hemlow, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 210. My own translation into English.

Burney's recollection of Murphy during alludes to her ongoing regard for his plays and the significance of his influence.

Though he played only a supporting role in the drama of Burney's literary life, Murphy was an important influence on *The Witlings.* Burney's journals and letters reveal that he gave her formative input on her original outline of the play, and that he read and offered encouragement on the first two acts and possibly others. As Burney's only mentor who was a playwright by profession, Murphy's advice was critical to the aspiring dramatist and his confidence that the play would succeed carried weight. Perhaps Murphy's most important contribution was his unequivocal support of the playwright herself. When Burney abandoned *The Witlings* following Dr. Burney and Crisp's condemnation, Murphy refused to agree that the play was not good enough to stage and expressed distress at her abandonment of a fine work. Burney drew on Murphy's confidence in her later in life when she once again renewed her efforts to become a comic playwright. Though her dream did not come to pass, Burney never forgot the support of Murphy and in her final publication before her death, a memoir of her father, she reflects affectionately on the "gaiety of spirits" and "convivial hilarity" of her mentor.[94]

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[94] Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 2: 174-75.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hannah Cowley: Staging Women in Oriental Comedy

In the final part of the century, two women playwrights, Hannah Cowley and Elizabeth Inchbald achieved unprecedented commercial success and "dominate[d] comedy" in London.[1] The following two chapters will focus on these women's remarkable careers, beginning with Cowley, who, between 1776 and 1794, produced over a dozen plays, almost all comedies. Her most enduring comedy, *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780), was produced annually through the end of the century and continues to be performed to this day.[2] Yet, in 1813, an anonymously authored biography of Cowley that was appended to the posthumously published collection of her plays and poetry, *The Works of Mrs. Cowley*, characterized the playwright as an "unassuming," "domestic," and anti-theatrical, woman:

> Neither before nor after she wrote did she take pleasure in viewing, nor was she accustomed to be present at, a theatrical representation. She never witnessed a first performance of her own plays. Successive years elapsed without her being at a Theatre once. Though her writing gave public celebrity to her Name, her mind always retreated to the shades of private life."[3]

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[1] Jeffrey Cox, "Cowley's Bold Stroke for Comedy," *European Romantic Review* 17, no. 3 (2006): 362.

[2] On 22 February 2021, Red Bull Theatre, based in New York, produced a professional livestream production of *The Belle's Stratagem* directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch.

[3] Preface to *The Works of Mrs. Cowley. Dramas and Poems*, vol. 1 (London: Wilkie and Robinson, 1813), xvii.

This depiction of Cowley is contradicted by the events of her career, the content of her plays, and the prefaces appended to them. In reality, Cowley had a great passion for the theatre and fierce professional ambitions. Like Catherine Clive and Frances Brooke, she was publicly outspoken about the sexism she faced within the theatrical establishment and she tenaciously and consistently defended her creative autonomy over a nearly twenty-year career.

This chapter evaluates Cowley's career as a comic playwright, with particular attention paid to her penultimate comedy *A Day in Turkey; Or, the Russian Slaves* (1791), in order to illuminate the feminist theatrical critique that defined her professional identity. *A Day in Turkey* is unique amongst Cowley's comic oeuvre; it deviates from her more conventional comedies of manners that feature feisty English heroines pursuing the men they love within London's competitive marriage market. While *The Belle's Stratagem* is considered emblematic of Cowley's career and a canonical example of an eighteenth-century woman's comedy, *A Day in Turkey*, in contrast, is irreverent, political, and experimental. Instead of foregrounding English social life, *A Day in Turkey* features a host of Turkish, Russian, French, and Italian characters imprisoned in the harem of a Turkish Pasha (anglicized in the play as Bassa). The play is set during the Russian-Turkish War of 1787-92 and the French Revolution, and contains critiques of the slave trade, gender inequality, and colonial brutality. These controversial topics and themes are presented within a play that contains multiple comic genres including farce, pantomime, sentimental and musical comedy. Contemporary critics were puzzled by the play. They found the genre mixing and political allusions discomfiting. A reviewer for the *Oracle*, for example, wrote: "[t]his piece is by no means a Comedy, for the Songs make a part of the communication of opinions; besides, the tragic incidents predominate […] It is an Opera, like many extremely

popular, with incidents of the serious and the comic kind."[4] The *Public Advertiser* complained about the play's political allusions, deemed "equally reprehensible whether they allude to this country or any other."[5] Despite the evident anxiety surrounding the play, it was a moderate commercial success, performed fourteen times throughout the 1791-92 season and revived in 1794.[6]

Understandably, modern critics of *A Day in Turkey* have been intrigued by Cowley's political voice and generic experimentation in the play. Betsy Bolton argues that mixing farce and sentiment allowed Cowley a certain freedom to engage in public political debate that might otherwise have been impossible.[7] Similarly, Daniel O'Quinn reads *A Day in Turkey* as an explicit political allegory and argues that Cowley "examin[es] what constitutes acceptable proximity between women and political power."[8] Anne K. Mellor argues that the play proposes an "embodied cosmopolitanism" that places women at the heart of international political unity, and Greg Kucich echoes this idea in showing how the play introduces "a new kind of women's cosmopolitanism."[9]

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[4] *Oracle*, 5 December 1791.

[5] *Public Advertiser*, 5 December 1791.

[6] Greg Kucich, "Women's Cosmopolitanism and the Romantic Stage," in *Transnational England: Home and Abroad, 1780-1860*, eds. Monika Class and Terry F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 24.

[7] See Betsy Bolton, "The balance of power: Hannah Cowley's *Day in Turkey*," in *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 173-201.

[8] Daniel O'Quinn, "Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* and the Political Efficacy of Charles James Fox," *European Romantic Review* 14, no. 1 (2003): 19.

[9] Anne K. Mellor, "Embodied Cosmopolitanism and the British Romantic Woman Writer," *European Romantic Review* 17, no. 3 (2006): 294; Kucich, "Women's Cosmopolitanism," 28.

Building upon this body of scholarship but moving away from Cowley's macro vision of gender and global politics, this chapter focuses on Cowley's criticism of theatrical politics within the play. By the late stages of her career, Cowley had become embittered by the sexism and censorship of the London theatres, as well as changing theatrical tastes including the demand for spectacular entertainment.[10] In *A Day in Turkey,* Cowley draws on her experiences as a professional woman playwright to create a biting metatheatrical critique of gender politics within the theatre. She draws on imperialism, revolution, and slavery to articulate her experience as a woman playwright subjected to the audiences', critics', and managers' tyrannical demands. By portraying the harem as a women-run theatrical playing space, Cowley reveals the disparate power dynamics between men and women in London's theatrical establishment. The play simultaneously exposes the theatre as a source of empowerment and oppression for women; a space in which they may exercise their power but only under precarious conditions.

Cowley's Theatrical Career

The details of Cowley's professional struggles with managers, critics, and audiences provides critical context to understanding her identity as a playwright and the critique at the heart of *A Day in Turkey*. Cowley was not born into a theatrical family, nor did she work as an actress before trying her hand at playwriting. However, like Brooke, she did receive an unusually good education at home. Cowley's father, Philip Parkhouse, was a bookseller and local politician in Tiverton—a town in Devon, far from London's bustling theatre scene—and his trade provided his young daughter with an endless source of reading material. As a young woman, Hannah

[10] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 141.

Parkhouse married Thomas Cowley, a Stamp Office clerk and theatre critic for the *Daily Gazetteer*, and relocated to London.[11] After attending the theatre with her husband, Cowley was apparently inspired to launch her own playwriting career, saying: "why I could write as well myself!"[12] However, she also had financial motives as the couple had children and Thomas did not earn a high wage.[13]

The Runaway was accepted by Garrick for production at Drury Lane and debuted on 15 February 1776. As I discussed in previous chapters, Garrick staged the plays of many women, but he also acted as a gatekeeper. Cowley was the last woman whose work Garrick produced before his retirement in 1776, and *The Runaway*, according to Ellen Donkin, was "the biggest success of them all," helping cement Garrick's legacy, problematically, as an ally of women playwrights.[14] Cowley was grateful to Garrick for his support of her play and she included a letter of praise to him in the first published edition: "[u]npatronized by any *name*, I presented myself to you, obscure and unknown. You perceived *dawnings* in my Comedy, which you *nourish'd* and *improved*."[15] Self-deprecating and ingratiating, the letter reveals the sort of

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[11] Mary De la Mahotière, *Hannah Cowley: Tiverton's Playwright and Pioneer Feminist 1743-1809* (Tiverton: Devon Books, 1997), 19. See also Mary De la Mahotière, "Cowley [née Parkhouse], Hannah (1743-1809), playwright and poet." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 25 Mar. 2021.

[12] Preface to *The Works*, vii.

[13] De la Mahotière, *Hannah Cowley*, 11.

[14] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 23.

[15] Hannah Cowley, "The Runaway (1776)," in *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick M. Link (New York: Garland, 1979), n.p. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

dynamic common amongst Garrick's female mentees. Cowley, however, also leveraged the relationship to her own advantage. She emphasized her association with Garrick, the most important theatre professional of the century, while also highlighting Garrick's approval of her work. Clearly aware of her gendered disadvantage as a woman playwright, Cowley paints herself as a humble woman, unthreatening to the existing status quo:

> The RUNAWAY has a thousand faults, which, if written by a Man, would have incurred the severest lash of Criticism—but the Gallantry of the English Nation is equal to its Wisdom—they beheld a *Woman* tracing with feeble steps the borders of the Parnassian Mount—pitying her difficulties (for 'tis a thorny path) they gave their hands for her support, and placed her *high* above her level.[16]

Cowley's self-effacing statement should not be misread as a sincere admission of her inferiority; rather, it is an example of the maneuvering women playwrights adopted regularly to appease the male-dominated industry and defang any threat that their work might pose. Cowley similarly emphasizes her female modesty in her prologue to the play, in which she portrays *The Runaway* as merely trivial and lighthearted:

> Our Poet of to-night, in faith's a—Woman,
> A woman, too, untutor'd in the School,
> Nor Aristotle knows, nor scarce a rule
> By which fine writers fabricate their plays,
> From sage Menander's, to these modern days:
> […]

[16] Ibid.

Now for a hint of her intended feast:

'Tis rural, playful,—harmless 'tis at least;

Not over-stock'd with repartee or wit,

Tho' here and there *perchance* there is a hit.[17]

Cowley's strategy of feminine demurral was effective. *The Runaway* was celebrated by the public and was performed an impressive twenty times in the year of its debut and thirty-nine times by the end of the century. The play featured a plot that would become the foundation of Cowley's comic oeuvre. Writing in the comic tradition of women playwrights since the Restoration, Cowley was familiar with the works of Aphra Behn and Susanna Centlivre, even adapting Centlivre's *The Stolen Heiress* (1702) and Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686).[18] As in her foremothers' plays, Cowley's opinionated and independent female characters successfully pursue companionate and egalitarian marriages in the face of patriarchal opposition, or do not marry at all. Indeed, Cowley paid conscious homage to Behn and Centlivre in several plays, linking her work to a women's comic lineage from the Restoration to the present day.

With such promising beginnings, Cowley's career should have progressed smoothly, but, like Brooke, she quickly found herself entangled in the disingenuous web of the theatre's managerial boys' club. When playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan took over Drury Lane theatre following Garrick's retirement in 1776, Cowley felt that he purposefully blocked *The*

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[17] Cowley, *The Runaway*, n.p.

[18] Melinda C. Finberg credits Cowley with being "the first professional female dramatist to draw directly from the works of other professional female playwrights." See Finberg, introduction to *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxxix.

Runaway from being revived in order to stage his own plays.[19] Thus, sabotaging the careers of women playwrights was not limited to Garrick, and theatrical record shows that Cowley's accusation against Sheridan was credible. His *A Trip to Scarborough* debuted later that season on 24 February 1777 and *A School for Scandal* on 8 May 1777. Additionally, Sheridan brought his comedy, *The Rivals*, which had initially played at Covent Garden in 1775, for its debut performance at Drury Lane on 16 January 1777. Though Cowley's *The Runaway* had done very well the previous season, Sheridan produced it only four times in 1777, making room for his own works. Possibly realizing that Sheridan, a comedian, had the power to quash any rival playwright, Cowley next tried writing a tragedy titled *Albina*. Unfortunately for Cowley, neither Sheridan nor Thomas Harris at Covent Garden were interested in *Albina*. Both men read the play, and both declined to produce it.[20] Cowley did not know that the two men had a pact not to produce the work declined by the other.[21] In the meantime, Sheridan accepted Cowley's afterpiece *Who's the Dupe* in 1778, but then delayed staging it until the very end of the season in April 1779, much to Cowley's annoyance.[22]

Adding to Cowley's frustration with the managers was the production of a less experienced woman playwright's tragedy. In 1777, Hannah More succeeded in staging her tragedy *Percy* at Covent Garden, followed by *The Fatal Falsehood*, in 1779. Cowley felt that

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[19] See Cowley's preface to "Albina, Countess Raimond (1779)," in *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick M. Link (New York: Garland, 1979), vii. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

[20] Ibid., ii-iii. In her preface to *Albina*, Cowley writes that both Sheridan and Harris were given manuscript copies of the play.

[21] De la Mahotière, "Cowley [née Parkhouse], Hannah," n.p.

[22] Cowley, *Albina,* v.

both plays, but especially *Falsehood*, shared striking similarities with her manuscript of *Albina,* as she wrote in her preface:

> Should it, after all, appear to the Public, that there is nothing more in these repeated resemblances, than what may be accounted for supposing a similarity in our minds; and that, by some WONDERFUL coincidence, Miss More and I have but one common stock of ideas between us, I have only to lament that the whole misfortune of this similarity has fallen upon me.[23]

Cowley had realized that there would never be a production of *Albina* at either of the more prestigious winter playhouses, so she offered the play instead to George Colman the Elder, manager of the Haymarket. The Haymarket primarily staged comedies during the summer season and *Albina,* a tragedy, was not a good fit; it was performed a meagre seven times beginning 31 July 1779. The situation struck Cowley as exceedingly unfair, but she hoped that the performance and publication of the play would prove that More had borrowed from her play, and not the other way around:

> [I]t seems reasonable that we should have our productions brought forward in turn; instead of which Miss More has had TWO tragedies brought out, both of which were written since mine, whilst I struggled for the representation of ONE in vain. But, as there seems to be little hope of my obtaining this, or any other favour from the Winter Managers, I presume at least, that, as I do not pretend to prove—what is impossible for me to know—that Miss More ever read, or copied me, it will be admitted that I have not copied her.[24]

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[23] Ibid., vii.

[24] Ibid.

Cowley was, of course, jealous of More's success in staging two tragedies when her own was declined, but, as she explains in her preface, she did not solely blame More for the injustice. Instead, she turns her anger toward the managers, Harris and Sheridan, who had mysteriously blocked her production of *Albina*: "by the conduct of the Winter Managers, I have been deprived of a reasonable prospect of several hundred pounds, and have spent years of fruitless anxiety and trouble…[m]y productions have been uniformly received by the Public with applause; yet I find the doors of the Winter Theatre shut against me."[25] Cowley feared that the managers, including Garrick to whom she had given a copy of the play and who mentored More, must have used her work to improve More's. Though Cowley could not prove her suspicions, her fears were not without merit. As I explained in chapter two, Brooke also feared that Garrick had stolen ideas from the manuscript of her tragedy *Virginia* in the 1750s. Like Cowley, Brooke had given Garrick a copy of *Virginia* where it sat in limbo until Samuel Crisp's version appeared at Drury Lane in 1754. Both Brooke and Cowley felt that their plays, which were so long in Garrick's hands, had been used to augment the works of their competitors. Unfortunately, Garrick died in 1779 and could not give an account of his role in the Cowley-More debacle.

Convinced that her work had been plagiarized, Cowley was tenacious in pursuing justice for herself in the press. Her husband, Thomas, possibly helped her promote her case in his role as reviewer for the *Gazetteer.*[26] Eventually More was compelled to respond to the aspersions cast in the papers. She wrote the following letter to the *Morning Post* on 13 August 1779:

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, 53. Donkin argues that an open letter to the St. James's Chronicle accusing More of plagiarism "may have been a plant" by Thomas Cowley.

> It is with the deepest regret I find myself compelled to take a step repugnant to my own feelings, and to the delicacy of my sex; a step as new to me as it is disagreeable; for I never, till this moment, directly or indirectly, was concerned in any paragraph in any London Newspaper. Of the low abuse bestowed on me repeatedly in the Gazetteer […] I took no notice as it amounted to little more than I had mounted a very bad play:—To a pretty plain insinuation in a Morning Paper, that The Fatal Falsehood too much resembled a manuscript play of Mrs. Cowley's not to have been stolen from it, I forbad my friends to reply:—To frequent messages, and menaces from Mr. and Mrs. Cowley I thought proper to be silent—This has been misconstrued into fear or guilt […] My moral character thus grossly attacked, I am under the necessity of declaring, that I never saw, heard, or read, a single line of Mrs. Cowley's tragedy […] Nothing shall compel me to enter into a Newspaper altercation, nor shall I make any further reply. This much I thought due to my own character, and to that public to whom I am so largely indebted.[27]

No matter how adamant her denials, More could never prove that she had not committed plagiarism, nor could Cowley prove she had. The scandal did, however, result in both Cowley and More becoming the subjects of widespread and enduring sexist criticism. In 1795, musician and dramatist Charles Dibdin wrote about the incident in his *Complete History of the British Stage*, more than a decade after the actual event:

> Nothing can be more ridiculous than literary quarrels even among men, but when ladies, fearful lest their poetic offsprings should crawl through life unheeded, publicly expose themselves to the world, in order to ascertain their beauty and legitimacy, who does not

[27] *Morning Post*, 13 August 1779.

> wish they had occupied their time with a needle instead of a pen. The attention of the world was called, when *Fatal Falsehood* came out, to a newspaper dispute between Miss More and Mrs. Cowley, who brought out a tragedy called *Albina* […] Had these foolish ladies no friend to prevent their making themselves a town talk?[28]

Dibdin's analysis of the scandal not only offers a forthright example of the sexism More and Cowley faced as women playwrights, but it also reveals the highly public nature of their feud. It is striking that precisely as the dispute was unfolding in the press, a young Frances Burney was told by her father that she must not stage her own play, *The Witlings*, as discussed in the previous chapter. I agree with Donkin that More and Cowley's public feud may have been "one factor among several" in Dr. Burney and Crisp's suppression of the piece.[29]

The scandal eventually fizzled out, but it left both Cowley and More with permanent scars. Anne Stott writes that More "learned the hard way that a woman could not win in this game. If she stayed silent, she must be guilty, if she defended herself, she was indulging in unfeminine conduct."[30] More never again wrote for the London stage and stopped attending the theatre altogether. When *Percy* was revived in 1788 with celebrity actress Sarah Siddons in the role of Elwina, More did not attend. Cowley, alternatively, weathered the debacle and persevered as a playwright, but her attitude toward the theatre had fundamentally changed. Years of fighting with the duplicitous managers made her wary and discerning. She avoided writing tragedy for

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[28] Charles Dibdin, *A Complete History of the English Stage*, 5 vols (London: C. Dibdin, 1795), 5: 303.

[29] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, 144.

[30] Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 46.

the next decade, distancing herself from the genre and the incident that associated her with it, and steering toward the more commercially rewarding genre of comedy.

In 1780, Cowley produced her third comic play and her second full-length comedy, *The Belle's Stratagem* at Covent Garden, a response to George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707). Harris either held no grudge over the debacle with *Albina*, or, more likely, he spotted the money-making potential of the play straight away. The well-received, five-act comedy ran for twenty-eight nights in its debut season and became part of the standard repertoire for the remainder of the century and into the next. It was followed by a dozen other original productions by Cowley over the next fourteen years, all comedies but one, placing her firmly amongst the top playwrights of the late eighteenth century.

Though *The Belle's Stratagem* cemented Cowley's fame, the remainder of her career was not without challenges. In 1786, Cowley faced criticism for her treatment of marriage and divorce in *A School for Greybeards*. Critics objected to the dissolution of a marriage between a young woman and a much older man before they had consummated their union but following the legal ceremony, a plotline that Cowley borrowed from Behn's Restoration comedy *The Lucky Chance* (1687). By this time, Behn was considered a morally problematic author, and for Cowley, or any woman writer, to imitate her inevitably drew critique on the grounds of decency. *A School for Greybeards* was viewed as offensive and was deemed unforgivable by the *Morning Chronicle* because Cowley was "a female and a parent."[31] Another review criticized Cowley's *The Way as it Goes* in 1781, writing that the play "exceeds in gross ribaldry, the productions of the notorious Mrs. Behn."[32] Cowley, seeking inspiration and legitimacy from the tradition of

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[31] *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 27 November 1786.

[32] *Morning Herald*, 26 February 1781.

women's comedy through Behn, as her male counterparts did when they drew on Dryden or Congreve, became increasingly frustrated by the unrelenting double standard of playwriting, and addressed this issue in her preface to *A School for Greybeards*:

> It cannot be the *Poet's* mind, which the public desire to trace, in dramatic representation; but the mind of the *characters*, and the truth of their colouring. Yet in my case it seems resolved that the point to be considered, is not whether that *dotard*, or that *pretender*, or that *coquet*, would so have given their feelings, but whether Mrs. Cowley ought so to have expressed herself.
>
> This is a criterion which happily no author is subjected to, but those of the drama. The Novelist may use the boldest tints;— seizing Nature for her guide, she may dart through every rank of society, drag forth not only the accomplished, but the ignorant, the coarse, and the vulgar-rich; display them in their strongest colours, and snatch immortality both for them, and for herself! I, on the contrary, feel encompassed with chains when I write, which check me in my happiest flights, and force me continually to reflect, not, whether *this is just*? but, whether *this is safe*?[33]

In this passage, Cowley reveals her resentment with the lack of creative expression she is allowed as a dramatist and emphasizes that this oppression weighs heavily on the woman playwright.

Cowley's growing frustration with the theatre reached a peak by the late 1780s. She once again tried to write a tragedy, and she once again experienced mediocre results. *The Fate of Sparta* was performed nine times in 1788 and was never revived. John Philip Kemble, who

[33] Cowley, *A School for Greybeards*, vi-vii.

played the lead, wrote scathingly of the play that "one would not suppose from this preface that *The Fate of Sparta* was hardly dragg'd through nine nights of empty houses."[34] Following the flop of *Sparta*, Cowley took a near four-year break from the stage before her next comedy, *A Day in Turkey*, debuted at Covent Garden on 3 December 1792. Cowley had actually begun writing *A Day in Turkey* amid the *Albina* debacle years earlier. She wrote at that time:

> I had indeed made some progress in writing a Piece founded on Turkish manners, the Scene of which is laid in Asia, and flattered myself with success from the novelty of the attempt; but it lies, and must lie, in its present state, till I have reason to believe it will meet with a fair and candid reception from the Theatres.[35]

Cowley waited for a over a decade to finish *A Day in Turkey* and submit it for production at the apex of her career. The play displays Cowley's expertise as an established and skilled playwright; it is a spectacular extravaganza, featuring a sensational plot, elaborate set and costume design, and a thrilling blend of music and comedy. But underneath this glittering mirage, the play points to Cowley's disillusionment with the London theatres, with the audience's increasing demand for spectacle over wit, the sexist condemnation of critics, and the tyranny of the managers. *A Day in Turkey* encompasses a decade of Cowley's knowledge of the theatre's innerworkings and paints an unflattering portrait of the gender politics within.

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[34] Kemble's inscription in his copy of the play at the Huntington Library. Quoted in Link, introduction to *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, xxxviii.

[35] Cowley, *Albina*, v.

Women Staging Empire

Cowley set *A Day in Turkey* against the backdrop of the Russian-Turkish War of 1787-92, during which the Ottoman Empire sought, and failed, to regain land in Oczakow (in modern-day Ukraine) previously lost to Russia.[36] Britain feared Russia's ascending power and prepared for the possibility that it may have to join the war. The matter was hotly debated in Parliament and in the papers, but, in 1792, the conflict ended and Britain's potential involvement became irrelevant. Cowley shrewdly capitalized on the immediacy of these events, making the recent conflict, now deflated of its immediate danger, the backdrop to her play. The prologue, possibly written by Cowley herself, explains:

> NOT from the present moment springs our play,
> Th' events which gave it birth are past away—
> Five glowing moons have chas'd night's shades from earth,
> Since the war fled which gave our Drama birth.
> "Not smiling peace o'er RUSSIA'S wide-spread land,
> Wav'd gently then, her sceptre of command.
> No! thousands rush'd at red ambition's call,
> With mad'ning rage to triumph—or to fall.
> 'Twas then our female bard from BRITAIN'S shore
> Was led by fancy to the distant roar"—
> 'Twas then she saw sweet virgins captives made,

[36] See Betsy Bolton, introduction to "A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves," in *The Routledge Anthology of British Women Playwrights, 1777-1843*, ed. Betsy Bolton (London: Routledge, 2019), 139. Bolton provides more historical detail about the conflict.

> 'Twas then she saw the cheek of beauty fade,
>
> Whilst the proud soldier in ignoble chains,
>
> Was from his country dragg'd to hostile plains.
>
> Thus was her bold imagination fired
>
> When battle with its horrid train retired.[37]

The prologue emphasizes both Cowley's gender and her topical intervention, while carefully framing her dramatization of the conflict between Russia and the Ottoman Empire as artistically, rather than politically, motivated. Spoken by George Davies Harley, the prologue legitimizes a woman's writing about such affairs through the voice of a male actor who highlights the play's feminine content, and describes Cowley as the "female bard."[38] In reality, Cowley's play is filled with direct and biting political commentary, sexual jokes, and her female characters are far from the helpless victims alluded to in the prologue.

Setting the play during the Russian-Turkish war also allowed Cowley to take advantage of the popularity of Orientalist plays: English plays set in the East.[39] Such plays had been

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[37] Hannah Cowley, "A Day in Turkey; or, The Russian Slaves," in *The Routledge Anthology of British Women Playwrights, 1777-1843*, ed. Betsy Bolton (London: Routledge, 2019), 143. There are no line number in the original or critical editions of the play, so I have cited by page number. I indicate the act and scene number in the body of the text when possible, but Cowley did not always number her scenes. The text in quotation in Cowley's prologue is by Robert Merry who, under the name of Della Crusca, had exchanged poetry with Cowley under the penname Anna Mathilda.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Orientalism played an important role in the creation of eighteenth-century English culture, art, novels, and drama. Building on the body of scholarship arising from Edward Said's field-defining *Orientalism* (1978), Suvir Kaul describes Orientalism as a "a capacious, supple and changing discursive system that enables Anglo-European writers to explain and to manage the encounters between themselves and the peoples of lands ranging from Turkey, Egypt, Persia and India to China and Japan." See Suvir Kaul, "Styles of Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century," in

standard fare in the London theatres since the Restoration. Charles II was fascinated by the Ottoman Empire, and when he reopened the theatres following his return to London the first play to be legally staged was William Davenant's Oriental drama *The Siege of Rhodes* in 1661.[40] Oriental plays remained highly marketable throughout the eighteenth century as they allowed dramatists to capitalize on the popularity of spectacular set and costume design, while portraying the English as racially and culturally superior. An important body of recent scholarship has drawn attention to the far-reaching and insidious influence of Orientalist theatre in eighteenth-century England, as well as to the complex and conflicting commentary on politics, economics, race, class, sex, and gender that exists within these plays.[41]

English women playwrights had been drawn to dramatizations of the East since the Restoration as a means to explore matters of gender inequality. Examples include Aphra Behn's *Abdelazer Or The Moor's Revenge* (1676), Mary Pix's *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* (1696), and Delarivier Manley's *Almyna, or, The Arabian Vow* (1706). As Jacqueline Pearson writes, these women "found Turkey and other Islamic countries profitable for images of power relations between the sexes, for potentates, harem women, sultanas, mutes, and

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Orientalism and Literature, ed. Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 35.

[40] For more on Charles II's Ottomanphilia and its influence on the Restoration theatre, see Laura J. Rosenthal, *Ways of the World: Theater and Cosmopolitanism in the Restoration and Beyond* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 19-53.

[41] See Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orients: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theater, 1660-1800: Identity, Performance, Empire* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000); Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Bridget Orr, "Galland, Georgian Theatre, and the Creation of Popular Orientalism," in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, eds. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104-130;); O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 1-32.

eunuchs."[42] By depicting "the position of women in other countries," Pearson explains, women writers opened up the possibility for "[f]eminist debate" at home.[43] For example, Mary Wortley Montagu compared her experiences as an English woman to those of the women of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in her famous *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763). In the theatrical context, Elizabeth Inchbald's first play, an Orientalist farce titled *The Mogul Tale*, debuted seven years prior to *A Day in Turkey* on 6 July 1784, and contrasts the gendered experiences of English and Indian women. The play follows a group of three English travellers—a cobbler named Johnny, his wife Fanny, and a Doctor—who accidently travel to India in a hot air balloon. The confused travellers comically attempt to discern their location: "it is Greenland, is it not?"[44] In fact, they are in the harem of an Indian Mogul and a group of women in the harem tease the travellers by explaining that they will be put to death. In a twist, the Mogul is actually a fair, benevolent, and rational ruler who decides to toy with the English travellers' prejudice and racism by pretending to be the tyrant they imagine him to be. The travellers, particularly the men, proceed to make fools of themselves as they pretend to be envoys from England: the Doctor plays an ambassador of the King, Johnny dubs himself the Pope. Disturbingly, the Doctor schemes to kidnap one of the Mogul's concubines, and Johnny attempts to seduce another.

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[42] Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse*, 16. For more on women writers and Orientalism, see Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Samara Anne Cahill, *Intelligent Souls?: Feminist Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Elizabeth Inchbald, "The Mogul Tale," in *The Plays of Elizabeth Inchbald*, vol. 2, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (New York: Garland, 1980), 2. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

Fanny, Johnny's wife, is the most sensible and moral of the group of travellers, but she is continually dismissed and undermined by the two men she travels with. Her situation as a free English woman is contrasted with that of the captive harem women and found lacking. At the end of the play, the Mogul gently chides the group for their chauvinism and deceitfulness:

> You have imposed upon me, and attempted to defraud me, but know that I have been taught mercy and compassion for the sufferings of human nature; however differing in laws, temper and colour from myself. Yes from you Christians whose laws teach charity to all the world, have I learn'd these virtues? For your countrymen's cruelty to the poor Gentoos has shewn me tyranny in so foul a light, that I was determined henceforth to be only mild, just, and merciful.[45]

After this criticism of British colonialism and English masculinity, the three travellers are allowed to leave in their balloon and return to England.

Beyond drawing connections between gender in the East and West, women playwrights also used Orientalist plays to comment on their role within the theatrical establishment itself. O'Quinn writes that "[i]n the hands of women playwrights, representations of empire could be turned inside out to ridicule the theatrical taste which produces and consumes such fare."[46] Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687), for example, is an overtly metatheatrical play. Two young women and their lovers trick their imperial-minded patriarch, a quack doctor named Baliardo, into believing he can colonize the moon. As Baliardo peers through his telescope, his

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[45] Ibid., 19-20.

[46] Daniel O'Quinn, "Theatre and Empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 233.

daughters trick him by putting on Oriental costumes and pretending to be part of a lunar harem. Behn emphasizes the power of women in the theatre by demonstrating that Baliardo's daughters can manipulate their father's gaze against an Orientalist backdrop. As the daughters exercise theatrical power, the father embodies the audience's own voyeuristic desire "to be dazzled and fooled."[47]

Cowley adopts a similar technique in *A Day in Turkey.* The play focuses on three Christian women, Alexina, Paulina, and Lauretta, who are enslaved in a Turkish harem and who orchestrate an elaborate theatrical performance to free themselves. Alexina is a beautiful Russian bride who has been captured and imprisoned in the harem of the Bassa Ibrahim. She is treated cruelly by a Turkish guard named Azim, but kindly by another named Mustapha. Alexina plans to commit suicide rather than submit to Ibrahim, but the presence of another captive, Paulina, a Russian peasant, changes her fate. Under the clever direction of the Italian captive Lauretta, Paulina pretends to be Alexina to distract Ibrahim's attention. Lauretta orchestrates the elaborate ploy and directs Paulina's performance with the assistance of Alexina and Mustapha. The play extempore is a success as Ibrahim falls for Paulina, and she, in turn, falls for him. Meanwhile, Alexina's husband, Count Orloff, has been captured and imprisoned by Ibrahim. After learning that his wife is still alive, Count Orloff hopes to save her. He is accompanied by his foppish French valet, A La Greque, a macaroni who is flippant, charming, and self-serving, and whose name implies the eighteenth-century interest in Greek fashion, architecture, and luxury goods.[48] He is a practical character, seeking to make the best of a bad situation and quick to forget

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[47] Paula R. Backscheider, "From the *Emperor of the Moon* to the Sultan's Prison," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 43, no. 1 (2014): 16.

[48] Escott, *Hannah Cowley*, 168.

previous loyalties. He is also the most overtly political character in the play, making continual witty allusions to the ongoing French Revolution, which are defanged by his pantomimic comedy.

In a Francophobic manner, Cowley paints A La Greque as disloyal and sexually driven. When A La Greque references the French Revolution, his calls for liberty are undercut by his insincere and submissive behaviour:

> IBRAHIM. Of what country are thou?
>
> A LA GREQUE. Oh, Paris, Sir, Paris. I travell'd into Russia to polish the brutes a little, and to give them some ideas of the general equality of man; but my generosity has been lost;—they still continue to believe that a prince is more than a porter, and that a lord is a better gentleman than his slave. O, had they but been with me at Versailles, when I help'd to turn those things topsey turvey there!
>
> IBRAHIM. Did you find them equally dull in other respects?
>
> A LA GREQUE. Yes. Finding they would not learn liberty, I would have taught them dancing, but they seem'd as incapable of one blessing as the other; so, now I am led a dance by this gentleman (*Turning to his master*). Into your chains, in which, if I can but dance myself into your favour, I shall think it the best step I ever took.
>
> IBRAHIM. The freedom of thy speech does not displease me.
>
> A LA GREQUE. Dear Sir, I am your most obedient humble slave, ready to bow my head to your sandals, and to lick the dust from your beautiful feet.[49]

[49] Cowley, *Turkey*, 152.

Though Cowley is obviously mocking A La Greque and his false sentiments, he is also portrayed as a court jester, speaking truth to power in a manner that borders on dangerous: "Death is an aristocrat! and I am bound, as a Frenchman, to hate him."[50] The ongoing Revolution was a divisive political issue in England, and some viewers of Cowley's play did not like to be reminded of the civil discontent that plagued France and might spread to England. William Godwin advised Inchbald to withdraw her play *The Massacre* from Covent Garden for this very reason, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, which was deemed politically dangerous for its depiction of a discontented populace, was staged only seven times during the final decade of the century.[51] Following the debut of *A Day in Turkey*, *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* took issue with A La Greque and "those passages, which, by exhibiting some of the present circumstances of France to ridicule, are injurious to the cause of general liberty."[52] *The Oracle* argued that Cowley ought to edit the play: "If the Fair Author would take our advice, she would strike out every *Political Sentiment* in the Play. Why, in the name of prudence, will any Writer split an Audience into Parties, and compel dissent when all should be conciliated?"[53] The *Public Advertiser* also took issue with the play's apparent divisiveness, writing that it "possessed also a glaring error in our opinion, that of political allusions; they are equally reprehensible whether they allude to this country or any other, for on those subjects there will always be different

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[50] Ibid., 173.

[51] Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 317-19; Frans De Bruyn, "Shakespeare and the French Revolution," in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 308-9.

[52] *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 5 December 1771.

[53] *Oracle*, 5 December 1771.

opinions; but this being easily remedied, it is to be hoped they will be expunged before a repetition."[54] Initially, Cowley bowed to the complaints that her play was too political, removing sections of the offending dialogue for the second performance on the evening of Monday, 5 December 1791. However, after a single censored performance, she decided to replace the dialogue in full and to publish the original text in February 1792.[55]

In her strongly worded advertisement appended to the published edition of *A Day in Tukey*, Cowley denies her political intent, which she agrees would be unfeminine, and argues that the play merely reflected the needs of her characters:

> HINTS have been thrown out, and the idea industriously circulated, that the following comedy is tainted with POLITICS. I protest I know nothing about politics;—will Miss Wollstonecraft forgive me—whose book contains such a body of mind as I hardly ever met with—if I say that politics are unfeminine? I never in my life could attend to their discussion.
>
> TRUE COMEDY has always been defined to be a picture of life—a record of passing manners—a mirror to reflect to succeeding times the characters and follies of the present. How then could I, pretending to be a comic poet, bring an emigrant Frenchman before the public at this day, and not make him hint at the events which had just passed, or were then passing in his native country? […] It is A La Greque who speaks, not I; nor can I be accountable for his sentiments. [56]

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[54] *Public Advertiser*, 5 December 1771.

[55] Cowley, *Turkey*, 142.

[56] Ibid.

Tanya Caldwell points out that Cowley's denial of political involvement is a red herring.[57] Here, Cowley is employing a maneuver similar to her defense of *A School for Greybeards*: she insists that her characters are not reflections of her own beliefs and stances, but rather products of creative inspiration. Cowley's denial of political commentary, her insistence of her own unwavering femininity, and her claim that her comic characters are merely meant to entertain, allows her to simultaneously distance herself from the political content of the play while also drawing attention to it. In this sense, Cowley's invocation of Mary Wollstonecraft is also particularly noteworthy. It highlights her knowledge of Wollstonecraft's work and publicly promotes her feminist ideals, while also allowing Cowley to position herself as the less radical of the two.[58] (Inchbald similarly invokes Wollstonecraft in her prologue to *Every One Has his Fault* in 1793, which I will discuss in the following chapter). Cowley's interest in Wollstonecraft is further alluded to in the play when Azim and Lauretta discuss A La Greque's politics and Lauretta makes the case for women's emancipation:

> AZIM. The new French slave—Frenchmen, there is no being guarded against.—They make free every where.

[57] Tanya Caldwell, "'A City Graced with Many a Dome': Hannah Cowley's Domestic Comedies, the Georgic Impulse, and the Female Arts," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 42, no. 1 (2018): 30.

[58] Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* had been published in 1790 in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published two years later in the first three months of 1792, around the same time as *A Day in Turkey*.

> LAURETTA. At least they have made themselves free at home! and who knows, but, at last, the spirit they have raised may reach even to a Turkish harem, and the rights of women be declared, as well as those of men.[59]

While A La Greque's own revolutionary sentiments are mocked within the play, Lauretta employs the language of revolution to promote women's rights. The licensing copy of *A Day in Turkey* reveals that the Lord Chamberlain censored this line from performance, but Cowley reinstated it for the published edition quoted above.

In *A Day in Turkey*, Cowley asks her audience not only to consider the theatre of global politics via the Russian-Turkish conflict and the French Revolution, but the politics of the theatre itself. She asks her audience to reflect on who holds power and how that power can be subverted. Despite the negative reaction to the play's political content in the press, *A Day in Turkey* was well-liked. As Frederick Link explains, by the end of the eighteenth century, "the patent theatres had been enlarged so much that intimate comedy depending on witty dialogue and facial expression could not as easily be supported, and the public was demanding ever greater portions of melodrama and spectacle." [60] Cowley took advantage of the audience's growing demand for spectacular entertainment and incorporated dances, musical numbers, and a royal procession complete with music written by Joseph Mazzinghi, a popular English composer. She also drew on a women's tradition of Oriental comedy tracing back to Behn in order to embed gender and theatrical commentary into her play.

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[59] Cowley, *Turkey*, 174.

[60] Link, introduction to *The Plays of Hannah Cowley* (New York: Garland, 1979), xli.

The Harem: A Woman's Playhouse

In the first act of *A Day in Turkey*, Ibrahim enters the stage during an elaborate royal procession. The stage directions read:

> *A march is played. Standard bearers advance first; they are followed by female slaves, who dance down the stage to light music, and exit. The chorus singers follow; Female Slaves strewing flowers from little baskets succeed; the Bassa then appears at the top with his principal officers.*[61]

Three women of the harem, Selim, Lauretta, and Fatima, sing to welcome Ibrahim whom they call their "prince restor'd," "Victorious hero," and "glory of our age."[62] Cowley thus establishes Ibrahim's patriarchal power within the play while simultaneously highlighting the theatrical quality of the harem—a space of the singing, dancing, celebration, and sexual entertainment. Though Ibrahim appears to hold supreme authority in this space in which women are objectified for his entertainment, the women of the harem are also imbued with a certain theatrical power. Throughout the play, Cowley depicts the harem as a site that both confines women and provides them an opportunity to create, perform, and influence those around them. The extent to which women can extend their theatrical power, however, is complicated within the play and particularly by its resolution.

All the female characters of *A Day in Turkey* participate in the theatrics of the harem in one way or another, but the clear embodiment of the woman playwright is the Italian Lauretta. Both Bolton and O'Quinn note the self-referential quality of Lauretta's character. Bolton

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[61] Cowley, *Turkey*, 149.

[62] Ibid.

identifies her as the "figure for the female playwright," and O'Quinn similarly describes her as the "playwright/manager" who reveals that "the realm of public affairs can be controlled through the manipulation of private desires." [63] However, the harem is far from a creative haven for Lauretta, who can only perform under the constant watch of the guards. Additionally, while the male characters of the play can filter in and out of the harem, Lauretta and the other female characters cannot leave. This nuance is critical to understanding Cowley's theatrical critique. She introduces the idea of a female-centric theatrical playing space, but it is not a theatrical utopia; rather, it is a theatre divided by gender in which women have creative power, but no authority—a reflection of Cowley's lived experience.

Lauretta's allegorical role as the female playwright is made clear from the first act of the play. In an extension of female camaraderie, Lauretta states that her goal is to save Alexina from Ibrahim, saying, "I am interested for her, and it is for this reason I shall endeavour to make Ibrahim pursue a conduct not usual from a mighty mussulman to his slave."[64] Initially, Lauretta attempts to derail Ibrahim's pursuit of Alexina by encouraging him to try and "become the slave of your captive, if you ever mean to taste the sublime excesses of a mutual passion."[65] Ibrahim is intrigued by the concept of mutual passion and Lauretta formulates her plan for the upcoming drama in a self-consciously theatrical aside to the audience at the beginning of the second act:

So, so! 'tis dangerous to give some people a hint, I find—I thought to have held the

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[63] Both Bolton and O'Quinn draw attention to the semi-autobiographical and metatheatrical qualities of *A Day in Turkey.* See Bolton, "The Balance of Power," 191, and O'Quinn, "Political Efficacy," 2.

[64] Cowley, *Turkey*, 150. Mussulman is an archaic term for someone of the Muslim faith.

[65] Ibid.

> master-spring, and to have managed him like a puppet; but presto! he's out of sight before I knew I had lost him, and leaves his instructor groveling behind —I must seek some other field for my talents, I see. (*Considering*). Yes, I think, I think that may do— Muley, and the other four, with our little Mustapha—Yes, yes; with these half dozen, I'll weave a web of amusement to crack the sides of a dozen gloomy harems with laughter— Mercy! what a sleepy life wou'd our valiant Bassa and his damsels lead, but for my talents at invention.[66]

Lauretta reveals a dual purpose in this passage. First, she seeks to entertain both the fictional characters of the harem, men and women, clearly establishing her position as Cowley's stand-in as playwright. However, her more serious purpose is to save Alexina from sexual slavery and, through her manipulation of Ibrahim, to arrange the freedom of all the women of the harem. This feminist intention is made clear in the 1813 edition of the play, when Lauretta ends the same passage by adding: "Yes, yes, with these I'll weave a web which, whilst it fills these gloomy regions with merriment, shall preserve Alexina—and gain liberty for us all!"[67]

The star of Lauretta's drama is Paulina, the Russian peasant. Like Lauretta, she is practical and unsentimental, although she is not especially clever. When Ibrahim first appears to Paulina in the garden, believing her to be Alexina, she has no idea who he is and is unimpressed by his advances, saying, "I tell ye what, mister, you may make grand speeches about this and that; but I hate both you and your love; and if ever you teize me with it any more, I'll make you repent, that I will."[68] Ibrahim is unused to being spoken to with disdain, and he is captivated by

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[66] Cowley, *Turkey*, 153.

[67] Qtd. in Bolton, *Turkey,* 189.

[68] Cowley, *Turkey*, 162.

Paulina's effort to dominate him. Lauretta, Alexina, and Mustapha, encourage Paulina to keep up this facade in order to distract Ibrahim's attention away from Alexina. Paulina, who is attracted to Ibrahim, is happy to play the part and Lauretta directs her performance, exclaiming: "I'll teach you in half an hour all the arts of a fine lady, and you shall be able to play on your lover as you would on your harpsichord. The whole gamut of his mind shall be in your possession, and every note of it obedient to your wish."[69] Under Lauretta's direction, Paulina proves to be a good actress who enjoys the power of performance:

> IBRAHIM. You smile! Ah, did you know the value of those rosy smiles, you would not bestow upon me more than one in a thousand hours—Each is worth a diadem.
>
> PAULINA. I suppose you hope by all this to make me forget I am a captive, and a slave (*Pretending to cry, then turning away, laughing*).
>
> IBRAHIM. You can be neither—It is I who am your slave—You hold the chains of my destiny—Ha! let me catch your tears![70]

Over the course of the play, Paulina falls in love with Ibrahim and, after her true identity is revealed, Ibrahim declares his love for her. But, before the two agree to wed in the final scene, Paulina further exercises her newfound power to negotiate the release of her brother and father from bondage:

> PAULINA. It blesses my heart to see you so happy! And shall my father and brother be releas'd from slavery—Shall they witness my happiness?
>
> IBRAHIM. They shall partake it. Riches and honour await those so dear to thee.[71]

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[69] Ibid., 163.

[70] Ibid., 171.

[71] Ibid., 179.

Paulina's performance in Lauretta's scheme is a great success. Not only is Alexina reunited with her husband, but it is implied that the other women of the harem will also be freed. However, Paulina also proves herself to be more than Lauretta's tool as she uses her newfound power to negotiate a cross-class, companionate marriage for herself, and the liberty of her family.

As the female characters in *A Day in Turkey* claim theatrical agency, using the harem as their stage to leverage a performance that benefits them all, the male characters stand in for the audience and their desire to be entertained. Cowley carefully highlights the association between the audience's gaze and the male characters who peer into the harem. This construction is most obvious in the case of Ibrahim who explicitly looks to the harem to feed his romantic *and* theatrical fantasies. Ibrahim, who has been away at war, is explicit in his desire to be dazzled, telling Lauretta to "[p]repare your banquets, compose your delights, let every hour teem with fresh invented joys, till I forget the toils of the sanguinary field and bathe my wounds with rosy-finger'd love."[72] Lauretta directs the drama, for her own secret purposes, and Paulina performs the role of the uninterested coquette. Ibrahim, in turn, watches Paulina from a distance, and revels in the theatrical nature of their romance: "Oh, fly me not—yet fly! Even the distance you throw me at gives you a thousand charms, and whilst it tortures, it bewitches me."[73] For Ibrahim, the primary pleasure in his pursuit of Paulina is a theatrical one. As Azim says in bewilderment: "Sir, she is your slave, *command* her!"[74] But Ibrahim prefers to playact the role of the Petrarchan

[72] Ibid., 150.

[73] Ibid., 170-71.

[74] Ibid., 150.

lover, reveling in the "delicious pain" of Paulina's feigned rejection.[75] Paulina, in turn, capitalizes on Ibrahim's theatrical and romantic fantasy and leverages events for her own benefit.

A La Greque, the Harlequin-like French valet, also embodies the gaze of the audience. In the first scene of act four, A La Greque strains to see through the harem wall crying, "Is there no getting a peep at those jolly girls?"[76] Eventually, one of his captors points out a space were he can sometimes "get a squint at the girls."[77] The scene then immediately shifts to a musical interlude inside the garden for which the stage directions read "[*e*]*nter Female slaves, singing and beckoning to their companions, who enter from opposite wings all the way up. During the song others enter, dancing to the music*."[78] On one hand, Cowley is pandering to the audience by staging spectacle that relies on the sexualization of women's bodies. However, she is also drawing attention to the gendered dynamic of the theatre itself which relies on the female form to titillate the male spectator. A La Greque's peep through the harem wall is manifested to the audience as they can see all that he looks upon. In act five, after A La Greque successfully steals into the harem, a more explicit performance of sexual fantasy takes place. An enslaved Turkish woman named Fatima and the other enslaved women set up a luxurious sofa bed, a stereotypical and highly sexualized Oriental prop, in the garden. A La Greque must hide from the palace guards, and Lauretta quickly decides to bury him under the sofa cushions, crying as she pushes him to the ground: "Lower! Lower still! rest on your hands—reach that covering—quick—

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[75] Ibid., 171.

[76] Ibid., 165.

[77] Ibid., 166.

[78] Ibid.

quick!"[79] She then sits atop the hidden A La Greque to obscure his hiding place. A La Greque is delighted with his proximity to Lauretta's bottom and, once the coast is clear, he calls her his "precious burden," exclaiming, "Jupiter, when loaded with Europa on his back, was not half so much charmed with her as I am with you."[80] In the original myth, Jupiter abducted Europa, adding a predatory element to A La Greque's comment. The encounter fulfills his sexual and theatrical fantasy as he becomes physically enveloped in the world of the harem.

The final scene of *A Day in Turkey* sees the fruition of the female characters' metatheatrical performance for freedom, and the fulfillment of the male characters' sexual and romantic desires. Alexina and Orloff are reunited, and Ibrahim and Paulina agree to wed. Alexina asks Ibrahim to forgive the cruel Azim, and Ibrahim, touched by her kindness, suddenly—even absurdly—converts to Christianity:

> ALEXINA. […] let Azim have frank forgiveness.
>
> IBRAHIM. Charming magnanimity! if it flows from your CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES such doctrines must be RIGHT, and I will closely study them.[81]

Ibrahim's spontaneous conversion panders to the audience's expectations of English superiority over eastern heathenism; however, it is also clearly ridiculous and the sincerity of the conversion questionable. In a further invocation of the audience through Ibrahim, Alexina next steps forward to address the spectators directly: "And may our errors have frank forgiveness too! Bestow on us your favour, and make the DAY IN TURKEY one of the happiest of this happy season!"[82] For

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[79] Ibid., 173.

[80] Ibid., 174.

[81] Ibid., 180.

[82] Ibid.

Mellor, the play's somewhat hackneyed resolution "reveal[s] Cowley's conservative feminism in its clearest form" as "[f]emale Christian virtue is the power that resolves the conflicts in the play."[83] However, I suggest that a deep irresolution disrupts the shiny surface of Christian marital bliss at the end of the play.

While it is suggested that Ibrahim will free his slaves following his conversion and marriage to Paulina, at the time of the play's conclusion this has not been explicitly declared or enacted. The failure to achieve liberation harkens to an earlier line in the play, when Azim reminds the audience, in one of the few direct critiques of England, that "the christians in one of the northern islands have established a slave trade, and proved by act of parliament that freedom is no blessing at all."[84] Here, Cowley is referring to William Wilberforce's failed motion in Parliament to abolish slavery on 19 April 1791.[85] Lauretta, the orchestrator of this play's metatheatrical drama, remains in captivity. After imprisoning the cruel Azim in the same cell in which he trapped Alexina, Lauretta is not heard from again. In case the audience has missed this lack of resolution, Cowley reminds them of it in the epilogue to the play:

> Escap'd from Turkey, and from prison free,
> Yet still a SLAVE you shall behold in me;
> An *English* slave—slave to your ev'ry pleasure,
> Seeking your plaudits as her richest treasure.[86]

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[83] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, 59.

[84] Cowley, *Turkey*, 148.

[85] Slavery was not abolished in the British colonies until 1833 under the Slavery Abolition Act, which took effect in 1834.

[86] Cowley, *Turkey*, 180-81.

In the epilogue, delivered by actress Elizabeth Pope who played Alexina, Cowley compares her own identity as a woman playwright to that of the harem slave, further emphasizing the self-referential nature of her theatrical criticism. While the framing of the playwright as a public servant was not unusual, Cowley pushes this notion to the extreme by invoking slavery. She reminds the audience that her creative freedom is dependent upon their whim and that of the theatrical establishment.

While Cowley's criticism of gender inequality in the theatre is veiled by allusion and symbolism in *A Day in Turkey*, a few years later she stated her position bluntly. In the preface to her next and final play, *The Town Before You* (first performed in 1794 and published in 1795), Cowley announced her retirement from playwriting. She directly identifies the audience's voracious demand for spectacle and physical comedy over witty dialogue and complex character as the source of her frustration, indicating that she felt some distress, or at least ambivalence, toward the spectacle that she had staged in *A Day in Turkey*:

> The patient developement [sic] of character, the repeated touches which colour it up to Nature, and swell it into identity and existence (and which gave celebrity to CONGREVE), we have now no relish for. The combinations of interest, the strokes which are meant to reach the heart, we are equally incapable of tasting. LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH! is the demand. […]
>
> Let Sadler's Wells and the Circus empty themselves of their performers to furnish our Stage; the expence to Managers will be less, and their business will be carried on better. The UNDERSTANDING, DISCERNMENT, and EDUCATION, which distinguish our

> modern actors, are useless to them;—strong muscles are in greater repute, and grimace has more powerful attraction.[87]

In this passage, Cowley not only compares herself with the canonical and celebrated playwright William Congreve, who was famous for his wit and comedy-of-manners, but she is openly critical of the contemporary audience and managers who no longer have taste for such comedy. She invokes Sadler's Wells Theatre, famous for its impressive entertainments including large water features, and the Royal Circus, which featured animal acts and pantomimes, as examples of new theatrical trends, and she criticizes the managers for pandering to these modes. Cowley no longer saw a place for herself within the changing theatre scene and her complaints were shared by other women playwrights. In 1798, Joanna Baillie raised similar concerns about changing theatrical tastes and the implication for women in her introductory remarks to *Plays on the Passions*.[88]

Following her retirement from the theatre, Cowley left London and returned to her hometown of Tiverton. Her husband had died overseas in 1797, and her only surviving daughter, Frances, lived in Calcutta, while her son, Thomas, lived in Portugal. Cowley's sister Mary had taken over the family bookshop in Tiverton after their father's death, and Cowley decided to return home.[89] These final years of Cowley's life appear to have been happy ones. She was an engaged member of her community and biographer Mary De la Mahotière writes that she

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[87] Hannah Cowley, "The Town Before You (1795)," in *The Plays of Hannah Cowley*, vol. 2, ed. Frederick M. Link (New York: Garland, 1979), x-xi. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

[88] See Joanna Baillie, *Plays on the Passions* (1798), ed. Peter Duthie (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), 95-96.

[89] De la Mahotière, *Hannah Cowley*, 85.

continued to be "concern[ed] with the injustices which beset women" evidenced by her organization of a women's group that met each Monday and raised funds for struggling married women.[90] She also worked on editing her plays for *The Works of Mrs. Cowley*, excising their more daring aspects—including her original gutsy prefaces that railed against the theatrical establishment—in order to make the collection more palatable. Sadly, Cowley's edits muted the fierce feminism that had defined her playwriting career as she considered her reputation for posterity. After her death in 1809, *The Works of Mrs. Cowley* was published by George Wilkie and John Robinson in a testament to the ongoing marketability of her plays.

Though Cowley had one of the most remarkable careers of any eighteenth-century woman playwright, tracing her struggles with *Albina* in the 1770s through her theatrical commentary in *A Day in Turkey* reveals a playwright beleaguered by the industry's gendered limitations. By 1795, when Cowley published her preface to *The Town*, she no longer saw stage comedy as a desirable or effective outlet for her creativity nor, as her earlier preface to *A School for Greybeards* reveals, did she view it as a safe mode for a woman writer. While women throughout the century had managed to leverage comedy as the most effective means of balancing creative and professional reward, shifting theatrical trends were beginning to upend that harmony. As demonstrated by Burney's decision not to stage *The Witlings* because of the Daddies' fear of infamy, and Cowley's admonition of Wollstonecraft in *A School for Greybeards*, the immense social pressure to maintain respectability was often at odds with the feminist impulses of women's comic playwriting in the late eighteenth century. No woman playwright made a greater effort to balance her professional success with personal virtue than

[90] Ibid., 89.

Elizabeth Inchbald, whose complex treatment of feminism and sentimental comedy will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Elizabeth Inchbald: Sentimental Comedy and Feminism

On the evening of 19 April 1797, the audience at Drury Lane was eagerly anticipating the debut of Frederic Reynolds' *The Will* when a heated confrontation broke out between Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), the foremost woman playwright of London, and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), the well-known advocate for women's rights and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). A week before the confrontation, Inchbald had learned of Wollstonecraft's sudden marriage to her friend and colleague William Godwin. Affronted, Inchbald wrote a salty note to Godwin and cancelled their arrangement to attend the play together with a group of friends:

> I most sincerely wish you and Mrs Godwin joy—But, assured that your joyfulness would obliterate from your memory every trifling engagement, I have entreated another person to supply your place and perform your office in securing a Box on Reynold's [sic] night. If I have done wrong—when you next marry I will act differently.[1]

The new Mrs. Godwin, hereafter referred to as Wollstonecraft, found Inchbald's behavior "very rude," but enlisted their mutual friend Amelia Alderson to calm Inchbald and "set the matter right."[2] The theatrical visit went ahead, but tensions were high and, on arrival, Inchbald and Wollstonecraft fought. Godwin later characterized Inchbald's behavior as "shuffling"—possibly

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[1] Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, 11 April 1797, MS. Abinger, c. 3, fol. 59, Bodleian Libraries.

[2] Mary Wollstonecraft to Amelia Alderson, London, 11 April 1797, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph Wardle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 389.

she refused to sit next to Wollstonecraft—and her words as "base, cruel & […] insulting."[3] The two women never spoke again.[4]

Biographers and critics have long attributed Inchbald and Wollstonecraft's feud to their supposed competing romantic affection for Godwin and Inchbald's discomfort upon learning of Wollstonecraft's sexual history, thus dismissing the quarrel as unimportant. When Godwin and Wollstonecraft married in 1797, they inadvertently revealed that Wollstonecraft was not already married to American diplomat Gilbert Imlay as she had claimed and that her daughter, Fanny, was illegitimate. Consequently, many people sought to distance themselves from the new couple, but Inchbald's reaction was the most public. Decades later, in 1836, Mary Shelley, Godwin and Wollstonecraft's daughter, posited that Inchbald must have been in love with Godwin and wrote that Inchbald "had reason to […] shed tears when he announced his marriage."[5] C. Kegan Paul printed Shelley's reflection in his 1876 biography of Godwin, and S.R. Littlewood, in his 1921 biography of Inchbald, advanced the broken-heart theory further, proposing that Inchbald's ire at

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[3] William Godwin to Elizabeth Inchbald, 13 September 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, ed. Pamela Clemit, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1: 241.

[4] Godwin's diary suggests that a meeting may have taken place between Inchbald and Wollstonecraft on 15 July 1797, three months after their quarrel at the theatre. Godwin records: "Call on Inchbald; & Cha. [Charlotte] Smith, w. Wt [Wollstonecraft]." However, the semi-colon separating Inchbald's and Charlotte Smith's names suggests that Godwin actually called on Inchbald alone, as he had on numerous occasions following the theatre debacle, and afterward called on Smith with Wollstonecraft. See 15 July 1797, *The Diary of William Godwin*, (eds) Victoria Myers, David O'Shaughnessy, and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010), http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

[5] Mary Shelley, "Life of William Godwin," in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, ed. Pamela Clemit, vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 2016), 250. Shelley never published the biography of her father that she began writing in 1836, but it survives in fragmentary manuscript form in the Abinger Collection, Bodleian Libraries.

Wollstonecraft was sparked by "wounded vanity."[6] This dubious narrative of events has continued to influence modern criticism. Katherine S. Green describes Inchbald and Godwin as "intimate friends, if not lovers," and Ildiko Csengei argues that Inchbald rejected Wollstonecraft "out of social prejudice—or possibly even jealousy."[7] However, Inchbald and Godwin's surviving correspondence reveals no passionate declarations of love, but, instead, is largely devoted to discussion of manuscripts and other literary matters.[8]

Regrettably, reducing Inchbald and Wollstonecraft's dispute to a love triangle obfuscates the significant creative, professional, and personal differences between two of the most important women writers of the late-eighteenth century, and has served as a denotation of the end of Inchbald's interest in progressive politics. This chapter uses the feud between Inchbald and Wollstonecraft as a starting point to explore the status of the professional woman playwright at the end of the eighteenth century, and the ways in which Inchbald used sentimental comedy to promote her own progressive ideologies following her break with Godwin and Wollstonecraft. I focus specifically on Inchbald's feminist politics and explore how she used sentimental tropes in

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[6] C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols. (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1876), 1: 239; S.R. Littlewood, *Elizabeth Inchbald and Her Circle* (London: Daniel O'Connor, 1921), 87.

[7] Katherine S. Green, "Mr. Harmony and the Events of January 1793: Elizabeth Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault*," *Theatre Journal* 56, no. 1 (2004): 50; Ildiko Csengei, "Godwin's Case: Melancholy Mourning in the "Empire of Feeling," in *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 172.

[8] Inchbald and Godwin discussed plots, characters, and more mundane literary matters. On 9 June 1792, for example, Inchbald asked Godwin to correct the title of one of her new plays, writing: "The title 'Every one his Fault' I am told is not grammar. I am sorry for it. Let me know." See Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, 9 June 9, 1792*,* National Art Museum, Forster Collection, Letter. 48.D.2. While rumors had circulated in the press that Godwin and Inchbald had a romantic relationship—for example, the *True Briton* speculated on 1 February 1797 that "Mrs. Inchbald is said to be on the point of bestowing her hand on Mr. Godwin"—I can find no evidence to validate this claim.

her novels and plays to advocate for women. However, Wollstonecraft objected to Inchbald's reliance on sentimental female characters as antithetical to feminist progress in scathing reviews of Inchbald's two novels, *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796). While Inchbald never wrote a public rebuttal to Wollstonecraft's criticism, I argue that her play, *Lovers' Vows* (1798), an adaptation of German playwright August von Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe* (1790), produced the year following Wollstonecraft's death, is a defense against such criticism and an articulation of Inchbald's own feminist strategies that relied on sentiment as a key technique to advocate for women.[9]

Inchbald's feminism has been treated ambiguously in modern scholarship. She is not easily grouped with outspoken feminists like Wollstonecraft who sought an overthrow of patriarchal social structure, nor with more conservative women like Hannah More who defended women's education. Annibel Jenkins, Inchbald's most recent biographer, suggests that Inchbald stands amongst the feminist writers of the period, but argues that she was more moderate in her thinking than others, writing, "[Inchbald] did not promote feminism as much as [Anna Laetitia] Barbauld or Catherine Macaulay."[10] Alternatively, Misty Anderson points out that, while Inchbald indicates support for women's rights in her plays, she cannot be defined as a feminist by modern standards: "[Inchbald's] politics are hardly feminist, but her plays express her passionate concern for the legal status of women."[11] While it is true that Inchbald was reticent to promote ideologies that might garner public condemnation, including calls for gender reform, I

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[9] August Von Kotzebue (1761-1819) was a famous German dramatist whose plays were regularly translated and adapted for the English stage.

[10] Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 463.

[11] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 199.

argue that considering Inchbald within the body of historical feminists helps to illuminate a fundamental tenet of her identity as a playwright. In focusing on Inchbald's encounters with Wollstonecraft, often referred to as the mother of modern liberal feminism, this chapter draws needed attention to the feminist underpinnings of Inchbald's late-century sentimental comedy. *Lovers' Vows* represents Inchbald's vexed efforts to blend the feminist tradition of women's comedy—with its focus on female characters, their sexuality, and their success—with the generic conventions of a popular genre that relied on benevolent patriarchs and subservient daughters.

From Farmhouse to Playhouse

To understand how Inchbald's professional identity as a playwright intersected with her interest in reform politics and feminism, it is vital to consider the evolution of her theatrical career.[12] Born to the Simpson family in Stanningfield, Suffolk in 1753, Inchbald's childhood was one of hardworking farm life. Her two brothers were sent to school, while she and her five sisters were taught at home. Though John Simpson, the family patriarch, died in 1761, his resourceful wife and children managed to preserve the farm. The family, devout Roman Catholics, were also enthusiasts of the local theater and they attended performances by the Norwich Company, which Inchbald's older brother, George, joined in 1770. As a teenager, Elizabeth also dreamed of a life on the stage. After being declined a post by Norwich manager Richard Griffith, she ran away from home on 11 April 1772 to pursue becoming an actor in London. Remarkably, without

[12] Biographical details for this chapter are from James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald, including her familiar correspondence with the most distinguished persons of her time*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1833). Inchbald's surviving pocketbooks have been published in an excellent modern critical edition; see *The Diaries of Elizabeth Inchbald*, ed. Ben P. Robertson, 3 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007). I also owe a great debt to the most recent biography of Inchbald by Annibel Jenkins.

training or experience—and with the additional barrier of a stutter—she succeeded. Only a few months after leaving home, Elizabeth married a travelling actor, Joseph Inchbald, whom she had met on a visit to London the previous year. The couple married in a Catholic ceremony on 9 June 1772, and in a Protestant ceremony the following day. Joseph was nearly twenty years older than his teenaged wife and he had two children from previous relationships. Despite these drawbacks, the marriage did offer Elizabeth access to her first acting roles alongside Joseph who was employed for the summer season in Bristol; she made her debut at the end of the season on 4 September 1772 as Cordelia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

That fall, the new couple joined actor-manager West Digges' company and spent the following four years performing in theaters across Scotland.[13] According to Inchbald's diaries, these years were grueling and her marriage often unhappy. Joseph was a heavy drinker and resented that his wife was paid separately. However, he also helped Inchbald to overcome her stutter and trained her in acting as they travelled, often by foot, across the unforgiving Scottish countryside. In June 1776, the Inchbalds were abruptly forced to leave the company after Joseph fought with the audience in Edinburgh for unclear reasons. They briefly moved to Paris where Inchbald studied French and Joseph studied painting, but they returned to London after one month with few remaining funds. Over the following years, the couple performed in the provincial theater circuit with various companies including Joseph Younger's company in Liverpool and then Tate Wilkinson's York Company, until, in 1779, Joseph died suddenly.[14] The

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[13] For more detail on Digges' company, see Phyllis T. Dircks, "Digges, West (1725?-1786), actor and theatre manager," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 3 January 2008; Accessed 24 April 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/7640.

[14] As of 1770, Tate Wilkinson was sole manager of a series of theatres known as the Yorkshire circuit, which included the Theatre in Leeds and the York Theatre Royal. See C. M. P Taylor, "Wilkinson, John Joseph Tate (1769/70-1846), actor and theatre manager," *Oxford Dictionary of*

newly widowed Inchbald, only twenty-five, decided to move permanently to London where she had connections to the theatrical community and was able to secure roles at Covent Garden, under the management of Thomas Harris, during the winter season, and at the Haymarket, under the management of George Colman the Elder, during the summers. She chose not to remarry, but instead to live an independent life as an actress, and eventually, playwright.

Following in Catherine Clive's footsteps, Inchbald identified farce as the best genre to break into the profession of playwriting. She leveraged her insider status as a London actress to get her first play, a two-act Oriental farce titled *The Mogul Tale*, which I described in the previous chapter, produced at the Haymarket on 6 July 1784. The farce was well received, running for ten performances in its first season and revived for many years following. Inchbald spent the next two decades writing more than twenty further plays, many of which were adaptations from French and German works, that both challenged and delighted her audiences. Inchbald primarily wrote comedies, both mainpieces and afterpieces, though she also wrote tragedies that were never performed and only posthumously published: *The Massacre,* which was set to be printed in 1792 but was suppressed as it dealt explicitly with *la Terreur* in France, and *The Case of Conscience*, written in 1800.[15] Inchbald's life in London revolved around the theatre; or, more accurately, the London theatre revolved around her. As Laura Engel writes:

> Inchbald's daily record details a life primarily spent onstage or in working for the stage in some way. Her attention to the careers and successes of other actresses, to responses to

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National Biography, September 23, 2004; Accessed 24 April 2021, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/38587.

[15] Both plays were published for the first time by Boaden in his 1833 memoir of Inchbald.

> her own performances and writings, and to her own appearance and image, suggest the degree to which she was constantly aware of what kind of an impact she was making and might make on the public theatrical world.[16]

As I have shown in previous chapters, women were often criticized as unfeminine when they wrote comedy, as in Cowley's and Burney's cases, and Inchbald was not immune to such sexism. However, aware of her visibility and influence as London's top woman playwright and judge of theatrical taste, Inchbald maintained a polished personal and professional image in order to dispel detractions.

Inchbald's playwriting was shaped by the theatrical climate at the end of the eighteenth century, namely the voracious demand for comedy over tragedy, and the generic shift toward a more deeply affective mode of comedy that precipitated the melodramatic conventions of the nineteenth-century stage.[17] Allardyce Nicoll summarized Inchbald's playwriting as "more advanced style of sentimental humanitarian drama," and, more recently, Wendy Nielsen has drawn a connection between Inchbald's dramatic oeuvre and theatrical trends within continental Europe, including the Storm and Stress (*Sturm und Drang*) movement in Germany and *genre sérieux* in France, forms that heavily emphasized deep emotion.[18] But Inchbald's comedies can hardly be called formulaic; Jane Moody argues that Inchbald "conducted radical experiments

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[16] Laura Engel*, Women, Performance and the Material of Memory: The Archival Tourist, 1780-1915* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 34.

[17] Cox, "Cowley's Bold Stroke for Comedy," 364. Cox explains that melodrama replaced comedy as the genre in greatest demand.

[18] Allardyce Nicoll, *Late Eighteenth-Century Drama 1750-1800*, vol. 3 of *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 14; Wendy Nielsen, "A Tragic Farce: Revolutionary Women in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* and European Drama," *European Romantic Review* 17, no. 3 (2006): 275-88.

into the limits of sentimental comedy."[19] As I discussed in previous chapters, eighteenth-century English sentimental comedy responded to the sexually risqué humour of the Restoration era, and in turn offered comedy that was deemed more polite, morally instructive, and emotionally resonant.[20] Inchbald's late-century sentimental comedy pushed these ideals further in translating topical public concerns—the growing British Empire, the abolition movement, the Regency Crises, and the French Revolution—into "comic events that diffused some of the anxieties of *fin de siècle* England."[21] Alongside tearful heroines, male gallants, and family reconciliations, Inchbald's plays contain interrogations of colonialism, despotism, slavery, and unhappy marriages. For example, *Such Things Are* (1788) features a benevolent sentimental hero, Haswell, based on the real-life prison reformer John Howard; *Every One Has His Fault* (1793) portrays a virtuous lower class juxtaposed against a corrupt nobility; and *Wise Man of the East* (1799) contains a scene of suicide brought on by an abusive relationship. Inchbald's sentimental comedies provided the playwright with the optimal commercial success and a fair degree of subversive expression.

Inchbald the Radical

Inchbald's dramatic work was deeply influenced by her interest in radical politics. By the early 1790s, Inchbald had established a large literary network in London amongst theatre creators, artists, and writers, many of whom were grappling with the political climate of the

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[19] Jane Moody, "Suicide and Translation in the Dramaturgy of Elizabeth Inchbald and Anne Plumptre," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. Catherine B. Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 279.

[20] See Freeman, *Character's Theater*, 192-234.

[21] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 171.

French Revolution. During this period, Inchbald became associated with leading English radicals who supported the Revolution including Thomas Holcroft, a playwriting colleague, George Robinson, her publisher, and William Godwin, the political philosopher. [22] This particular group of "literary Jacobins," as Gary Kelley dubs them, were English intellectuals and writers who sympathized with the values that instigated the Revolution and, within their works, called for the widespread reform of government and society in order to expand and protect individual liberties.[23] Kelly characterizes the ideology of Inchbald's circle thus:

> They opposed tyranny and oppression, be it domestic, national or international, spiritual or temporal; they were against all distinctions between men which were not based on moral qualities, or virtue; and they were utterly opposed to persecution of individuals, communities, or nations for their beliefs on any subject.[24]

For the women within the group—Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and Inchbald herself—the reform movement ushered in an exciting opportunity to interrogate social and legal norms that had oppressed English women for centuries. Inchbald's correspondence and journals of 1793 reveal the significance of her growing association with the movement in the early 1790s. Both Godwin and Holcroft regularly visited Inchbald at her home where they would discuss current events, politics, and literature; on 24 August 1793, she writes that "Mr. Godwin &c called," and

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[22] For recent analysis of the English literary radicals, see Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property, and the Law: Critiquing the Contract* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); David O'Shaughnessy, *William Godwin and the Theatre* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010); and Miriam L. Wallace, *Revolutionary Subjects in the English "Jacobin" Novel, 1790-1805* (Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press, 2009).

[23] Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (New York: Clarendon, 1976), 5.

[24] Kelly, *Jacobin*, 7.

on September 26 she "walkd with Mr. Holcroft."[25] Godwin had emerged as a leading voice in British reform politics after publishing *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793, and Inchbald's diary from the same year reveals her developing relationship with him. The two established the practice of reading and editing one another's writing. Inchbald read Godwin's *Political Justice* and edited a manuscript of his novel *Caleb Williams* (1794), writing, "[y]our first volume is far inferior to the two last. Your second is sublimely horrible—captivatingly frightful."[26] In turn, she allowed Godwin to read her manuscripts, including drafts of both of her novels, and trusted his opinion on literary matters.

Godwin encouraged Inchbald's interest in novel writing. Not only did he edit drafts of both *A Simple Story* and *Nature and Art*, but he also generally encouraged her to pursue novel writing over playwriting, saying: "It seems to me that the drama puts shackles upon you, and that the compression it requires prevents your genius from expanding itself."[27] Inchbald would later agree with Godwin's assertion that the novel provided her more creative freedom than the stage, writing in 1807:

> The Novelist is a free agent. He lives in a land of liberty, whilst The Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government.—Passing over the subjection in which an author of plays is held by the Lord Chamberlain's office, and the degree of dependence which he

[25] Inchbald, *Diaries*, 2:314; Ibid., 2:317.

[26] Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, [1794], quoted by Paul, *William Godwin*, 1:139. *Caleb Williams* was later adapted into a play titled *The Iron Chest* by George Colman the Younger in 1796 and performed with disastrous results (see Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 387-94). Inchbald took no part in the project, but she later criticized Colman's adaptation of the novel.

[27] Godwin to Inchbald, [30-1 January 1794], *Letters of William Godwin*, 2: 94.

has on his actors—he is the very slave of the audience.[28]

Inchbald's words echo Hannah Cowley's similar complaints about the state of theatrical censorship in 1786 when she wrote that she was "encompassed with chains when I write, which check me in my happiest flights, and force me continually to reflect, not, whether this is *just*? but, whether this is *safe*?"[29] Both of Inchbald's novels contain overt political commentary, including criticism of patriarchal oppression, class prejudice, and abuse of power in the church.

While Inchbald felt that the novel allowed her more freedom to express political and social dissent than playwriting, it would be a mistake to view her theatrical work as unaffected by her participation in the reform movement. Daniel O'Quinn, Anne K. Mellor, and Amy Garnai have made significant contributions to uncovering the radical politics within Inchbald's plays.[30] Mellor observes that: "implicit in Inchbald's plays is the argument that Britain is not the land of liberty that it claims to be, that its wives are prisoners, its subjects the victims of an oppressive class system that sends many honest workers to debtor's prison, and its ruling classes the slaves of dissipation and folly."[31] Indeed, Inchbald's plays were scrutinized by the press for any note of political allusion. After the debut of *Every One Has His Fault*, a review in the *True Briton*

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[28] Elizabeth Inchbald, "To The Artist," in *The Artist: A Collection of Essays Relative to Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Architecture, the Drama, Discoveries of Science, and Various Other Subjects*, vol. 1, (London: John Murray et al., 1807), 16.

[29] Cowley, *A School for Greybeards*, vii.

[30] Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Mellor, "*Mothers of the Nation*, 39-68; Daniel O'Quinn, "Inchbald's Indies: Meditations on Despotism circa 1784," in *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2005), 125-63.

[31] Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, 68.

deemed the play "highly objectionable" for its exposure of poverty in London, and there was even a politically motivated riot in the Portsmouth Theatre in February 1795 when a group of military officers disrupted a performance of the play because it was perceived to be unpatriotic.[32] Inchbald responded by denying that she had a political agenda in her play, writing: "had I been so unfortunate in my principles, or blind to my own interest, as to have written anything of the nature of which I am accused, I most certainly should not have presented it for reception to the manager of Covent Garden theatre."[33] The controversy did not appear to have a detrimental effect on the popularity of *Every One Has His Fault*, and may even have stirred interest in it as the debut run was extended to an impressive thirty-one nights.

Inchbald's pragmatic choice to obfuscate, and even deny, the political and social underpinnings in her plays proved an effective strategy for her professional success, but her caution has also resulted in a muddying of her political orientation by later critics.[34] Boaden wrote in his *Memoirs* that her political writings were a short-lived product of the revolutionary decade and "happily perished in the furious season that gave birth to them."[35] Likewise, S.R. Littlewood wrote in his 1921 biography that Inchbald "did not go to anything like the lengths [Godwin] demanded over the various causes in which […] he was so courageous a pioneer,"[36]

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[32] *True Briton,* 30 January 1793; Gillian Russell, "Riotous Assemblies: The Army and Navy in the Theatre," in *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society 17931815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112.

[33] Inchbald's response to the *True Briton* is printed in Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1:311.

[34] Anderson, *Female Playwrights*, 183.

[35] Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1:330.

[36] Littlewood, *Circle*, 87.

and even Jenkins writes that "Mrs. Inchbald had a wide knowledge of the political scene,"[37] but "she [was] never outspoken about the government nor does she discuss the views of her friends who were involved."[38] Such assessments misguidedly attempt to save Inchbald from the impropriety of politics, while painting her as a temporary political satellite, merely orbiting more significant political figures like Godwin and Holcroft. Yet, Kelly has shown that both men actually went on to "imitate particular aspects" of *her* novels, when they realized that "a novel of ideas, to be effective, had to be effective artistically, as well as philosophically."[39] Assessing Inchbald as moderate or politically ambivalent, fails to consider the significance of her plays *and* the nuances of her disagreement with Mary Wollstonecraft.

Enter Wollstonecraft

It was through her relationship with Godwin that Inchbald was first introduced to Wollstonecraft in 1796. The two should have been natural allies and even friends as they shared much in common. They were roughly the same age, they published in the same period, and they were part of the same social networks. Like Inchbald, at eighteen Wollstonecraft made the unorthodox decision to leave home and make her own way in the world. She worked variously as a lady's maid, school mistress, and governess, and travelled across Ireland, Wales, the provinces, and, later, France and Scandinavia. In 1787, she published her first book, a conduct manual advocating for women's education titled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* followed by

[37] Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 518.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Kelly, *Jacobin*, 113.

several other works including a novel, *Mary: A Fiction* (1788).[40] In 1790, Wollstonecraft was the first writer to respond to Edmund Burke's provocative *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) with her own *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). When Wollstonecraft published *Rights of Woman* two years later—calling for "a revolution in female manners"—her name became closely associated with women's rights and gender reform.[41] *Rights of Woman* was quickly republished and, in the first five years after its initial publication, sold between 1500 and 3000 copies.[42] However, it was also controversial, and Wollstonecraft was subjected to numerous gendered attacks. In 1792, she was viciously satirized in Thomas Taylor's *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes,* which mockingly compared women's rights to animal rights.

There is evidence that Inchbald had been drawn to Wollstonecraft's call for gender equality in *Rights of Woman* long before the two were introduced. When *Every One Has His Fault* debuted at Covent Garden on 29 January 1793, it was introduced with a prologue that promoted Wollstonecraft's feminist text:

> *The Rights of Women*, says a female pen,
>
> Are, to do every thing as well as Men.
>
> To think, to argue, to decide, to write,
>
> To talk, undoubtedly—perhaps, to fight.

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[40] A second novel by Wollstonecraft, *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, was published posthumously in 1798.

[41] Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," in *A Vindication of the Rights of Man; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: University Press, 1999), 113. Henceforth referred to as *Rights of Woman*.

[42] Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 185.

(For Females march to war, like brave Commanders

Not in old Authors only—but in Flanders.)[43]

Though the prologue was written by the Reverend Robert Nares, not Inchbald, Green argues that Inchbald would have been consulted and may even have "participated in the process" of creation.[44] The reference to *Rights of Woman* in Inchbald's play emphasizes the way the two women were publicly linked by their shared interests. It also reveals that Inchbald had no qualms about being compared to the author of *Rights of Woman*, at least in the early part of the decade, and perhaps even saw the association as a beneficial marketing opportunity, as Hannah Cowley did when referencing Wollstonecraft in her preface to *A Day in Turkey* in 1791 as I discussed in the previous chapter.[45]

By the time Inchbald and Wollstonecraft's worlds collided in 1796, they had built quite different writing careers and professional identities, the distinctions of which would come to divide them. The first recorded meeting between Inchbald and Wollstonecraft took place at a dinner party on 22 April 1796. The two women did not warm to one another. In letters to Godwin over the following months, Wollstonecraft refers to Inchbald as "Mrs. Perfection" and expresses irritation over the time Godwin spent with her.[46] However, over time, Wollstonecraft's icy references to Inchbald began to thaw. On 4 September 1796, Wollstonecraft writes fondly

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[43] Inchbald, "Every One Has His Fault (1793)," in *The Plays of Elizabeth Inchbald*, vol. 2, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (New York: Garland, 1980): i. Subsequent references are from this facsimile edition.

[44] Green, "Mr. Harmony," 52.

[45] See Cowley, *Turkey*, 142.

[46] Wollstonecraft to Godwin, London, 2 August 1796, *Collected Letters*, 333. See also Wollstonecraft to Godwin, London, 24 August 1796, *Collected Letters*, 340.

about a walk she took with Inchbald, writing to Godwin: "I have spent a pleasant day, *perhaps*, the pleasanter, for walking with you first, with only the family, and Mrs. Inch—We had less wit and more cordiality—and if I do not admire her more I love her better—She is a charming woman!"[47] In another letter sent to Godwin on 18 November 1796, Wollstonecraft asks him to bring her a copy of Inchbald's new play to read, and on 3 February 1797 she writes that she tried to call on Inchbald, but Inchbald was not home. These references suggest the possibility that a relationship was developing between Inchbald and Wollstonecraft independent of their shared relationship with Godwin. However, Wollstonecraft and Godwin's marriage on 29 March 1797 terminated the possibility of friendship between the two women.

The clandestine marriage, rushed when the couple discovered Mary was pregnant, had significant social repercussions. It revealed that Wollstonecraft had been lying about being married to Imlay whose last name she had adopted to avoid the social stigma of being an unmarried mother. After Wollstonecraft and Godwin's marriage became public, two weeks after the actual event, many of Godwin and Wollstonecraft's friends—notably Inchbald, actress Sarah Siddons, and retired actress Frances Twiss (Siddons' sister)—distanced themselves from the couple.[48] The fact that three actresses—though Inchbald and Twiss were retired from acting by this time—were quick to make their disapproval known points to the particular scrutiny women theatre professionals faced at the time. As Janet Todd writes, "theatrical people could not afford

[47] Wollstonecraft to Godwin, London, 4 September 1796, *Collected Letters*, 346. In this letter, Wollstonecraft appears to suggest that she and Godwin believe that Inchbald has romantic feelings for him.

[48] Wollstonecraft wrote to Amelia Alderson on 11 April 1797 that the Twisses had ended their friendship with her after they learned of the marriage, and Godwin later named Siddons as doing the same in his memoir of Wollstonecraft published in 1798.

tainted acquaintances," and this was especially true for women like Siddons, Twiss, and Inchbald, who carefully balanced their highly publicized careers with virtuous reputations.[49] Inchbald's social rejection of Wollstonecraft was first and foremost an act of preservation. Ben Robertson observes that Inchbald "kept careful watch over her reputation, in personal terms as a woman and in professional terms as an actor and writer," and Anna Lott agrees that Inchbald's immediate efforts to distance herself from the couple "demonstrate the precarious nature of her own reputation as a public, professional woman."[50] Inchbald's status as a single woman and her closeness to Godwin—the two were often seen in public together—became a major liability following his marriage to Wollstonecraft and the revelations of the latter's sexual history.

Exacerbating matters, Godwin was infamous for his call to abolish marriage after writing in *Political Justice*, "[m]arriage is law, and the worst of all laws."[51] As Harriet Guest observes, Godwin and Wollstonecraft's marriage was "particularly alarming to fellow radical intellectuals" because it put their ideas into practice with implications for the larger group.[52] As a woman and a playwright, Inchbald had to be careful about the extent to which she was perceived to challenge conventional morality. While fellow playwright Thomas Holcroft stood by Godwin and Wollstonecraft following their marriage, he was in a far less precarious position than Inchbald

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[49] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 417.

[50] Ben Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 11; Anna Lott, introduction to *A Simple Story*, by Elizabeth Inchbald (Toronto: Broadview, 2007), 20.

[51] William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols. (London: G.G.J and J. Robinson, 1793), 2: 850.

[52] Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

whose professional success relied on her personal reputation as a woman. Godwin's abandoned views on marriage help explain Inchbald's rude treatment of Wollstonecraft at the theatre on 19 April 1797. It was the first time Inchbald had been seen with Godwin or Wollstonecraft since learning of the marriage, and the encounter was taking place in a crowded theatre, the space most associated with Inchbald's professional identity. Godwin may have thought that the public nature of the meeting would encourage Inchbald to behave discreetly. However, it had the opposite effect as Inchbald was quick to make her feelings clear to observers with more decisiveness than may have occurred had the meeting been in private.

Any hope of reconciliation between the two women was forever lost when, only five months later, on 10 September 1797, Wollstonecraft died from complications following the birth of her and Godwin's daughter, Mary. Mere hours after Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin wrote a note to Inchbald and revisited their dispute: "My wife died at eight this morning. I always thought you used her ill, but I forgive you. You told me you did not know her."[53] Inchbald responded later that day, offering her condolences, but defending herself: "I did not *know* her—I never wished to know her—as I avoid every female acquaintance who has no husband, I avoided her—against my desire you made us acquainted—with what justice I shunned her, your present note evinces, for she judged me harshly."[54] While not a particularly compassionate note, Inchbald's letter offers two illuminating defenses for her rejection of Wollstonecraft. First, that as a woman playwright, she was especially vulnerable to attacks on her reputation and, therefore,

[53] Godwin to Inchbald, 10 September 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, 1: 238.

[54] Inchbald to Godwin, 10 September 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, 1: 238, n.1.

cautious of associating with women who were perceived to be sexually dubious. She reiterates this defense more strongly in a subsequent letter to Godwin on 14 September 1797, writing:

> As the short and very slight acquaintance I had with Mrs Godwin, and into which I was reluctantly impelled by you, has been productive of petty suspicious detractions, and revilings (from which my Character has been till now preserved) surely I cannot sufficiently applaud my own penetration in apprehending, and my own firmness in Resisting a Longer and more familiar acquaintance.[55]

While these statements are painfully blunt, Inchbald's comments reveal that it was not Wollstonecraft's reputation alone that caused her anxiety, but Godwin's attempts to further develop the association between them. Perhaps if Godwin had allowed his friend and confidant to distance herself from the initial scandal of the marriage, she may have felt able to extend her friendship at a later time. Inchbald's second point of defense against Godwin's charge that she treated Wollstonecraft badly, is that Wollstonecraft, not she, threw the first punch and "judged [her] harshly."[56] Here, Inchbald is likely referring to the two negative reviews of her novels that Wollstonecraft had published in the *Analytical Review* in 1791 and 1796.[57]

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[55] Inchbald to Godwin, 14 September 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, 1:243, n.4.

[56] Inchbald to Godwin, 10 September 1797, *Letters of William Godwin*, 1: 238, n.1.

[57] See Mary Wollstonecraft, "Contributions to the *Analytical Review*," vol. 7, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 13-487 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1989). All subsequent references to Wollstonecraft's essays for the *Analytical Review* are from this edition.

Wollstonecraft's Reviews of Inchbald's Novels

Both of Inchbald's novels were generally well received by the public and critics alike, but Wollstonecraft disliked aspects of both works, and her feminist critiques reveal a philosophical discord with Inchbald. Inchbald's first novel *A Simple Story* reached its second edition only a few months after its initial publication in early 1791 and garnered praise from many reviewers. The novel follows the romantic relationship between Dorriforth, a Catholic priest, and Miss Milner, his ward. The two marry when Dorriforth takes up his inheritance as Lord Elmwood, but later separate after Lady Elmwood has an affair. Lord Elmwood shuns his wife and daughter, Matilda, who is left exposed to the predatory behavior of another local Lord following her mother's death. The plot is resolved by a reunion between father and daughter through his restored benevolence as patriarch and her voluntary subservience as his child. The *Gentleman's Magazine* complimented Inchbald's creativity, writing, "[w]e do not recollect an instance of invention so happily calculated."[58] Similarly, the *Lady's Magazine* expressed total admiration for the novel, particularly its emotional authenticity: "[s]he traces the working of a passion with justice and minuteness, places it in every *setting*, if we may use the expression, and exhibits its luster and its dimness, its brilliancy and its specks, precisely as we may observe in real life."[59] Wollstonecraft, in contrast, was highly critical of the novel's sentimental tropes.

Wollstonecraft's critique, published in the *Analytical Review* in May 1791, stands apart from others both because of its overtly feminist critique of the novel and because of its personal criticism of Inchbald, who, by this time, was a highly respected and admired playwright.

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[58] Review of *A Simple Story*, *Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 61 (1791), 225.

[59] Review of *A Simple Story*, *Lady's Magazine* 21 (1791), 59-61.

Wollstonecraft begins by noting that *A Simple Story* has a "useful moral in view, namely, to show the advantage of a good education" for women, but argues that the novel never fully realizes its goal:

> [Matilda] should have possessed greater dignity of mind. Educated in adversity she should have learned (to prove that a cultivated mind is a real advantage) how to bear, nay, rise above her misfortunes, instead of suffering her health to be undermined by the trials of her patience, which ought to have strengthened her understanding.[60]

For Wollstonecraft, Matilda is guided too strongly by sentiment, rather than reason. This emphasis is problematic for Wollstonecraft because Matilda is better educated than "the vain, giddy" Miss Milner but behaves similarly.[61] The contrast between the two characters, Wollstonecraft argues, should be more obvious. Wollstonecraft then turns her criticism directly on Inchbald, accusing her of writing female characters that promote sexist impressions of women:

> Why do all female writers, even when they display their abilities, always give a sanction to the libertine reveries of men? Why do they poison the minds of their own sex, by strengthening a male prejudice that makes women systematically weak? We allude to the absurd fashion that prevails of making the heroine of a novel boast of a delicate constitution; and the still more ridiculous and deleterious custom of spinning the most picturesque scenes out of fevers, swoons, and tears.[62]

Wollstonecraft is particularly disturbed by the heightened emotion of female characters in *A*

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[60] Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 10 (1791), 101.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 10 (1791), 102.

Simple Story. Indeed, in the novel, female characters stifle or break into tears more than fifty times, while male characters are described in the same condition only twenty times. For Wollstonecraft, this gendered disparity of sentimental display promotes female weakness—an egregious portrayal when made by a woman writer.

Wollstonecraft was seriously concerned about the influence that sentimental female characters had on their readers. In *Rights of Woman*, published less than a year after her review of *A Simple Story*, Wollstonecraft argues that women, when deprived of formal education, "naturally imbibe the opinions expressed in the only kind of reading that can interest an innocent frivolous mind."[63] She further argues that unchecked sentiment is a feature of "feminine weakness" and a tool of patriarchal oppression: "[w]omen subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life."[64] This is not to say that Wollstonecraft was fundamentally anti-sentimental. Critics have shown that her approach to this issue was complicated.[65] Rather, she drew a distinction between the ability to sympathize within reason and what she perceived as artificial displays of sentiment.

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[63] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 272.

[64] Ibid., 271.

[65] For further discussion of Wollstonecraft's complex treatment of sentiment and sensibility, see Syndy McMillen Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994); Harriet Guest, "Remembering Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 88-122; and Mitzi Myers, "Sensibility and the 'Walk of Reason': Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Reviews as Cultural Critique," in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 120-44.

For Wollstonecraft, the portrayal of female characters with "false sentiments and over-stretched Feelings" was not merely a product of poor writing, but an attack on women's equal ability to exercise rational thought, a theme Wollstonecraft explored within her own novels, *Mary: A Fiction* and *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Women*, both of which are critical of sentimental tropes and feature heroines who seek fulfillment beyond marriage.[66]

Wollstonecraft's review of Inchbald's second novel *Nature and Art*, published in May 1796, is more positive than her review of *A Simple Story* as she deems the second novel to be "more philosophical."[67] The novel follows two brothers, William and Henry, who fall out when William advances in London society and Henry does not. Their two sons, also named William and Henry, are models of their fathers: William is socially successful but morally bankrupt, while Henry, raised away from English society in a remote area of Africa, has a kind and generous spirit. As in *A Simple Story*, two female characters become the focus of sentiment in the novel. Rebecca is a righteous woman who sacrifices her reputation, but not her virtue, to protect an illegitimate child, while Hannah is seduced by young William and suffers as a social outcast after becoming pregnant. Initially, Wollstonecraft praised the novel for its intellectual quality, but she also adds bitingly that it does not have enough "lively interest to keep the attention awake."[68] Like her criticism of Matilda in *A Simple Story*, Wollstonecraft takes issue with the fact that Rebecca is an educated woman who martyrs herself to feminine virtue: "The making a young modest woman, with some powers of mind, acknowledge herself the mother of a child that she

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[66] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, 74.

[67] Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 23 (1796), 511.

[68] Ibid.

humanely fostered, in the presence of the man she loved, is also highly improbable, not to say unnatural."[69] She is similarly critical of the sensational progress of Hannah's character. In the latter half of the novel, Hannah is forced to turn to sex work and theft as her only means of survival. In a melodramatic turn of events, Hannah is then arrested and sentenced to death by young William, now a magistrate, who no longer recognizes the woman he seduced years earlier. Inchbald's sympathetic treatment of Hannah, a female character who has sexual relationships outside of marriage, was controversial for the time. Possibly in response to accusations of impropriety, Inchbald later excised a number of passages related to Hannah and William's illegitimate child in the second edition of the novel released in 1797.[70] Wollstonecraft, whose posthumously published novel *The Wrongs of Woman* took a similarly sympathetic approach to the character of a sex worker, was not concerned with Inchbald's portrayal of Hannah's sexual behavior, but rather the melodramatic occurrences of her plotline:

> The story of Hannah Primrose we found particularly affecting: the catastrophe giving point to a benevolent system of morality. The transitions, however, from one period of the history to another, are too abrupt; for the incidents, not being shaded into each other, sometimes appear improbable. This we think the principal defect of the work as a whole.[71]

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[69] Ibid.

[70] For a detailed analysis of Inchbald's revisions to various editions of *Nature and Art*, see Janice Marie Cauwels, "Authorial 'Caprice' Vs. Editorial 'Calculation': The Text of Elizabeth Inchbald's 'Nature and Art,'" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 72, no. 2 (1978): 169-85.

[71] Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 23 (1796), 511.

Though Wollstonecraft approves more of *Nature and Art* more than *A Simple Story*, she remains frustrated that female characters are portrayed in sensational circumstances and lack agency.

When Wollstonecraft published her review of *A Simple Story* in May 1791, Inchbald would not have known who wrote it. Articles for the *Analytical Review* were published under the authors' initials only and Wollstonecraft published this review under the initial 'M.'[72] This anonymity explains why Inchbald had no qualms about allowing a reference to Wollstonecraft to appear in the prologue to *Every One Has His Fault* in 1793. However, by the time that Inchbald and Wollstonecraft were introduced in April 1796, Inchbald likely would have known that 'M,' who had recently published a lukewarm review of *Nature and Art*, and a scorching review of *A Simple Story* years earlier, stood for Mary Wollstonecraft. Not only was Wollstonecraft now a famous feminist author with a distinct critical voice, she and Inchbald were now part of the same social circle. Todd argues that when Inchbald met Wollstonecraft, she "probably remembered the mocking review of [*A Simple Story*] as insipid and pandering to male prejudice […] [a]nd she could not have relished the recent review of her new work, *Nature and Art*, which damned her with faint praise."[73] Lott concurs, writing that Wollstonecraft's reviews contributed to

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[72] See Ralph M. Wardle "Mary Wollstonecraft, Analytical Reviewer," *PMLA* 62, no. 4 (1947): 1000-9. Wardle was the first to attribute all reviews signed 'M,' 'W,' 'T,' to Wollstonecraft. For more recent analysis of Wollstonecraft's work for the *Analytical Review*, see Anne Chandler, "The 'Seeds of Order and Taste': Wollstonecraft, the *Analytical Review*, and Critical Idiom," *European Romantic Review* 16, no. 1 (2005): 1-21; Fiore Sireci, "'Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity': Mary Wollstonecraft's Literary Criticism in the *Analytical Review* and *a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79, no. 2 (2018): 243-65; and Mary A. Waters, "'The First of a New Genus—': Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and *The Analytical Review,*" in *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789-1832* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 86-120.

[73] Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, 382.

"Inchbald's dislike for her."[74] Of course, Inchbald was not the only sentimental novelist that Wollstonecraft strongly critiqued in the *Analytical Review*: she deemed Charlotte Lennox's female characters in *Euphemia* "very affected" and "*ridiculously* squeamish," and criticized the "preposterous sentiments" of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle*.[75] Wollstonecraft's criticism of Inchbald, however, was especially severe, and Inchbald, who foregrounded female characters and their experiences in her novels, was likely deeply offended by the charges laid against her. Regrettably, Wollstonecraft's premature death in 1797 eliminated any possibility of further debate between the two women or the chance for Inchbald to defend her female characters and sentimental strategies.

***Lovers' Vows*: Sentimental Comedy and Feminism**

For Inchbald, whose theatrical oeuvre was made up of sentimental comedies, displays of emotion were a necessary tool of her professional success. She wrote that playwrights must appeal to the audience's "habits, passions, and prejudices, as the only means to gain this sudden conquest of their minds and hearts."[76] Though Inchbald never confronted Wollstonecraft about the criticism of her novels, her next play, which followed Wollstonecraft's death, offers a striking reclamation of an unwed mother and positive depiction of female sexuality. I suggest

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[74] Lott, introduction to *A Simple Story*, 21.

[75] Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 8 (1790), 223; Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review* 1 (1788), 333.

[76] Elizabeth Inchbald, "Remarks for *John Bull*," in *The British Theatre; or, a Collection of Plays, Which Are Acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket*, vol. 24 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 4. Here, Inchbald is commenting on a play by George Colman the Younger.

that Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*, an adaptation of Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe*, can be read as a response to Wollstonecraft's criticism of her novels, a rebuttal to Godwin's accusations that she mistreated Wollstonecraft out of bigotry, and a model of her own feminist strategies, grounded in the affective bonds of sentiment. *Lovers' Vows,* first performed at Covent Garden on 11 October 1798, was one of Inchbald's most successful plays. It ran for forty-two consecutive nights in its first season, well above Inchbald's average debut, and was positively reviewed by critics. The *London Chronicle* deemed the play "unquestionably the most interesting and best Performance the stage has for many years witnessed," though the reviewer also expresses some discomfort over the depiction of "pardon[ing]" an unwed mother."[77]

The plot of *Lovers' Vows* follows Agatha Friburg who was seduced and became pregnant in her youth by a local Baron. Abandoned by the Baron and his family, Agatha raises her son Frederick with the help of a kind local chaplain. However, after the chaplain's death, Agatha is rejected by the community and the play opens with her suffering from starvation and illness. The local landlord of a nearby inn will not help her and her death seems imminent when her son unexpectedly arrives, returned from the military to retrieve his certificate of birth. Consequently, Agatha is forced to reveal the truth that he is the illegitimate son of Baron Wildenhaim. Horrified by his mother's suffering, but penniless himself, Fredrick begs on the streets for money to help her. In a twist of fate, he comes across the Baron, recently returned from Alsace with his only daughter after the death of his noble wife. When the Baron offers only a nominal sum to help, Frederick tries to rob him at knifepoint. The Baron quickly arrests Fredrick and sentences him to death. Only then does Frederick realize that he almost killed his own father. The sub-plot of

[77] *London Chronicle*, 11-13 October 1798.

Lovers' Vows focuses on the Baron's young daughter Amelia who is being courted by Count Cassel, a rich but superficial nobleman. Amelia is actually in love with her tutor and the local chaplain, Anhalt. Anhalt explains to Amelia that a marriage between them is impossible due to her noble birth. Later, once Frederick's true relation to the Baron is revealed, Anhalt encourages the Baron to marry Agatha and make his son legitimate. The Baron agrees and, grateful for Anhalt's good council, consents to the marriage between Anhalt and Amelia.

Adapting Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe*, rather than writing an original play, offered Inchbald a chance to explore controversial themes while distancing herself from them personally. While English adaptations of Kotzebue's plays were popular and likely to succeed commercially—between 1796 and 1802, twenty of his plays were translated from German and staged in England—they were also known for their risqué content.[78] For example, when Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Stranger* (1798), another Kotzebue adaptation, achieved great commercial success, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* wrote scathingly: "Kotzebue's Stranger holds out falsehood and promotes immorality."[79] Interestingly, the review places blame primarily on the original playwright Kotzebue, rather than the adaptor Sheridan. Similarly, adaptation provided Inchbald with, as Jane Moody describes, a "strategic form of theatrical disguise," allowing her to obscure her own personal and political views behind those of the original author.[80] John Loftis

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[78] John Loftis, "Political and Social Thought in the Drama," in *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*, ed. Robert D. Hume. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980): 282.

[79] *Anti-Jacobin Review,* 4 September 1799. Despite facing criticism, *The Stranger* was a success, in large part due to performances by celebrity siblings Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble. The two did not perform in *Lovers' Vows* as they were acting at Drury Lane when the play was first acted at Covent Garden.

[80] Moody, "Suicide and Translation," 262.

argues that Inchbald was likely particularly drawn to Kotzebue's plays because they offered her a chance to portray "social and even sexual themes that English conservatism had kept off the stage for generations."[81] In the preface to *Lovers' Vows*, Inchbald excuses her own authorial interventions as mere stylistic improvements, writing:

> It would appear like affectation to offer an apology for any scenes or passages omitted or added, in this play, different from the original: its reception has given me confidence to suppose what I have done is right; for Kotzebue's "Child of Love" in Germany, was never more attractive than "Lovers' Vows" has been in England.[82]

According to her own preface, Inchbald was given a rough, literal translation of the original play that necessitated many alterations and allowed her to transform the work to suit her own taste and style. While Christoph Bode criticizes Inchbald's adaptation as a "de-politicized" version of Kotzebue's original, her changes, in fact, were not purely reductive.[83] Inchbald does dismantle some of Kotzebue's political commentary, including references to Revolutionary France (likey cut to ensure her play would pass English censorship laws), but she also expands the play's treatment of female sexuality and its criticism of gender inequality as I will discuss below.[84] In a testament to the disruptive treatment of gender and sexuality in the play, Jane Austen later

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[81] See Loftis, "Political and Social," 283.

[82] Elizabeth Inchbald, "Lovers' Vows (1798)," in *The Plays of Elizabeth Inchbald*, vol. 2, ed. Paula R. Backscheider (New York: Garland, 1980), i. Subsequent citations are from this facsimile edition. When possible, act and scene numbers are referred to in the main body of the text.

[83] Christoph Bode. "Unfit for an English Stage? Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* and Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe*," *European Romantic Review* 16, no. 3 (2005): 303.

[84] See Bode, "Unfit," 303-4.

incorporated a scene featuring *Lovers' Vows* in her novel *Mansfield Park* (1814) when the Bertram family attempts to stage Inchbald's play to the horror of the family patriarch and embarrassment of the heroine, Fanny.[85]

As in her novels, in *Lovers' Vows* Inchbald once again places two sentimental female characters, Agatha and Amelia, at the center of the story—with one new twist. In her novels, the sexually compromised female characters, Miss Milner (later Lady Elmwood) and Hannah Primrose, die, a conventional resolution for fallen women in sentimental novels that functions to affirm Christian morality and unburden the plot of an inconvenient female character. *Lovers' Vows* offers a striking alternative to this convention when Agatha, an unwed mother, does not die, but throughout the course of the play is absolved of guilt and reintegrated back into the community. Amelia, on the other hand, is a young woman filled with desire for a man who is of a lower class, and successfully negotiates her marriage to him. *Lovers' Vows* manages these unconventional narratives by relying on heightened displays of emotion, rather than action, to maintain narrative suspense. Though the play contains some moments of action—for example, when the landlord throws Agatha on to the street, or when Frederick attempts to stab the Baron—for the most part the play foregrounds the emotional bonds between mother and son, father and daughter, husband and wife.

In adapting the role of Amelia, Inchbald made some of her most significant deviations from Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe*. Kotzebue's character is a simple ingenue, but Inchbald transforms Amelia into a complex character infused with wit, sexual desire, and strength. Inchbald defends her alterations in her preface to the play: "[t]he part of Amelia has been a very

[85] See Byrne, *Jane Austen*, 149-77. Byrne offers a detailed analysis of the *Lovers' Vows* scene in *Mansfield Park*.

particular object of my solicitude and alteration: the same situations which the author gave her remain, but almost all the dialogue of the character I have changed."[86] Though she insists that her alterations merely make Amelia more suited to English taste, in actuality Inchbald's changes do more. Inchbald rejects Kotzebue's depiction of Amelia's sexual desire as naïve and instead imbibes her with a confident understanding of her own desire and the will to pursue its fulfillment. Because of his own unhappy marriage, the Baron is insistent that his daughter Amelia marry someone with whom she is romantically compatible. He hopes that this will be Count Cassel:

> BARON. Amelia, you know you have a father who loves you, and I believe you know you have a suitor who is come to ask permission to love you. Tell me candidly how you like Count Cassel?
>
> AMELIA. Very well.
>
> BARON. Do not you blush when I talk of him?
>
> AMELIA. No.
>
> BARON. No. [*Aside*] I am sorry for that. [*To her*] Have you dreamt of him?
>
> AMELIA. No. […]
>
> BARON. But do you not feel a little fluttered when he is talked of?
>
> AMELIA. [*Shaking her head*] No.
>
> BARON. Don't you wish sometimes to speak to him, and have not the courage to begin?
>
> AMELIA. No.
>
> BARON. Do not you wish to take his part when his companions laugh at him?

[86] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, iii.

AMELIA. No, I love to laugh at him myself.[87]

Instead, Amelia loves Anhalt, and not the rich Count that her father has chosen for her. The Baron assumes that Amelia does not understand love and, in act three, scene two, he enlists Anhalt to try and discover if Amelia is in love with the Count. Amelia is quick to turn the interrogation on Anhalt and express her desire for him:

AMELIA. What is the subject?

ANHALT. Love.

AMELIA. (*Going up to him*) Come, then, teach it me. Teach it me as you taught me geography, languages and other important things.

ANHALT. (*Turning from her*) Pshaw!

AMELIA. Ah! You won't. You know you have already taught me that, and you won't begin again.[88]

Eighteenth-century translator Anne Plumptre, who published the first complete English translation of *Das Kind der Liebe*, was so horrified by Inchbald's amorous portrayal of Amelia, that she wrote: "Amelia in *Lovers' Vows*, so far from being the artless innocent Child of Nature, drawn by Kotzebue, appears a forward Country Hoyden, who deviates in many Instances from the established Usages of Society, and the Decorums of her Sex, in a manner wholly unwarranted by the Original."[89] Paula Byrne confirms that Inchbald's depiction of Amelia was

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[87] Ibid., 21-22.

[88] Ibid., 41-42.

[89] Anne Plumptre, Preface to *The Natural Son*, by August Von Kotzebue (London: R. Phillips, 1798), v. For a discussion of Plumptre's and Inchbald's different approaches to translating *Lovers' Vows*, see Moody, "Suicide and Translation," 264-72.

risqué for the period, writing that Inchbald takes "a huge leap in notions of female propriety" by "tak[ing] up the cause of a woman's right to court.[90]" By emphasizing Amelia's desire for Anhalt and her practical efforts to achieve his love, Inchbald shows female desire to be both natural and morally good. Thus, Inchbald counters the fallen woman trope in Agatha's plotline with a positive display of female sexual desire in Amelia's.

Though Agatha's narrative is one of improper sexual activity outside of marriage, Inchbald is careful not to suggest that her sexual desire is unnatural. When Agatha first reveals to her son, Frederick, that he is the illegitimate son of Baron Wildenhaim in the first scene of the play, she is explicit that she was not forced by the Baron, but motivated by desire and promises of love:

> He was a handsome young man—in my eyes a prodigy, for he talked of love, and promised me marriage. He was the first man who had ever spoken to me on such a subject. […] I was intoxicated by the fervent caresses of a young, inexperienced, capricious man, and did not recover from the delirium till it was too late.[91]

Frederick expresses sympathy toward his mother and orients blame on the Baron's broken promises, not Agatha's sexual transgression, exclaiming, "he is a villain!"[92] After the Baron and Frederick are reunited, the Baron proposes that his son become his rightful heir, but Frederick refuses to be separated legally from his mother: "My fate, whatever it may be, shall never part me from her. This is my firm resolution, upon which I call Heaven to witness! My Lord, it must

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[90] Byrne, *Jane Austen*, 158.

[91] Inchbald, *Lovers' Vows*, 10.

[92] Ibid., 13.

be Frederick of Wildenhaim, and Agatha of Wildenhaim—or Agatha Friburg, and Frederick Friburg."[93] Because of his love for his mother, Frederick insists that her legal identity be restored through marriage.

After the Baron agrees to marry Agatha, Anhalt further insists that the marriage be attended by the entire community, reinstating Agatha's social standing:

> BARON. Where is she?
>
> ANHALT. In the castle—in my apartments here—I conducted her through the garden, to avoid curiosity.
>
> BARON. Well, then, this is the wedding-day. This very evening you shall give us your blessing.
>
> ANHALT. Not so soon, not so private. The whole village was witness of Agatha's shame—the whole village must be witness of Agatha's re-established honour. Do you consent to this?
>
> BARON. I do.[94]

Though the play ends with a conventional marriage plotline, Anhalt's insistence that the marriage be treated as an act of community reconciliation and public redemption for Agatha adds a radical quality to the resolution. Here, Inchbald pushes the generic bounds of sentimental comedy, proposing that the reintegration of sexually compromised women and illegitimate children into society is both possible and admirable.

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[93] Ibid., 84.

[94] Ibid., 88.

In 1808, Inchbald wrote a new set of remarks for *Lovers' Vows* for a collection of plays titled *The British Theatre*.[95] Her preface reiterates her call for compassion to be directed toward unmarried mothers and their children:

> The grand moral of this play is to set forth the miserable consequences which arise from the neglect, and to enforce the watchful care, of illegitimate offspring; and, surely, as the pulpit has not had eloquence to eradicate the crimes of seduction, the stage may be allowed an humble endeavour to prevent its most fatal effects. But there are some pious declaimers against theatrical exhibitions; so zealous to do good, they grudge the poor dramatist his share in the virtuous concern […] those critics arraign its catastrophe, and say—"the wicked should be punished"—they forget there is a punishment called *conscience*, which, though it seldom troubles the defamer's peace, may weigh heavy on the fallen female and her libertine seducer.[96]

Inchbald argues that it is not society's place to punish women for their sexual wrongdoings, but, rather, to care for the vulnerable and leave judgement to the individual's conscience. The frontispiece appended to the play (see Figure 1 below) emphasizes Inchbald's message that sentiment is key to reconciliation and to alleviating women's suffering. Agatha is seated at the

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[95] See *The British Theatre; or, a Collection of Plays, Which Are Acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket. Printed Under the Authority of the Managers from the Prompt Books. With Biographical and Critical Remarks, by Mrs. Inchbald,* 25 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808). The *British Theatre* was initially published serially between 1806 and 1808, and later released as a twenty-five-volume collected edition in 1808 with each play paginated separately. All subsequent references to Inchbald's prefaces are from the 1808 edition and are cited by volume and page number when available. Five of Inchbald's own works were included in the collection: *Every One Has His Fault* (1793), *Lovers' Vows* (1798), *Such Things Are* (1787), *To Marry, or not to Marry* (1793), and *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are* (1797).

[96] Elizabeth Inchbald, "Remarks for *Lovers' Vows*," in *The British Theatre*, 23:7.

center of the scene with the Baron kneeling beside her and holding her hand. Frederick stands over his mother gripping her other hand. In the background Anhalt stands with his arm around Amelia as she rests her hand on his chest. The caption beneath the frontispiece is a line of Frederick's from act five, "Ha! Mother! Father."[97] Frederick's exclamation emphasizes the highly affective nature of the scene and the play and tether this emotional outburst to the family's restoration.

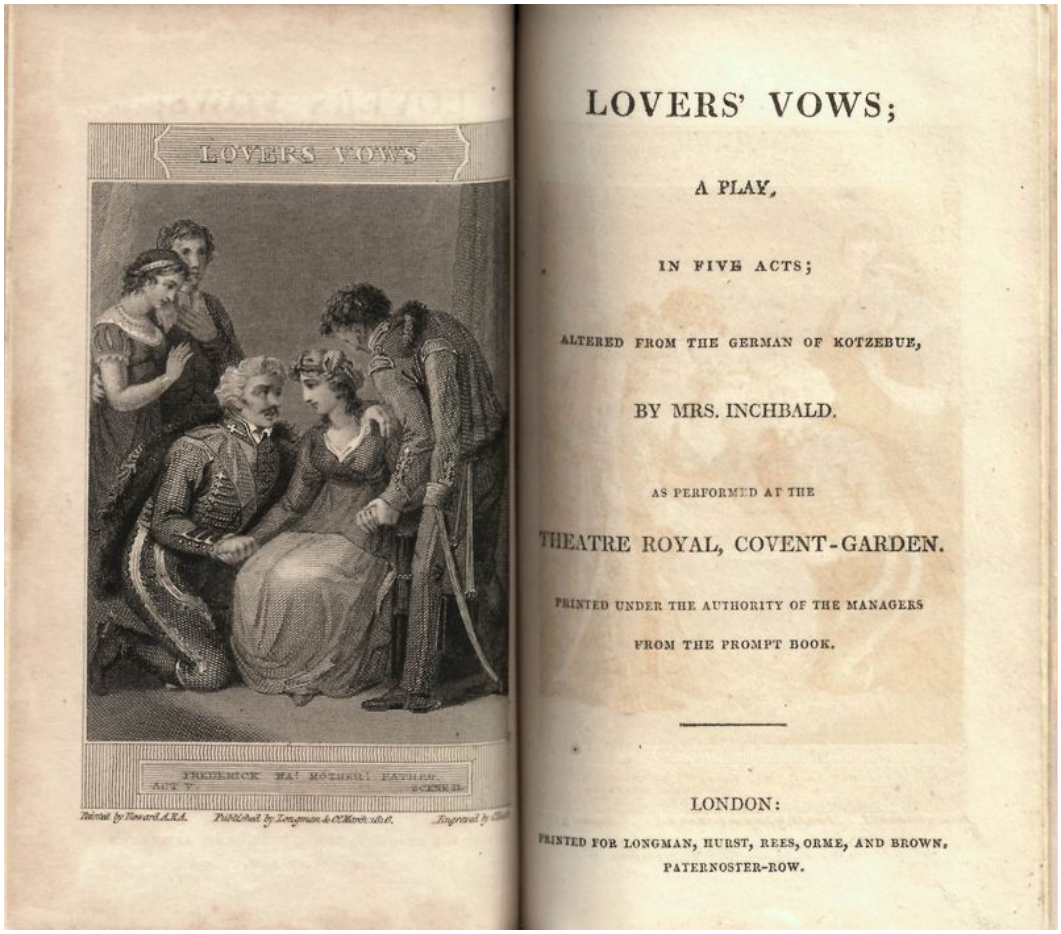

Figure 1. Frontispiece of *Lovers' Vows*, in *The British Theatre,* vol. 23 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), n.p.

[97] Ibid., n.p.

So unusual was Inchbald's sympathetic treatment of a fallen woman in *Lovers' Vows*, that her friend, actress Mary Wells, believed that Inchbald must have based the character of Agatha on her. In her memoirs, Wells writes: "in [Inchbald's] play of *Lovers' Vows* she alludes to my children, where Frederick says to his mother, 'Cursed be that child who could find his mother guilty, though all the world should call her so.'"[98] While there is no clear evidence that Inchbald did base the character of Agatha specifically on Wells, her sympathetic portrayal of a woman's sexual activity outside of marriage may very well have been informed by this relationship and others. Inchbald's sister Debby, for instance, was a sex worker in London and though Inchbald was estranged from her, she supported her financially until her death in 1794 and later expressed regret for rejecting her.[99] Consistent with her treatment of Wollstonecraft, Inchbald distanced herself from women she cared about when their reputations threatened her livelihood. This behavior is not necessarily evidence of Inchbald's lack of care, but her pragmatic response to society's strictures on women's sexuality. Inchbald's literary and theatrical works, in turn, reveal a fierce advocation for women.

Though she was wary of jeopardizing her own career through overt calls for reform, and she was willing to sacrifice personal relationships that might risk her reputation, Inchbald's caution proved a successful strategy for leveraging her own personal and professional success within the theatrical marketplace. By the end of the eighteenth century, Inchbald had accumulated widespread acclaim in a profession that was dominated by men. Nearly all of her plays were published, many in multiple editions for publishers in England, Ireland, and America,

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[98] Mary Wells, *Memoirs of the life of Mrs. Sumbel, late Wells: of the Theatres-Royal, Drury-Lane, Covent-Garden, and Haymarket*, 2 vols. (London: C. Chapple, 1811), 2: 203.

[99] Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 1:332-33.

most had successful runs of ten or more performances, and some were revived for decades. Following the completion of her final play, *To Marry or Not to Marry* (1805), Inchbald was commissioned to write introductory remarks for *The British Theatre*. The commercial success of the collection led to her invitation to curate a *Collection of Farces and Afterpieces* in seven volumes in 1809, and *The Modern Theatre* in ten volumes in 1811. Inchbald's contributions mark the most substantial theatrical criticism ever to be written by a woman and confirmed her role as England's most trusted judge of theatrical taste.[100] In the final decade of her life, Inchbald continued to be an engaged member of London's literary community and a trusted advocate for women, especially those with a feminist bent. She remained close friends with Amelia Alderson, through whom she was introduced to French author, political theorist, and Napoleon critic Anne Louise Germaine de Staël in 1813. She befriended young novelist Maria Edgeworth and, in 1814, she read and edited a manuscript copy of Edgeworth's *Patronage*, providing detailed criticism of the novel and sending corrections to the publisher.[101]

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[100] For further discussion of Inchbald's theatrical criticism see Marvin Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: A Woman Critic in her Theatrical Culture," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. Catherine B. Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 207-22; Lisa Freeman, "On the Art of Dramatic Probability: Elizabeth Inchbald's Remarks for *The British Theatre*," *Theatre Survey* 62, no. 2 (2021): 163-81; Katharine M. Rogers, "Britain's First Woman Drama Critic: Elizabeth Inchbald," in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 277-90; and Mary A. Waters, "Renouncing the Forms: The Case of Elizabeth Inchbald," in *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789-1832*, ed. Anne K. Mellor and Clifford Siskin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 57-81

[101] Some of Edgeworth's letters to Inchbald's are printed in Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 2: 192-99. Other letters are housed today in the Archive of Maria Edgeworth and the Edgeworth Family, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MSS. Eng. lett. c. 696-747.

CONCLUSION

Like William Congreve, his fellow male critic of three hundred years earlier, Christopher Hitchens wrote in a 2007 article for *Vanity Fair* that women and comedy are "antithetical" to one another.[1] "Those who risk agony and death to bring children into this [world]," he writes, "simply can't afford to be too frivolous."[2] Hitchens argues, as Congreve did in 1695, that women are biologically and essentially incapable of being as funny as men, an assertion that has proliferated in comic theory, theatrical, film, and television criticism, and cultural attitudes over the centuries, even though women have been writing and performing comedy successfully the entire time.[3] By unearthing the contributions of eighteenth-century women playwrights, my dissertation contributes to a feminist revision of theatre history and the history of comedy that reveals a vibrant tradition of women's participation.

This study focused on a period of flourishing for women playwrights, 1750-1800, during which time they produced a substantial and influential portion of London's stage comedy. In my introduction, I drew attention to the fact that the number of women playwrights working in London surged after the mid-century as more women than ever before wrote and produced comedies following the near moratorium caused by the Stage Licensing Act of 1737. I have shown that these women cemented a distinct comic tradition, one that relied on professional savvy, self-awareness of their gendered disadvantage, and the creation of plays that emphasized

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[1] Christopher Hitchens, "Why Women Aren't Funny," *Vanity Fair*, 1 January 2007, https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2007/01/hitchens200701.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See Gabrielle Moss, "A Brief History of 'Women Aren't Funny,'" *Bitch Media*, 29 April 2013, https://www.bitchmedia.org/post/a-brief-history-of-women-arent-funny.

women and their concerns. In my first chapter, I considered the neglected playwriting career of actress Catherine Clive, who, I argued, played a crucial role in bridging the gap between women playwrights of the first and second waves of the eighteenth century. Through the creation of four comic afterpieces, Clive successfully clawed back space for herself and other women playwrights by demonstrating that women's comedy remained entertaining and marketable. Clive's contributions have been overlooked in scholarship in part because her plays are afterpieces and therefore deemed less important than mainpieces, even though afterpieces were often what drew audiences and made money. A similar issue plagues the study of Frances Brooke's comic operas, *Rosina* and *Marian*, which, as I demonstrated in my second chapter, were huge commercial successes with enduring influence yet are often treated as Brooke's least important works. By focusing on the afterpieces of Clive and Brooke, I highlight that a more expansive definition of comedy, not confined by the scholarly preference for studying mainpieces, is required to fully understand women's playwriting in the eighteenth century.

Brooke experienced gendered institutional retaliation that curtailed her career for decades after she criticized Drury Lane manager David Garrick in the press. In my fourth chapter, I revealed that Hannah Cowley experienced similar career sabotage by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Garrick's successor, who shelved her plays to stage his own. Cowley was incensed when Sheridan and other managers appeared to join forces to block her work. Like Brooke, she was outspoken about the tyranny of the patent system and, I argued, addressed the gender politics of the theatre in her metatheatrical play, *A Day in Turkey.* Though both Brooke and Cowley wrote tragedies, they were able to overcome managerial blacklisting by writing commercially appealing comedies.

The subject of my third chapter, Frances Burney, experienced gendered barriers accessing the stage from within the home. In my analysis of the well-known suppression of Burney's first play, *The Witlings*, I showed that an overlooked aspect of the censorship Burney faced was rooted in her interest in laughing comedy that was deemed unfeminine by her father, Charles Burney, and Samuel Crisp, a family friend. Though Burney never published or staged a comedy, she did realize later in life that she had the skill, talent, and instinct required to do so successfully. The suppression of *The Witlings* epitomizes an issue that would continue to plague women playwrights of the period, that of maintaining a virtuous reputation. Cowley, for example, was criticized for adapting the works of Aphra Behn, who was deemed licentious by the late eighteenth century, and Elizabeth Inchbald, the subject of my final chapter, devoted much of her career to crafting a reputation of feminine decorum, going so far as to shun women who she felt threatened her character. I interpreted Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (1798) as the playwright's attempt to blend the feminist tradition of women's comedy with the popular genre of sentimental comedy after being accused by another women, Mary Wollstonecraft, of writing overly emotional and weak female characters. Though the play was a commercial success, it also raised much criticism for its unconventional treatment of women's sexuality. The uneasy responses to *Lovers' Vows* signaled a changing landscape for women's comedy in the nineteenth century.

By 1800, London was the largest city in the world and the population continued to grow exponentially over the coming decades.[4] New "illegitimate" theatre venues appeared throughout the city to meet the demand of this growing and diverse public.[5] The patent theatres legally

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[4] Bratton, *Making of the West End Stage*, 7.

[5] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre*, 45-46.

monopolized spoken drama, and the so-called minor theatres, including the Lyceum, the Royal Circus, Astley's Royal Amphitheatre, and Sadler's Wells, specialized in providing music, melodrama, spectacle, pantomime, and even animal entertainments. As these new venues became more popular, Parliament, the press, and the public anxiously discussed the state of the theatre and the apparent decline of the previous century's key genres, tragedy and comedy. For women, the new abundance of genres and venues eroded a system, however flawed, within which they had carved space for themselves. However, the new century also created opportunities for women.

In the face of major change, women playwrights did not disappear from the London theatre as has been suggested; instead, as Katherine Newey has demonstrated, they thrived in new and varied ways, seizing the chance to test new genres and modes of performance.[6] At least ninety women playwrights were active in the theatres between the late 1770s and the 1830s, including many notable examples of women who flourished in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[7] Actress Marie Thérèse du Camp, wife of Charles Kemble and mother of Fanny Kemble, followed in Clive's footsteps by writing comedies for her and her husband's benefit performances through 1815; the prolific Jane M. Scott wrote more than fifty theatrical entertainments for her and her father's Sans Pareil Theatre founded in 1806 (later renamed the Adelphi); and, though she struggled to have her plays produced, Joanna Baillie was widely considered to be England's greatest living playwright. The early nineteenth century, then, was a period of experimentation, adaptation, and survival for women playwrights.

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[6] See Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing*, 1-9.

[7] Jeffrey Cox and Michael Gamer, introduction to *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), xiii.

While critical engagement with women's theatrical history has developed impressively over the last two decades, much work remains to be done to recover the lives and works of eighteenth-century women playwrights, including those outside the scope of this dissertation. I have primarily traced a tradition of women's comedy within London's patent system, but women who operated outside these professional venues, like Elizabeth Craven, and those who created theatre in the provinces, such as Sarah Baker, are also deserving of more critical attention.[8] Only by heightening the visibility of these women will we fully uncover the long and rich tradition of women's comedy.

[8] For more on Elizabeth Craven and Sarah Baker see chapter two.

APPENDIX

Women's Plays Staged in London's Patent Theatres, 1750-1800

Debut	Play	Playwright	Genre/Form	Venue
15 March 1750	*The Rehearsal; or, Bayes in Petticoats*	Catherine Clive	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
17 March 1752	*The Oracle*	Susannah Cibber	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
20 March 1760	*Every Woman in Her Humour*	Catherine Clive	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
3 February 1763	*The Discovery*	Frances Sheridan	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
21 March 1763	*The Sketch of a Fine Lady's Return from a Rout*	Catherine Clive	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
10 December 1763	*The Dupe*	Frances Sheridan	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
24 January 1765	*The Platonic Wife*	Elizabeth Griffith	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
18 March 1765	*The Faithful Irish Woman*	Catherine Clive	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
9 January 1766	*The Double Mistake*	Elizabeth Griffith	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
21 April 1767	*The Young Couple*	Jane Pope	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
4 February 1769	*The School for Rakes*	Elizabeth Griffith	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
18 February 1769	*The Sister*	Charlotte Lennox	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
27 April 1770	*Fashion Display'd*	Philippina Burton	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
12 January 1771	*Almida*	Dorothea Celesia	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
10 May 1771	*The Capricious Lady*	Jael-Henrietta Pye	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
9 March 1772	*A Wife in the Right*	Elizabeth Griffith	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
12 April 1774	*The South Briton*	A Lady	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
9 November 1775	*Old City Manners*	Charlotte Lennox	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
15 March 1776	*The Runaway*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
9 August 1777	*The Advertisement*	Sarah Cheney Gardner	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket

10 December 1777	*Percy*	Hannah More	Tragic mainpiece	Covent Garden
27 April 1778	*The Little French Lawyer*	Ursula Booth	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
30 April 1778	*The Lucky Escape*	Mary Darby Robinson	Comic opera	Drury Lane
10 April 1779	*Who's the Dupe*	Hannah Cowley	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
28 April 1779	*The Double Deception*	Elizabeth Richardson	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
6 May 1779	*The Fatal Falsehood*	Hannah More	Tragic mainpiece	Covent Garden
31 July 1779	*Albina*	Hannah Cowley	Tragic mainpiece	Haymarket
2 December 1779	*The Times*	Elizabeth Griffith	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
22 February 1780	*The Belle's Stratagem*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
4 April 1780	*The School of Eloquence*	Hannah Cowley	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
5 August 1780	*The Chapter of Accidents*	Sophia Lee	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
31 January 1781	*The Siege of Sinope*	Frances Brooke	Tragic mainpiece	Covent Garden
24 February 1781	*The World as it Goes*	Hannah Cowley	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
24 March 1781	*Second Thoughts are Best*	Hannah Cowley	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
18 July 1781	*The Silver Tankard*	Elizabeth Craven	Comic opera	Haymarket
9 February 1782	*Which is the Man?*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
31 December 1782	*Rosina*	Frances Brooke	Comic opera	Covent Garden
25 February 1783	*A Bold Stroke for a Husband*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
6 December 1783	*More Ways Than One*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
8 March 1784	*The Double Disguise*	Harriet Horncastle Hook	Comic opera	Drury Lane
6 July 1784	*The Mogul Tale*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Haymarket
4 August 1785	*I'll Tell You What*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
22 October 1785	*Appearance is Against Them*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
18 May 1786	*The Peruvian*	A Lady	Comic opera	Covent Garden

20 June 1786	*The Widow's Vow*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
25 November 1786	*A School for Graybeards*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
10 February 1787	*Such Things Are*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
22 May 1787	*The Midnight Hour*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
10 November 1787	*The New Peerage*	Harriet Lee	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
15 December 1787	*All on a Summer's Day*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
31 January 1788	*The Fate of Sparta*	Hannah Cowley	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
8 April 1788	*The Ton*	Eglantine Wallace	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
29 April 1788	*Animal Magnetism*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
22 May 1788	*Marian*	Frances Brooke	Comic opera	Covent Garden
9 August 1788	*The Sword of Peace*	Mariana Starke	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
28 November 1788	*The Child of Nature*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
25 May 1789	*Half an Hour after Supper*	A Lady	Comic afterpiece	Haymarket
15 July 1789	*The Married Man*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
22 March 1790	*The Spoiled Child*	Attributed to Dorothy Jordan	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
5 May 1790	*The Widow of Malabar*	Mariana Starke	Tragic mainpiece	Covent Garden
11 May 1791	*The Hue and Cry*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
9 July 1791	*Next Door Neighbors*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Haymarket
3 December 1791	*A Day in Turkey*	Hannah Cowley	Comic opera	Covent Garden
18 January 1792	*Huniades*	Hannah Brand	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
2 February 1792	*Agmunda*	Hannah Brand	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
18 April 1792	*The Intrigues of a Morning*	Eliza Parsons	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
30 June 1792	*Young Men and Old Women*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic afterpiece	Haymarket
23 August 1792	*Cross Partners*	Attributed	Comic	Haymarket

		variously to Miss Griffiths and Elizabeth Inchbald	mainpiece	
29 January 1793	*Every One Has His Fault*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
24 October 1793	*The Ward of the Castle*	Miss Burke	Comic opera	Covent Garden
25 February 1793	*Anna*	Catherine Cuthbertson	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
22 May 1794	*The Speechless Wife*	Mrs. Rainsford	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
1 November 1794	*The Wedding Day*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
29 November 1794	*Nobody*	Mary Darby Robinson	Comic afterpiece	Drury Lane
6 December 1794	*The Town Before You*	Hannah Cowley	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
21 March 1795	*Edwy and Elgiva*	Frances Burney	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
22 April 1795	*Mrs. Doggerel in Her Altitudes*	Sarah Cheney Gardner	Comic prelude	Haymarket
20 April 1796	*Almeyda*	Sophia Lee	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
4 March 1797	*Wives as They Were, and Maids as They Are*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
27 April 1798	*Matrimony*	Attributed to Frances Abington	Comic afterpiece	Covent Garden
11 October 1798	*Lovers' Vows*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
19 April 1799	*The Princess of Georgia*	Elizabeth Crave	Comic opera	Covent Garden
27 April 1799	*What is She?*	Charlotte Smith	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
3 May 1799	*First Faults*	Marie Thérèse du Camp	Comic mainpiece	Drury Lane
30 November 1799	*The Wise Man of the East*	Elizabeth Inchbald	Comic mainpiece	Covent Garden
29 April 1800	*De Montfort*	Joanna Baillie	Tragic mainpiece	Drury Lane
30 October 1800	*Virginia*	Dorothea Plowden	Comic opera	Drury Lane

Source: Data from David D. Mann and Susan Garland, *Women playwrights in England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1660-1823* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 407-413.

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