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Mongrel Forms

Tragedy, Comedy, and Mixed Genres in Britain, 1680-1760

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in English

by

Vivian Leigh Davis

2012

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mongrel Forms

Tragedy, Comedy, and Mixed Genres in Britain, 1680-1760

By

Vivian Leigh Davis

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Felicity A. Nussbaum, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the unlicensed mixtures of tragedy and comedy that appeared in the playhouses, periodicals, and novels of the eighteenth century. Scholars have argued that in the Restoration's coterie theaters, the Hegelian dialectic of tragicomedy functioned as a heuristic device for debates about political theory. "Mongrel forms" extends this premise, contending that by the turn into the eighteenth century, the tidiness of bipartite tragicomedy had been replaced by powerful ideas about generic contagion and corruption. For an increasingly bourgeois audience, tragicomic monsters and mongrels, widely derided by literary and dramatic critics, became associated less with debates about kingship and more closely aligned with a discourse on the perils and pleasures of different kinds of social mixing. As dramatic genres were mediated by live, feeling bodies, the "mongrelization" of tragedy and comedy created sites of contact in which social categories, such as race, class, gender and sexuality, could be contested or confirmed. Inverted generic hierarchies, and the social re-organization they intimated, could be

attacked as aesthetically monstrous. The blended form's resistance to regulation was also deployed subversively to make visible identities and experiences not otherwise legible.

The five chapters of the dissertation include a number of case studies in which mongrelizing tragedy and comedy creates a vital space in which players, writers, spectators, and critics imagine possibilities of change to aspects of English civil society. The first chapter begins with neoclassical critic Thomas Rymer's infamous 1693 treatise on *Othello's* comic flaws, an essay in which a critique of a corrupted tragedy becomes inseparable from underlying fears about interracial desire and contact between black and white bodies. Colley Cibber's critically neglected writing for the tragic stage comprises the dissertation's second chapter. Though the neoclassical establishment consistently argued for the propriety of tragedy, actor-manager Cibber theorizes laughter as part of the genre's successful performance which, he insists, brings bodily pleasure to audiences and liberties to performers. The third chapter assesses Nahum Tate's notorious adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in light of the changing sexual politics of the London stage. The analysis focuses on the performance history of the tragedy's lead female role, Cordelia, in order to show how Tate's mongrelization of *King Lear* expressed anxieties about women's increasing centrality on the tragic stage and their visibility in culture more generally. The fourth chapter analyzes the tragicomic structure of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), a novel in which generic friction signals the limited range of expression available to both Lennox's aristocratic titular heroine and professional female authors at midcentury. The dissertation closes with a study of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761), an allegorical canvas that positions David Garrick between two ancient female muses in order to articulate and assuage contemporary worries about actors' sexuality and rank.

The dissertation of Vivian Davis is approved.

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## Chapter 1: Mongrel Forms

For seventeenth-century critic Thomas Rymer, an unhappily mixed drama – tragedy that lurched into the comic or comedy that aspired above its station – was a violation of the highest order. “Never in the World had any Pagan Poet his Brains turn’d at this Monstrous rate,” he seethes, railing against William Shakespeare, the playwright who unwisely mixed a “long rabble of Jack-pudden farce” into the sobriety of a full-length tragedy.<sup>1</sup> Rymer was a critic of great vitriol, to be sure, known for his unflinching adherence to neoclassical dogma. Comparing him with another contemporary critic of the age, Samuel Johnson writes, “Dryden's criticism has the majesty of a queen; Rymer's has the ferocity of a tyrant.”<sup>2</sup> Faced with generic indiscretion, Rymer’s wrath turns to the froth of hysterical anger; he castigates Shakespeare for the corruption of pure tragedy with “all the little plays, jingle, and trash,” that is to say, with the clamor of comic tones and conventions (110-111). The implications of what might seem to be a minor formal gaffe are, for Rymer, profound. He maligns Shakespeare for “un-hallowing the Theater, profaning the name of Tragedy; And instead of representing Men and Manners, turning all Morality, good sense, and humanity into mockery and derision” (112). The violation of generic convention is tantamount to blasphemy. The moral order of society, “Men and Manners,” is at stake as the world onstage threatens the one outside playhouse walls; the result is a morass of non-meaning in which the faint outline of humanity’s character is no longer legible. Rymer takes this logic to its

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy in Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd, and A Short View of Tragedy*, ed. Arthur Freeman (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1974), 110-111. All citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson, “Dryden,” in *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Muddendorf, vol. 21 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 23 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 21:438.

foreseeable end, writing witheringly of Shakespeare: “to him a Tragedy in *Burlesk*, a merry Tragedy was no Monster, no absurdity, nor at all preposterous; all colours are the same to a Blind man” (157).<sup>3</sup> Building upon the image of the poet’s “Monstrous” brain, Shakespeare’s inability to ensure the integrity of dramatic genres likewise disables his sight.<sup>4</sup> Employing the metaphor of blindness, Shakespeare’s distorted authorial vision is made corporeal; dramatic form and the body are intimately linked.

For the eighteenth-century critical imagination, unlicensed mixtures of tragedy and comedy could quickly turn monstrous. Throughout the period, leading critics ranging from Joseph Addison to Samuel Johnson enforced, in varying ways, the separation of tragedy and comedy in their literary criticism. In the words of scholar Frank Ristine, “such a procedure represented the worst possible violation of decorum; it outraged the canons of classical usage and correct taste; it was an insult to art.”<sup>5</sup> While the formal situation of a degraded comic plot beneath an elevated tragic arc proliferated after the Restoration, mixed drama was, by the turn into the eighteenth century, proscribed by critics and frequently characterized as a threat to the dignity of genre, the playhouse, and England as a nation. To combine the two genres unpalatably was, as Sir Philip Sidney disparagingly wrote in his earlier and influential *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), to “mingle clowns and kings,” an act of hierarchical inversion that created the sort of

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<sup>3</sup> Rymer’s reference to a “merry Tragedy” comes in the midst of a discussion of the characters Portia and Desdemona, whose dignity, Rymer contends, Shakespeare violates (*A Short View*, 157).

<sup>4</sup> According to Rymer, Shakespeare’s success in comedy offers a contrast to his tragedies: “*Shakespears* [sic] genius lay for Comedy and Humour. In Tragedy he appears quite out of his Element; his Brains are turn’d, he raves and rambles, without any coherence, any spark of reason, or any rule to control him, or set bounds to his phrenzy [sic]” (*A Short View*, 156).

<sup>5</sup> Frank Humphrey Ristine, *English Tragicomedy: Its Origin and History* (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1910), 200.

play that could best be described as “mongrel.”<sup>6</sup> The bugbear of unhappily mixed drama violated the norms of neoclassical decorum, signaling a breakdown in the dramatic order of things. Tears turned to laughter as royalty became risible; social hierarchies were upended and affective confusion reigned. Those critics whose self-appointed task it was to maintain such categories followed Sidney’s lead and vented their spleen accordingly. In *Spectator* 40 (16 April 1711), Joseph Addison describes tragicomedy as “one of the most monstrous Inventions that ever entered into a Poet’s Thoughts.”<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on the follies of the Renaissance stage, Nicholas Rowe opines: “Trage-Comedy was the common Mistake of that Age,” adding that “the severer Critiques among us cannot bear it.”<sup>8</sup> Samuel Johnson, while known for his defense of Shakespearean tragicomedy, elsewhere reprimands playwrights who “have unhappily confounded tragick with comick sentiments,” concluding that “the robes of royalty can give no dignity to nonsense or folly.”<sup>9</sup> The strongly-held opinions of these literary men became commonplace as the century progressed.<sup>10</sup> By 1775 *The Monthly Review* referred to

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd and R.W. Maslen, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press), 112. Lamenting the current state of the Renaissance stage, Sidney contends that the “gross absurdity” of the mixed drama exists as a negation; the plays in question can be classified as “neither right tragedies nor right comedies” (112). That is, the dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy should remain separate so as to adhere to the Aristotelian tenets central to a Christian humanist aesthetic.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 40, Saturday, 16 April 1711, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:170.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *Some Account of the Life &c of William Shakespeare in Works of William Shakespeare*, 7 vols. (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1709), 1: xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vols. 3-5 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 23 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), 5:301-302. Channeling Sidney, Johnson fixes on a passage from Dryden’s tragedy *Aureng-zebe* (1675), finding in it the prime example of “a thousand instances of such impropriety”; he goes on to censure the mixed emotions produced by the scene’s “torpid risibility,” fuming that “there is scarce a tragedy of the last century which has not debased its most important incidents, and polluted its most serious interlocutions with buffoonery and meanness” (5:304-305).

tragicomedy as “that old stage-monster,” characterizing the hybrid form as a “strange and horrible Being, begot by Comus on the Goddess of Death!”<sup>11</sup> In his *Elements of Dramatic Criticism*, published in the same year, William Cooke wards off the return of the long-banished specter: “We hope, for the credit of posterity, no succeeding age will relapse into a species of the drama, at once so repugnant to the laws of art as well as nature.”<sup>12</sup> Throughout the century critical naysayers conjured up creatures from the hoary deep, tenaciously holding their ground against the threat of the tragicomic.

Though “mongrel” forms, to use Sidney’s preferred adjective, were eschewed, often vehemently, by many of the eighteenth century’s leading arbiters of literary taste, this dissertation begins with the premise that maligned mixtures of tragedy and comedy created a vital space in which players, writers, spectators, and critics imagined possibilities of change to English civil society. While actual “tragicomedy” was largely absent from the eighteenth-century stage, outlaw versions of tragedy and comedy persisted in the period’s literary debate and theatrical practice, whether in the work of playwrights such as Nahum Tate and Colley Cibber, performers like Elizabeth Barry and David Garrick, prose writers Charlotte Lennox and Samuel

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of critical censure are plentiful during this period and appear often as casual asides or interjections. See, for example, William Mason in *The Poems of Mr. Gray, to which are Prefixed Memoirs of his Life and Writings by W. Mason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Printed by H. Hughs, 1775), 25, Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, who makes reference to that “monstrous species of composition called Tragi-comedy.”

<sup>11</sup> This quote is drawn from an anonymous review of an essay by Diderot; the article is titled “Art. VII. Du theatre, ou nouvel essai sur l’art dramatique – A New Essay on the Drama,” in *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal: From January to July 1775*, ed. Ralph Griffiths (London: Printed for R. Griffiths, 1775), 635.

<sup>12</sup> William Cooke, *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism. Containing an Analysis of the Stage, under the Following Heads, Tragedy, Tragi-Comedy, Comedy, Pantomime, and Farce* (London: Printed for G. Kearsly, in Fleet-street; and G. Robinson, in Pater-noster-row, 1775), 121, Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. Cooke argues that the form of tragicomedy is “egregiously unnatural” (120).

Johnson, or artist Sir Joshua Reynolds. As dramatic genres were mediated by live, feeling bodies, the “mongrelization” of tragedy and comedy created sites of contact in which social categories, such as race, class, gender and sexuality, could be contested or confirmed.<sup>13</sup> This project recuperates the descriptor “mongrel” specifically to call attention to the hefty weight such forms carried; these conflated genres existed not merely as theoretical abstractions, but intimately as linked the textual and corporeal.<sup>14</sup> For the eighteenth century a period bent on contesting as much as embracing classical form, tragic/comic polyvalency often marked a pressure point of ideological forestalling or transmission.<sup>15</sup> The re-organization blurred genres enacted (the mingling of “clowns and kings”) could be attacked as an aesthetic blunder and cordoned off in acts of containment or expulsion. The blended form’s resistance to determination was also deployed subversively to make visible identities and experiences not otherwise legible; that is, to “imagine” new social modes.<sup>16</sup> Given the affective valence of tragic and comic forms, the

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<sup>13</sup> I employ the term “contact,” a concept that while originating in linguistics has been put to effective use in other fields, such as postcolonial studies and studies of affect. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 4, Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” In *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), 3, Kathleen Stewart defines the public feelings she studies as “a kind of contact zone where the overdeterminations of circulations, events, conditions, technologies, and flows of power literally take place.”

<sup>14</sup> The term “mongrel” has been taken up by postcolonial scholars, such as Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2007), who “documents the history of resistance by African, Caribbean, and white Britons to such insular representations of national identity,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” *The American Scholar* 49.2 (1980): 165-179, for example, takes notes of the pervasive and significant blurring of genres present in the field of social sciences. Geertz writes, “It is a phenomenon general enough and distinctive enough to suggest that what we are seeing is not just another redrawing of the cultural map – the moving of a few disputed borders, the marking of some more picturesque mountain lakes – but an alteration of the principles of mapping. Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think” (166).

<sup>16</sup> I gesture at Benedict Anderson’s classic study *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; repr., London: Verso, an imprint of New Left Books, 2006), 6-7, in which he



emotions circling around social categories could be worried, affirmed, or revalued. Scholars have long characterized the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) as a radical break with the earlier eighteenth century's ostensibly staid neoclassical strictures; however, an examination of mongrel tragedy and comedy reveals that long before the Romantic period writers and performers were experimenting with genre in order to re-vision the social order.

In exploring the social dimensions of mixed tragedy and comedy, my dissertation is in conversation with a rich body of existing scholarship on Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, particularly the work of scholars who have studied the politics of Restoration tragicomedy. J. Douglas Canfield's classic essay "The Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy" analyzes the tragicomic dialectic and its themes of loyalty and patrilineality, arguing that the short-lived resurgence of tragicomedy after the Restoration offered the power-elite a tool with which to "reflect and reaffirm" aristocratic ideology.<sup>17</sup> In her study *Regicide and Restoration*, Nancy Klein Maguire extends this premise, situating tragicomic dramatic form within a larger historical frame, beginning with the political upheaval of the English Civil Wars and ending with the Restoration of the throne in 1660. "Reflecting and attempting to negotiate a maelstrom of mixed government and mixed feelings which could not otherwise be resolved," she argues, "the monarchical tragicomedies of the 1660s function as an analysis of the psychic forces which impelled the mid-century generation of Royalists."<sup>18</sup> Most recently, and perhaps most

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defines the nation as "an imagined political community" that is both "limited and sovereign" and conceptualized as a "deep, horizontal comradeship." Anderson focuses on the novel and newspaper as the primary medium for this collective imagining, though the playhouse, and the corporeality of live performance, performs a related function.

<sup>17</sup> J. Douglas Canfield, "The Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy," *ELH* 51.3 (1984): 447-464.

compelling, is Richard Kroll, who, in *Restoration Drama and "The Circle of Commerce,"* contends that in the salad days of the Restoration, tragicomic form, especially as conceived by earlier playwrights Beaumont and Fletcher, became for Dryden and others "heuristic devices by which their age could deliberate on issues which were for it the profoundest sources of anxiety," namely political theory.<sup>19</sup> Tragicomedy, because it was by its very definition "generically indeterminate," Kroll suggests, stood as a primary method for contrasting worldviews, and the tragicomic dialectic gave shape to the era's standing preoccupation with competing forms of power and kingship.

We see this function of tragicomedy in John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668), for example, as Dryden's proxy Neander abandons Sidney's prohibition in an attempt to recuperate, rather than dismiss, generic mixtures under the rubric of neoclassical tragicomedy, defending the practice of carefully aligning the two genres as a specifically English approach to form. Dryden subsumes the generic friction of tragicomedy into a structure of *concordia discors*, suggesting that "contraries when plac'd near, set off each other."<sup>20</sup> Dryden defers to the logic of eighteenth-century poetics' favored form, the couplet, as he refigures a potentially confusing mixture of tragedy and comedy as a neat balancing act. Framing tragicomedy as part of an English neoclassical aesthetic serves to contain and defuse its disruptive potential through reaffirming each genre's place in a formal hierarchy. Neander argues, therefore, that

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<sup>18</sup> Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660-1671* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 5. The author interprets tragicomedies in this period as "serious attempts to come to terms with the historical events of 1640-1670" (8).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Kroll, *Restoration Drama and "The Circle of Commerce"* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 2. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>20</sup> John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatick Poesie" in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Samuel H. Monk and A. E. Wallace Maurer, 20 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971), 17:46.

tragicomedy's pleasing mixture is a sign of the superiority of England's stages and England itself, and indeed, Kroll characterizes Dryden's position as a "defense of the dialectical and political power of vernacular English drama" (22). Canfield, Maguire, and Kroll all agree, however, that the tragicomic form ceased to operate in these respective capacities as the Restoration wore on. Canfield determines that the period lasted between "1660 and 1671," and Maguire similarly claims that "By 1671, the evanescent subgenres of Carolean tragicomedy had vanished."<sup>21</sup> Kroll declares that by the end of the seventeenth century "the dialectical power of Fletcherian tragicomedy had run its course" (15).

In this project I examine the afterlife of dialectically defined tragicomedy, a period to which these previous studies only quietly gesture. As the Restoration transitioned into the eighteenth century, the tidiness of the Restoration's bipartite stage tragicomedy was replaced by powerful ideas about generic mixtures, monsters, and mongrels. For an increasingly bourgeois audience, these illegitimate forms became associated less with debates about kingship, as in the Restoration, and more with a growing discourse on the perils and pleasures of different kinds of social contact. Throughout the dissertation I therefore strategically situate my discussion of mongrel forms alongside a wide and varying range of social contexts, including conversations about race and empire, the practice of gender and genre bending, the growing visibility of women in public in the eighteenth century, the rise of sentiment, and anxieties about actors' rank and sexuality and the period's celebrity culture.<sup>22</sup> In his study Kroll deftly likens the "internally

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<sup>21</sup> See J. Douglas Canfield, "The Ideology of Restoration Tragicomedy," 448; Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> For the specifics of individual analyses, please see the last section of this introduction's chapter descriptions.

competitive mode” of tragicomedy to a form of anatomy through which ideas concerning the body politic and the circulatory system of world trade is dramatized (2). The anatomical image identified by Kroll is still very much a useful one: mongrel tragedy and comedy offered a means to shape the body of English civil society, as well as the bodies of individual English subjects.

## II. A Short View of Rymer

Thomas Rymer’s 1692 invective against tragedy *manqué* and the critical responses it generated provide sterling examples of the discourse on mongrel forms, as well as the potentially disturbing social implications of these aesthetic quarrels. While the title of the screed, *A Short View of Tragedy*, suggests Rymer’s agenda is primarily the enforcement of tragic decorum, he is just as intent on regulating other seemingly corrupted social categories: sexuality and race. Shakespeare’s chief transgression is, according to Rymer, the composition of *Othello, The Moor of Venice* (1603), the tragedy that, throughout the treatise, bears the brunt of the critic’s outrage.<sup>23</sup> In an excruciating act-by-act analysis, Rymer concludes the play to be, like Shakespeare’s addled brain, “Monstrous; And the constitution, all over, to be *most rank, foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural*” (121).<sup>24</sup> Just as Shakespeare’s desecration of generic purity

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<sup>23</sup> Rymer also undertakes a critical examination of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and Ben Jonson’s *Catiline* in *A Short View of Tragedy*, though he dedicates a mere twenty-one pages to Jonson and *Caesar* (147-168), as opposed to the sixty pages he spends with *Othello* (86-146). Denigrating remarks about *Othello*’s characters appear also in his reading of *Julius Caesar*. See, for example, Rymer’s comments on Desdemona (156-157).

<sup>24</sup> The italicized portion of Rymer’s commentary in this passage from *A Short View of Tragedy* is a quotation drawn from one of Iago’s lines from Shakespeare’s tragedy in which Iago questions Desdemona’s willingness to accept Othello as a match, rather than pairing with a person of her “own clime, complexion, and degree” (120).

deformed the playwright, the characters of *Othello*, those whose black and white bodies threaten to mingle dangerously, are potential infections. In a rant against the elevation of the titular character to a status of consequence, Rymer complains that “With us a Black-a-moor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but *Shakespear* [sic] would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General” (91-92).<sup>25</sup> Rymer’s criticism of the Moor’s ostensibly undeserved promotion veers toward social commentary. The subtle pronoun “us,” indicating England’s citizens rather than its poets, argues that it is not only in tragedy, but in England more generally, that the social advancement of so-called “low” characters, in this instance a cultural “other,” is verboten. The conversation moves between the dramatic stage and the world outside playhouse walls as Rymer’s worries shuttle between Shakespeare’s imagined Venice and Rymer’s own 1690s London. The critic stalls in the troubling traffic between the two. Lashing out at the union between Othello and Desdemona, he writes: “Should the Poet have provided such a Husband for an only Daughter of any noble Peer in *England*, the Black-a-moor must have chang’d his Skin, to look our House of Lords in the Face” (102). The statement presents a troubling hypothetical scenario: What if a man such as Othello *was* among us? Fighting our wars? Marrying our daughters? In a defensive gesture, Rymer relocates his critique to the country’s center of masculine authority and classed rule: the House of Lords. Confronted with the edifice of England’s seat of power, Othello would have no choice but to blanch himself white in order to enter into its presence, or its contracts. Though couched in the language of literary criticism, maintaining the boundaries of tragedy and comedy becomes a project with distinct eugenic possibilities. The anxieties surrounding mixtures of

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<sup>25</sup> Rymer follows with a comment on the improbability of Othello’s marriage to Desdemona: “With us a *Moor* might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench: *Shake-spear* [sic], would provide him the Daughter and Heir of some great Lord, or Privy-Councillor” (*A Short View*, 92).

tragedy and comedy become enmeshed with and inextricable from the dread of contact between black and white bodies.

Roxann Wheeler has characterized the early eighteenth century's understanding of race as "elastic," arguing that the period depended on a range of signifiers to mark difference, of which bodies and skin color were not necessarily prominent.<sup>26</sup> It is important to note, therefore, that Rymer's criticism of *Othello* as a mixed tragedy nonetheless consistently coalesces around the body and the threat of miscegenation. Rymer obsessively confronts the persistent problem of corporeality as textual concerns become inseparable from bodily matters. The critic returns repeatedly to the specter of Desdemona's marital bed and the imagined coupling between European female and Moorish male:

For his *Desdemona's* Marriage, He might have helped out the probability by feigning how that some way, or other, a Black-amoor [sic] Woman had been her Nurse, and suckl'd her: Or that once, upon a time, some *Virtuoso* had transfus'd into her Veins the blood of a black Sheep: after which she might never be at quiet till she is, as the Poet will have it, *Tupt with an old black ram.*

(151)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 7. Wheeler's study takes up the eighteenth century's "uncertainty about the signifiers of human difference, especially skin color" (48). For the importance of skin color in the later eighteenth century, see Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 176-233.

<sup>27</sup> Rymer's comments on the relationship between *Othello* and *Desdemona* appear throughout *A Short View of Tragedy*; this particular quotation is drawn from his explication of *Julius Caesar*.

Rymer frames Desdemona's desire as both an infraction against tragic probability and a potential pathology. He first pictures Desdemona being suckled by a "Black-amoor" [sic] nurse, then lingers on a scenario in which the blood of a "black" sheep has been magically transfused into her veins. Rymer reaches a climax by returning to a line from *Othello* with which he intimates that Desdemona's intercourse with her husband amounts to bestiality. Specifically, he brings to the fore the play's own image of a young white woman who has "tupt," a verb that refers to the copulating habits of sheep.<sup>28</sup> The succession of images represents myriad forms of illicit desire, whether between child and caretaker, members of the same sex, or human and animal. The erotic dimensions vary, yet all of Rymer's examples relish the frisson attending the transmission of blood or bodily fluids. Such transfusions locate Desdemona's desire in the loss of bodily integrity, a process by which she is made to crave intercourse with that which Rymer figures as less than human. Commentary on mongrel forms in *Othello*, therefore, acts as a dually-hinged language with which to address miscegenation and the spreading circulation of bodies marked as "other."

Rymer's fears about a Moor in a "Lieutenant-General's" uniform, and said Moor's interest in bedding the daughters of England, resonated not merely on the page, but also on the stage. Dramatic genres are frequently yoked to material realities, dramatizing in time and space the possibility of such unions. As the frontispiece to Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition of *Othello*

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<sup>28</sup> The image of the sheep and ram are related Rymer's earlier discussion in *A Short View of Tragedy* of *Othello's* opening act in which Iago and Roderick awaken Barbantio and jeer at him with taunts about his daughter's sexual union with Othello (*A Short View*, 96-99). Rymer quotes the scene at length calling it a "rabble of Skoundrel [sic] language" (*A Short View*, 99).

suggests, Rymer's anxieties were brought to life nightly in London theaters.<sup>29</sup> In the illustration for Rowe's tragedy, the enraged tragedian brandishes a pillow, and is dressed in a long coat, looking every bit the part of an officer of his station.<sup>30</sup> The scene is set in the play's final act, as Othello is about to commit the murder of his wife. The woman, a very white and soon-to-be dead Desdemona, is sprawled across the couple's marriage bed with her arm hanging limply and a breast exposed. The engraving's emphasis on naked flesh visualizes the fatal and erotic implications of Rymer's essay: the black Moor is dressed in English clothes, standing over a white, European woman. The scene is framed as voyeuristic and shocking, emphasized by the hastily drawn bed curtain. While the part of Othello was played on stage in the period by seminal English actor Thomas Betterton, the illustration shows no obvious signs of charcoal or blackface.<sup>31</sup> The dark skin of Othello is emphasized simply by its contrast with Desdemona's whiteness, and his hair is short, black, and hatched. As for Desdemona, a character who was played in this period by English actresses Anne Bracegirdle and her successor to the role, Lucretia Bradshaw, her exposed body and half opened eyes suggests that the throes of domestic violence might easily be confused with a pre-coital tussle.<sup>32</sup> The consequences of either are, the

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<sup>29</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello* in *The Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Nicholas Rowe, 5:2552. For further context, see Paul H.D. Kaplan's "The Earliest Images of Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.2 (1988): 171-186.

<sup>30</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, "Othello in Restoration England," *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), points out that the character of Othello was known to wear the uniform of an eighteenth-century British soldier on stage beginning in the early eighteenth century, 95-97.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Milhouse and Robert D. Hume's "General Index" to *The London Stage, 1660-1800; A New Version of Part 2, 1700-1729*, ed. Judith Milhouse and Robert D. Hume (2001; Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, Forthcoming), 4-5, url: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/hb1/London%20Stage%202001/>, reflects that Thomas Betterton played the part of Othello more than any other actor between 1700 and 1711.

<sup>32</sup> Anne Bracegirdle is the only actress listed in *The London Stage* to have played the role between the 1700-01 and the 1707-08 seasons. Lucretia Bradshaw, a protégé of Elizabeth Barry, played Desdemona in 1708-09.





Figure 1.1: *Othello*, V.ii (1709)  
By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library

illustration intimates, equally fatal. The two characters are posed in around both a marital and a death bed, again conflating a tragic and comic *mise-en-scène*.<sup>33</sup> As the frontispiece suggests, it was in the space of the playhouse, and through the condition of performance on which the theater relies, that real bodies were fused with symbolic ones, provisionally realizing the kind of unsettling scenarios that sent critics into hysterical ranting flights.

Rymer most fittingly ends his examen of *Othello* with a turn to the playhouse, a space he describes as being as explosive as a “Magazine.”<sup>34</sup> Considering the widespread effects of the play’s generic confusion on theater audiences, he asks:

What can remain with the Audience to carry home with them from this sort of Poetry, for their use and edification? How can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, *Tintamarre*, and Jingle-jangle, beyond what all the Parish Clerks of *London*, with their *old Testament* farces, and interludes, in Richard the Seconds [sic] time cou’d ever pretend to?

(146)

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<sup>33</sup> For comic dimensions of *Othello* in later novels, see Felicity Nussbaum’s reading of a performance of *Othello* in Frances Burney’s novel *Camilla* (1796) in *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 128-133.

<sup>34</sup> Rymer contends that “the Theater is a Magazine, not to be trusted, but under the special eye and direction of a Virtuous Government” (*A Short View*, 50). For analysis of Rymer’s views of the “juridical function of drama and government involvement in the theater,” see P.D. Cannan, “*A Short View of Tragedy* and Rymer’s Proposals for Regulating the English Stage,” *Review of English Studies* 52.206 (2001): 213, 207-226.

The critique of a mixed play once again returns to a monstrous body, but this time it is a civil one: the disordered passions of English subjects. As Rymer's breathless catalogue of potential ailments suggests, the dangers of exposure to generically corrupted plays is seemingly endless. The working order of the mind and senses are greatly threatened, of course, but also mentioned are "affections" and "appetite," words bringing to mind Rymer's rebuke of Desdemona's debased sexual desires. Such comments gesture once again at the potential for the spread of interracial desire and the fatal tangling of white and black bodies. The trope of improperly mixed genre stands in for Rymer's earlier images of bodily transfusions, the two so completely conflated as to work interchangeably, both engaging in acts of affective transmission. As Rymer writes earlier in his treatise, "We laugh and weep with those that laugh or weep; we gape, stretch, and are very *dotterels* by example" (4). Like Desdemona's lust, the passionate response of spectators has the capacity to spread *ad infinitum*. Rymer's explication of the play therefore concludes most frighteningly with the menace of a disordered audience let loose in a larger world. The crazed spectators run amuck in the streets of London, and perhaps most disturbingly, threaten to bring the violent perversity of their mixed passions, of all places, "home."

For contemporary scholars, Rymer's rant about mongrel tragedy demands situation in a larger social and cultural context, betraying as it does a deep and troubling obsession with policing the intimacy between the "Black-a-moor" Othello and his European bride. As such, critics have read in Rymer's splenetic treatise pronounced concerns about England's status as an emerging commercial nation, worries about imperial expansion, and a drive to preserve English stages and

an English population from the kinds of outsiders that Othello represents.<sup>35</sup> A.G. Barthelemy and Bridget Orr respectively have written of the controversy surrounding Rymer's comments on *Othello*, specifically as it relates to the formation of empire.<sup>36</sup> Both characterize Rymer's comments as "lurid" (Orr's adjective), evidence of the period's prejudices against Moors, and are quick to point to Rymer's troubling obsession with miscegenation in the play.<sup>37</sup> Barthelemy suggests that Rymer's critique takes up the "problem of sympathy" regarding a tragic hero such as Othello, noting that a black character of Othello's status was not prominent on the London stage until Southerne's *Oroonoko* in 1695.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, as Felicity Nussbaum observes in a discussion of the Earl of Shaftesbury's treatment of Othello in his *Soliloquy* (1711), "For the eighteenth-century audience, it seems that *Othello* embodies the racialized monstrousness that undermines the nation."<sup>39</sup> The play then becomes significant for the way in which it asks its London audiences to form tragic attachments and respond passionately to radical difference. Rymer's hateful response is an emotional backlash to these pleas for tragic pity or fear; his tirade precludes attachment, it would seem, to a character such as Othello, whether symbolic or real.

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<sup>35</sup> For accounts of increased contact between England and other cultures see, for example, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1660-1800* (London: J. Cape, 2002); and Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Anthony G. Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 160-162; Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage: 1660-1714* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 21-24.

<sup>37</sup> Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony G. Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race*, 161-162.

<sup>39</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human*, 4.

Rymer's *A Short View*, however, because it expresses these socio-cultural anxieties through a work of dramatic criticism, also requires an equal attention to the aesthetic preoccupations that enable Rymer's critique. While scholars such as Barthelemy and Orr consider Rymer's treatise in debates about race and empire, most critics largely ignore the tirade about mixed genres that makes an essay such as Rymer's, in all of its peculiarity, even possible. While Barthelemy, for example, rightly points to the problems of feeling *Othello* poses, he sidesteps the fraught discourse on the tragicomic that is the engine of Rymer's spleen. Rymer's assault on mongrel forms, while sanctioned by the Aristotelian hierarchy, is not limited to form in and of itself; rather, mixed genre is thematized throughout the essay and comes to extend across a number of categories: tragedy and comedy, the body of the "Black-a-moor" Othello and the European Desdemona, and the audience of the playhouse and the subjects of the nation. Rymer uses to his advantage the way in which the discourse on tragedy, comedy, and hybrid mixtures of the two could be uniquely positioned to simultaneously address issues of text and body. The difficulty in parsing the workings of these multiple valences is clear. In the twentieth century, T.S. Eliot, in a footnote to an essay on *Hamlet*, wrote that he had not yet encountered "a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to *Othello*."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" in *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 55.

### III. Vindicating *Othello*

Thomas Rymer's *A Short View of Tragedy*, and his lambast of Shakespeare's *Othello*, did indeed set off a debate about English tragedy amongst the critics of the day; however, not all addressed Rymer's concerns about the "Black-a-Moor" *Othello*. John Dennis, for example, in *The Impartial Critick* (1693), responded to Rymer's diatribe by fixating on the role of the chorus and inevitably deferred to Rymer's judgment, confessing that his "Censures of *Shakespear* [sic] in most of the particulars, are very sensible and very just."<sup>41</sup> Dryden would likewise temper his response, writing in a 1694 letter to Dennis that "almost all the faults he has discover'd are truly there; yet who will read Rymer, or not read Shakespeare? For my own part, I reverence Mr. Rymer's learning, but I detest his ill nature and his arrogance."<sup>42</sup> At least one critic, however, acknowledged both the aesthetic and social implications of Rymer's ferocious attack. In 1695, Charles Gildon, a mentee of John Dennis and a Whig, wrote a take-down of Rymer entitled "Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*, and An Attempt at a Vindication of Shakespeare in an Essay directed to John Dryden, Esq."<sup>43</sup> Echoing Rymer's pique, Gildon

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<sup>41</sup> John Dennis, "Dialogue Five" in *The Impartial Critick* in *The Impartial Critick by John Dennis and Miscellaneous Letters and Essays by Charles Gildon*, ed. Arthur Freeman (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1973), 52. Dennis' critique comes in the form of a dialogue between a character named Freeman, who responds directly to Rymer's criticism, and Beaumont, his interlocutor.

<sup>42</sup> See "Letter IX; To Mr. John Dennis; March 1693-4" in the second part of the first volume of *The Critical and Miscellaneous Prose Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Malone, 3 vols. (London: Printed by H. Baldwin and Son, 1800), 1:2:35.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Gildon, "Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*," in *Miscellaneous Letters and Essays in The Impartial Critick by John Dennis and Miscellaneous Letters and Essays by Charles Gildon*, ed. Arthur Freeman (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1973). All citations refer to this edition. In the same volume is another reply, entitled "An Essay at a Vindication of Love in Tragedies, against Rapin and Mr. Rymer, Directed to Mr. Dennis" (145-171). In the essay, Gildon attempts to convince Dennis that "thoughts of Love" are "agreeable to the Majesty of Tragedy" (146). By so doing, he also argues for women's place in tragedy:

defends outright Shakespeare's mixture of tragedy and comedy, arguing that the playwright wrote for his bread and therefore simply played to the demands of his audience:

For, He not having that advantage the *Greek* Poets had, of a proper Subsistence, or to be provided for at the Public Charge, what Fruit he was to expect of his Labors, was from the Applause of the Audience; so that his chief aim was to please them; who not being so Skilful [sic] in *Criticisms*, as Mr. *Rymer*, would not be pleas'd without some Extravagances mingl'd in (tho' contrary to) the Characters such, and such a Player was to Act. This is the Reason that most of his *Tragedies* have a mixture of something Comical; the *Dalilah* of the Age must be brought in, the Clown, and the Valet jesting with their Betters, if he resolv'd not to disoblige the Auditors.

(88)

Emphasizing Shakespeare's position as a commercial writer is an obvious move for Gildon, who would end his days in poverty and be lampooned in Pope's *Dunciad* as a hack writer.<sup>44</sup> For Gildon, Shakespeare becomes a relevant figure of the current mercantile age and the

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"Woman is a glorious part of the Creation, therefore I wou'd willingly see the Love of them Establish'd on as Noble a Foundation, as the Love of Glory, in the opinions of Men, which in Reality is so far more Excellent and Happy" (171).

<sup>44</sup> In Book III of *The Dunciad in Four Books*, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven, C.T.: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), Pope writes:

"Ah Dennis! Gildon ah! What ill-starr'd rage  
Divides a friendship, long confirm'd by age?  
Blockheads with reason wicked its abhor,  
But fool with fool is barb'rous civil war.

(lines 173-178)

author of choice for a country emerging as a commercial nation. Gildon defends, even embraces, Shakespeare's audience-pleasing mixture of tragedy and comedy as a necessary part of remunerative authorship. Of particular note is that Gildon makes use of the word "mingle," a polite verb that will figure largely in efforts to recuperate tragicomedy later in the century, in an attempt to elevate Shakespeare's tragicomical compositions above the mongrels impugned by Rymer.<sup>45</sup> Dennis contends therefore that a "nice Observation of Rules, is a Confinement a great *Genius* cannot bear, which naturally covets Liberty" (91).

Dennis' defense of mixed genre invariably leads him to a spirited defense of Othello, both as a tragic hero and as a Moor. The language of monsters appears consistently, though is often turned onto Rymer himself or used in a defense of the character of Othello.<sup>46</sup> Gildon directly quotes and amends many of Rymer's passages:

'Tis granted, a *Negro* here does seldom rise above a Trumpeter, nor often perhaps higher at *Venice*. But then that proceeds from the Vice of Mankind, which is the Poets Duty as he informs us, to correct, and to represent things as they should be, not as they are. No 'tis certain, there is no reason in the nature of thing, why a *Negro* of equal Birth and Merit, should not be on an equal bottom, with a *German, Hollander, French-man, &c.* The Poet, therefore, ought to do justice to Nations, as well as Persons, and set them to rights, which the common course of things confounds.

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, the discussion of Samuel Johnson and Shakespearean tragicomedy in this dissertation's concluding chapter.

<sup>46</sup> Gildon refers to the "monstrous advantage" Rymer assigns to the Greeks over the English ("Vindication" 87).



For Gildon, widening generic license becomes a way to widen the scope of a nation into that of an empire, assimilating cultural “others” in the process. Gildon argues that a “Negro” (changing Rymer’s word “Black-a-moor”) would, in the best of all possible worlds, be eligible for social advancement and, as a subject of tragedy, be worthy of humanity’s sympathy.<sup>47</sup> Though Gildon points out that such advancement would be unlikely either in his England or Shakespeare’s Venice, the stage, he seems to suggest, offers a space in which that sort of mixing and mingling might be tentatively realized. As Bridget Orr points out, “participants in this discussion realized there were ethical and political questions at stake in the dramatic imperative.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Gildon’s emphasis on Othello’s “equal bottom” with other Europeans resonates. His writing becomes distinctly politicized later in the essay as he argues that the enslavement of a people based upon the “meer Accident of their Complexions” is a “customary Barbarity”; he contends that Othello is worthy of his tragic status “unless [Rymer] can prove that the Colour of a Man alters his Species, and turns him into a *Beast or Devil*” (98).<sup>49</sup> Gildon adds, “‘Tis such a vulgar Error, so criminal a fondness of our Selves, to allow nothing of Humanity to any but our own Acquaintance of the fairer hew” (99). A quarrel over generic propriety morphs into a prescient

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<sup>47</sup> Gildon seems to take a jab at Rymer for his usage of “*Blackamoor*,” insinuating, perhaps, that “*Negro*” is a more current term (90).

<sup>48</sup> Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> The status of women in this project, it should be noted, remains unclear. Gildon defends the love between Othello and Desdemona (100); however, Gildon’s comments on Othello’s jealousy typically figure Desdemona as an object of exchange in an economy of male desire.

argument about human rights - perhaps not altogether surprising when one recalls that the title of Gildon's essay includes the word "vindication."<sup>50</sup>

#### IV. Tragedy, Comedy, and Mixed Genres

Heated moments of generic friction, such as the critical antagonism between Thomas Rymer and Charles Gildon over tragedy, miscegenation, and *Othello*, drove this project, even in its earliest stages, to unpack the social baggage with which the tragicomic is so often freighted in this period; however, the dissertation's emphasis on "mongrel" mixtures of tragedy and comedy that link dramatic form with embodied concerns also developed as a response to scholarship, both in eighteenth-century studies and studies in genre more generally, that doggedly assesses classical tragedy and comedy as distinct, rather than interrelated, genres and in doing shores up, rather

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Gildon seemingly amended his stance in later criticism not published under his name, bowing to Rymer's attack on *Othello*. These writings appear in an unauthorized volume that was appended to Rowe's edition of Shakespeare's works by publisher Edmund Curll in 1710. As the unauthorized volume was attached to Rowe's edition, Gildon may have merely parroted the popular critical sentiment. See Charles Gildon, "An Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England" and "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare" in *The Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Nicholas Rowe, 7 vols. (London: E. Curll, 1710; New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), volume 7. Gildon, for example, writes:

I must own that the Faults found in it by Mr *Rymer* are but too visible for the most Part. That of making a *Negro* of the Hero or chief Character of the Play, wou'd shock any one; for it is not the Rationale of the thing and the Deductions, that may thence be brought to diminish the Opposition betwixt the different Coulours of Mankind that wou'd not be sufficient to take away that which is shocking in this Story; since this entirely depends on Custom which makes it so, and on common Womens [sic] admitting a *Negro* to a commerce with her everyone almost starts at the Choice. Much more in a Woman of Vertue; and indeed *Iago*, *Bambutio* [sic], &c. have shewn such Reasons as make it monstrous.

(7:410)

The commentary foregrounds the color of Othello's skin as an objection to his status as a tragic hero: "If *Othello* had been made deformed, and not over young but no [sic] Black, it had removed most of the Absurdities, but now it pleases only by Prescription... but Nature or what is all one in this Case, Custom having put such a Bar as so opposite a Colour, it takes away our Pity from her, and only raises our Indignation against him" (410).

than interrogates, the Aristotelian hierarchy of genres. In this section I briefly take stock of these fields, beginning with genre studies and moving to eighteenth-century studies of genre, in order to further establish the critical context of the dissertation's primary argument. The generic segregation I identify in this section often gives way to a-historicity, an inattention to the conditions of performance, and a larger disconnect between genre and its place in any given society. Writing of genre's "recursive landscape" more broadly, Dimock suggests instead that "genre is best seen not flatly, as the enactment of one set of legislative norms, but as an alternation between dimensions, mediated by vectors of up and down, front and back, in and out. To study a single genre by itself is to obscure these vectors and the complex motions they permit....None does its work in isolation, and none without a continuous stream of input from other genres. Receiving and compounding are crucial to both, as are osmosis and sedimentation."<sup>51</sup> To offer up tragedy and comedy as an either/or proposition (with tragedy, the higher rung on the generic ladder, as the more favored), then, is to produce a body of scholarship which has internalized the logic of an inherited classical hierarchy. To re-inscribe such a commonplace denies the crucial ways in which the formation of genre is always in process, or, as Dimock writes, the way in which genre works "as open sets endlessly dissolved by their openness," as a "taxonomy that never fully taxonomizes."<sup>52</sup>

Within the broader field of genre studies, there are few immediate or adaptable models available to the scholar interested in undertaking a study of mixed tragedy and comedy. The critical history

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<sup>51</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," *PMLA* 122.5 (2007): 1380.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1377. Dimock identifies the "systemic failing in all genres," what she goes on to qualify as a "productive failing" (1379).

of tragedy and comedy is, after all, one of plenitude and paucity, of feast and famine. Tragedy, the genre exalted in classical hierarchies, receives the lion's share of critical attention.

Innumerable articles, journal issues, chapters, and books have been dedicated to extensive considerations of the very word, considering tragedy and its adjectival subordinate "the tragic" as a genre, idea, sensibility, and mode.<sup>53</sup> Such over-categorization is symptomatic of the not always productive tendency in genre studies to attempt durable, and frequently transhistorical, definitions of literary form.<sup>54</sup> Is tragedy best assessed as a brand of drama? An imprecise literary mood? A structure of feeling? These critical lines-of-questioning often lead to the impasse of ambivalence.<sup>55</sup> To echo Northrop Frye, critics can only seem to agree that tragedy is simply what comedy is not.<sup>56</sup>

Critics also speculate on tragedy's life cycle: its birth, most certainly, but also famously its death. Writing in the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche's account plots the form's conception in fifth-century B.C. Athens through to its premature demise at the hands of Euripides, the

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<sup>53</sup> While many hold to the notion that tragedy is first and foremost a dramatic subgenre, scholars in the field of genre studies have sought to unlock this limited definition. See, for example, Northrop Frye's "theory of modes" in *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays* (1957; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000) 33-67 and Terry Eagleton's sprawling first chapter of *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), 1-22. Similarly, Rita Felski, in her "Introduction" to *Rethinking Tragedy* (Baltimore, M.D.: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008), 2, points out the tendency to discuss tragedy using the terms of the literary (dramatic poetry), the philosophical (German Romanticism), and the vernacular (everyday usage). Like Frye, Felski looks to mediate these three categories by adopting the usage of "mode" – what she argues is a more flexible term that "lends itself especially well to the complicated history and vicissitudes of tragic art" (14).

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Northrop Frye, "Polemical Introduction," *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays*, 7-8, who compares the study of literature to scientific inquiry.

<sup>55</sup> Rita Felski, "Introduction," *Rethinking Tragedy*, 1, refers to the surplus of tragic commentary as "endless and interminable."

<sup>56</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 13, writes, "Thanks to the Greeks, we can distinguish tragedy from comedy in drama, and so we still tend to assume that each is the half of drama that is not the other half."

playwright who fatally sundered the chorus from the spectacle on stage.<sup>57</sup> Despite later Greek playwrights' failure to resuscitate the form, Nietzsche prognosticates on tragedy's return in the compositions of nineteenth-century German composer, Richard Wagner. George Steiner's 1961 study, *The Death of Tragedy*, declares such atavism an impossibility, nailing tragedy's coffin shut and placing the hammer in the hands of modernity's optimism, the democratic impulse of the twentieth century which would make a return to tragic form epistemologically untenable.<sup>58</sup> Michel Maffesoli, writing decades later, builds on Steiner's cornerstone study, prophesying that while modernity may have been at odds with tragedy, what he defines as a force akin to the "wind" that "blows where it will," a timely resurrection is on the horizon.<sup>59</sup> This rise from the grave via the spirit of postmodernity performs the exhumation necessary to fulfill the promise of Nietzschean return. This obsessive scripting of tragedy's life and death conforms to the elliptical arcs of tragic character: to live, die, and inevitably appear on stage once more. Tragedy, it would seem, has met as many critical ends as the unfortunate protagonists it routinely puts to death.<sup>60</sup>

Comedy and "the comic," by comparison, remain relatively under-theorized as a genre, mode, sensibility, or idea. A recent volume entitled *English Comedy* makes note of the "notoriously slim" pile of comic theory and acknowledge the tendency in criticism to "stand

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<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, ed. Michael Tanner, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1993).

<sup>58</sup> George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961; repr., New Haven, C.T.: Yale Univ. Press, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> Michel Maffesoli, "The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Societies [with Commentary]," *New Literary History* 35.1 (2004): 133.

<sup>60</sup> Flipping the critical script, a study by Erich Segal, *The Death of Comedy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), traces "comedy's glorious life cycle and ultimate destruction by the 'intellectuals' of the so-called Theater of the Absurd," iv.

aside from comedy – to let it go about its mischief unmolested.”<sup>61</sup> While such observations are in agreement with popular notions of comedy’s ineffability or the non-meaning of nonsense, the lack of foundational texts such as Aristotle’s *Poetics* and comedy’s inferior position in the classical generic hierarchy may also contribute to critical negligence.<sup>62</sup> Though important essays by Charles Baudelaire, George Meredith, Henri Bergson, and Sigmund Freud all make significant contributions to discussions about comic byproducts such as laughter and humor, there seems to be a reluctance within the larger field of genre studies to approach comedy on its own historical and/or cultural terms, resulting, as often is the case with tragedy, in a habit of treating comic form, when treated at all, as universal and unchanging.<sup>63</sup> If studies in tragedy are characterized by surplus (i.e., a tendency to hyper-taxonomize, an overwhelming obsession with the birth and death cycle of an inanimate genre), studies in comedy are marked by a disturbing inverse: deficit. That is, a tendency to say almost nothing whatsoever.

As is fitting for scholarship regarding a hybrid form, studies in tragicomedy strike a balance between these two poles. Though book-length projects are few and far between, the existing work on tragicomedy is, in general, far more historicized. Most criticism, however, concentrates on canonical works, those properly defined as “tragicomedy,” that originate in

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Cordner, Peter Holland, and John Kerrigan, eds., “Introduction” to *English Comedy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>62</sup> “This inexplicability is the very motor of comedy,” writes Alenka Zupančič in *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), 172.

<sup>63</sup> See Charles Baudelaire, *The Essence of Laughter and Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*, ed. Peter Quennell (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1956); George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*, ed. Lane Cooper (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1956); Henri Bergson, *Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1921); Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. and ed. Joyce Crick (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002).

select historical periods, primarily the Renaissance, the Restoration, which I have discussed earlier in this introduction, and the twentieth century. The volume *The Politics of Tragicomedy*, for example, features essays converging on the milieu of playwrights such as Fletcher, Webster, and Shakespeare.<sup>64</sup> Tragicomedy is treated as a legitimate, though at times problematic, theatrical genre and often compared, especially in the case of Shakespeare, to the genre of romance.<sup>65</sup> The additional period of privilege in the study of tragicomedy is the twentieth century. In *Modern Tragicomedy*, for example, Karl S. Guthke maps the history of dramatic theory in order to provide a genealogy of modern tragicomic forms, such as those practiced by Beckett and Ibsen.<sup>66</sup> More recent studies, such as Faye Ran-Moseley's *The Tragicomic Passion and Tragicomedy*, edited by Ashley Brown and John L. Kimmey, give sporadic attention to classical drama but are occupied largely with later canonical works of drama, film, and sometimes poetry, connecting tragicomedy to the works of T.S. Elliot, Wallace Stevens, Peter Handke, and Federico Fellini.<sup>67</sup> There exist, of course, exceptions to these generalizations. Marvin Herrick's capacious study, *Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France, and England*, begins with Plautus' "tragicomedia," tracking the development of the form on to

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<sup>64</sup> Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, ed., *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>65</sup> A more recent, though similarly oriented volume, *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2007), takes stock of tragicomedies written and performed between two landmark theoretical treatises: Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) and Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668).

<sup>66</sup> Karl S. Guthke, *Modern Tragicomedy: An Investigation into the Nature of the Genre* (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1966).

<sup>67</sup> See Faye Ran-Moseley, *The Tragi-Comic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) and the volume *Tragicomedy*, ed. Ashley Brown and John L. Kimmey (Columbus, O.H.: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968).

Diderot, Beaumarchais, and Mercier's popularization of the serious/comic play known as "le drame."<sup>68</sup> Herrick's study, however, because of its comparative literature approach, falls prey to the characteristics of genre studies more generally: the propensity to leap across large patches of time, attention chiefly to works within canonical boundaries, and a limited definition of the form under consideration.

The critical imbalance, the surfeit of work on tragedy and the lack of work on comedy, reveals a scholarly impulse to sever the two terms, to treat each in strict and thorough isolation.<sup>69</sup> Such clinical precision fails to acknowledge, much less assess, the ways in which comedy and tragedy were often very much in contact with each other and understood to be as such in certain historical moments. Studies in tragicomedy often complicate this problem by focusing only on proper dramatic tragicomedies or highly canonical works rather than seeking out texts which embrace or experiment with the porous weight of tragic and comic valences. Such observations lead from a consideration of the separation of genre from genre to a consideration of the division of genre from history. Studies in tragedy and comedy often place the historical on the backburner, frequently lurching into metaphysical or essentializing arguments about form transcendent with very few allowances for historical contingency. The stakes of this universalism, it should go without saying, are dangerously high. Lack of historical specificity translates into a loss of the many ways in which codified generic categories were constantly contested by ephemeral performing bodies and nearly always mediated by reacting spectators.

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<sup>68</sup> Marvin Herrick, *Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France, and England* (Urbana, I.L.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1955).

<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Surin, "Theology and Marxism: The Tragic and Tragi-Comic," *Literature & Theology* 19.2 (2005): 112-131, argues for the importance of the tragicomic in a recent and memorable exception.



The particulars of these real-life audiences, stages, or actors are strangely absent from most scholarly considerations of tragedy and comedy. Meaning, it is assumed, is static and relegated solely to the hands of playwrights and theorists who dominate the stage through the mechanics of the page. Theory, it is incorrectly assumed, rules practice. In this we hear echoes of Aristotle, who was one of the first to devalue spectacle.<sup>70</sup> As performance theorist Diana Taylor, however, in her attention to the relationship between repertoire and archive reminds us, performances are “acts of transfer” that serves as a conduit for “social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity.”<sup>71</sup> A reclamation of performance as epistemology brings to light the way in which the stage itself serves as a site of knowledge production, what scholars such as Joseph Roach refer to as “performance genealogies.”<sup>72</sup> The historically-specific condition of performance is therefore a crucial part in the study of tragedy and comedy’s larger cultural resonance. The work of tragedy, or any genre, is, in a very basic sense, to make meaning within culture, and as Rebecca Bushnell reminds, “in Western culture the meaning of tragedy is inseparable from history.” The meaning of genre, therefore, requires context.<sup>73</sup>

The field of eighteenth-century studies is one thoroughly invested in historical context and as such, is notable for its pioneering incorporation of performance studies frameworks into the

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<sup>70</sup> In *The Poetics*, Aristotle notes that the spectacle is ranked as the least valuable element of tragedy, intimating that drama’s power is not tied specifically to its performance. He writes, “For the effect of tragedy is not dependent on performance and actors” (13).

<sup>71</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), 26.

<sup>73</sup> Rebecca Bushnell, ed., *A Companion to Tragedy* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005), 2.

study of drama, literature, and culture more generally; however, much of the research within eighteenth-century studies can, from time to time, fall prey to its own kind of genre trouble.<sup>74</sup> Scholarship on comedy and tragedy in the theater has traditionally been subject to a plethora of taxonomies. A certain easiness with, and acceptance of, formal schematization is sedimented in the field's bedrock. Allardyce Nicoll's body of work, while part of the very foundation of studies in eighteenth-century theater, heavily relies on such distinctions. Nicoll is prone to parceling out tragedy from comedy, what is then separated from other miscellaneous forms of the theater, such as opera, pantomimes, and masques.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Robert Hume's formidable *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* distinguishes between "comic" and "serious" drama, attending to tragicomedy during the Restoration, for example, as a variety of the serious.<sup>76</sup> J. Douglas Canfield's towering volumes *Tricksters and Estates* and *Heroes and States* practices a similar approach, cordoning off tragedy and comedy not into separate chapters, but separate studies entirely.<sup>77</sup>

The division of tragedy and comedy in this scholarship is usually symptomatic of an approach to genres as closed systems, attending also, for instance, a separation of drama and novel. Laura Brown's seminal *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760: An Essay in Generic*

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<sup>74</sup> Performance studies has played a large role in eighteenth-century studies, especially given the popularity and influence of the scholarship of theorists such as Joseph Roach, whose *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* is by now a cornerstone of the field.

<sup>75</sup> See Allardyce Nicoll's *A History of English Drama: 1660-1900*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966) volumes 1-3.

<sup>76</sup> Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 209-216.

<sup>77</sup> See J. Douglas Canfield, *Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1997) and J. Douglas Canfield, *Heroes and States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 2000).

*History*, for example, has heretofore provided the field with a definitive schematization of dramatic genres, supplying an extensive critical vocabulary while charting a movement from the dramatic satire of the Restoration (social forms) to the sentiment of the eighteenth century (moral forms). Brown's figuration, however, also entails a hegemonic progression from drama to novel which culminates with the realization of "novelistic moral actions" in the work of Richardson and Fielding in the middle of the century.<sup>78</sup> Studies such as Brown's, while successfully rendering intelligible a rather unwieldy number of texts, are often deceptive in their linear portrayal of the period as generically homogenous. "The form of the drama," Brown writes "can be most generally described as a coherent fiction," a coherency that is, for Brown, subsequently handed over to the novel's rise.<sup>79</sup> In these instances, generic interplay and experimentation fall by the wayside, as they do not conform to the master narrative. Even more recent studies, such as Lisa Freeman's *Character's Theater*, bear up such generic distinctions, structuring analysis of tragedy apart from that of comedy, and considering the ideological work of the stage as apart from, or in resistance to, that of the novel.<sup>80</sup>

Formalist frameworks belie the diversity of the eighteenth-century's generic spectrum and often overlook or discount the period's extensive cross-pollination. As Richard Kroll, anticipating theorists such as Wai Chee Dimock, has suggested, "For the Restoration and eighteenth century, genre (whether poetry, prose, or drama) constitutes no fixed category," but

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<sup>78</sup> Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 185.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>80</sup> For Lisa Freeman's arguments about identity on the tragic and comic stages, see *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), chapters 3-5.

rather an “experimental space.”<sup>81</sup> Many scholars who study eighteenth-century form, and whose work influenced the conception of this project, have already successfully modeled this approach, attending to the interplay between generic systems rather than treating genres as discrete formal units. Gabrielle Starr, for example, presents necessary challenges to our understanding of generic boundaries by studying the way in which the history of the lyric in the eighteenth century is impacted by the emergence of the novel, or rather, “transformed by a history ostensibly not its own.”<sup>82</sup> She writes, “Eighteenth-century literary history is steeped in seeming generic heterodoxies ranging from the literary influence of newspapers and political tracts to the cross-pollination of high literary species.”<sup>83</sup> Emily Anderson, on the other hand, brings together both eighteenth-century drama and novels and in so doing, uncovers the way in which women writers employed theatrical frames across genres in order to “consciously explore the self-expressive capabilities of artifice.”<sup>84</sup> Anderson’s research deftly bridges the often looming gap between studies in the novel and theater and in doing so uncovers previously unattended forms of gendered authorial expression. Regarding tragedy and comedy itself, Diana Solomon’s work has incisively brought together the study of comedy and tragedy and the performance of such genres, especially in her essay on comic epilogues appended to tragedies.<sup>85</sup> As she writes, “These

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Kroll, *The Material World: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Gabrielle Starr, *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and Theater, Haywood to Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

combinations of character and persona, tragedy and comedy, both enlivened spectators and sparked debates about decorum that themselves influenced the authorship and reception of character and genre.”<sup>86</sup> Solomon’s work complicates our understanding of how audiences experienced dramatic genres; further, her attention not only to tragedy and comedy, but to the genres of the archive and the repertoire, enrich ongoing discussions of character, identity, and the stage.<sup>87</sup> Inquiries such as these are, I believe, necessary to uncover forms, both social and generic, that stubbornly refuse to conform to the received critical narratives.

## V. Mixed Genres in Britain

When engaging the “sociology” of eighteenth-century genre, it is necessary to acknowledge, if only to depart from, the pervasive trends in this field.<sup>88</sup> In particular, scholarship on two genres, the novel and the drama, have largely influenced our understanding of the formation of social identities in the eighteenth century, usually offering a narrative or counter narrative concerning the emergence of modern selves or subjects. Novel studies have been, perhaps, the most prolific

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<sup>85</sup> Diana Solomon, “Tragic Play, Bawdy Epilogue?” in *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-raisers, and Afterpieces: the Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*, ed. Daniel James Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2007), 155-178.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>87</sup> I invoke here Diana Taylor’s theorization of performance itself as a “genre” in “Remapping Genre through Performance: From “American” to “Hemispheric” Studies,” *PMLA* 122.5 (2007): 1416–1430.

<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, the phrase “sociology of genre” comes with its own history within genre theory. As editor David Duff notes in his “Introduction” to *Modern Genre Theory* (Harlow, England and New York: Longman, 2000), the twentieth century saw “a shift from a *morphology* of genre concerned primarily with *form* to a *sociology* of genre concerned primarily with function,” 14. Duff details this changeover from Russian formalism to Marxist studies of genre, what includes the school of Mikhail Bakhtin and figures such as Raymond Williams and Frederic Jameson (8-11).

in this respect, perpetually building on, critiquing, or responding to Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (1957), a study that famously argues for the epistolary novel as the prime medium through which bourgeois interiority was expressed.<sup>89</sup> Watt's argument twins the trajectories of the middle class subject and the novel's formal characteristics, a field-shaping alliance between genre and the history of social identity that, as William Warner notes, "has been told and retold in different variants since the 1750s."<sup>90</sup> Necessary amendments have since worked to situate the novel, and those whom it ostensibly represents, within an ever-broadening cultural and historical horizon, whether the context of popular fiction markets (Richetti, McKeon, Ballaster), the novel-news nexus (Davis), notions of authorship (Gallagher, Ingrassia), gendered subjectivity (Armstrong, Thompson), a print-based media and consumer culture (Lynch, Warner, Park), or post-colonial contexts (Aravamudan).<sup>91</sup> This list is in no way meant to be exhaustive, but rather, I hope, both gestures at the power of the novel as a generic location from which to study social identity and calls attention to the substantial critical heft of existing accounts.

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<sup>89</sup> Ian Watt, *Rise of the Novel* (1957; repr., Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2001).

<sup>90</sup> William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1998), xii.

<sup>91</sup> See John Richetti, *Popular Fiction before Richardson 1700-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Michael McKeon, *Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987); Rosalind Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Catharine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995); William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*; Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: a Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998); Deirdre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998); Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999); Helen Thompson, *Ingenious Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel-Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010).

Scholars in eighteenth-century theater studies have made their own pioneering contributions to the ongoing debate about genre and identity, consistently intervening into the dominance of critical narratives about the middle-class novel subject. Lisa Freeman, for example, begins with the premise that in order to undertake a study of theater and identity, her study must abandon “the subject” in favor of “the concept of ‘character’ as it was elaborated and understood in an eighteenth-century context.”<sup>92</sup> Freeman, then, develops her counter theory of character, and its surfaces rather than depths, arguing that the stage offered a “structure for those identities and our experience of them that was fundamentally distinct and was particular to the qualities of the theatrical medium.”<sup>93</sup> Freeman’s situation of her project in opposition to a novel subject is a recalibration familiar to theater scholars writing in the shadow of the eighteenth century’s ostensibly favored form. Emily Anderson’s *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction*, though straddling genres, locates in female authors’ play with dramatic frames “a kind of resistance to and critique of the illusion of transparency and plenitude that the novel offered in ‘the subject.’”<sup>94</sup> Both Joseph Roach and Felicity Nussbaum, who have deepened debates about models of theatrical character with studies of the emergence of the Restoration’s celebrity system, can also be located in this counter position.<sup>95</sup> Roach, for example, traces the origins of celebrity and its attendant modern social forms, what he discusses as “public intimacy,” “synthetic experience,” and the “It-Effect,” not to early or mid-century novelists but

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<sup>92</sup> Lisa Freeman, *Character’s Theater*, 7.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph Roach, *It*; Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

rather to the theater of the Restoration.<sup>96</sup> Nussbaum, on the other hand, in her study of actress's public and private lives, argues that the "public performative identity" of famous early actresses created a kind of "effect of intimacy," that offered a rival to "the more decorous version of the modern individual" that arose from the novel.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the cumulative weight of this scholarship, in this dissertation I do not wish to make an explicit claim about the relationship between mongrel forms of tragedy and comedy and the development of a modern self or individual subject, whether originating on the stage or in the pages of the novel. The mixed genres I study appear in various locations: the theater, neoclassical theory, periodical culture, the novel, and portraits. These mongrel forms move across and through other genres, and cannot always be easily allied with, or even opposed to, the critical narratives about subject formation or character found in scholarship on the novel or in theater research. Instead, as others have before me, I embrace an intersectional approach that looks at the ways in which mongrel forms of tragedy and comedy could be thematized to think through changing "*aspects*" of social life, such as race, class, gender and sexuality.<sup>98</sup> That is, I am interested not so much in situating this project in relation to the development of a modern, coherent self, as exploring the way in which the relationship between textuality and corporeality inherent in mongrel forms made available a language with which to express feelings and fears about bodies and their place in the formation of a civil society. Within eighteenth-century

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<sup>96</sup> Joseph Roach, *It*, 3.

<sup>97</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 63.

<sup>98</sup> Dror Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), concerns his analysis, for example, "not with identity *tout court*, but with specific *aspects* of identity: gender, race, class, and the distinction between humans and animals," xii.



studies, Deirdre Lynch's now classic study, *The Economy of Character*, skillfully implements this kind of critical expediency, emphasizing a "pragmatics of character" in order to understand the way that characters were "used" by eighteenth-century culture.<sup>99</sup> Lynch resists situating her study at the intersection of "the rise of individualism" and the "rise of realism," looking instead to how character "operated in culture."<sup>100</sup> A grounding premise of my own dissertation is that the discourse on and performance of mongrel forms offered eighteenth-century playwrights and players, authors and artists, a means to steady themselves upon the moving ground beneath them, functioning both structurally and affectively to revise, resist, or rethink various aspects of their social experience.

As in my explication of Rymer and Gildon's racially-charged discussion of Shakespeare's *Othello*, the dissertation chapters I outline below pinpoint a number of flashpoints in which mongrel forms flourish and proliferate; theatrical and literary cultures become microcosms for larger social ruptures. The project, in its selection of material, has been driven not so much by chronology or an investment in linear critical narratives but an attention to moments of generic friction between tragedy and comedy in which power is both fluid and contested. Influencing this method has been the work of Kathleen Stewart, who conceives of her scholarly self "not as a trusted guide carefully laying out the links between theoretical categories and the real world" but rather as one who seeks out "a point of impact, curiosity, and encounter."<sup>101</sup> While Stewart's avant-critical work is *sui generis*, her emphasis on "impact" and

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<sup>99</sup> Deirdre Lynch, *The Economy of Character*, 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007).

“encounter” has guided my own focus, as I look to foreground varying degrees of contact, both generic and embodied.

The comedian Colley Cibber’s critically neglected writing for and performances on the tragic stage comprise the subject of the second chapter of this dissertation. Though the neoclassical critical establishment consistently argued for tragedy as an elevated genre, guarding the form from monstrous hybridity, Cibber, as I show, writing from the position of the repertoire, theorizes laughter as part of the successful performance of tragedy, what he insists brings bodily pleasure to the audiences and offers performers such as himself “happy Liberties.”<sup>102</sup> Cibber embraces, rather than bemoans, the destabilization of hierarchies that attends genre bending, valuing bodily pleasure, entertainment, and spectacle over moral improvement and nation building. As Cibber consistently twins gender-bending and genre play, I interpret Cibber’s experiments with the pleasures of mongrel forms in light of the eighteenth-century’s changing notions of gender and sexuality, amidst the transition from a one to a two-sex system. Cibber’s freedoms with tragedy and comedy, and his avowal of pleasure, I argue, add a layer of texture to our understanding of the formation of sexual ideology in the period, as well as its affective resonances. This chapter also demonstrates how the study of Cibber’s comic tragedy presents a challenge to many of the highly influential narratives about gender and the cultural work of tragedy in the field of eighteenth-century studies.

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<sup>102</sup> Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740), ed. B.R.S. Fone (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1968), 72.

The third chapter of the dissertation marks the historical origin of my project: 1681. This year sees both a curious development in the history of genre and a significant change in the sexual politics of the Restoration stage. First, the year saw the debut of Nahum Tate's infamous version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the mongrel adaptation that, with its poetically-just happy ending of marriage, took a seemingly inexplicable hold of eighteenth-century theatrical culture for nearly a century. Second, 1681 is, according to theater research, also the year in which tragic actresses rose to prominence in London theaters, most famously in the person of Elizabeth Barry.<sup>103</sup> In this chapter, then, I explore the sexual politics of the eighteenth-century's mongrel *King Lear*. The practice of poetic justice in adaptations of *King Lear*, I suggest, constitutes a mongrel form through which male playwrights, ranging from Nahum Tate to later adapters George Colman and David Garrick, expressed anxieties about women's increasing centrality on the tragic stage, and, as I will show, visibility in culture more generally. The structural elements of a tragedy with a happy ending effectively sidelined female actresses through a structure of surrogation, reserving the play as a vehicle for displays of male power and pathos. The result was a mixed tragedy whose dramatic form impacted both real and imagined bodies, both structurally and affectively limiting the place of women performers on the stage, in the audience, and in the nation-building work associated with the tragic genre.

In the fourth chapter of the dissertation, I move to a study of mixed forms and feelings in a midcentury novel, Charlotte Lennox's 1752 *The Female Quixote*. While critics most often read the genre crisis in the novel as one between realism and romance, I instead frame the novel's

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<sup>103</sup> See Elizabeth Howe, "Elizabeth Barry and the Development of Restoration Tragedy," *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 108-128.

generic mandate, and the engine of the novel's humor, as the friction between the competing affective frames of tragedy and comedy. Arabella, Lennox's aristocratic heroine, experiences the novel's generic instability as an epistemological crisis, that is, a double bind of structural friction and emotional dissonance that signals the lead character's inability to satisfactorily express her desires for freedom and autonomy given the limited range of generic arcs presented to her. The novel, therefore, resists the idea that one genre and one genre alone can fully express Arabella's classed and gendered experience. The novel, then, in its mixed form and feeling, can be read as a response to the sentimentality of tragic novels, such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), whose tragic subject and the feelings surrounding the heroine, I argue, *The Female Quixote* actively critiques. This chapter also connects Arabella's generic quandary to Charlotte Lennox's own plight as a female author at mid century. Lennox's tumultuous career in the theater powerfully undergirds her novel's argument for generic experimentation, as she attempts to write plays for a marketplace that would only praise her novels.

The final chapter of the dissertation takes up the temporal conundrum of mongrel forms, arguing that mixed tragedy and comedy provided ancient classical frameworks for treading the eighteenth century's *terra incognita*. I undertake a study of the contexts surrounding Sir Joshua Reynolds' towering allegorical canvas *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761), interpreting tragedy and comedy as genres of their moment. That is, while the theater was inundated with celebrity culture, commercial culture, and new scientific theories of acting, David Garrick and Sir Joshua Reynolds nonetheless appropriated older, even ancient, classical genres in order to articulate Garrick's legitimacy as an actor and claim his place as a symbol of the nation. Garrick's pose between two female muses, Thalia and Melpomene, articulates and assuages, I

argue, very real and present worries about actors' class status and sexuality. I examine, for instance, the controversy of 1761 surrounding Garrick's performances of tragedy by the Irish critic Thaddeus Fitzpatrick, that circled around concerns about authority, class, and sexuality. I close the chapter by examining writing on tragicomedy and Shakespeare, Garrick's cultural proxy, as male critics attempted to recuperate Shakespeare's tragicomedy as a sign of class mobility. I also show how one female critic, Elizabeth Montagu, in her critique of Shakespeare, adapted other generic strategies focusing not on mixed genres, but on the singular form of tragedy to elevate women's position in society.

In all of the above analyses the dissertation returns repeatedly to the idea that mixed tragedy and comedy, and the recourse to mongrel forms by playwrights, players, and writers, offered ways to re-imagine social experience within English civil society. This social function of mongrel forms persists throughout the historical frame I research; debates about mongrel forms were not simple aesthetic quibbles, even when articulated from that position. As Thomas Rymer wrote in his 1674 translation of René Rapin's essay on Aristotle:

But as the end of tragedy is to teach men not to fear too weakly the commonly misfortunes and manage their fear, it makes account also to teach them to spare their compassion for objects that deserve it. For there is an injustice in being moved at the afflictions of those who deserve to be miserable.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> René Rapin, *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie Containing the Necessary, Rational, and Universal Rules for Epick, Dramatick, and the Other Sorts of Poetry: with Reflections on the Works of the Ancient and Modern Poets, and their Faults Noted*, trans. Thomas Rymer (London: Printed by T.N. for H. Herringman, at

By the middle of the century moral philosopher Adam Smith had made, more or less, the very same connection:

We weep even at the feigned representation of a tragedy. If you labour, therefore, under any signal calamity, if by some extraordinary misfortune you are fallen into poverty, into diseases, into disgrace and disappointment; even though your own fault may have been, in part, the occasion, yet you may generally depend upon the sincerest sympathy of all your friends, and, as far as interest and honour will permit, upon their kindest assistance too. But if your misfortune is not of this dreadful kind, if you have only been a little baulked in your ambition, if you have only been jilted by your mistress, or are only hen-pecked by your wife, lay your account with the raillery of all your acquaintance.<sup>105</sup>

Whether in early neoclassical criticism or Smith's later *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), the socially sympathetic community of England hangs on the ability to distinguish between comic and tragic modes. In this way, the lines drawn, and redrawn, between tragedy and comedy had resounding implications for the civil society imagined on stage and off. Tragedy, comedy, and mixed forms of the two could be used to mark the limits of social experience in Britain. They

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the Anchor in the Lower Walk of the *New Exchange*, 1674), 104, Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>.

<sup>105</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments, to Which Is Added a Dissertation on the Origin of Languages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Printed for A. Millar, A. Kincaid and J. Bell in Edinburgh, 1767), 69-70.

offered ways to recognize the difference between objects of pity and objects of amusement, between clowns, kings, and mere mongrels.

## Chapter 2: Happy Liberties Colley Cibber's Tragic Stage

In *Spectator* 39 (14 April 1711), Joseph Addison, one of the early eighteenth century's most influential literary figures, writes, "As a perfect Tragedy is the Noblest Production of Human Nature, so it is capable of giving the Mind one of the most delightful and most improving Entertainments."<sup>1</sup> Upholding a neoclassical aesthetic, Addison's veneration confirms tragedy as the loftiest of genres. The form's nobility is married to the didactic improvement it imparts, driving from the mind "everything that is mean or little" (164). Addison implicitly refers to comedy, tragedy's opposite, as the domain to which more trivial matters are tacitly relegated, as the lowly *other* part of drama. Comedy, one would assume, had nothing much to do with tragedy or its project of "cultivat[ing] that Humanity which is the Ornament of our Nature" (164).<sup>2</sup> As Addison notes in his opening gambit, the purview of tragedy's cultural work is ever widening, from London theaters to stages across the globe. "It is no wonder," he continues, "that in all the polite Nations of the World, this part of the Drama has met with publick Encouragement" (164). The rest of Addison's *Spectator* paper, then, is spent revising and rehearsing the controlling maxims of the most elevated of genres: the improvement of English tragedy through attention to matters of versification, regulation of tragic form and content, and critiques of the early

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 39, Saturday, 14 April 1711, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 1:163-164. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>2</sup> While tragedy is given full treatment in the early *Spectator* papers, a similar discussion of comedy is conspicuously absent. In *Spectator* 44 Addison writes: "It would be an endless Task to consider Comedy in the same Light, and to mention the innumerable Shifts that small Wits put in practice to raise a Laugh" (191). Addison elsewhere refers to tragicomedy as "monstrous" (*Spectator* 40, 16 April 1711, 1:170).



eighteenth-century tragedy's leading playwrights.<sup>3</sup> The author's command of language and mastery of classical tradition, the *Spectator* paper suggests, qualifies him to preserve and protect the sanctity of England's drama, as well as drama elsewhere. Addison's emphasis is, after all, on the effects of neoclassical rule on language; theatrical performance does not figure into his discussion.<sup>4</sup>

Not all eighteenth-century minds, however, shared Addison's view of tragedy as a genre with the capacity to civilize humanity; nor, insisted upon the genre's separation from all things "mean or little." In chapter five of Colley Cibber's autobiographical *Apology* (1740), the aging author and retired manager of Drury Lane, in the midst of a panegyric on the merits of Restoration actor Edward Kynaston, pauses for a digression upon tragedy and its relationship to comedy. Cibber does not extol tragedy as an ennobling genre; rather, he reflects instead upon tragedy and laughter:

Here I cannot help observing upon a modest mistake, which I thought the late Mr. Booth committed in his acting the part of Morat. There are in this fierce character so many Sentiments of avow'd barbarity, insolence, and vain-glory, that they blaze even to a ludicrous lustre, and doubtless the poet intended these to make his spectators laugh, while

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<sup>3</sup> The paper concludes with commentary on England's leading modern tragic playwrights, Nathaniel Lee and Thomas Otway, both of whom Addison praises and, at times, mildly censures. Lee is reprimanded for his ranting flights of style; Otway, on the other hand, is chided for his "Familiarity of Phrase" (167).

<sup>4</sup> That Addison overlooks performance as an essential part of tragedy's success is no great surprise. While certain *Spectator* papers address trips to the theater, Lee Andrew Elioseff notes in *The Cultural Milieu of Addison's Literary Criticism* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1963), 75 that Addison himself "rarely went to the theater, and reviewed no contemporary plays or recent performances"; rather, it was Addison's relationship with his collaborator Richard Steele that kept him tied to London's theatrical milieu.

they admir'd them; but Booth thought it depreciated the dignity of tragedy to raise a smile, in any part of it, and therefore cover'd these kind of sentiments with a scrupulous coldness, and unmov'd delivery, as if he had fear'd the audience might take too familiar a notice of them.<sup>5</sup>

In this passage Cibber makes a comparison between two different portrayals of John Dryden's character Morat, the prime villain in the 1675 Oriental tragedy *Aureng-Zebe*. One is a performance by Ned Kynaston, the Restoration actor who made the role popular upon the play's debut, and the other is a performance by Barton Booth, the later and, according to Cibber, less adept player who acted the part on the early eighteenth-century stage. Cibber takes Booth to task for his failure to burnish the part of Morat, an oriental despot, to its "proper ludicrous luster."<sup>6</sup> That is, Booth lacked that "Wantonness of Spirit which the Nature of those sentiments demanded."<sup>7</sup> Cibber specifically identifies "Wantonness," a word thoroughly grounded in the overabundance of the body, not as that which is "mean or little," but an element constitutive to tragedy's successful performance. Booth's mistake was not simply that he took the part too seriously, but that he was not in possession of a certain performative excess that ran flush in

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<sup>5</sup> Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740), ed. B.R.S. Fone (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1968), 72. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>6</sup> Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714*, 111, characterizes Morat as the "brutal embodiment" of Oriental characteristics: "The Emperor's and Morat's invocation of arbitrary power and their abandonment to lust can be accounted for by Bernier's remark that the 'decay of the Empires of Asia proceeds from thence, that the Children of the Kings thereof are brought up only by Women and Eunuchs, which often are no other than wretched slaves.' So raised, these rulers indulge in 'cruelties,' 'drunkenness,' 'unreasonable luxury... with their concubines' or, 'altogether abandoning themselves to the pleasures of Hunting, like some Carnivorous Animals,' they 'always run into some extreme or another, being altogether irrational and extravagant.'" Orr cites one of Dryden's probable source texts, François Bernier's *The History of the Late Revolution of the Empire of the Great Mogol* (London: Moses Pitt, Simon Miller, John Starkey, 1671).

<sup>7</sup> Colley Cibber, *Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 73.

Kynaston, a man most notable for his turn upon the Restoration stage in female roles. When Kynaston delivered his lines, Cibber gushes, it was “impossible not to laugh,” a phrase that calls attention to forced bodily pleasure rather than moral improvement.<sup>8</sup> Kynaston’s virtuosic performance as Dryden’s villain was one that confused otherwise staid categories: tragedy, in its likeness to comedy; masculinity, in its flirtation with femininity; and the Orient, in its construction as both menace and spectacle. The blurring of tragedy and comedy in Kynaston’s performance therefore attended an unsettling of the organizing hierarchies of the stage’s representation of genre, gender, and England itself.

I begin this chapter with commentary on tragedy from Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* and Colley Cibber’s *Apology* because these two passages represent, I believe, two fundamentally different, though certainly related, understandings of eighteenth-century dramatic form. Addison’s purview is perhaps most familiar and authoritative, as was Joseph Addison himself. Known as the Whig moral essayist and writer of periodicals such as *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1714), Addison’s criticism was, thanks to the burgeoning periodical press, widely disseminated in the period and, moreover, successfully dramatized on the London stage: he wrote his towering neoclassical tragedy *Cato* (1713) only a few short years after *Spectator* 39.<sup>9</sup> The opinions Addison expressed in periodicals, however, gain credibility not only from Addison’s respected position within early eighteenth-century culture; rather, the view he espouses is legitimate because it resonates with the period’s neoclassical critical prerogative. As

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>9</sup> Colley Cibber trumpets the play’s overwhelming success in his *Apology*: “Yet the sublime Sentiments of Liberty in that venerable Character, rais’d, in every sensible Hearer such conscious Admiration, such compell’d Assent to the Conduct of a suffering Virtue, as even *demand’d* two almost irreconcilable [sic] Parties to embrace, and join in their equal Applauses of it” (196).

Lee Andrew Elioseff points out, Addison's writings on tragedy were, by and large, "Aristotelian, religious, and didactic," and as such, in step with the aesthetic zeitgeist.<sup>10</sup> Addison's opinions would have been, on the whole, supported by a critical establishment that included recent and contemporary critics such as Thomas Rymer, John Dryden, Jeremy Collier, and John Dennis. While Aristotelian doctrine was vigorously debated among these men, nearly all formed a critical consensus around the validity of neoclassicism as an aesthetic paradigm.<sup>11</sup> As Allardyce Nicoll notes, "The critics declared for Aristotle's rules as interpreted by France, and to a certain extent they imposed their authority."<sup>12</sup>

The views Colley Cibber propounds in his *Apology*, on the other hand, run counter to most eighteenth-century neoclassical dramatic critics. A sprawling volume of gossipy tidbits, performance reviews, and nostalgia for an earlier stage, Cibber's *Apology* is written not from the position of a learned critic versed in Aristotle's *Poetics*, but rather as a theater insider whose life had been defined by his professional role as manager, playwright, and most importantly, player. Cibber's personal and highly idiosyncratic narrative resists identification with a tradition of dramatic theory or criticism; his autobiography is instead embedded within and often displaced by the history of the London stage, signaling the text's demand that it, as well as the theatrical genres such as tragedy and comedy it treats, be interpreted through genealogies of performance.

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<sup>10</sup> Lee Andrew Elioseff, *The Cultural Milieu of Addison's Literary Criticism*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Earl R. Wasserman, "The Pleasures of Tragedy," *ELH* 14 (1947): 283-307, discusses the different views of tragic pleasure held by Joseph Addison and John Dennis. While both men upheld Aristotle, Wasserman argues that Dennis was influenced by Descartes' association of tragic pleasure with the agitation of the emotions; Addison, on the other hand, Wasserman argues, can be tied to Hobbesian notions of self love.

<sup>12</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama: Early Eighteenth-Century Drama, 1700-1750*, 6 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952), 2:51.

Cibber's *Apology* outright ignores, in fact does not typically engage with, the debates of contemporary neoclassical critics. Rather than the edicts of Aristotle, he refers to the authority of past performances, such as Kynaston's role as *Morat* on the Restoration stage, as he nonchalantly flaunts critical rule in favor of playhouse repertoire.<sup>13</sup> By placing more importance on successful performance than critical prescription, Cibber wrests interpretive authority from the critic, locating it instead with the actor. Genre opens up into a free space, one that stands in contrast to the controlling strictures set forth by the critical status quo. By celebrating Knynaston's genre bending, Cibber suggests that at least some of tragedy's potential pleasures are not anchored in moral improvement; rather, they stem from the hierarchical destabilization that attends a liberatory practice of mongrelization.

Because Cibber's aesthetic sensibility presents a departure from the neoclassical critics of the day, it is easy, perhaps, to dismiss the above anecdote as nothing more a lark found in the autobiography of the eighteenth-century's most notorious dunce. In this chapter, however, I suggest that Cibber's attempt to vindicate mongrel forms amounts to a significant and sustained critical position that is both resistant to the dominant critical tradition and worthy of examination. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Kristina Straub, and Laura Rosenthal have all suggested, Colley Cibber often marks a position throughout the first half of the eighteenth century outside of established orders, whether in the suspect sexuality of the fop or in his dual

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<sup>13</sup> Underlying this comparison between Cibber and Addison is Diana Taylor's theorization of the spaces of the archive and the repertoire. As Taylor provocatively asks in her article "Performance and/as History," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50.1 (2006): 68: "How can performance, often thought of as ephemeral practice, as taking place only in the here and now, give evidence of past behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes? If archival evidence (documents, records, ruins) sustain historical inquiry, is the repertoire of performed acts un- or even anti-historical? Does it have explanatory potential? What standards of inquiry would have to be met if performed behaviors were recognized as socially legitimate ways of understanding the past?"

status as poet laureate and metonym for hack authorship.<sup>14</sup> His writings on genre, beyond the neoclassical pale as they are, are no exception, and as others writing on Cibber have frequently noted, his ostensibly marginal status is often acutely relevant to dominant culture.<sup>15</sup> Granted, scholars of dramatic form such as Allardyce Nicoll have admitted that, in terms of tragic theory, there were “stray voices” who challenged the neoclassical critical establishment; Nicoll adds, however, that “for the most part hardly anyone thought of going counter to the precepts of ancient and modern.”<sup>16</sup> While Nicoll identifies the erosion of neoclassical ideals in the rise of sentimental comedy, bourgeois tragedy, and growing interest in Shakespeare, I believe that Cibber’s theory and practice of mongrel forms represent an earlier challenge to neoclassical mandates and dominant tragic traditions on the stage.<sup>17</sup> Cibber’s attempts at tragedy should not be characterized as a “stray voice,” but rather as a crucial critical standpoint that is important to understanding both eighteenth-century tragedy and eighteenth-century tragedy’s cultural work.

My focus on Cibber’s writing and performances for the tragic stage, much of it marked by commercial and critical failure, comes, in part, as a response to the fixation, both in the

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), describe Cibber as a figure of “mediation,” 113. Aligning him with his famous fops, Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 35 contends that Cibber “mark(s) a desire for an ambiguous or contradictory masculinity,” outside of the simple cultural delineations of class and gender. Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 162-203, assesses Cibber’s playwriting career, considering his authorship alongside female writers.

<sup>15</sup> Granted, Stallybrass and White’s proclamation that “what is socially peripheral is often symbolically central” has become something of a cliché (*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 20).

<sup>16</sup> Nicoll, *A History of English Drama*, 2:51-52.

<sup>17</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *The Theory of Drama* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1923), 20.

eighteenth century and in contemporary scholarship, on assessing the cultural significance of Cibber's work in sentimental comedy, itself a hybrid genre, though one that both gained cultural traction and rewarded Cibber with overwhelming success. The association with Cibber and comedy is, admittedly, supported and justified by Cibber's biography. Cibber's breakout role was as the fop Sir Novelty Fashion in his 1695 play *Love's Last Shift; or the Fool in Fashion*, a part he wrote for himself and would reprise throughout his career in comedies such as *The Careless Husband* (1704).<sup>18</sup> Though Cibber attempted to write for the tragic stage, it is within the genre of comedy that he garnered critical praise and financial remuneration. His performances in tragedy often generated derision among his peers; Aaron Hill famously compared Cibber's performance of the tyrannical Richard III to "the distorted heavings of an unjointed *caterpillar*" and declared the actor was "born to be laughed at."<sup>19</sup> Later biographers, such as Helene Koon, echo these sentiments, asserting that "Cibber's *métier*, whether he perceived it or not, was comedy."<sup>20</sup> No wonder, then, that the bulk of contemporary scholarship on Cibber confines the actor-playwright's relevance to his famous fop characters and the genre of sentimental comedy. In her classic 1982 essay "A Few Kind Words for the Fop," Susan Staves characterizes Cibber as the "fop *par excellence*," a title that, with its focus on the comic dimensions of Cibber's personal and professional life, has come to shape subsequent

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<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Shevelow, *Charlotte: Being a True Account of an Actress's Flamboyant Adventures in Eighteenth-Century London's Wild and Wicked Theatrical World* (New York: Picador, Henry Holt and Company, 2005), suggests that it was the blend of "sexual intrigue" and "sentimental ending" in *Love's Last Shift* that came to "define Cibber's career," 37.

<sup>19</sup> Aaron Hill, *The Prompter* ed. William W. Appleton and Kalman A. Burnim (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber: A Biography* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1986), 36. Similarly, Leonard R.N. Ashley, *Colley Cibber*, ed. Betram H. Davis, rev. ed. (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1989), posits that the majority of Cibber's tragedies are "poor or melodramatic," 21.

scholarship.<sup>21</sup> In *Sexual Suspects*, Kristina Straub builds her thesis concerning actors' sexuality by exploring prominent tropes in Cibber's career over a three-chapter arc, investigating personae such as the Addisonian butt, the fop, and the school boy.<sup>22</sup> Straub focuses her analysis primarily on Cibber's "comic world."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Laura J. Rosenthal analyzes Cibber's mode of composition, what she locates mostly within the sphere of comedy, as a kind of "fop authorship," in which Cibber's cultural position outside of dominant masculinity coincides with his relationship to professional writing; in this way, she argues, "the position of fop articulates economic and class tensions as well as gender and sexual ones."<sup>24</sup> Granted, Joseph Roach importantly calls attention to the similarity between the larger-than-life hairstyles of both comic fops and "tragedy kings"; however, while Roach notes that Colley Cibber "aspired painfully" to tragedy, he assesses Cibber as a comedian rather than as an actor who routinely crossed generic boundaries.<sup>25</sup> Discussed primarily in relation to comedy, the significance of Cibber's vast and varied attempts at tragedy, failed though they might have been, receives less attention, as does the overall generic experimentation that, I argue, marked Cibber's career as a whole.

While the formal emphasis of the majority of the above scholarship on Cibber has been on comedy, the social and historical frameworks of these studies have focused on Cibber's position as it relates to the eighteenth century's emerging notions of gender and sexuality. Here I

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<sup>21</sup> Susan Staves, "A Few Kind Words for the Fop," *Studies in English Literature* 22 (1982): 413-28.

<sup>22</sup> Straub argues that actors' ambiguous, and often suspect, sexuality carved out a space in the "eighteenth-century imaginary of sexual possibility" against and through which notions of binary gender formed (*Sexual Suspects*, 23).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England*, 190, 199.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2010), 119, 130.



do not wish to depart from existing critical work so much as build on and expand what are, I believe, already compelling arguments. While Cibber's views on genre, as the anecdote concerning Morat suggests, destabilizes any number of categories, in the remainder of the chapter I wish to pay particular attention to the way in which, for Cibber, mixtures of tragedy and comedy prove a site for the pleasurable imagining of fluid sex and gender roles. Scholars have long argued that the eighteenth century saw the emergence of modern sexual difference.<sup>26</sup> Michael McKeon summarizes the thrust of this scholarship, writing that "the customary distinction between the genders along a shared and common spectrum" was, over the course of the eighteenth century, superseded by "the tendency to view men and women as basically different from each other, separate ways of being whose difference is crucially marked by a preference for the other sex and crucially mediated by the existence of a category of people who, on the contrary, prefer the same sex."<sup>27</sup> Kristina Straub has located Colley Cibber within this context, pointing out how Cibber's "resistance to a dichotomous and relational structure of gender and sexuality that set masculinity off against both the femininity of women and the newly emergent role of the homosexual male arises out of a conservative impulse. Cibber's tropes encode meanings from an older order of sexuality that resists the new."<sup>28</sup> Cibber's resistance to

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Harvey, "The Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies, and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth-Century" *The Historical Journal* 45.4 (2002): 899–916, reviews the substantial scholarship that traces the shift from a one-sex to a two-sex system.

<sup>27</sup> Michael McKeon, "The Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sexuality Hypothesis," *Signs, Sex: A Thematic Issue* 37.4 (2012): 791-801. The issue's symposium includes further commentary from leading researchers, including Thomas Laqueur's "The Rise of Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Historical Context and Historiographical Implications," 802-812; Laura Gowing's "Women's Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England," 813-822; Tim Hitchcock's "The Reformulation of Sexual Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century England," 823-831; and Randolph Trumbach's "The Transformation of Sodomy from the Renaissance to the Modern World and Its General Sexual Consequences," 832-847.

<sup>28</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 50.

emergent sexual ideology, then, marks not a particularly progressive stance, but rather recourse to a residual paradigm. Straub, therefore, acknowledges that the “antihomophobic and feminist politics” of her own analysis are not specific to Cibber, but to her own critical point of view; rather, Cibber’s position marks “the failure of sexual ideology to totalize, to completely dominate human experience and subjectivity.”<sup>29</sup> In the same vein, I do not wish to take a stance of arguing that Cibber’s mongrelization of tragedy constitutes any kind of feminist politics; rather, I instead hope to uncover the complex mechanisms by which sexual ideology took shape in the period and the way in which the stage and its generic structures offered a site for imagining those processes. Cibber’s tragic stage, as I show, is not so much concerned with masculinity or femininity, as gender broadly conceived, and he thematizes the fluidity of gender roles through formal experimentations with tragedy and comedy. Perhaps most importantly, I would argue, is that Cibber’s play with gender and genre, though staked in a cultural paradigm shift, is not fraught with anxiety; his compositions ardently embrace the possibility of producing bodily pleasure, even within a revered genre such as tragedy. Resisting the critical mandate that tragic form be tied to moral improvement, Cibber’s body of work provides rationale for the boogeyman of the tragicomic; Cibber revalues mixed genres as an expression of personal and professional freedom and celebrates mongrel forms as a source of *jouissance*.

In taking this argumentative direction, I attempt a second order of critical intervention. Much energy has been dedicated in recent years to examining the cultural work of eighteenth-century

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

tragedy, and it is conceivable that Joseph Addison's views rather than those of Colley Cibber inform the majority of that scholarship. Consider, for example, the two following influential critical narratives about tragedy and gender in the period. Laura Brown, in her influential essay, "The Defenseless Woman and the Development of English Tragedy," argues that the passivity of the she-tragedy's protagonist becomes the linchpin in England's transition from aristocratic ideology to bourgeois morality as the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth.<sup>30</sup> "The female protagonist," she declares "is the crucial catalyst in the major transition of Restoration and eighteenth-century dramatic history."<sup>31</sup> As the nation moved from the land economy of Charles II to the burgeoning middle classes and expanding trade networks of early mercantile capitalism, so too did the tastes of London audiences change, shifting from the heroic drama of Dryden to the pathetic register of playwrights such as Thomas Otway and Nicholas Rowe. These tragedies played on stages from as early as the 1680s and on into the 1710s, Brown argues, and formed a new genre known as "she-tragedy," creating a new kind of heroine that, while it gave women "extraordinary prominence," also cast tragic heroines as passive victims.<sup>32</sup> What is played out on tragedy's stage, the paradoxical centralization of the female protagonist coupled with the divestment of her agency, is mirrored culturally in middle-class women who found themselves displaced in the early eighteenth century's newly emergent model of economic production. The valorization of this passivity in she-tragedy, therefore, produced a new grid of valuation upon which to plot the plight of the middle-class woman. Brown concludes, "The fully

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<sup>30</sup> Laura Brown, "The Defenseless Woman and the Development of English Tragedy," *SEL* 22 (1982): 429-443.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

developed cult of womanhood joins chastity, sexlessness, innocence, and moral purity to simple helplessness, and the result is a new female prototype whose hegemony extends over more than two hundred years.”<sup>33</sup>

In Brown’s thesis, England’s social reordering plays out and around a passive tragic figure that is female. Lisa Freeman’s *Character’s Theater*, however, seeks a reevaluation of tragedy’s trajectory at the end of the seventeenth century by arguing that tragedy favored not passive femininity, but a model of ideal masculinity constituted against the expulsion of corrupting female agents.<sup>34</sup> Like Brown, Freeman’s formulation attempts to link the development of dramatic form with social history, specifically the rise of the bourgeois individual and the emergence of middle class ideology; however, in Freeman’s analysis tragedy scripts the narrative of a changing nation through characters who are dominantly male, not female. Freeman points to the “common sentiment” of the period that “tragedy has strong affinities with and responsibilities to a distinct form of masculinity,” a manhood, she suggests, that is established through the rejection of virulent femininity.<sup>35</sup> Acknowledging the rise of the genre known as she-tragedy, Freeman counters Brown’s argument by suggesting that though the plays featured professional actresses with newly realized economic and social power, “the narratives of those tragedies, with their attending web of motifs, themes, and allusions, consistently attempted to position the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa Freeman, *Character’s Theatre*, 87-144.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 91. See Freeman’s analysis of John Dennis’ prologue to the tragedy *Iphigenia* (1700) (91).

*female characters* as ideologically marginal.”<sup>36</sup> Tragedy, therefore, provisionally stages a definitively male hero who stands as a “metonymic emblem” for the nation.<sup>37</sup>

The problems in reconciling these two theses about eighteenth-century tragedy are manifold.<sup>38</sup> Tragedy either centralizes an intensely pathetic female figure (Brown’s she-tragedian) or an ideal imagined masculinity (Freeman’s heroic masculinity), but never, it would seem, both. There is a critical quarrel over whose narrative occupies the privileged position in tragedy’s ostensibly unilateral aim of establishing something resembling a national master narrative. By giving priority to female heroines or strictly emphasizing male heroes, the relationship between gender and genre becomes an either/or proposition. Tragedy would seem to only be *about* masculinity or conversely *about* femininity, rather than, say, gender as a category more generally. Both studies, then, have a tendency to approach genre, in this case tragedy, as a closed set, rather than acknowledging what Wai Chee Dimock and other contemporary scholars have called the “unfinishability” of generic systems.<sup>39</sup> These arguments, I believe, may elide the complexities of the way in which the drama of the period could also serve as a site in which to dramatize, very simply, the “unfinishability” of gender. On Cibber’s tragic stage, for example, the hierarchies that organize gender and genre are constantly put into crisis in order to create spaces of pleasure and play. Tragedy is frequently mirrored with comedy; gender performance is

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>38</sup> In terms of chronology, Brown’s essay takes stock of the she-tragedies of the later Restoration, while Freeman’s study begins with Rowe’s *Fair Penitent* (1702). These respective critical narratives, however, overlap significantly.

<sup>39</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge," 1377. Dimock continues, “Even ancient genres such as tragedy and epic (which Aristotle discusses in the *Poetics*) get messed up as more and more unrecognizable objects lay claim to those titles” (1378).

rewritten, revised, and reversed. The generic stage on which British culture played out shifting notions of sex and gender was perhaps more unruly and diverse than studies by Brown and Freeman intimate.

In the following pages I continue my exploration of Cibber's mongrel mixtures of laughter and tears. I first take up Cibber's early career and his initial attempt at writing for the tragic stage in his oriental tragedy *Xerxes* (1699). In *Xerxes*, I analyze the way the roles of the tragically effeminate king and his dramatically comic poet frame mixed genres and fluid gender as violent spectacles and pleasurable productions. The chapter then turns to Cibber's parodic burlesque of Nathaniel Lee's popular heroic tragedy *The Rival Queens* (1677). In *The Rival Queens* (1710), Cibber casts men in parts written for women and in doing so distorts, for comic effect, the binary structures that organize the stage and the larger culture to which the theater is tied, establishing, with gusto, genre-bending as a practice of bawdy play. I move then to Cibber's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tragical History of King Richard III* (1699) in which Cibber adds a travesty role for a young actress who acts as both an agent of satire and object of sentiment. This spectacular part, as I will show, disrupts gendered narratives about pathos that were frequently attached to the tragic genre. Lastly, I turn to Cibber's tragedies that he wrote for the Drury Lane stage, a spate of highly unsuccessful plays produced between 1705 and 1724 that featured a cast familiar from sentimental comedies such as Cibber's *The Careless Husband*: Anne Bracegirdle, Robert Wilks, Barton Booth, and Cibber himself. In these plays, I suggest, Cibber rewrites tragedy in comic form, mixing the loftiest of genres with romance, sentiment, and happy

endings. Such compositional strategies suggest that the bloody predicaments of tragedy can best be resolved through the form and content of comedy: that is, the stuff of love and marriage.

## II. Tragic King and Comic Poet in Cibber's *Xerxes* (1699)

While Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift; or Sir Novelty Fashion* (1696) proclaimed the budding playwright London's "high priest of comedy," Cibber soon after composed a stunningly bloody Oriental tragedy for the stage at Lincoln's Inn's Fields.<sup>40</sup> *Xerxes* (1698) was a critical and commercial failure; however, the play is significant, I argue, in that analysis of the play reveals Cibber's positive view of both mixed genres and gender trouble, a trademark of the playwright's writing for the tragic stage more generally.<sup>41</sup> *Xerxes* pairs tragedy with comedy and conflates masculinity with femininity in order to create a stage drama that emphasizes entertainment value over moral instruction. Specifically, the titular character Xerxes, originally played by lead actor John Verbruggen, is a once-heroic military leader who abandons the battlefield for the unmanly pursuits of the sensual world.<sup>42</sup> Rather than figuring Xerxes' faltering heroic masculinity as a tragedy, however, the play instead closely links the leader's failed gender performance to the

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<sup>40</sup> Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber*, 29. Colley Cibber came to the Drury Lane company in September of 1690 and played a variety of small parts in plays by Southerne, Otway, Congreve, and others; however, as Koon notes, the "only way Cibber could break through the barrier was to write a play for himself" (25). The result was *Love's Last Shift* (1696). Leonard Ashley writes, "Loud applause told Cibber that he had found his character as an actor" (*Colley Cibber*, 28).

<sup>41</sup> Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber*, 36, speculates that the play possibly played only once judging from a satirical reference in a *Tatler* paper from June 16, 1709.

<sup>42</sup> Laura, *English Dramatic Form*, 71, notes that the period between 1677 and 1707 saw many affective tragedies on the stage dramatizing emperors in decline; especially popular were Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) and John Dryden's *All for Love* (1677).

comic antics of “the Poet,” the engineer of the king’s spectacles and pageants, a part played by the comedian William Bowen.<sup>43</sup> By twinning tragic king and comic poet, the play suggests that Xerxes’ effeminacy, what paradoxically includes his violent pursuit of Elizabeth Barry’s Tamira, can be likened to the dramatic entertainments organized by the sycophantic Poet. Tragedy mirrors comedy and masculinity is likened to femininity, collapsing, with great relish, the structures that typically organize both the stage and the society it represents. Bridget Orr’s reading of the play emphasizes the hollow theatricality of Xerxes’ conquests, arguing that it amounts to Cibber’s critique of the tyrannical Xerxes’ ambition.<sup>44</sup> I would suggest, however, that the play’s metatheatricality, first and foremost, attempts to make a case for tragedy’s entertaining rather than instructive qualities.

The prologue to *Xerxes*, delivered by Thomas Betterton, announces the play’s concern with unsettling generic structures, and the opening comment addresses the failure of tragedy and comedy to properly instruct audiences: “*Long have we strove, with Passion and Grimace, / To show you Vice and Vertue's diff'ring Face*” the speaker opines, but alas, “*For what you shou'd*

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<sup>43</sup> Colley Cibber, *Xerxes; A Tragedy* (London: Printed for Richard Basset [etc.], 1699), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0189.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0189.xml). All citations refer to this edition of the play. References are to page number when possible. The cast list includes a “Mr. Boin,” a variation of “Bowen.” Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1973), 2: 251-253, indicate that William Bowen was performing with Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1698 and would have played the part of the Poet in Cibber’s tragedy. Cibber himself does not appear in the cast list.

<sup>44</sup> Bridget Orr writes, “Cibber’s mordant vision of the imbrication of imperial pretension in theatricality, where Emperors imitate player-Kings, suggests a skepticism about the mechanisms of ambition which reflected on his own newly expansionist culture, as well as more obvious past and present seekers after universal monarchy” (*Empire on the English Stage*, 125).



*contemn, is your Example*” (lines 1-2).<sup>45</sup> Though the stage attempts to reform through comic satire or tragic flaws, audiences are, the prologue intimates, contrary in their responses. Spectators take pleasure in, not warning from, depictions of vice. For example, a “Powder’d Fop” is often admonished on stage, the prologue points out, yet viewers still strive to emulate the character (line 17). Further, while the stage dramatizes “the Fate of Jilting,” female spectators nevertheless insist on scrambling after sparks (line 20). Written shortly after Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), the prologue gestures at the inadequacy of genre to initiate the kind of moral improvement for which reformers such as Collier had called during the 1690s. “*In vain we wear the Buskin, or the Sandal,*” the speaker huffs, “*Your judging false makes our Instruction Scandal*” (lines 10-11). The prologue figures the theater as a source of mimetic desire, as traditional generic operations cease. Comedy is tragedy and tragedy may as well be comedy, as neither produces the desired social reform in spectators. Rather, audiences simply accept whatever it is they are shown on stage. Taking a gibe at Jeremy Collier, the speaker intimates that the illicitness of the subject material drives young readers to rush to even the reformer’s writings: “*Girls may read him, not for the Truth he says, / But to be pointed to the Bawdy Plays*” (lines 27-28). The prologue sets forth a model of spectatorship, gently satirized though it may be, rooted in illicit pleasure rather than moral improvement. While the speech concludes by imploring that audiences “*begin to day / To make a just Construction of a Play*” (lines 45-46), present is the idea that the audiences of *Xerxes*, much

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<sup>45</sup> Citations from “THE PROLOGUE. Spoken by Mr. *Batterton* [sic]” in Cibber’s *Xerxes; A Tragedy* refer to line number.

like the young readers of Collier, will surely find secret delight in whatever salacious scenes the drama brings forth.

While the prologue discusses the failure of dramatic genres to reform audiences, the first act focuses on anxieties concerning the collapse of a different order: gender as an organizing social structure. As the play begins, the Persian army has suffered a recent defeat at Salamis, and the men are smarting over the blow to their manhood. The opening dialogue between the soldiers Mardonius and Arantes suggests the strong alliance between the soldiers' martial prowess and a virile form of masculinity. When Arantes declares "I am a Soldier, Sir," Mardonius responds with a pithy, "Then talk like one" (1). Arantes replies, "I wou'd not talk; the Tongue's a Woman's weapon; / While there's a *Greek* on Earth, my Arm shall speak my Thoughts" (1). Arantes' preference for the "Arm" over the "Tongue" represents the men's hope to reclaim their masculine dominance through future military valor; their leader Xerxes, however, known as the "Drooping King," shows no interest in reclaiming his honor and instead indulges in pageants of false victory (2). Thomas Betterton's Artabanus describes the situation thusly:

He has resolv'd to enter *Persia*,  
In a splendid Triumph, I saw him move  
Amidst his shameful Pageantry, in all  
The Haughty Pride, and State of an Insutling [sic]  
Conqueror; Poor Slaves, and Vagabonds are Hir'd,  
To Personate the seeming Captives of  
A Real Victory; vast Empty Coffers,

Suppos'd of Treasure taken from the Enemy,  
High Castled Elephants, Rich Gilded Trophies,  
Spoils, and Armour Trumpets, and Songs prepare his way,  
The People stare upon the Gawdy show,  
And Rend the Skies with Ecchoed Wellcomes: [sic]  
While he in solemn Pace stalks Proudly on,  
And ev'n out swells the Hero of a Theatre.

(4)

Artabanus' description of Xerxes' luxurious lifestyle bears the hallmarks of Orientalist discourse; however, also prominent in the passage is the idea that Xerxes' effeminacy is highly theatrical.<sup>46</sup> Like an actor, Xerxes now personates a hero's triumphant procession, complete with a hired supporting cast of "seeming Captives" and prop-like "Empty Coffers." Artabanus declares a few lines later that Xerxes "ev'n out swells the Hero of a Theatre" (4). This highly self-conscious moment brings into view and implicitly likens both the spectacle of the now-effeminate warrior and the evening's entertainment that the playhouse audience has paid to see. When the aforementioned pageant inevitably makes its way onto the stage, then, Xerxes, completely out of his senses, stands unwittingly at the center of the parade, ordering "that the Wind receive Three Hundred Lashes" and a band of archers attack the sun (8). The loss of

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), famously outlines such characteristics: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal,'" 40.

Xerxes' heroic masculinity is just as much a spectacle as the pageant on stage, from which he is now inseparable.<sup>47</sup>

While the soldiers regard their leader's failed manhood as a tragedy, the play troubles this static interpretation through the performance of the Poet, a character who is the "Orderer of this Days Foolery" and a possible proxy for Cibber himself (5). Referred to as the "Mungril Poet" by Xerxes' men and "the Envy of *Parnassus*" by his admirers, the Poet is the architect of the pageant and the court masque (4, 5). Unlike Xerxes' crestfallen soldiers, the Poet considers the spectacles he creates on stage to be essentially comic:

While other Fools were drudging, to acquire  
A Name by the Pathetick, and the Dull sublime:  
I unthought of, or'e a Bottle, would now and then  
Surprize them with my Madrigals, my Songs,  
My Whimms, and Knick-Knacks  
Carry'd the Vogue of Town and Court before me;  
Whipt off the Lawrel from Dispairing Brows,  
And by the Hand of Merit fix'd it on my own.

(5)

Describing his productions as the stuff of "Whimms" and "Knick-Knacks" rather than sublime or pathetic, the poet's commentary authorizes a comic, and far more lighthearted, understanding of

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<sup>47</sup> See also Xerxes' theatrical masque in the play's second act.

the theatrics on stage, one that comes to extend to the tragedy as a whole. Buoying this interpretive frame are the Poet's constant jokes, a series of barbs that provide both comic relief and establish critical distance between the audience and the play's tragic action. At the beginning of the second act, for example, Cleontes, one of Xerxes' sycophants, tells the Poet about the king's secret lust for the virtuous Tamira, played by Elizabeth Barry, and reveals that the Poet must help procure her. Rather than lamenting Tamira's fate, the Poet replies with the comical aside, "Possible! O ye Gods! A Pimp!" (11). When Cleontes, making use of the high-flown diction of tragedy, claims that Tamira's name is "*Virtue*," the Poet replies with the deflating barb, "*Virtue!* She does not belong to the Court, Sir, does she?" (11). The joke counts on both the likeness of and discrepancy between the world on stage and off for laughs, as do the Poet's subsequent remarks about the unlikelihood of ever finding a woman who would not, for love or money, cuckold her husband. In this way the Poet acts as a mediator who overturns the play's already unsteady structures: masculinity and femininity, comedy and tragedy, England and the East, and the stage and reality.

When the Poet disappears by the end of the play's second act, the stage gives way to an endgame comprised of violent, sexually-charged theatrics in which Xerxes attempts to rape Barry's Tamira. Xerxes' violent pursuit of the virtuous female lead displaces and stands in for the pageant and masque orchestrated by the Poet, a move that figures rape, and the slaughter that follows, as its own kind of gratuitously violent, yet nevertheless entertaining, script. Xerxes' description of his assault on Tamira, for example, includes a prominent prop, an actual torture rack, as well as disturbingly graphic dialogue describing the promised sexual assault. Xerxes imagines pinning Tamira to the ground "With smiling Spite" so that her "very Soul shall feel the

Rape” (30). Tamira’s resistance is marked with a similar aggressive theatricality. Realizing that Xerxes finds pleasure in her pain and pain in her potential pleasure, Tamira takes on the role of harlot and acts out false desire in order that she remain “safe in that foul disguise” (40). Indeed, the trick works, as Xerxes becomes thoroughly disgusted and confesses his inverted emotional state: “Thy Frowns were Smiles to me” (38). In the throes of escalating theatrics, the tragedy ends in an outright bloodbath. Xerxes is murdered, Artaban dies, and Tamira is driven mad by her own grief; she takes her own life. The mounting body count signals both the serious dangers and potentially thrilling shock value of the kind of gendered and generic role playing in *Xerxes*. Tamira’s last words beg the play’s survivors to warn her infant son of the perils of “wild Ambition, or too powerful Love,” yet such over-the-top theatricality has provided the play with its blood sport. By bringing together the tragic madness of Xerxes, the comic spectacles of the poet, and gratuitous scenes of near-rape and violence in parallel ways, the play, therefore, suggests that the action of the tragic stage, however disturbing morally, might also provide theater audiences with a perverse evening of gruesome entertainment.<sup>48</sup>

### III. Tragic Burlesque: Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* and Colley Cibber’s *The Rival Queens*

In 1710, Colley Cibber performed the lead role in a comical-tragedy he ostensibly wrote in the late 1690s, a play entitled *The Rival Queens*, the title a riff on Nathaniel Lee’s popular heroic

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<sup>48</sup> That the play failed commercially signals, among other things, the unwillingness of audiences and critics to accept Cibber’s recuperation of mixed genres.

tragedy *The Rival Queens* (1677).<sup>49</sup> *The Rival Queens* marks an amplification of Cibber's earlier experiments with the entertaining pleasures of tragedy. The parody abandons any semblance of tragic decorum and instead styles itself as an outright burlesque, featuring an all-male cast and cross-dressed roles. Marjorie Garber has discussed cross-dressing as a marker of "category crisis," that is, "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable" and indeed, in *The Rival Queens* the bodies of the cross-dressed actors act as powerful visual markers of the massive destabilization of hierarchies that Cibber's parody enacts more generally.<sup>50</sup> Cibber's experiments with gender and genre in *The Rival Queens*, I argue, create what Garber calls a "*space of possibility structuring and confounding culture... not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself.*"<sup>51</sup> In this section, then, I offer analysis of both Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* and Colley Cibber's *The Rival Queens* in order to demonstrate the way in which Cibber's parody exploits, for comic effect, the gendered and generic structures that organize Lee's *The Rival Queens*. In Lee's *The Rival Queens* the reversal of gender roles becomes a tragedy in and of itself, and a sign of the crumbling empire; however, in Cibber's

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<sup>49</sup> Cheryl Wanko, "Colley Cibber's *The Rival Queens*: A New Consideration," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theater Research* 3.2 (1988): 38-39, points out that though evidence exists of the play's performance in the 1690s, the first recorded performance of *The Rival Queens* was on June 29, 1710 at the Queen's Theatre in Haymarket with Colley Cibber playing the role of Alexander. The production featured an all-male cast of the company's leading comedians. Timothy J. Viator and William Burling, "Introduction," *The Rival Queens in The Plays of Colley Cibber* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2001), 422, find evidence of at least seven productions, with the last recorded performance in 1780 at Covent Garden. The cast was comprised of both men and women.

<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 10. Beth H. Friedman-Romell, "Breaking the Code: Toward a Reception Theory of Theatrical Cross-Dressing in Eighteenth-Century London" in *Theater Journal* 47.4 (1995): 465, hypothesizes that unlike breeches roles performed by women, male actors cross-dressing as females was "rather uncommon" on the eighteenth-century stage, especially for the duration of a full-length play. See also: Jill Campbell, "When Women Turn Men": Gender Reversal in Fielding's Plays," *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Leslie Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993), 58-89.

<sup>51</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, 17.

production, generic hybridity and gender confusion once again create an atmosphere of bawdy merriment in which the actors irreverently re-imagine the stakes of the tragic genre.

On March 17, 1677 the King's Company's production of Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens; or The Death of Alexander the Great*, appeared upon the London stage, offering audiences a tragedy deeply fascinated with, and troubled by, miscast gender roles.<sup>52</sup> Set in Babylon, *The Rival Queens* details the fatal love triangle resulting from the victories gained by Alexander in his conquest of Persia, what is played out between Alexander and his two wives, the virtuous Statira and the power-mad Roxana. The two women compete for Alexander's affections, and inevitably, Roxana murders her rival, Statira. As for Alexander, his own men conspire against him and, in the end, take his life. As scholars such as Felicity Nussbaum have noted, the play, with its central triad of an effete conqueror and two towering females, "overturns traditional gender distinctions and challenges sexual stereotypes."<sup>53</sup> Granted, the characters of the play certainly strain against conventional gender roles; however, it is important to note that the tragedy's trajectory nevertheless depends upon characterizing that gendered behavior as unnatural, grotesque and in at least one instance, fatal. In Lee's *The Rival Queens*, the messy breakdown of neat binary gender roles is in and of itself grounds for tragedy.

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), points out that *The Rival Queens* "quickly became and remained a stock play"; Howe uncovers records for performances on "at least twelve separate occasions between 1660 and 1700, on thirty-six occasions between 1700 and 1729 and on thirty-five between 1729 and 1746," 205-206.

<sup>53</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 75. Nussbaum treats both Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* and Colley Cibber's *The Rival Queens* (61-91).



At the center of the love triangle, stands the cowed and effeminate Alexander, who both refuses to pursue military conquests and is unable to assert patriarchal control over the two women in his life. A familiar type on the London stage, Alexander is a forerunner both of Antony from Dryden's *All for Love* (1677), which debuted in December of the same year, and Cibber's titular *Xerxes*. Unlike Cibber's later portrait of a military leader past his prime, however, Lee's Alexander isn't explicitly linked to a comic proxy. Rather, Alexander's faltering manhood is an unremitting source of anxiety for his men, particularly the older soldier Clytus, who refuses to wear the decadent Persian robes Alexander has adopted.<sup>54</sup> Referencing Alexander's father, Clytus declares: "Philip fought men - but Alexander women" (4.2.142).<sup>55</sup> By reminding Alexander of his weakened position in the play's tense love triangle, the underlying implication is that acting like a woman threatens to literally make one into a woman, even when descended from a genealogy of virile male warriors. Alexander's inability to perform therefore would seem to paradoxically exclude him from his biological destiny, nullifying his relationship to his heroic father. Alexander responds to Clytus with a sardonic retreat to his history on the battlefield:

Was I a woman, when, like Mercury  
I left the walls to fly amongst my foes,  
And like a baited lion dyed myself

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<sup>54</sup> Laura Brown discusses Alexander's pathetic moments: his fainting and pleading with his lover (*English Dramatic Form*, 72).

<sup>55</sup> Nathaniel Lee, *The Rival Queens*, ed. P.F. Vernon (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1970). All citations refer to this edition of the text. Citations refer to act and line number.

All over with the blood of those bold hungers?

(4.2.161-164)

Clytus replies simply “’Twas all bravado, for before you leapt, / You saw that I had burst the gates in sunder” (4.2.168-169). Alexander’s histrionic dealings with Roxana and Statira in the present have seemingly undone his glorious deeds in the past, as Clytus implies that Alexander’s former heroism was nothing more than its own brand of shallow performance. Granted, Bridget Orr reads Alexander’s effeminacy as a, “a critique of the effect of a Francophile Court’s adoption of Gallic fashion and effeminacy” and to be sure, Lee’s play depends upon the power of xenophobia to dramatize the fall of the patriarch, a role that would have been linked to the reign of Charles II and the notoriously debauched Restoration court.<sup>56</sup> Lee’s faltering Alexander, however, also perhaps reflects a broader set of cultural fears about, as well as a fascination with, the waning power of masculine heroism and the aristocratic values such gender constructions entail.

Roxana, Alexander’s frenzied, pregnant murderess of a wife, is another role around which the gender confusion in the play blazes. The stability of the nation is in danger due to Alexander’s Persian effeminacy, but also Roxana’s hyperbolic aspirations, she who, though marked as culturally “other,” is not directly aligned with the Persian camp. While the Persian women are linked through mothers and sisters, Roxana is, much as with Alexander, isolated from her matrilineage. In a description of her earlier childhood, for instance, Roxana describes her formative experiences with other women:

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<sup>56</sup> Bridget Orr writes, “Lee’s depiction of Alexander offered a rebuke to a Court notorious for its license which had also, some years previously, adopted Persian vest” (*Empire on the English Stage*, 120).

When in my nonage I at Zogdia lived,  
Amongst my she-companions I would reign;  
Drew 'em from idleness and little arts  
Of coining looks and laying snares for lovers;  
Broke all their glasses and their tires tore;  
Taught 'em like Amazons to ride and chase  
Wild beasts in deserts, and to master men.

(3.77-83)

Roxana describes herself as an outsider who not only stands apart from the community, but actively transforms her surroundings; she draws other women from their domestic arts (the practice of procuring lovers through circumnavigation of male constructs), teaching them instead such Amazonian skills as riding, hunting, and the means to “master” men. The image of the Amazon profoundly resonates as the body’s breast is severed, thereby dismantling the biological function of maternity, excluding Roxana not only from a past genealogy, but a future one as well.

The play repeatedly imagines Roxana’s rejection of conventional feminine social roles and biological burdens as grotesque, what is accomplished through the recurrent motif of the breast. The wounded body part comes to function as a synecdoche for the mutilated Amazonian woman who violates her body in order to perform as warrior, as well as Roxana’s lust for power

over Alexander. Roxana initially describes her encounter with Alexander in the bridal bed as follows:

What said he not, when in the bridal bed  
He clasped my yielding body in his arms,  
When, with his fiery lips devouring mine,  
And molding with his hand my throbbing breast,  
He swore the gloves of heav'n and earth were vile  
To those rich worlds; and talked, and kissed, and loved,  
And made me shame the morning with my blushes.

(3.106-113)

The breasts are imagined as globes, the scope of the entire earth, and the female body, held and molded by the male, symbolizes the dominion of Alexander, the imperial and sexual conqueror. As foreshadowed by the breasts' throbbing, however, that same female body will eventually become monstrous and homicidal, suggesting the loss of Alexander's power. In only the next act, Roxana declares again to Cassander: "Then my veins swell and my arms grasp the poles, / My breasts grow bigger with the vast delight, / 'Tis length of rapture and an age of fury" (4.1.193-195). Roxana's breasts are still metaphorically linked to imperial dominion, this time, though, one driven not by the surrender of amorous coupling, but the frenzy of her own appetite for power, as the female form becomes distorted and grotesque.

Inevitably, the climax of the play brings together Alexander and Roxana in a spiral of tragic violence. Though pregnant, Roxana's lust leads her to murder her rival Statira, and though Alexander longs for revenge, the burden of fatherhood, prevents him from slaying the transgressive, dangerous woman. Alexander can only express his desire to commit an act of violence against his wife by recasting Roxana as a man, and by imagining her as if she were in fact of a different sex: "O, that thou wert a man, that I might drive / Thee round the world, and scatter thy contagion, / As gods hurl mortal plagues when they are angry" (5.1.193-195). The threat of physical violence contained in Alexander's plea (to drive one around the world, to scatter thy contagion) is an echo of the imaginative violence of transforming Roxana into that which can be physically combated. Alexander's speech identifies the very root of Lee's tragedy, which is that, Roxana is *not* a man, though she *acts like* one. In other words, that she is a woman who is performing masculinity renders her problematic and difficult to combat, as well as virulent and contagious. Likewise, Alexander's tragedy, at the play's conclusion, is that he cannot with honor ever revenge the death of his wife Statira because, though he *acts* like a woman, he is, in body, also still a man.

If Nathaniel Lee's tragedy associates aberrant gender performance with the tragic downfall of an empire, the function of Cibber's parody is to wildly distort Lee's broken gender binary and establish it as a site of comic sexual excess. Cibber achieves this feat by trading in the conventions of tragedy for the freedoms that come with working in explicitly hybrid genres, such as burlesque and comical-tragedy. Though the basics of the plot remain, Cibber transforms Lee's Babylonian dirge into a comic romp through the gutters of the city. While the setting ostensibly

remains in Babylon, the city is recast as a contemporary London, and the distant Persia becomes a stand-in for France. Alexander's wives are re-imagined as London prostitutes, played on stage by male actors; Alexander's men, meanwhile, are transformed into rakes with voracious appetites for commodities of all kinds, from snuffboxes to courtesans. Alexander himself, a part played in 1710 by Colley Cibber, is translated into the effete, modern-day fop. The vertiginous shifts Cibber's parody enacts therefore dramatize a world in which gendered constructs have been comically, rather than tragically, turned upside down.

In Cibber's *The Rival Queens*, the transgressive Roxana is no longer a woman acting like a man, as in Lee's play; rather, the role of Roxana is played by an actual man who is, conversely, acting like a woman, a reversal which, the play's humor assumes, is in no way the same. As Garber has written, "one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notion of binarity, putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male,' whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural."<sup>57</sup> The cross-dressed male playing Cibber's Roxana, then, simply by appearance, calls into question the stability of the gender role being performed. Roxana again, as before, recalls her younger years:

When in my bib and apron I at Zogdia  
Boarding school did learn to dance;  
O'er my she playfellows still I would reign,  
Drew from chalk and oatmeal, and the girlish games  
Of man and wife, and making pies of dirt,

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<sup>57</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests*, 10.

Broke all their playthings, and their babies tore,  
Taught 'em to ride on five-barred gates,  
To scratch and quarrel, and to box like drawmen.

(3.21-28)<sup>58</sup>

The passage, with its references to contemporary gendered activities (the “girlish games”), depends upon the body of the male actor for its punchline. With the reference to the figure of the Amazon absent, the literal man on stage stands in place of that image, presenting instead to the audience the visual gag of having Roxana, a masculinized woman, played by an actual man in drag. Because the humor relies upon the dissonance between the two, Cibber is ceaselessly attentive to the physical body of the actor playing Roxana, frequently drawing attention to his masculine extremities. Alexander’s man Cassander, who is attracted to Roxana, observes: “Her look, her words, her every motion fires me” (3.29), absurdly building the sexual tension of the scene. Later in the act, Statira refers to Roxana’s “lantern jaws” (3.122), and Roxana refers to her own “mutton fist” (4.1.84). The gender confusion plays for laughs, and Cibber’s clever reversal generically transforms the binary logic of Lee’s play from the stuff of tragedy to the makings of comedy.

Incidentally, Cibber’s rendition of Alexander is not subject to the same treatment as Roxana. Cibber does not cast the role with a woman player; rather, Alexander is made feminine in degree rather than kind in that he is played by Cibber himself, an actor known, by this time,

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<sup>58</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Rival Queens* in *The Plays of Colley Cibber*, ed. Timothy J. Viator and William Burling (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2001). All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

primarily for his fop parts. Despite the absence of cross-dressing, however, the body of the actor remains an essential part of the comedy on stage. In the figure of Cibber's fop, sexual and commercial consumption are linked with a ravenous appetite, what infects the ranks of Alexander's men with consuming camaraderie:

O my Hephestion, raise thee on thy legs,  
Up to my lips, and jump into my mouth,  
Why hang thy arms so like a changeling!  
Kiss me, or else by heaven thou lov'st me not.

(3.45-48)

Rather than the twinning of sexual and imperial conquest, Cibber literalizes the fop's obsession with commercial consumption as he instead desires to literally consume his men. Alexander's longings are repeatedly articulated through hyperbolic or exaggerated metaphors, most circling around the body, as when he says to his men "Kiss me dear rogues, my heart, and lung, and guts / Are ever yours," (4.2.207-208). His foppish behavior, however, still creates tension with his men. When confronted by Clytus, for example, Cibber transposes the scene into one in which Clytus accuses Alexander of spending his time abusing prostitutes rather than fighting with men. Alexander replies: "Is then my glory come at last to this, Only to kick a whore" (4.2.245-246). While the scene mimics Lee's version, Cibber's Alexander resists recourse to a gender binary and does not suggest that kicking whores makes him a whore (as quarreling with women makes Lee's Alexander a woman); instead, Cibber's Alexander signifies as a fop, an excessive gender



performance that cannot be reduced to “femaleness.” Alexander seems aware of this illegibility himself when he says earlier in the play: “Why was I born a god, proclaimed a prince, / Yet never could arrive at common sense!”(2.273-274). What Alexander represents in Cibber’s play, then, is a model of masculinity that cannot be reduced to the safety of a binary definition.

In 1704 an anonymous dialogue appeared staging a conversation between “Nat. Lee the Tragedian” and “Colly C---r the Plagiary” in which the two playwrights discuss at length what was presumed to be Cibber’s parody of Lee’s *The Rival Queens*.<sup>59</sup> Though Lee accuses Cibber of plagiarism and of irrevocably altering his tragedy by relegating his heroic characters to the seedy London underworld, Cibber responds with characteristic good humor. The conversation proceeds as follows:

C: The prejudice of your Passion gives a worse construction of it than the piece deserves; the pit and the Boxes were far wide of your Opinion, they laughed heartily at the performance, and seemed well enough pleased with the Entertainment.

Nat: I have seen the Action of a Dog, and the Dancing of a Monkey, excite the same Passion, and for ought I know are the more agreeable Diversions to your entertainment.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Visits from the Shade*, ed. Arthur Freeman, (Garland, NY: Garland Publishing, 1972), 21.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Though the dialogue pits Cibber and Lee against one another, an examination of Cibber's strategies in *The Rival Queens* reveals a likeness between the two playwright's positions. Lee compares Cibber's composition to the tricks of trained animals. Cibber's parody, however, simply re-visualizes Lee's own hyperbolic and often grotesque representations of gender; he reclaims the tragic gender trouble of Lee's drama as an explicitly comic space. As the reference to playhouse audiences who "laughed heartily" intimates, *The Rival Queens* jettisons any moral imperative in favor of pure "Entertainment." Cibber's lampoon therefore both exposes and exploits the binary logic through which Lee's tragedy implicitly operates.

#### IV. Shakespearean Travesty

The original cast of Colley Cibber's 1699 adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* (1597) featured a striking, and typically unremarked upon, actor: Miss Dennis Chock, an eleven-year-old girl who travestied the role of Richard Duke of York, the king's young nephew and innocent victim.<sup>61</sup> In this section I investigate the role of the cross-dressed child in Cibber's adaptation, a casting move that, I argue, generates an atmosphere of generic confusion that both capitalizes on and problematizes depictions of gendered violence. Figured variously as tragic and comic, an agent of satire and an object of pity, Chock's travesty part visually disrupts dominant narratives about gender, feeling, and power. The cross-dressed child acts as a radically unstable signifier who is, by turns, a token of comedy and a symbol of

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<sup>61</sup> *The Biographical Dictionary of Actors* records that Miss Chock was born in 1689; she may have been related to Alexander Chock, the Duke's Company scene keeper of the 1660s (3:206).

tragedy, conjuring up laughter soon followed by tears. Felicity Nussbaum, in her discussion of Peg Woffington's travesty roles, observes that "travesty roles are especially difficult to sustain in tragedy," and she argues that "tragedy, especially she-tragedy, resisted the inclusion of travesty roles that worked to disrupt its nostalgic assertions."<sup>62</sup> I argue here that travesty contests the static narratives that genres such as she-tragedy, driven by the passivity of pathetic female heroines, reinforced. While scholars typically focus on Colley Cibber's own spectacular performance in *Richard III*, the notorious young actress, I argue, comes to stand at the center of the bloody spectacle, even serving as a comic mirror for Cibber's own performance of the deformed, tragic king.<sup>63</sup> Chock's travesty role is therefore central to the meaning of play, standing as an embodiment of Cibber's broader approach to the tragic genre, as well as a marker of the play's resistance to dominant tragic traditions and their attendant sexual ideology.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 225. Nussbaum attends particularly to Woffington's performance as the rake Lothario in Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703). Nussbaum also contends that "she-comedies" as a genre were more welcoming to "the ambiguously gendered characters and excess of identity that pointed toward modernity" (111).

<sup>63</sup> Cibber's relationship to cross-dressed women has been discussed within the context of his relationship with his sister, Charlotte Charke. See Kathryn Shevelow, *Charlotte*, 51-54, for a discussion of Charke's parody of Colley Cibber as a child, as well as Colley Cibber's rebuke of Charke for cross dressing outside of the theater (198-199).

<sup>64</sup> Julia Fawcett, "The Overexpressive Celebrity and the Deformed King: Recasting the Spectacle as Subject in Colley Cibber's *Richard III*," *PMLA* 126:4 (2011): 950-965, explores what she terms Cibber's "overexpression" in his adaptation of *The Tragical History of Richard III*, arguing that Cibber's role as Richard, with its emphasis on deformity as spectacle, became a way for Cibber to fashion and maintain his own public persona, as well as, with several inserted soliloquies, contemplate subjectivity. Fawcett acknowledges that the first act, upon which she bases a very large portion of her analysis, was cut from the original production; however she does not address the scenes, especially those featuring Chock, that were added to the play. By expanding the critical horizon to include the whole of Cibber's tragedy, what becomes clear is that Cibber was not only interested in his own subjectivity and celebrity, but that of others who acted as reflections, and upon whom his own "overexpression," was more than likely, contingent.

Up until Cibber's 1699 production of *The Tragical History*, from the Renaissance on through the Restoration, Richard III's nephews, Edward the Prince of Wales and Richard the Duke of York, had been played on stage by young male actors.<sup>65</sup> Cibber's Drury Lane adaptation, however, travestied the two roles by casting a "Mrs. Allison" as Edward the Prince of Wales and "Miss Chock" as the prince's precocious younger brother.<sup>66</sup> The actress listed as "Mrs. Allison" was, most likely, one of the Allison sisters, either Maria or Betty, about both of whom not much is known, except that both were cast in the parts of young boys and sometimes delivered prologues and epilogues. On the other hand, Miss Dennis Chock, who played the role of Richard Duke of York, had, by the tender age of 11, a storied history on the stage. Most likely hailing from a theater family, the child garnered a dubious kind of fame performing, occasionally in drag, bawdy prologues and epilogues, often appended to tragedies.<sup>67</sup> As Allardyce Nicoll notes, epilogues featuring children "uttering the most filthy obscenities in the licence [sic] of the epilogue" were not uncommon in the theater of the Restoration.<sup>68</sup> By the time Miss Chock played the role of the young Richard, she had performed in a number of these prologues and

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<sup>65</sup> Editor James R. Siemon, *Richard III* (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), explains that the roles in the 1689-90 season were played by two young boys, Tommy Kent and one unidentified (245).

<sup>66</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Tragical History of King Richard III, As It Is Acted at the Theater Royal* (London: Printed for B. Lintott...and A. Bettesworth [etc.], 1700), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0190.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0190.xml). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>67</sup> Miss Chock's lines from the epilogue of George Powell's *The Cornish comedy as it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Dorset-Garden by His Majesty's servants* (London: Printed for D. Brown at the Black Swan and Bible without Temple-Bar [etc.], 1696), Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>, indicate both that she lived a life in the theater and that this was a well-known fact: "I live, you know, where I can't but be well Taught" (47, line 12).

<sup>68</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama: 1660-1900*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923, 1952), 1: 265-266. Fred Burwick, *Playing to the Crowd: London Popular Theater, 1780-1830* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 9-26, addresses child actors in the later eighteenth century, specifically William Henry West Betty.

epilogues at both Drury Lane and Dorset Garden; her name appeared in the printed versions of George Powell's tragedy *Bonduca* (1695) and comedy *The Cornish Comedy* (1696), Elkanah Settle's opera *The World in the Moon* (1697), Charles Gildon's tragedy *Phaeton* (1698), and William Phillip's tragedy *The Revengeful Queen* (1698).<sup>69</sup> In at least two of these instances, her young age was explicitly advertised.<sup>70</sup> As Diana Solomon's research reflects, tragic plays were often concluded with an actress delivering a comic epilogue in order to accommodate, among other things, the audience's desire for "actresses' sex comedy."<sup>71</sup> Miss Chock's case, however, presents an additional level of contrast: the visual presentation of her child's body set against the sexual innuendo such epilogues often entailed. The girl-child's paradoxical innocent precocity therefore constitutes an appealing frisson, even figuring into the marketing of the play itself.

Before her appearance in *Richard III*, Miss Chock, much like Cibber, found success in breaking with generic decorum and violating sexual taboos. In the salacious epilogue appended

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<sup>69</sup> See George Powell, *Bonduca: or the British Heroine* (London: Printed for Richard Bentley, 1696), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0137.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0137.xml); George Powell, *The Cornish Comedy as It Is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Dorset-Garden by His Majesty's Servants* (London: Printed for D. Brown at the Black Swan and Bible without Temple-Bar [etc.], 1696), Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Elkanah Settle, *The World in the Moon an Opera as It Is Perform'd at the Theatre in Dorset-Garden by His Majesty's Servants* (London: Printed for Abel Roper, at the Black Boy over against St. Dunstan's Church, in Fleet-street, 1697), Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Charles Gildon, *Phaeton, or, The Fatal Divorce a Tragedy as It Is Acted at the Theatre Royal in Imitation of the Antients: with Some Reflections on a Book Call'd, A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (London: Printed for Abel Roper, at the Black-Boy over against St. Dunstans Church in Fleetstreet, 1698), Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; William Philips, *The Revengeful Queen* (London: Printed for P. Buck [etc.], 1698), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0320.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0320.xml). In *Phaeton*, Chock received only a very minor part in the prologue, as the bulk was delivered by the actor and actress playing the leads.

<sup>70</sup> The epilogue for Powell's *Bonduca* reminds readers that Miss Chock was "But Six Years Old" (epilogue), as does Powell's *The Cornish Comedy*: "Spoken by Miss CHALKE, Seven Years Old" (47).

<sup>71</sup> Diana Solomon, "Tragic Play, Bawdy Epilogue?" in *Prologues, Epilogues, Curtain-raisers, and Afterpieces: the Rest of the Eighteenth-Century London Stage*, eds. Daniel James Ennis and Judith Bailey Slagle, (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2007), 155. Autrey Nell Wiley, "Female Prologues and Epilogues in English Plays," *PMLA* 48:4 (1933): 1069, cites only two epilogues delivered by Chock.

to Powell's 1695 tragedy *Bonduca*, and indeed in nearly all of the epilogues she performed, Chock specifically addresses the male audience members, calling attention to her potential desirability: "*I am too Young for your kind Smiles to pray,*" she announces from the stage; a few lines later, referencing her sexual pre-pubesence, the child adds: "*our Cupid's Darts / Must first be Feather'd, e're we shoot at Hearts*" (lines 3, 6-7). In 1695's *The Cornish Comedy*, Miss Chock appears in the epilogue in order to bargain with the "Witty Gentlemen call'd *Beaus*" for the favor of the playwright, offering "my First Fruits when I'm a Woman" in exchange for a positive reception (lines 2, 6). Elkanah Settle's *The World in the Moon* in the following year builds on the sensational aspect of Miss Chock's earlier appearances as she is costumed "with a great Wig like a Beau." Her opening lines, addressed to "Gallants," up the ante on her former flirtation with the men of the audience:

THE Author sends me here, to win your Hearts  
 With this full Wig, and not his own Deserts;  
 For he believes, and I suppose you know,  
 There's nothing pleases more than a young Beau.

(lines 1-5)

The child's costume re-imagines her undeveloped girl's body as that of a male youth and, taken with her lines, would seem a comical reference to the libertine sexual practice of pederasty.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> In the Earl of Rochester's "Song," a poem on the perils of heterosexual conquest, the frustrated speaker proclaims: "There's a sweet, soft page of mine / Does the trick worth forty wenches." See *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. David M. Veith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), lines 15-16.

With a playful jab at the effeminacy of her audience, Chocks pulls out a sword and adds: “But I swear / I’d fight our Foes, did I not too well know / ’Twould spoil my Character of being a Beau” (lines 19-21).<sup>73</sup> The cross-dressed body of the child becomes an illicit site that is both titillating and satirical, playing on myriad forms of desire. Miss Chock stands as an over-determined marker of sexual excess and cipher onto which the audience can project. Paradoxically conjuring up an innocent child and flirtatious adult, girl and male youth, Chock’s performance appeals to sexual practices that ostensibly fall anywhere on a spectrum that would include both heterosexual activity and same-sex attraction. The stunt from *The World in the Moon* may have proved popular, as it is perhaps referenced in her lines from *The Revengeful Queen* in the following year when Miss Chock laments that at one time the men of the audience loved “*Virgins in their Prime*” but that “*Nothing will please the Beaux now, but a Beau*” (lines 21,23).<sup>74</sup>

The excessive fluidity of gender and genre (including both cross dressing and comic epilogues delivered after tragedies) that mark Miss Chock’s previous appearances are amplified in Cibber’s production of *The Tragical History*. Up until her casting in Cibber’s *The Tragical History* in 1699, Miss Chock’s relationship to the stage had been, at best, peripheral. In her role as the young Richard, however, she is brought into the main action of the play where, as the young Richard/Chock, she is by turns figured as satirical and sentimental, comic and tragic, profane and sacred. Chock’s first appearance in the play is as a comedian and foil to Cibber’s

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<sup>73</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama*, 1:265-266, describes Chock’s lines from Powell’s *Bonduca* as “particularly objectionable verses” and characterizes her lines in Powell’s *The Cornish Comedy* as “the most atrocious sentiments.”

<sup>74</sup> The reference is to the beaux’s tendency to “ogle one another”; however, the passage also gestures at Chock’s past performance (line 25).

Richard. Their initial meeting takes place in the third act, where amidst the company of adult men, the two nephews of Richard tease their deformed uncle and demonstrate a facility with language that proves equal to Richard's adult wit. With Edward the Prince of Wales's lines trimmed, the part of the Duke, played by Chock, becomes especially prominent.<sup>75</sup> The humor begins soon after Richard/Chock enters, as the young actress delivers Shakespeare's lines about idle weeds growing fast, and that the boy's uncle Richard too must therefore have been idle: "*Because I've heard Folks say you grew so fast / Your Teeth wou'd gnaw a Crust at two hours old, / Now 'twas two years e'er I cou'd get a Tooth*" (22). Richard/Chock's lines provide a jest, yet also draw an apt comparison between the two Richards in the scene, the parts played by Cibber and Chock, yoking together the malformed body of Richard/Cibber and the verbal precocity of the young Richard/Chock. In response to his brother's taunts, Edward/Allison remarks to Cibber/Richard: "*I hope your Grace knows how to bear with him?*" to which Richard/Chock replies: "*You mean to bear me; not to bear With me, / Uncle, my brother mocks both you and me, / Because that I am little, like an Ape. / He thinks that you should bear me on your shoulders*" (22-23). With the pun on "bear," and a simile that compares the child with an ape, the emphasis is once again on bodies that signify in excessive ways, intimating that Richard/Chock is just as much a spectacle as Richard/Cibber. Neither are what they seem. In this way the two roles, deformed tragic king and travestied child comedian, become distorted mirror images of each other.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Edward's lines about Julius Caesar and the Tower of London from Shakespeare's version of the play (3.1.68-89) are cut.

<sup>76</sup> Lord Stanhope, in lines added by Cibber, draws this connection for spectators, linking the young Richard's barbed critique with self-satire: "*With what a sharp provided Wit he reasons, / To mitigate the scorn he*



Chock, however, is soon repositioned on stage; rather than a comedian on par with Cibber's Richard, Chock is immediately recast as an innocent and truly pathetic tragic figure. While the nephews of Richard appear primarily in the third act of Shakespeare's play, Cibber's adaptation invents a new situation to bring the children back during the fourth act.<sup>77</sup> The tone is no longer comically satiric. Though Richard/Chock provided witty repartee during the first encounter with their uncle, in the subsequent act, the children, who are now imprisoned, are relentlessly figured as objects of pity. As the fourth act opens, Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and Richard's wife Ann, who is "in tears," surround the children, a change in mise-en-scène that foregrounds not Richard/Chock's audacity in the company of men but rather the nephews' lamentable state as they are surrounded by maternal figures (32). The women on stage, most of whom are mothers, offer comfort, though cannot provide protection, a grouping that figures the nephews as vulnerable children. Edward's complaints of his treatment reduce both himself and his brother to tears, to which the Queen remarks "Alas, poor Innocence" (32). No longer presented as novel curiosities, the nephews have now become the play's engine of pity as the maternal figures are cued to weep intermittently throughout the scene. Notably, the lines of Richard/Chock have been reduced from the previous act; the witty comic youth has become the pathetic, fearful child: "Won't you take me with you," he asks his mother, "...I shall be so 'fraid to stay when you are gone" (34). The action shifts to the two princes in bed on a darkened stage.

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*gives his Uncle: / He prettily and aptly taunts himself" (23). Tressing replies "So cunning, and so young, is wonderful" (23).*

<sup>77</sup> Cibber purportedly wrote the additional scenes because the play's first act featured King Henry, a role thought to bear too much likeness to James II. Cibber's decision to dramatize the death of the children might also act, in a way, as a substitute for the death of Clarence, a scene Cibber cuts entirely from the play. See Arthur Colby Sprague, "A New Scene in Colley Cibber's *Richard III*" *Modern Language Notes* 42.1 (1927): 29-32.

In a scene that is entirely Cibber's invention, henchmen enter to murder the children; the two youths beg for their life, crying "For your dear Souls sake pity us" (39). Richard's men are not insensible to the horror of the violence; soon after the deed is done, Tirrel appears *solus* on stage and calls the act "the most Arch-deed of piteous Massacre / 'That ever yet this Land was guilty'" (39). The juxtaposition of the comic and tragic scenes visually and generically challenge narratives about tragic subjects; the children's cross-dressed bodies suggests that objects of pity and suffering are constructed and contingent rather than essentially male or female. Further, that Richard Duke of York is played by Miss Dennis Chock, a cross-dressed child with a history of notorious behavior on stage, troubles the question of gendered constructions of virtue as a determinant for pity and pathos.

The reversal of Miss Chock from an agent of satire to object of pity, from comedian to a tragic victim, suggests that power is, like the gender roles practiced by the young actresses, fluid. The final act of the play forwards this point, as it witnesses the return of the nephews in ghostly form, portending that, despite the dramatization of their deaths on stage, the two children do not signify solely as victims of a tragic plot. Whereas in Shakespeare's version of *Richard III*, nearly all of the murdered characters return to haunt Richard's dreams as he prepares for battle, in Cibber's version, the night terror features only King Henry, the two nephews, and Richard's wife Anne. In the Shakespearean dream sequence, the boys are but two voices in a long parade of Richard's murder victims; they spend half their short lines charging Richmond to action to avenge their death.<sup>78</sup> In Cibber's play, however, the children do not call on Richmond for revenge. Instead, they lament their own passing, underscoring their pitiable state, and also

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<sup>78</sup> Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 5.3.143-150.

envision themselves as ghosts whose images who will haunt their uncle: “*Richard*, dream on; and see the wandering spirits / Of thy young Nephews, murder'd in the Tower:” (52). Imagining themselves as “wandering spirits” who are pitied by all but Richard, the two boys curse their uncle and foretell his tragic fall. The moment of return is recuperative; the curse uttered by the ghosts does indeed come to pass. Once again, the play defies expectations about tragic fatality and reconfigures the tragic subject’s relationship to power.

In closing, it is worth noting that Cibber reprised his interest in travesty roles later in his career, specifically when again charged with the task of adapting Shakespeare, namely the history play *The Life and Death of King John* (1623). Cibber’s later, and far less successful, Shakespearean adaptation, the tragedy *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John* (1745), radically departs from Shakespeare’s script and, as in his adaptation of *Richard III*, casts a young girl in a travesty part.<sup>79</sup> Specifically, the role of the child Arthur was played by Cibber’s teenage granddaughter, Jane “Jenny” Cibber.<sup>80</sup> As in Cibber’s adaptation of *Richard III*, the body of the girl actor again forwards the action, holding the potential to resolve the play in either tragedy or comedy.<sup>81</sup> Like

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<sup>79</sup> Only loosely adhering to the Shakespearean source material, the play centralizes the role of the child Arthur; Cibber also writes a villain for himself, the Roman cardinal Pandulph, a character that coincides with the anti-catholic sentiment prevalent in England in 1745. Cibber had been attempting to adapt Shakespeare’s *King John* since the 1720s. Fielding mocked his attempts in *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737).

<sup>80</sup> Colley Cibber, *Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John; a Tragedy* (London: Printed for J. Watts [etc.], 1745), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0198.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0198.xml). Jenny Cibber was born in 1730; she would have been around fifteen at the time of performance. See *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 3:240.

<sup>81</sup> In Garrick’s version of 1754, a young boy, listed as “Master Simson,” takes the part of Arthur. See William Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John. A Tragedy* (London: 1754), Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. See also Henry William Pedicord, “Garrick Produces “King John,” *Theater Journal* 34.4 (1982): 443.

Miss Chock's young Richard, Jenny Cibber's Arthur, caught between the warring England and France, is variously framed as either tragic liability or the key to the play's happy, and comic, resolution. The child's body is once again overburdened with multiple significations, and Jenny/Arthur is interpreted by surrounding onlookers as either helpless child or capable soldier, depending upon the desires and motivations of the interpreters. King Philip, for example, who requires justification for his military action, refers to Arthur/Jenny as an "Infant" in need of protection, emphasizing Arthur/Jenny's "youthful Innocence" (5, 9); Arthur's mother Constance, on the other hand, seeking to defend her family's vulnerable position, calls him "little Soldier" (9). Constance's later speech highlights the precariousness of Arthur/Jenny's position: "The Victor, the Defeated—Slave or Monarch!...A Prince in Glory, or a high-born Beggar! / O! miserable, wide Distinction, hark!" (8). The character of Arthur is, like the cross-dressed girl actress playing him, a cipher whose meaning is not fixed, returning too from the grave after death to challenge power and agency.<sup>82</sup> The epilogue, moreover, features additional genre play as actress Kitty Clive makes a case for comic epilogues appended to tragedies.<sup>83</sup> In sum, Cibber's continued attempts to incorporate travesty parts into his genre-bending Shakespearean

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<sup>82</sup> Jenny/Arthur, like the nephews of Richard III, gains a kind of agency in death. Arthur is "more terrible than living," and the corpse of Jenny/Arthur is powerfully displayed on stage at the funeral (51, 65). While by the end of the play King John cannot fight, Arthur can still, it would seem, control the action of the play beyond the grave.

<sup>83</sup> Clive's lines read as follows and point to the pleasures of tragedy mixed with comedy:

How often has the *Grecian* Dame, distress'd,  
 Been dismal Company till made a Jest?  
 And when her prudish Pride warm Love has slighted,  
 How lusciously her Epilogue delighted!  
 O! what Enjoyment to a modern Sinner,  
 To have it prov'd at last—she'd nothing in her!

(vii-viii)

adaptations, and his strategic positioning of the bodies of cross-dressed young girls to destabilize these play's larger meanings, argues for his lasting interest in defining tragedy as a generic free space of spectacle and play, entertainment and pleasure.

## V. Drury Lane Tragedies: Comedies of Empire

In the examen of his 1712 tragedy *Ximena*, Colley Cibber writes rapturously of the competing constructions of virtue, one female and the other male, he has placed on stage before the audience:

“The fluctuating pity, that is so finely perplex'd between the tears of a pious daughter, and the venerable sorrows of a father: The happy skill of throwing them both, in the same instant, at the King's feet for justice and mercy; and with pretensions, so equally laudable, is an incident which few tragedies, either ancient or modern, can boast of” (113).<sup>84</sup>

Singing his own praises, Cibber emphasizes the importance of dramatizing not one, but multiple models of gendered virtue and further, highlights this aspect as one of the uniquely “laudable” features of his tragedy. That is, it is not Brown's she-tragic heroines or Freeman's masculine

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<sup>84</sup> Cibber's examen, written seven years after the play itself, offers details about his process of adaptation, chronicles his disappointment in the audience's reaction, and offers a defense of the play's happy ending. See Colley Cibber, “To the Reader,” *Ximena; or, The Heroick Daughter* in *The Dramatic Works of Colley Cibber*, 5 vols. (London: Printed for J. Rivington and Sons, 1777), 3:103-124. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the play.

tragic hero who stands at the center of Cibber's tragedy; rather, Cibber's *Ximena* critiques the vaulting ambition of heroic individuals and instead imagines the mending of these nations and empires through marriages, love relationships, and united families.<sup>85</sup> Here, mongrel forms serve a purpose beyond mere entertainment. Indeed, *Ximena* ends triumphantly with a marriage between the lovers and conciliation amongst its fractious patriarchs. In the following section, I consider Cibber's tragedy *Ximena*, as well as *Perolla and Izadora* (1705) and *Caesar in Aegypt* (1724), all performed at Drury Lane and all featuring the same cast, as plays that, while advertised as tragedies, imagine their ends through the conventions of comedy, mixing romance and sentiment with national and imperial concerns.<sup>86</sup> Cibber sets romantic courtship in a Rome that is threatened by both internal division and the approaching forces of Hannibal (*Perolla and Izadora*), a Spain on the verge of an invasion by the Moors (*Ximena*), and an Egypt in a tense relationship with imperial Rome (*Caesar in Aegypt*). The plays' tragic heroes and heroines who, while separately are flawed, when joined in marriage or family relations familiar from comedy, consolidate their national or imperial project.<sup>87</sup> Cibber's tragedies for the Drury Lane stage therefore continue to make a case for mixed genres as a valuable source of pleasure, yet also contend that mongrel forms are important to the affairs of the nation.

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<sup>85</sup> Susan Staves, "Tragedy" in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theater, 1730-1830* eds. Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), points out that many eighteenth-century tragedies took the form of romance and were concerned with displaying "ideal virtue," 89.

<sup>86</sup> The same cast of actors and actresses, those whom Cibber had written for so successfully in his stage comedies, appear throughout: Anne Oldefield as the tragic heroine, Robert Wilks or Barton Booth as the leading man, and Cibber himself in an ancillary capacity.

<sup>87</sup> Cibber is suspected of having composed *Cinna's Conspiracy* (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott [etc.], 1713), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0199.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0199.xml), however his authorship cannot be confirmed (Koon, *Colley Cibber*, 70). I have omitted the play from my analysis as the translation from Corneille is far more literal than the other tragedies Cibber composes in this period.

Cibber's 1705 *Perolla and Izadora*, an adaptation of Roger Boyle's sprawling prose romance *Parthenissa* (1654-69), is set in Rome and dramatizes the love story of the two titular youths, parts played by Anne Oldefield and Robert Wilks, who are kept apart both by family tensions and threats to Rome. On the most immediately level, the two lovers are barred from marriage by an ancient family feud, what is characterized as centuries of "Ceaseless Hate" (10).<sup>88</sup> While the strife between the families signals internal division within Rome, an outside threat, in the person of the conquering Hannibal, threatens the populace as well; Perolla's father has defected to Hannibal's camp. The task of the play, then, is to suture the familial wounds torn by the two patriarchs, Pacuvius (Cibber) and Blacius (John Mills), as well as remedy the encroaching threat of conquest. Neither individual alone can accomplish this task, rather the marriage between the two lovers will heal the wounds of the rival families as well as the problems of the nation. The prologue explicitly imagines the solution to the play's conflicts, detailed above, as a comic one. On Cibber's tragic stage, the audience will find "*No Ranting Heroes with loud Glory swell, / Nor build their Fame on Deeds impossible:*" (lines 23-24). The prologue continues: "*Nay, we've neglected too, tho' much in fashion, / To murder Innocence to move Compassion;*" (lines 27-28). The prologue's final lines broadly conceive this rewriting of tragedy as one that occurs through comic means and that likens tragedy to comedy more generally, begging the audience to be kind and "*give the Muse a safe Retreat to Comedy*" (line 40).

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<sup>88</sup> Colley Cibber, *Perolla and Izadora; a Tragedy* (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott [etc.], 1706), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0191.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0191.xml). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

Indeed, taking a cue from the comic muse, it is the marriage between Perolla and Izadora that is the play's solution to its tragic dilemmas, arguing for an equally heroic, and often theatrical, masculinity and femininity. Perolla, the heroic Roman youth played by Wilks, is a man of military prowess and constant savior, who is notable for his martial feats as well as the theatrical form they frequently take. In the first act we learn that he has saved the women of Rome from the threat of rape from the Numidians, who "vaunting cry'd, to mend the *Roman Breed / On their young Wives and Daughters:*" (1). He also saves Izadora's father, Blacius, twice from capture by his own father Pacuvius, once in African dress.<sup>89</sup> In this way Perolla defends the Roman lines where necessary; however, he is also capable of crossing those lines in spectacular and comic ways. Perolla is both actor and soldier, entertaining and heroic. Like Perolla, Izadora displays a powerful model of feminine virtue that would seem to lend her protection, as in her avoidance of Pacuvius' attempted rape: "Strike home, and stamp me with Immortal Fame," she proclaims "To die in proof of Vows preserv'd to him, / Of Faith unshaken to *Perolla's Love, / Adds unexpected Glory to my Death:*" (45). However, despite the protections afforded by her internally-located virtue, she is also highly theatrical. Later in the fifth act's scaffolding scene, for example, she enacts a clever trick in which she takes the blame for her father's prison escape and through which is able to ask for the pardon of her father. By this Hannibal is visibly moved, decrying her "Provoking Virtue! in a Female Soul! / Where have I liv'd, that never yet conceiv'd the Charm?" (59).

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<sup>89</sup> During the second rescue attempt, Perolla dons African dress; the stage directions read: "*in African Habits mask'd, driving several before them*" (46).



Hannibal's reformation, in the end, however, is accomplished only through the joined virtue of both Perolla and Izadora. Perolla enters the scene and the two, much to the delight of the crowd, declare that they shall die together: "For me, *Perolla*, / To make our Virtue try'd Immortal, as our Love!" (60). Hannibal comments of the pair: "Such daring Spirits have I never seen; / Thou hast our leave, propose thy Thought, and ease / Me quick of this unactive Wonder" (60). Their mutual love inspires the conquerors reform. "The World shall see, that / *Hannibal* in spite / Of his ador'd Ambition dares be Great" (62). Indeed it is their shared virtue that is framed as the tragedy's spectacle; rather than suffering bodies of female women or murdered innocence, the lovers' theatrical virtue and pending union joins the two cultures.

Cibber's 1712 *Ximena; or, the Heroick Daughter* (1712), an adaptation of Corneille's play *Le Cid* (1636), again cast Oldefield and Wilks in the romantic lead roles and similarly dramatizes a marriage that brings a nation together.<sup>90</sup> The scenario is nearly identical to *Perolla and Izadora*. The setting is Seville, Spain and Ximena and Carlos are barred from marital felicity by yet another ancient hereditary feud between their family's respective patriarchs, as the promised social union of an extended family is sacrificed for the vaulting ambition of the patriarchs.<sup>91</sup> Running parallel to these internal conflicts is, again, an external threat: that of the Moors, who, while they do not appear on stage, threaten the margins of the play with violence. The solution,

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<sup>90</sup> Colley Cibber, *Ximena; or, The Heroick Daughter* (London: Printed for B. Lintot ... A. Bettesworth ... and W. Chetwood [etc.], 1719), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0193.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0193.xml). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>91</sup> While *Izadora and Perolla* featured at least one death, there is little to no violence in *Ximena*. Most of the malice is relegated to a malcontent by the name of Sanchez who invents various stratagems in order to act out his lust for Ximena and who, by the end of the play, will be reformed.

too, is similar to that which is staged *Perolla and Izadora*. While the title of the play suggests an interest primarily in constructions of female virtue, the play, like *Perolla and Izadora*, stresses the union of two virtuous lovers. In his examen of the play, Cibber is very adamant about an interest in not only Ximena, but both lovers: “The great beauties of the *French* play, are in the tender compassion that rises from the misfortunes of the two lovers *Rodrigue*, and *Chimene* (106). Cibber underscores the point that the audience should not attend only to Chimene, but also be “better acquainted with the merit” of Rodrigue and have a “proper admiration of the lovers” (107-108). The idea is that both young people must be joined together to “cure these Wounds” (2). Added to the lovers is Cibber’s Don Alvarez, the sentimental father of Ximena, who, I argue, also becomes important in establishing the virtuous union between the two families.

As in *Perolla and Izadora*, the play offers multiple versions of the linkage between virtue and gender as means to reconcile the “hereditary Hate” between the families (33). While the play begins with an emphasis on the power of Ximena’s “nobler Vertues” and her ability to reform characters such as Alvarez, the limits of Ximena’s virtue, when taken in isolation, becomes clear (2). At the end of the first act, the patriarchs embrace, and their houses seem to be joined solely through Ximena’s virtues (10). By the beginning of the next act, however, the ambition of the patriarchs again tears the families asunder and the blood feud continues. Ximena’s construction of virtue is further problematized by her position within both a patriarchal and tragic structure as we see the double bind her “strict” duty and “hard-fated Vertue” create, as she is torn between obligations to her lover and also to her father (44, 48).<sup>92</sup> When her beloved Carlos triumphs

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<sup>92</sup> Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 234 discusses this same structure, “the conflict between love and family,” though in the novel, 234.

against the Moors, for example, Ximena is a veritable ball of mixed emotions. Her “guilty Joy” for example (40) signals her damned position. Ximena is caught in the rigidity of her duty to patriarchy. The king, even, finds her situation frustrating (and perhaps comic) remarking, “What, still in Tears” (66).

Ximena’s limited power argues for the necessity of other constructions of virtue in a project that attempts to heal civic wounds: namely, the martial prowess of Carlos and the sentimental goodness of his father, Alvarez. That is, Ximena’s merits must be contextualized within a larger field. Carlos is the martial side of virtue who, like Perolla before him, acts as a warrior and savior, defending Spain from the Moors. In fact, Carlos reconciliation comes through the display of a captured black body as he “bore his Captive to his father” who then “gushes at his Eyes” at the sight of the capture of the Moors (41). However, Carlos’ martial valor is also problematized; in order to defend his father he must kill the father of Ximena, which, surprisingly, he does, though Cibber brings back the father in the final act with a *deus ex machine*. Put into tension with these constructions of virtue is the sentimentality of Don Alvarez, the part played by Cibber. The centrality of Ximena’s virtue is often offset by the spectacle of the weeping older man as the major contest becomes between the power of female virtue and the power of filial duty. We see the competition visually dramatized in the third act as Alvarez and Ximena trade lines before the king. Ximena declares “O godlike Monarch, hear my louder Cries!” to which Alvarez responds “O be not to the Old and Helpless deaf!” (27). Here two entities plead before a governing figure, begging either for the exercise of mercy and acknowledgement of social ties (Alvarez) or the continuation of bloodlust and vendetta law

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(Ximena). Both are given their turn to speak, and both make equally compelling cases before the King as the virtues of the father and that of a lover are balanced against each other. Ultimately both are necessary as the ending of the play offers us two sets of reconciliations, the first between the two lovers and the second between the fathers. In this way, both resolutions, the union of marriage and the bringing together of families, are necessary to bringing accord to Spain.

The last of the tragedies Colley Cibber wrote for his Drury Lane cast was the spectacular and commercially doomed *Caesar in Aegypt* (1724).<sup>93</sup> If *Perolla and Izadora* and *Ximena* stage marriages and family unions in order to bring together empires, in *Caesar in Aegypt*, the titular Caesar learns how to maintain his newly-acquired empire through his love relationships with the women around him, namely his mistress Cleopatra, but also including the widow of Pompey, Cornelia. In this way *Caesar in Aegypt* is a rewriting of Dryden's earlier tragedy, staging as it does the events leading up to Dryden's play, with a comic sensibility; Caesar is strengthened rather than debilitated by the two women in his life. In Cibber's play, love does not ruin empire, rather love maintains an empire. Of Dryden's play, the prologue states: "*Since then, his World well Lost, your Hearts admire, / Let Her with Cæsar live, with Antony Expire*" (line 35).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The play was a source of much amusement for its spectacle, and many remarked upon Cibber's use of cardboard swans (Helene Koon, *Colley Cibber*, 107-109). *Caesar in Aegypt* saw Cibber, Oldefield, Wilks, and Booth returning to the stage for Cibber's first tragic venture in over a decade. Booth plays the triumphant Caesar while Bracegirdle takes the role of Cleopatra. Cibber returns to the stage in the part of Achoreus while his son, Theophilus, plays the role of Cleopatra's brother, Ptolemy. Wilks makes an appearance as the smitten Marc Antony.

<sup>94</sup> Colley Cibber, *Caesar in Aegypt* (London: Printed for John Watts [etc.], 1725), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0194.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0194.xml). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

As in nearly all of Cibber's tragedies in this period, the play seeks to "mend Mankind" as both nations and marriages have both been ruined by the ravages of war and conquest (77). Indeed much of the play revolves around the literal display of mangled body parts, the ashes of dead husbands and the wounds of injured soldiers, images that bring to the fore the costs of a culture of heroic warrior masculinity. This cost of bloody conquest and masculine militarism is underscored repeatedly. Upon arrival in Egypt, for example, Caesar is confronted with the head of his foe Pompey who has been ignobly assassinated by Ptolemy in his overeager desire to please, to which Caesar responds, in shock: "Hence! from my View! remove the ghastly Form!" (17). Similarly, the beginning of the third act is set before the tomb of the dead conqueror Alexander's tomb, in which Caesar converses with his companion Achoreus about the perils of conquest and individual ambition (35). Finally, the widow Cornelia, the wife of the decapitated Pompey, is brought on stage fiercely guarding her husband's urn of ashes, marring military glory with the image of the widow (65). In these instances, the excitement that often attends violence does not hang on violations of the female body, but rather images of wounded male bodies that betoken the price of imperial conquest.

The crisis in heroic masculinity reconciles itself through Caesar's intimate relationships with the women of the play. Caesar's proper command of the empire is not, like Dryden's Antony, dependent on expelling virulent femininity, but rather linked to and improved by Caesar's associations with the women of the play. Most prominent, and striking, is Caesar's association with Cleopatra, whom in Dryden's play proved Marc Antony's downfall. In Cibber's play, however, Cleopatra proves a friend and loyal confidant to Caesar who, unlike her brother

Ptolemy, understands the masculine codes of honor that organize warfare.<sup>95</sup> Cleopatra's own legendary beauty is a point of emphasis; however, Cleopatra also attends to Caesar's image as well.<sup>96</sup> Upon the play's conclusion, she declares triumphantly: "Now ye chaste Matrons, that reproach my Love, / Behold my *Cæsar* in this Blaze of Glory!" (76).<sup>97</sup> Also important to Caesar's rule is Cornelia, the virtuous wife of Pompey, a character who emphasizes Caesar's role not only as conqueror, but as a benevolent ruler. Cornelia confronts Caesar with the grief over the loss of her husband: "*Cæsar*, some say thou hast a human Heart, / O'er private Sorrows melting to Compassion" (39).<sup>98</sup> In this way their relationship is not sexual or romantic, as with Cleopatra, but rather affective and reflects a relationship between feeling peers. Perhaps most importantly, though, Cornelia is not figured as a rival to Cleopatra, but rather the two are empathetic allies. Even Cleopatra, for example, feels the pain of Cornelia's loss of Pompey. When his murder is related to her, she declares: "O! thou hast giv'n *Cornelia's* Pangs to me!" (17).

In the end, then, Caesar's virtue combines gender traits both masculine and feminine, aspects both of sentiment and martial prowess; he both feels deeply and acts heroically. He adopts the virtues displayed by the women, suggesting that gender is fluid and constructed. For

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<sup>95</sup> Cleopatra does not condone the death of Pompey; she asks her brother: "Are those fit Agents for your Gratitude? / Owe you not your Crown to *Pompey's* Favour?" (9).

<sup>96</sup> Caesar asks: "What is Ambition, if not crown'd by Beauty" (43).

<sup>97</sup> Though Cleopatra is "Coheiress of [Ptolemy's] Throne," she remains tethered to Caesar upon the conclusion of the play (12).

<sup>98</sup> To this Caesar replies, sensibly: "I feel *Cornelia's* Woe, tho' she contemns / My Pity" (39). She implores him to "Have pity on her Wounds! her Sighs! her Groans! / O yet relent! and Conquer with Compassion!" (39). He replies: "O *Cornelia!* spite of all my Boasts, / Thy pale Calamities upbraid Success, / And, like a chilling Frost, deface my Laurels!" (40).

example, when faced with a mutiny in the last act of the play he immediately kills one of the men with a javelin, proclaiming: “Who next advances, to receive Dismission? / Ye noisy! turbulent! vain-glorious Rout!” (61). Only a few lines later, however, he acknowledges, feelingly, the disabled war veterans who had “felt my arm forgotten” and orders that “a Donative / Of ten great *Attick* Talents, be his Meed!” (62). Both a heroic and feeling figure, Caesar displays varying virtues that, importantly, are not figured as conflicting. In this way *Caesar in Aegypt* dramatizes the concerns of all of Cibber’s tragedies from this period demonstrate: the resolution of public concerns through private relationships, suggesting that the domain of comedy can restore the losses incurred by tragedy.

## VI. Conclusion: Happy Liberties

Whether in oriental tragedies, parodies such as *The Rival Queens*, Shakespearean adaptations, or the comically-structured tragedies he wrote for the cast at Drury Lane, Cibber’s career demonstrates that he experimented with both genre and performance strategies in order to mix comedy into tragedy, creating plays that, both on page and stage, resisted dominant tragic traditions. Cibber’s dramatic output freely violated neoclassical decorum, championing instead the value of mixed genres as a source of bodily pleasure and perhaps, as in his Drury Lane tragedies, a structure through which to imagine the fate of nations. In either case, the destabilization of genre found on Cibber’s stage offers a space free from the strictures of tragic theory.

Meditating on the libratory power of comedy, and indeed laughter more generally, Cibber elaborates on his critical prerogative as follows in a passage from his *Apology*:

Why the Tragedian warms us into Joy, or Admiration, or sets our Eyes on flow with Pity, we can easily explain to another's Apprehension: but it may sometimes puzzle the gravest Spectator to account for that familiar Violence of Laughter, that shall seize him, at some particular Strokes of a true Comedian. The Decency too, that must be observ'd in Tragedy, reduces, by the manner of speaking it, one Actor to be much more like another, than they can or need be suppos'd to be in Comedy: There the Laws of Action give them such free, and almost unlimited Liberties, to play wanton with Nature, that the Voice, Look, and Gesture of a Comedian may be as various, as the Manners and Faces of the whole Mankind are different from one another.<sup>99</sup>

Comedy's greatest attraction is the way in which it frequently breaks with decorum, is far less subject to the regulatory mechanisms of dramatic theory and criticism, and moreover, produces visceral and unexplainable emotional response. Comedy's inexpressibility, that the genre has not been widely theorized, protects it from the dramatic legislation that can reduce tragedy to an adherence to formal regulations. Well-read audience members can explain why they cry, feel pity or terror at a tragic exhibition; however, the upheaval produced by the comic performance – “the familiar Violence of laughter” - defies interpretation through the neoclassical framework and produces an emotional response that does not depend upon language to express its meaning.

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<sup>99</sup> Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 82.



Comedy is proposed as the genre in which the actor experience “free, and almost unlimited Liberties.” That is, comedy offers players interpretive freedoms and the ability to distinguish their individual performances.

While Cibber wrote and adapted a considerable number of tragedies, few were successful. What resonated more in the period, most likely, and what is perhaps more difficult as a scholar to assess, was not Cibber’s own tragedies, but the pleasures and perils of the laughter, and the freedom and licenses of comedy, he brought to the stage more generally, in a lifetime’s worth of performances in tragedies by other playwrights. As Cibber notes in his *Apology*, he often appeared with much success “in some particular Characters in tragedy, as *Iago*, *Wolsey*, *Syphax*, *Richard the Third*, &c.”<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Cibber’s friend Richard Steele referred to Cibber as a man who had garnered “great applause” in both genres.<sup>101</sup> While Cibber failed to fully translate his vision of tragedy to London audiences, his wider influence, we might conclude, is the way in which he functioned, as a player, as a comic figure of excess within the dominant tragic tradition. Cibber’s tragedies may have given him an opportunity to fully dramatize, on the center of the stage, his oppositional view of genre; however, in practice he most often performed his parts on the periphery of others’ plays, as a supporting tragic villain.

Perhaps, then, this is his larger legacy. Indeed, the anecdote with which this chapter began comes from a portion of Cibber’s *Apology* dedicated to a discussion of Addison’s play *Cato*, a role in which he played the part of Syphax. The passage following Cibber’s description of Morat suggests that he brought just this approach to *Cato*’s neoclassical masterpiece: “In Mr.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>101</sup> Richard Steele, *The Theater*, ed. John Loftis (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), 28.

Addison's *Cato*," Cibber writes, "Syphax has some Sentiments of near the same Nature [as Morat], which I ventur'd to speak, as I imagin'd Kynaston would have done, had he been then living to have stood in the same Character." Cibber continues: "Mr. Addison, who had something of Mr. Booth's Diffidence, at the Rehearsal of his Play, after it was acted, came into my Opinion that even Tragedy, on such particular Occasions might admit of a Laugh of Approbation."<sup>102</sup> According to Cibber, Addison, then, could be persuaded to laugh at his own work, at the very least in a laugh of approval. Such tempering suggests that Cibber's views of tragedy in performance had an effect on even the staunchly neoclassical Addison – and potentially others as well. Though Morat is the villain of Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*, Cibber extends his comments in the *Apology* to several of the central tragic roles which were popular upon the stage: "In Shakespear [sic] Instances of them are frequent, as in Macbeth, Hotspur, Richard the Third, and Harry the Eighth, all which Characters, tho' of a tragical Craft, have sometimes familiar Strokes in them, so highly natural to each particular Disposition, that it is impossible not to be transported into an honest Laughter at them: And these are those happy Liberties, which tho' few Authors are qualify'd to take, yet when justly taken, may challenge a Place among their greatest Beauties."<sup>103</sup> While his own plays failed, Cibber's larger contributions to the shape of eighteenth-century tragedy, the "happy Liberties" of Cibber's mongrel forms, then, are perhaps substantial, though like laughter itself, ephemeral.

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<sup>102</sup> Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 72.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

Chapter 3: Revising Cordelia  
The Sexual Politics of Mixed Genres in the Eighteenth Century's Mongrel *King Lear*

On November 17, 1747, Anne Donnellan, a single woman of keen intellect and comfortable fortune, wrote a letter to her friend and frequent correspondent, the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu.<sup>1</sup> In it, she recorded the events of a trip to London, what included a visit to Drury Lane to see an adaptation of William Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*. In the passage quoted below, she briefly shares her opinion of the adaptor's revisions to the role of Cordelia, the tragic king's youngest, and most virtuous, daughter:

"I went with Mrs. Southwell on Saturday to *King Lear* to see Garrick and Mrs. Cibber, both performed extremely well. I think he took the part of the old testy madman better than the Hero, and Mrs. Cibber is the soft, tender Cordelia in perfection. I am only provoked that they have altered Shakespear's [sic] plain, sincere, art-less creation into a whining, love-sick maid. I would have an Act of Parliament, at least of Council, that nobody should add a word to Shakespear, for it makes sad patchwork."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to Patrick Kelly, "Anne Donnellan: Irish Proto-Bluestocking," *Hermathena* 154 (1993): 39-68, Donnellan was a woman of privilege born into a prominent Irish family at the turn of the eighteenth century. She socialized and corresponded widely with figures ranging from Mary Delaney and Elizabeth Montagu to Jonathan Swift and Samuel Richardson; while she had the opportunity to marry, she remained single throughout her life (46-47).

<sup>2</sup> Emily J. Climençon, *Mrs. Montagu, The Queen of the Bluestockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1906), 1:253-254. Montagu and Donnellan first became acquainted in Bath in 1740 and remained longtime friends. Montagu's correspondence, as collected in *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu: with Some of the Letters of her Correspondents* (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809-1813), does not reflect a reply to Donnellan's comments about the performance of *King Lear*.

Donnellan's letter betrays her sharp sense of humor; however, the letter is also notable for the way in which it calls attention to the discrepancies between Shakespeare's Cordelia and the one who trod the boards a century-and-a-half later. Beginning with Nahum Tate's adaptation in 1681, the character of Cordelia was considerably amended under the neoclassical aegis of "poetic justice," a moral imperative in dramatic form in which virtue must be rewarded and vice punished.<sup>3</sup> Citing Lear's youngest daughter as one of many challenges to the play's "regularity and probability," Tate recast the character, along with Gloucester's son Edgar, in a staple from the comic stage: a marriage plot.<sup>4</sup> The result is a tragedy that builds to a happy ending, a mongrel form that fundamentally altered Cordelia's character for nearly a century.<sup>5</sup> In printed versions of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, whether the quarto of 1608 or folio of 1623, Cordelia speaks truth to her father's faltering power; she leads France's armies to English shores to save Lear's

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Rymer, *The Tragedies of the last Age* (1678) in *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer*, ed. Curt A. Zimansky (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1956), 22-23, coins the phrase "poetic justice" and advocates the concept as a means of assuring art's moral balance, writing that "a poet must of necessity see justice exactly administered, if he intended to please." In *A Short View of Tragedy*, however, Rymer argues specifically against tragedies that are corrupted by the inclusion of a love plot, what he characterizes as "whining on the Stage to Effeminate the Majesty of their tragedy" (62). In *Spectator* 40 (16 April 1711), Addison rails against both poetic justice and Tate's adaptation of *King Lear*, arguing against what he calls a "ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism," claiming that the rule has "no foundation in nature, in reason, or in the practice of the Ancients" (168-169).

<sup>4</sup> Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear*, ed. James Black (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1975), 1. All citations refer to this edition of the play.

<sup>5</sup> While little evidence of the play's performance exists before 1700, scholars tend to agree that Nahum Tate's adaptation was first performed in the season of 1680/1681 at Dorset Garden, with possible further productions in the earlier period (Black, xxxiv, xiii). After 1700, the play was performed throughout the century steadily as a stock play. For example, between 1700 and 1711, *The London Stage's* "Index of Plays and Playwrights," 2:16, lists 18 performances of *King Lear*. Other Shakespearean adaptations such as *Macbeth* and *Othello* were more often in the repertoire, with Hamlet at 37 performances and *Macbeth* at 34; *Othello's* performance rate is closer to *Lear's*, having played 19 times in this span of time (2:15). Garrick brought the part to particular prominence beginning with his performances in 1742, and Romantic actor Edmund Kean unsuccessfully attempted to restore Shakespeare's script in the nineteenth century. The play eventually reverted to the Shakespearean script with Charles Macready's productions (1834, 1838).

kingdom.<sup>6</sup> Tate's revised Cordelia, meanwhile, is cut from different cloth. She schemes to make a love match; she dons a disguise and wanders the heath, where she is threatened with rape; she is rescued by her lover, and later her father, from the clutches of henchmen. With her sphere reduced to a subplot of the heart, Cordelia's primary aim becomes securing her choice in marriage and avoiding male-inflicted violence. She no longer challenges Lear's authority; she simply navigates a crumbling patriarchal order as best she can. Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that Anne Donnellan, a woman who in a letter to Jonathan Swift referred to herself as "an asserter in the rights and privileges of women," found the revisions to be so irritating.<sup>7</sup> Donnellan even goes so far as to politicize the matter, arguing, somewhat facetiously yet nevertheless trenchantly, that she would have "an Act of Parliament, at least of Council" to preserve Shakespeare's original tragedy. Donnellan ends the passage with safe recourse to the sanctity of the bard; however, her critique of Tate's altered Cordelia suggests Donnellan's reverence for Shakespeare is contingent upon his dramatization of female characters whose roles are not circumscribed by the dramatic arc of courtship.

Taking a cue from Anne Donnellan's letter, this chapter takes up the sexual politics of mixed genres, specifically the case of the eighteenth century's mongrelization of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Why did eighteenth-century male adaptors, from Nahum Tate to George Colman to David

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<sup>6</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear: The 1608 Quarto and 1623 Folio Texts*, ed. Stephen Ogel (New York: Penguin Books, 2000). Marianne Novoy, "Patriarchy, Mutuality, and Forgiveness in *King Lear*," *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's King Lear*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), argues that the Cordelia attempts to "keep her integrity in a patriarchal world" and refuses "pretense as a means of survival," 88.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Donnellan to Jonathan Swift, 10 May 1735, *Swift Correspondence*, ed. David Woolley, 4 vols. (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 4:32. Cited in Patrick Kelly, "Anne Donnellan, 'Irish Proto-Bluestocking,'" 53.

Garrick, wrest the role of Cordelia from her tragic trajectory and place her instead in a marriage subplot? Beginning with the debut of Tate's adaptation in 1681, Shakespeare's tragic heroine was confined to the vicissitudes of courtship for over a century, even in the face of increasing demands that Shakespeare's plays be returned to their original state.<sup>8</sup> While the period saw a growing number of textual editions that preserved the bard's moribund heroine, from 1681 until the early nineteenth century, every single version of Cordelia performed on London stages by female actresses ended not in death, but in marriage.<sup>9</sup> Scholars and critics have offered a variety of solutions to this puzzle.<sup>10</sup> Many reduce the matter to aesthetics, pointing to the neoclassical dictum of poetic justice, along with Restoration audiences' desire for a simplistic and morally coherent vision of the social order.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, more recent critics have connected the

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<sup>8</sup> For accounts of eighteenth-century bardolatry, see Jean Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1995); Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); and Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> The eighteenth-century saw the flourishing of the editorial tradition within Shakespeare studies, with famous editions by Nicholas Rowe (1709), Alexander Pope (1723-25), Samuel Johnson (1765), and others. See Arthur Sherbo, *The Birth of Shakespeare Studies: Commentators from Rowe (1709) to Boswell-Malone (1821)* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1986); and Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentleman: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labor, 1725-1765* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). As for Cordelia's performance history, I refer here to the known stage adaptations of *King Lear* in this period by Nahum Tate (1681), George Colman (1768), and David Garrick (pub. 1774).

<sup>10</sup> Peter Womack, "Secularizing *King Lear*: Shakespeare, Tate, and the Sacred" in *King Lear and Its Afterlife*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 97-98, provides a useful inventory of critics who argue for the aesthetic appeal of the play versus those who point to its potentially political content in his essay.

<sup>11</sup> Editor James Black contends that the revisions are merely "typical" of Restoration drama; he argues that Tate's addition of a love plot adheres to Restoration audiences' expectations (xvi, xviii-xix). Black's opinion is shared even by recent scholars, including Lynne Bradley, *Adapting King Lear for the Stage* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 46-49. Michael Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, 83, points out, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, that Tate was no "neo-classical cissy," citing the playwright's very bloody version of *Coriolanus*.

adapted *Lear* to the politics of the Exclusion Crisis of the late 1670s and early 1680s.<sup>12</sup> Michael Dobson, for example, argues that the love plot between Edgar and Cordelia acted as a cover for the play's otherwise risky political content, namely the plight of the bastard Edmund.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, at least one scholar contends that the eighteenth century simply could not comprehend the great "complexity" of Shakespeare's original Cordelia.<sup>14</sup> While most of these arguments illuminate some aspect of the adaptation's cultural resonance, none, I would suggest, fully accounts for the long and persistent popularity of the revised Cordelia.

In order to offer a different answer to this perennial question, I would like to shift the terms of the critical conversation by bringing together generic and social history: that is, I would like to address the mongrelization of *King Lear* in tandem with the rising power and visibility of professional tragic actresses in the eighteenth century. As Frances Gentleman writes in *The Dramatic Censor*: "Every alterer of SHAKESPEARE should remember, there were no female performers in his days, and improve according to the present time, such parts as necessity, not

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<sup>12</sup> The Exclusion Bill attempted to oust Charles II's Catholic brother James from the line of succession, while the monarchy was threatened by Charles II's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. The drama of the Exclusion Crisis dominated the court from the late 1670s up until the defeat of the Exclusion Bill in 1681. For readings of Tate's adaptation within the context of the Exclusion Bill, see J. Douglas Canfield, "Royalism's Last Dramatic Stand: English Political Tragedy, 1679-89" *Studies in Philology* 82.2 (1985): 243; Nancy Klein Maguire, "Nahum Tate's *King Lear*: 'The king's Blest restoration,'" in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, ed. Jean Marsden (London: Harvester Press, 1991), 29-42; and C.B. Hardman, "Our Drooping Country Now Erects Her Head": Nahum Tate's *History of King Lear*, *The Modern Language Review* 95.4 (2000): 913-923. For a general overview of the politics of the plays of the 1680s, see Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, 340-376.

<sup>13</sup> Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, 80-85; Dobson contends that Edmund is the "real star" of the play (82).

<sup>14</sup> Susan Allen Ford, "The Eye of Anguish: Images of Cordelia in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Borrowers and Lenders* 4.1 (2011): 1-27, argues that Shakespeare's version of Cordelia "contains within herself more complexity than Tate, his dramatic heirs, and their audiences would comprehend," 3.

want of genius or knowledge, made him abbreviate.”<sup>15</sup> As eighteenth-century male dramatists rewrote *King Lear* for professional women players, I argue, the role of Cordelia presented a persistently problematic body that was newly identifiable in the theatrical and social landscape and hence was repeatedly revised and re-imagined through the controls of genre.<sup>16</sup> That adaptations by male playwrights and performers consistently dwindled the role of Cordelia into, as Donnellan would have it, a “whining love sick maid,” signals anxieties, I suggest, about the growing centrality of actress’s place on the tragic stage, an arena heretofore dominated by male actors, as well as the increasing visibility of women in society more generally.<sup>17</sup> Granted, theater scholars, Elizabeth Howe in particular, have importantly pointed out that Tate’s version of Cordelia, threatened with rape and granted a breeches part, was re-written by Tate to feature actresses’ body and showcase female players’ physical talents.<sup>18</sup> I propose, however, that rather than positively featuring Cordelia, eighteenth-century adaptations of *King Lear* clung to the marriage plot in order to limit Cordelia’s role in tragedy, the role of the actress on stage, and the imagined position of the women who watched from the audience. In the face of successful female players who excelled in tragedy, the play was preserved as a vehicle for male, rather than

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<sup>15</sup> Frances Gentleman, “*King Lear*. A Tragedy. Altered from Shakespeare, by Tate and Colman,” *The Dramatic Censor; or, Critical Companion*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for J. Bell, 1770), 1:360.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Staves, “Tragedy” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theater, 1730-1830*, 89, points out that Restoration and eighteenth century tragedies often ended in marriage; that is, a triumphant conclusion including marriage does not preclude a categorization of a play as a tragedy. I am mainly interested, however, in Cordelia’s arc as it was adapted and revised from the Renaissance script, its differences from emerging trends in tragedy during the 1680s, and the way in which Cordelia’s love plot, despite the rise of bardolatry, persisted throughout the eighteenth century in the work of male playwrights.

<sup>17</sup> This line of argument builds on Jean-Christophe Agnew’s suggestion in *Worlds Apart: the Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 152-156, that the theater of the Restoration did not entertain the existential quandaries of the Renaissance; rather, social issues were more often at stake.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Howe makes this argument in *First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 119-121.



female, displays of power, feeling, and authority.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, then, the mixed genre of the eighteenth-century's most infamous Shakespearean adaptation flags a skirmish over the place and possible meaning of emergent identities in the social landscape.

The letter with which I began this chapter itself registers the changing place of women in theatrical culture and in British society more generally. Donnellan's mention of "Mrs. Cibber," for example, refers to Susannah Cibber, the star player whom ranked alongside David Garrick in terms of the performance's importance. This double billing reminds us that audiences would have seen Tate's Cordelia brought to life by highly-paid actresses rather than the boy performers familiar from the Renaissance stage.<sup>20</sup> As Virginia Woolf famously notes, Shakespeare's leading female characters, as powerful and compellingly as they were, had no historical corollary, on stage or off.<sup>21</sup> By 1681, however, when Tate took up his pen to adapt *King Lear*, women were becoming central to the life of the theater, as they cultivated their celebrity, harnessed their earning power, and reshaped the boundaries between public and private spheres.<sup>22</sup> Audiences,

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<sup>19</sup> The excision of the Lear's fool can also be interpreted in this light, since the character's absence enables the further elevation of Lear's pathos.

<sup>20</sup> A testament to the growing popularity of actresses on stage, the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 3:281 notes that in 1765 Susannah Cibber was paid "£15 weekly, the highest salary among the actresses and only 5s. 6d. less than Garrick and Lacy paid themselves." Felicity Nussbaum takes account of Susannah Cibber's rising salary: "Mrs. Cibber, for example, earned £100 during the 1734-35 season, doubling her salary in the next two seasons, tripling her benefit earnings by 1747-48, and doubling them yet again to make a total of £700 in the 1755-56 season" (*Rival Queens*, 55).

<sup>21</sup> As Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*, ed. Susan Gubar (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), "She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history," 43.

<sup>22</sup> Recent and classic work on actresses and female playwrights in the Restoration and eighteenth-century theater informs the bulk of this chapter. See Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700*; Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage, 1660-1720* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006); Gilli Bush-Bailey, *Treading the Bawds: Actresses and Playwrights on the Late-Stuart Stage* (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006); Gill Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations: Viewing the Actress in British Art and Theatre 1768-1820* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2007); Felicity Nussbaum,

too, were changing, as rising numbers of women participated in public life.<sup>23</sup> The missive's author, Anne Donnellan, was an educated, unmarried woman who at middle age pursued various intellectual interests, traveled widely, and kept up to date with the latest London gossip and newest offerings on stage.<sup>24</sup> She represented a growing class of women who actively circulated within and commented upon eighteenth-century culture. I propose, then, that the eighteenth century's mixed genre *King Lear* had social and even political implications for both the women who played Cordelia on stage, as well as the women who watched from the audience. By placing Cordelia in an alternate generic arc, eighteenth-century adaptors were able to re-position actresses' place on the tragic stage, and simultaneously place restrictions on women's position in society more generally.

To build this argument the first section of the chapter begins by reading Tate's adaptation against the changing power and gender dynamics of the theater in the year of the play's debut. As numerous theater scholars' research has shown, the year 1681 is a crucial moment not simply for the political assignments of the court, but for the sexual politics of the theater, as it is the year

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*Rival Queens*; and Brett D. Wilson, *A Race of Female Patriots: Women and Public Spirit on the British Stage, 1688-1745* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Jean Marsden discusses the growing debates about female spectatorship during the late seventeenth century in the first chapter of *Fatal Desire* (17-38). A growing body of scholarship addresses literary women's place within the rise of the middle class. Those that particularly inform this chapter include Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: Univ. of California Press, 1995); Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000); Elizabeth Eger ed., *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere: 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001); and Helen Thompson's *Ingenious Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel*.

<sup>24</sup> Montagu's correspondence records a madcap visit in the summer of 1747 with Donnellan to the home of "Mr. Sloper," the notorious lover of the married Susannah Cibber in *Mrs. Montagu, The Queen of the Bluestockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, 1:242-243. The episode gestures at the larger network of leisure activities and economy of celebrity gossip through which audience members like Donnellan valued the performances of actresses such as Cibber.

in which Elizabeth Barry, the actress who would originate the role of Tate's Cordelia, rose to astounding prominence through performances of powerfully pathetic she-tragedy.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Howe has categorized Barry's skyrocketing fame as an outright shift in the power dynamics of theatrical production, effectively redirecting the audience's gaze "from hero to heroine."<sup>26</sup> Against the backdrop of Barry's ascendancy, I interpret Tate's adaptation of Cordelia for a female performer to be a comic "surrogation," to use Joseph Roach's term, of tragic character, a process that invariably calls attention to Cordelia's position as a commodity in the sexual economy rather than a moral agent or actor on a national stage.<sup>27</sup> Rather than a character motivated by an inner conflict, Cordelia is divested of pathos and confined to a marriage subplot where she is motivated by the external forces of the marriage market. The play therefore, as I show, enacts a generically hierarchical relationship between plot and subplot in which female social navigation is subordinate to the male heroics and feeling showcased in the main plot. Cordelia's plight, occupying a subordinate position in the play's structure, elevates male pathos and valor as the play becomes solidly a vehicle for a tragic actor rather than a tragic actress. The

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<sup>25</sup> See Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses*, 108-128.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses*, 113. Howe builds on past arguments about Barry's significance, such as those made by Jocelyn Powell in *Restoration Theater Production* (London: Routledge, 1984), 151-158.

<sup>27</sup> In *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Joseph Roach defines "surrogation" as how "culture reproduces and re-creates itself," 2. I am interested in the way in which the surrogated Cordelia is serially juxtaposed with the grandeur of Lear's own tragic character. Cordelia's time on stage, embroiled in the constricting affairs of a marriage plot, serves as a counterpoint to Lear's ostensibly larger tragedy, a concurrence that magnifies Lear's plight, and along with it, the actor who played Lear. Influencing my close reading is Roach's analysis of Thomas Southerne's 1694 stage tragedy *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* as it was adapted from Aphra Behn's 1688 novella. Roach is attentive to how aspects of Behn's novella change "by means of performance" (153). Southerne adds a comic marriage plot concerning husband hunting, what is then contrasted with the high tragic plot involving Oroonoko and an Imoinda who is newly-blanching white. Speaking to the tensions created by these competing generic plots, Roach notes: "The overall effect of these revisions is to make the issue of surrogation the focal point by adding miscegenation to Behn's tragic plot of doomed lovers and to intensify its threat by interpolating scenes of husband hunting among a dwindling field of white men" (154).

play's comic surrogation of tragic character, then, enacts an interpretive struggle, fought through genre, about women's place on the stage, in the family, and as related to the affairs of the nation.

I track the lasting influence of Tate's mongrel *Lear* by concluding the chapter with two sections that examine adaptations of *King Lear* written later in the century, at the height of bardolatry. First, I consider the strategies used during the 1760s and 1770s by male playwrights George Colman and David Garrick, both of whom, though faced with the cultural imperative to return Shakespeare to the original text, kept a marriage arc for the character of Cordelia. Sexual politics are again in play as both Colman and Garrick further winnow the role to fit mid-century notions of feminine domestic virtue. In these instances, Cordelia was sanitized to middle class sexual ideology, while the tragedy with a happy ending continued to preserve a hierarchal relationship between male and female pathos and reserved the tragedy for male players. To conclude the chapter, I give attention to a counter vision of Cordelia found in Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespear Illustrated* (1754). Circumventing the dramatic tradition, Lennox instead turns to *King Lear*'s archival antecedents. Abandoning the vexed sexual politics of the theatrical system, Lennox finds refuge in the genre of history, where, through a reading of *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577), she is able to imagine a version of Cordelia that is not bound to the marriage plot or death scenes familiar from versions of *Lear* by male dramatists. Instead, Lennox finds within the imaginative space of the archive a version of Cordelia that is central to familial and national concerns, confirming, I would argue, Wai Chi Dimock's suggestion that "switching genre is one of the most eloquent signs of political agency."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, "Genres as Fields of Knowledge," 1384.

## II. Surrogating Cordelia

Nahum Tate's 1681 adaptation of *King Lear* came to the stage in the midst of a catalytic moment for the sexual politics of London stages: the rise of the tragic actress. In 1680, Elizabeth Barry found unprecedented acclaim for her riveting performance at Dorset Garden of Monimia in Thomas Otway's she-tragedy *The Orphan; or the Unhappy Marriage* (1680).<sup>29</sup> As Elizabeth Howe's research elegantly demonstrates, for one of the first times since the opening of the playhouses after the Restoration, a tragedy had become a vehicle primarily for a female instead of a male performer; indeed, the tragedy had been written by Otway for Elizabeth Barry herself.<sup>30</sup> Earlier actresses such as Mary Betterton, Rebecca Marshall, Elizabeth Boutell, and Mary Lee certainly played important roles in the tragedies of the early Restoration; however, as Laura Brown has pointed out, the dominant heroic mode provided excellent vehicles for star actors rather than actresses.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Elizabeth Howe notes, even after the pathetic mode

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<sup>29</sup> According to the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 1:313-316, up until 1680 Barry herself had been performing with the Duke's Company at Dorset Garden; her success, however, had been somewhat limited. She was given roles in tragedy and comedy alike, taking on smaller parts in productions such as Otway's *The Cheats of Scapin* (1676) and Aphra Behn's ensemble comedy *The Rover* (1677). She was also a deliverer of prologues and epilogues. Colley Cibber catalogs the difficulties of Elizabeth Barry's early career in the theater in his *Apology*, 91: "There was, it seems, so little Hope of Mrs. Barry, at her first setting out, that she was, at the end of the first Year, discharg'd the Company, among others, that were thought to be a useless Expence to it" (91).

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses*, 108-128. Thomas Otway was famously obsessed with the actress, what the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, 1:315, refers to as a "hopeless passion," writing to her a series of love letters. While Elizabeth Barry maintained affairs with other playwrights, her relationship to Otway remains ambiguous.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form: 1660-1760*, details the plays dominant in the heroic mode, written by playwrights such as Davenant, Orrey, and Dryden, that held the stage between 1660 and 1770; they were, she argues, "shaped and governed by a system of precise epic, chivalric, or Platonic standards, which express the ideology of a self-consciously exclusive social class and which are justified aesthetically by neoclassical epic and dramatic theory," 3. For the roles afforded to male actors, see Brown's discussion of the "Herculean hero" in the dramas of Dryden (10-22).

became popular at the end of the 1670s, “the leading male actors Betterton, Smith, Harris and Hart continued to play the majority of star roles in tragedy.”<sup>32</sup> The production of Otway’s *The Orphan*, however, put the actress Elizabeth Barry center stage in a play written specifically for what would become known as her strength: the pathetic register. As John Downes records in *Roscius Anglicanus*, it was Barry’s part in Otway’s tragedies of the 1680s that “gain’d her the Name of Famous *Mrs. Barry*, both at Court and City; for when She *Acted* any of those three Parts, she forc’d Tears from the Eyes of her Auditory, especially those who have any Sense of Pity for the Distress’t.”<sup>33</sup> She-tragedy’s emphasis on female pathos had elevated Barry to stardom.<sup>34</sup>

Much of she-tragedy’s significance, and the reason the genre acts as a counterpoint to *King Lear*, I would argue, is that the emergence of she-tragedy opened up an imaginative space in which female roles, and the actresses who played them, were central to the workings of tragedy as a *genre*. That is, actresses and their roles were becoming crucial to she-tragedy’s success in terms of both its content and performance. As for content, scholars have discussed the way in which Otway’s drama in the early 1680s models a kind of tragedy in which female roles

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses*, 113.

<sup>33</sup> John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, ed. Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1929), 38. The passage also refers to Barry’s later role as Isabella in Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage* (1694).

<sup>34</sup> The success of actresses in the tragic genre has been taken up by subsequent scholars. Felicity Nussbaum re-evaluates actresses’ place in the rise of she-tragedy in *Rival Queens*, especially 71-85. Diana Solomon, “From Infamy to Intimacy: Anne Bracegirdle’s Mad Songs,” *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 35.1 (2011):1-20, has shown how the late 1680s was significant for Anne Bracegirdle, the actress who would become Elizabeth Barry’s partner. By 1692, Solomon notes, Dryden and Southerne had begun “customizing” parts for Bracegirdle (2).

become structurally essential to plots about family relationships and political turmoil.<sup>35</sup> With its aim of dramatizing private woe, for instance, Otway's *The Orphan* arranges a deadly love triangle between the orphan Monimia, played by Barry, and her guardian's twin sons: Castalio, played by Thomas Betterton, and Polydore, played Jo. Williams.<sup>36</sup> The tragedy revolves around Monimia as the brothers' object of desire and culminates with the spectacle of Monimia's heart-wrenching suicide. As Jean Marsden writes of the role of Monimia, "She is not only the focus of all eyes, but of all desires – the central object around which the play revolves."<sup>37</sup> Further, Otway's tragedies in this period do not confine their vision of women's importance to private or domestic affairs. In 1682, for instance, Otway's second celebrated tragedy for Barry, *Venice Preserved*, expanded its horizons beyond a love triangle to political intrigue and conspiracy. The tragedy showcases Elizabeth Barry's Belvidera, who is central not simply to the play's romantic entanglements, but also affairs of the state.<sup>38</sup> As Jaeffir and Pierre plan revenge against the senate, Pierre urges his friend to action through images of Jaeffir's suffering wife: "Thy *Belvidera* suffers: *Belvidera!*"<sup>39</sup> Barry's role is figured as the central motivating factor in the political plot that then unfolds.

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<sup>35</sup> Laura Brown, "The Defenseless Woman and the Development of English Tragedy," 432, connects the "unmerited suffering – the inevitable plight of the defenseless heroine" to the transition from aristocratic to middle-class values. For a longer treatment of Brown's argument, see this dissertation's first chapter.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Otway, *The Orphan; or, The Unhappy Marriage* (London: Printed for R. Bentley, and M. Magres [etc.], 1680), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0022.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0022.xml).

<sup>37</sup> Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserv'd, or, a Plot Discover'd; a Tragedy* (London: Printed for Jos. Hindmarsh [etc.], 1682), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0023.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0023.xml).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

In terms of the genre's performance, she-tragedy offered female players not so much courtship plots or the promise of marriage, as is Tate's emphasis; rather, she-tragedy gave actresses the opportunity to successfully display their talents through spectacular death scenes and significant speeches. Jean Marsden describes how she-tragedies "established a pattern of mingled titillation and suffering, dependent on displaying the afflictions and ultimate death of a central female figure."<sup>40</sup> While sexual violation was at stake in most plays, actresses, especially Elizabeth Barry, were also given meaty, culminating speeches. Actresses were not only items of sexual display; they articulated their desires and despair in full tragic eloquence. In *The Orphan*, for example, the set-piece of the tragedy's ending culminates with the thrilling death speech by Barry's Monimia. She declares with relish: "When I'm laid low in the Grave, and quite forgotten, / Maist thou be happy in a fairer Bride; / But none can ever love thee like *Monimia*."<sup>41</sup> Granted, Betterton's Castalio receives his fair share of stage time during the conclusion, and he is afforded the final death speech; however, his lines eventually refer back to the climax of Monimia's death: "Now all I beg, is, lay me in one Grave, / Thus with my Love. Farewell, I now am— nothing."<sup>42</sup> In 1682's *Venice Preserved*, Barry is afforded a particularly striking death sequence, as Betterton and Barry's positions are reversed from *The Orphan*: Betterton's death is dramatized first, and Barry's death scene occupies the play's final, gripping moments. After the death of Jaeffir, Barry's Belvidera launches into a mad, tragic rant. She is led onstage where she

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<sup>40</sup> Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 79. Marsden's analysis of *The Orphan* aligns the male characters with politics and the female characters with pathos (80-83).

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Otway, *The Orphan*, 69.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



sees the silent ghosts of her husband and Pierre; she dies, struggling with the imagined visions: “They have hold on me, and drag me to the bottom. / Nay—now they pull so hard—farewell.”<sup>43</sup>

Tate’s adaptation of *King Lear* is at odds with the she-tragedy boom, both in the way in which it portrays women’s place on stage as ultimately peripheral to displays of male virtue, what includes both pathos and heroic action, as well as in terms of the part it assigns to the actress who would play Cordelia, Elizabeth Barry. *Lear*’s mixed generic structure works to elevate male, rather than female, pathos, cultivating a vision not of a suffering wife or daughter, but a noble yet besieged father. Howe suggests that Tate was one of the first to “capitalise on Barry’s success as Monimia” and argues that Tate rewrote the play to “focus on” the character of Cordelia.<sup>44</sup> Close analysis of genre in Tate’s adaptation reveals instead that Tate’s mixed *Lear* places significant limits on the female-centric vision of she-tragedy by replacing Cordelia’s tragic trajectory with a marriage plot.<sup>45</sup> The addition of the love plot actively circumscribes Cordelia’s position within the family and the larger political landscape, emphasizing instead Cordelia’s interest in money and finance, the limits of her theatrical maneuvering, and her position as a commodity within the play’s sexual economy. The fixation on Cordelia’s coupling thoroughly roots her in the sexual economy of the play and foregrounds her economic worth as she is brokered as a commodity whose own power is limited. As for Barry, while she is often the focus of specular desire, she is never afforded any power or pathos in her own right; rather, her performance is always subordinate to, and therefore elevates, the feelings and actions of her male

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserved*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Howe, *First English Actresses*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

peers. Cordelia's marriage plot affords Barry no spectacular death scene or powerful speeches as in Otway's she-tragedies; rather, her final moments are a comparatively tame promise of marriage to Edgar. The tragedy of *King Lear*, then, elevates a filial tragic figure as pathetic subject and heroic agent, and does so, at least in part, by limiting actresses' proximity to tragic speech and tropes.

The first act of Tate's adaptation casts off the inner struggle that compels Shakespeare's tragic Cordelia, insisting instead upon the character's position as a commodity in the play's sexual economy. Appearing on stage alongside Edgar, Cordelia's opening dialogue is expanded beyond the breathless aside in which she contemplates the virtue of love and silence; instead, her introduction is comprised of an exchange with her lover, a young man who laments that the "treasure" of Cordelia's beauty will be given to his rival Burgundy. Edgar's comparison of his beloved's beauty to "treasure" is thoroughly conventional; nevertheless, the inaugural metaphor defines Cordelia's trajectory throughout the play. Cordelia's motivating conflict is allied with the pecuniary matters of the marriage market, a system through which any interior moral dilemma she might face must be understood. Cordelia's response to Edgar confirms this interpretive context:

Now comes my trial. How am I distressed,  
That must with cold speech tempt the choleric king  
Rather to leave me dowerless, than condemn me  
To loathed embraces!

(1.1.92-95)

Cordelia's "cold speech" to her father is in fact a result of her distaste for Burgundy rather than her virtue as a daughter (i.e., her unwillingness to coddle Lear's waning judgment). With this remark Tate dispenses with the inner morality that presumably drives Shakespeare's tragic Cordelia, or indeed she-tragic heroines of the period, offering in its place a character whose motivations are shaped by the external pressures of a system that values her as a brokered body rather than a tragic subject.<sup>46</sup> Cordelia's famous "nothing," delivered only a few lines later, now signifies as an artful piece of dissembling that successfully prevents the "loathed embraces" of an unwanted marriage (1.1.101, 1.1.95).<sup>47</sup> The recalibration of Cordelia's character, we must note, subsequently elevates Lear's own position. Lear, seemingly aware of the market forces that influence the actions of his daughter, instantly deduces the meaning of Cordelia's actions and openly suggests that her "fondness for the rebel son of Gloster" is to blame for her behavior (1.1.120). Lear's surprising insight bars an interpretation of the king as a man blind to his youngest daughter's true feelings; after all, his mind is sharp enough to ferret out the secret love between Edmund and his daughter and the money matters that underlie the situation. Cordelia, meanwhile, is presented to the audience as a character who questions not so much Lear's

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, 84, makes note of Cordelia's "bourgeois sensibility"; I would argue instead that Cordelia is not driven primarily by the conflicts of an inner morality but by external forces. However, she does work, as I will show, to confirm the inner feelings of the men around her.

<sup>47</sup> Cordelia's subsequent declaration, "Unhappy that I am that I can't dissemble," rings a bit hollow (1.1.103).

judgment, what seems to be fairly intact, instead whose sole focus is securing her choice of suitors.<sup>48</sup>

Cordelia's role as heroine in a marriage plot affords the character a limited degree of mobility; she is potentially an object of erotic display, though often helpless or silent. Her own social navigation is always subordinate to male theatrics. In the heath scene that follows, for example, Cordelia appears in costume accompanied by her waiting-woman Arante, wandering the landscape in search of the king. The stage directions do not specify the kind of costume to be worn by Cordelia, but one would assume that she is either masked or wearing breeches. Breeches roles, familiar in Barry's repertoire and highly popular in the period, would have afforded an opportunity to highlight the body of the actress.<sup>49</sup> As Pat Rogers points out, "the display of leg enhances the sexual display of womanhood even as it pretends to mimic manhood," and indeed Rogers names Barry as one of the talented Restoration practitioners who made a "considerable impact" in these roles.<sup>50</sup> However, Tate does not dramatize Cordelia and Arante's full search for Lear or fully realize the pair's potential to have a sexual escapade, as in other Barry roles; instead, the women enter the stage weakly exhausted at the end of their search and attempt to seek shelter. Immediately, they are beset by two of Edmund's henchmen. Edgar, close by and

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<sup>48</sup> After Burgundy declares his disinterest in a dowryless bride, for example, Cordelia, still concerned above all else with the terms of her wished-for union, decides to test Edgar's affections. Cordelia's persistent need to put her lover to the test suggests misgivings about notions of interior worth completely displacing the economics of that drive marriage and, along with it, patriarchy. Cordelia, therefore, stages a repeat performance of her earlier "cold speech" to her father with a plan to play the part of "cold Cordelia" in order to deny Edgar a profession of her love until he might somehow prove himself constant (1.1.226-234).

<sup>49</sup> The trope of the wandering, disguised woman would have been enticingly familiar to audiences who were fans of the erotically-charged comedy of the period, such as Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1677), in which Elizabeth Barry played the wily Helena.

<sup>50</sup> Pat Rogers, "The Breeches Part," *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1982), 248-249.

outfitted in his Tom O'Bedlam costume, plays the part of Cordelia's *deus ex machine*. He accomplishes a piece of theatrics that the women cannot: he scares off the attackers with his quarter-staff, a theatrical prop from his bedlam beggar garb. The moment quite conspicuously contrasts the two lovers: Edgar's costume enables his heroics on the heath, Cordelia's disguise, on the other hand, while momentarily titillating and diverting, becomes a liability, throwing her in harm's way. Unlike Edgar, Cordelia is never able to leverage her playacting into any sort of action; she can only be acted upon, whether in the attempted assault or her rescue by Edgar. Further, it is Edgar's inner worth, not Cordelia's, that is confirmed by the scene. His trick proves, in Cordelia's eyes, his sincerity. After he reveals his identity, Cordelia fixes on his fantastic appearance: "These hallowed rags of thine, and naked virtue, / These abject tassels, fantastic shreds / (Ridiculous even to the meanest clown) / To me are dearer than the richest pomp / Of purple monarchs" (3.4.97-100).

Cordelia's escapade on the heath elevates not only her suitor's heroic metatheatricity and assumed sincerity, but also buoys the high tragedy of the main plot, that which revolves around her father, King Lear. Cordelia's scenes on the heath are strategically situated side by side with King Lear's fits of madness, replicating a structure of generic hierarchy familiar from earlier tragicomedies.<sup>51</sup> The effect is that Cordelia and Aarante's short-lived venture to search for the king, and Edgar's spectacular rescue of the pair, is set against Lear's more pathetic and moving speeches. The third act begins, after all, with a scenario designed to elevate the pathos of the king as he confronts both the ferocity of the natural world and his own vulnerability,

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<sup>51</sup> John Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* (1673) or *The Spanish Fryer* (1680), in which Barry also performed, feature plots of this structure.

declaring, “Blow, winds, and burst your cheeks; rage louder yet. / Fantastic lightning singe, singe my white head” (3.1.1-2). With the knowing antics of the Fool cut from the production, Lear is instead flanked by Kent who does not criticize Lear, but points out instead his pitiable state: “This poor slight covering on his aged head,” he observes “Exposed to this wild war of earth and heaven” (3.1.8-9). The following scene provides a necessary contrast in which, after his exchange with Cordelia, the Bastard reveals his intentions to violate Cordelia and enjoy her as Jove did Semele, graphically describing how the storm would “deaf her cries / Like drums in battle, lest her groans should pierce / My pitying ear, and make the amorous fight less fierce” (3.2.121-124). While the storm provides a stage for elegant and prolix speeches from Lear, for Cordelia the heath becomes a source of threatened silence and sexual violence, suggesting their differing positions in the larger world that the heath therefore represents. The grandeur of Lear’s speeches on the heath is elevated through its contrast with the erotic titillation of Cordelia’s near-rape and subsequent rescue.

Crucial to understanding the play’s sexual politics is Cordelia’s speech in the fourth act of the play, a passage entirely of Tate’s invention, in which she fully articulates and accepts her inferior place in the social and generic hierarchy. The moment, I want to suggest, powerfully marks an argument for women’s limited place within tragedy, on the theater stage, and concerning national affairs. This speech, as I show in subsequent sections of this chapter, persists throughout all of the eighteenth-century adaptations of *Lear*. Hearing the war drums play, Cordelia delivers the following lines:

Oh for an arm

Like the fierce Thunderer's, when th'earth-born sons  
Stormed the heav'n, to fight this injured father's battle.  
That I could shift my sex, and dye me deep  
In his opposer's blood. But as I may  
With women's weapons, piety and prayers,  
I'll aid his cause:

(4.5.61-67)

Shakespeare's Cordelia willingly assumes a potentially heroic leadership position; here, however, Tate's Cordelia disavows such a venture. Though war times have historically thrown gender binaries into crisis, Kent's forces prompt Cordelia to reaffirm a traditional gender role. While disguises and adventure are appropriate activities for a marriage subplot, Cordelia's comments imply that such behavior cannot extend to matters of national import: namely war, conquest, and rulership. That is, the conventional, and Aristotelian-defined, subject of tragedy's main plot. Cordelia's role in this brand of tragedy is clearly delineated as a supporting one; she positions herself as a subordinate and admits that her weapons are "piety and prayers" and are only effective, presumably, with the accompanying martial forces. Symbolically she must remain pure and practically all she can do is pray. On the heath her disguise in breeches rendered her vulnerable; on the battlefield, she cannot even consider such a venture, suggesting that for Cordelia biology is, at least in affairs of state, her destiny.

As the tragic plot overtakes the stage, and with her faith in her lover resolved, Cordelia's function in the main plot is to serve a point through which male pathos or male power is

articulated. Cordelia is not figured centrally, but is more often than not an accessory through which the patriarchs of the play are valued. Her own pathos, for example, is typical contingent on the suffering of her father and she frequently images, in her speech, the suffering king. In the third act, she fears that her father has been harmed by the harsh elements. She laments that if her father has indeed been injured:

That you'd convey me to his breathless trunk:  
With my torn robes to wrap his hoary head,  
With my torn hair to bind his hands and feet,  
Then, with a shower of tears,  
To wash his clay-smear'd cheeks, and die beside him.

(3.2.86-90)

In this instance Cordelia is indeed part of the play's torrent of feeling; however, her tears are not in and of themselves markers of her value, but rather function in service to the image of her dead father. This relationship extends to other patriarchs in the play as well. In the second scene of the fourth act, for example, Cordelia meets the blinded Gloucester, saying to him, "I cast me at thy feet, and beg of thee / To crush these weeping eyes to equal darkness, / If that will give thee any recompense" (4.2.87-89). Again, Cordelia's emotional response reaffirms the pathos of a wounded patriarch. Paradoxically, however, it is also through her weakness that Cordelia reaffirms the power of these patriarchs. In the prison scene that ends the play, for example, Cordelia confirms the return of her father's power. When a captain and officers enter the cell,



Cordelia begs the presumed henchmen for mercy, yet her pleas are ineffective. As she says to the men: “no prayers / Can touch your soul to spare a poor king’s life” (5.6.26-27). The scene marks the limits of Cordelia’s display of emotion, offering up instead a space for the display of patriarchal valor. Lear is miraculously revived and dispatches the two intruders, saving his daughter’s life and his own. The relative ineffectiveness of Cordelia’s virtue is confirmed; it is not greater than Lear’s own martial heroics.

The play’s finale confirms that Cordelia’s position in the tragedy of *Lear* is a limited one. Denied a death scene or speech, elements that showcased actresses in she-tragedy, she is instead united to Edgar. While Lear declares that “Cordelia then shall be a queen” (5.6.107), the implication is that she will be subject to her husband’s will, whose theatrical prowess and true sincerity the play has proven. Lear, after all, implores Edgar to “take her crowned” (5.6.136). Edgar then is given the last words of the play, that “Our drooping country now erects her head, / Peace spreads her balmy wings, and Plenty blooms” (5.6.154-155). While he makes mention of Cordelia’s “bright example” of virtue, it is Edgar who speaks, not Cordelia (5.6.158). Ultimately, then, the play has made clear what Cordelia’s role is in varying contexts. Within the family, her aim is to secure marriage. In wider society, as in her role on the heath, Cordelia provides entertainment and titillation; however, her own acting is a mere lark in relation to the thundering speeches of Lear. Within the context of the nation, she is subject to male needs, whether in proving the pathetic nature of male bodies in pain or confirming their marital prowess through her own powerlessness.

Though there are conflicting accounts regarding whether or not Thomas Betterton or Elizabeth Barry truly excelled in their performances in Tate's *Lear*, by mid-century the stock play had established itself as a showcase for star male actors.<sup>52</sup> The gaze of audiences and critics, at least in this tragedy, was fixed on the hero rather than heroine.<sup>53</sup> Commentary on *Lear*, especially once David Garrick took up the role, gave primacy to the performances of the lead male actor.<sup>54</sup> Samuel Foote's pamphlets of 1747, for example, focus on Garrick to the exclusion of his co-star Susannah Cibber.<sup>55</sup> A debate in the 1750s periodical press between Warburton and Charles Ranger (Arthur Murphy) featured a fight over the tragic motivation of the tragedy's titular king; in the midst of the debate Garrick's performance is referenced and praised.<sup>56</sup> Frances Brooke

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<sup>52</sup> Little is known about Thomas Betterton's acting of *Lear*. Cibber's *Apology* contains no description. William Winter offers a review of the absence of comment on Betterton as *Lear* in *Shakespeare on the Stage* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1915), 351-353. As for Barry, neither John Downes' *Roscius Anglicanus* nor Cibber's *Apology* cite Cordelia as one of Barry's popular roles. Cibber mentions instead the roles of Monimia and Belvidera: "In the Art of exciting Pity she had a Power beyond all the Actresses I have yet seen, or what your Imagination can conceive. Of the former of these two great Excellencies she gave the most delightful Proofs in almost all the Heroic Plays of *Dryden* and *Lee*; and of the latter, in the softer Passions of *Otway's Monimia* and *Belvidera*" (*Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 92).

<sup>53</sup> Jean Marsden, *Fatal Desire*, 66 contends that Tate's adaptation only becomes truly "notable for its rendition of male pathos" when taken up by actors such as David Garrick in the middle of the eighteenth century.

<sup>54</sup> George Winchester Stone, working from a manuscript in the Folger Library, notes that Garrick's first performance was March 11, 1742, and it was of Tate's *King Lear*. See George Winchester Stone Jr.'s "Garrick's Production of *King Lear*: a Study in the Temper of the Eighteenth-Century Mind," *Studies in Philology* 45.1 (1948): 89-103.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Foote published two tracts that addressed Garrick's role in *Lear* in 1747: *A treatise on the Passions, So Far as They Regard the Stage; with a Critical Enquiry Into the Theatrical Merit of Mr. G-k, Mr. Q-n, and Mr. B-y. The First Considered in the Part of Lear, the Two Last Opposed in Othello*, (London: Printed for C. Corbet, against St. Dunstons-Church, Fleet-Street, 1747), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>; and *The Roman and English Comedy Consider'd and Compar'd. With Remarks on The Suspicious Husband. And an Examen into the Merit of the Present Comic Actors* (London: Printed for T. Waller, in Fleet-Street, 1747), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. In *A Treatise on the Passions* he comments on Susannah Cibber's acting, though not in the role of Cordelia (34-36).

<sup>56</sup> Warburton's comments appear in numbers of 113, 116, and 122 of *The Adventurer* (London: 1752-1754), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. Murphy's

famously ruffled Garrick's feathers by writing an extended review of two competing stage versions of the play in which she admired Spranger Barry's performance of the king, but not Garrick's.<sup>57</sup> No early actress, however, garnered intense acclaim, generated an abundance of critique, or maintained such significant celebrity from her role as Cordelia. Gesturing at the difficulties of fitting an actress to part of Cordelia, Francis Gentleman, in his commentary from *The Dramatic Censor*, goes so far as to catalog the many actresses who took up the role without note:

In compliment to Lear, she is generally given to the first actress, whether fit for her or no; delicacy of figure, and tenderness of expression, are all the requisites which seem necessary for her; Mrs. CIBBER was no doubt very pleasing, but during our remembrance too much of the woman; as Mrs. YATES is at present, with the unsufferable addition of an imperious, uncharacteristic aspect: Mrs. BELLAMY looked the part amiably, but tuned the words most monotonously: Mrs. BARRY speaks and feels it extremely well, but rather outfigures it; and we apprehend that very deserving young actress, Mrs. BULKELEY — why is she so neglected by the managers ? — would render Cordelia more agreeable than any other lady now on the stage.<sup>58</sup>

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response, along with a letter from an anonymous participant in the discussion, can be found in numbers 16 and 17 of *The Gray's-Inn Journal* (London: Printed for W. Faden, 1753-1754), 91-101.

<sup>57</sup> In No. 18 of the periodical *The Old Maid* (London: Printed for A. Millar in the Strand, 1764), 149-150, Brooke criticizes Garrick for drinking from Tate's "adulterated cup"; however, she praises Spranger Barry's acting of Lear and admits she has not seen Garrick play the role. Her spleen, while not very great, is often traced to Garrick's dismissal of one of her plays. See Ellen Donkin *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (London: Routledge, 1995), 41-45. Kevin Joel Berland details the ongoing animosity between the two in "Frances Brooke and David Garrick," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 20 (1990): 217-30.

<sup>58</sup> Francis Gentleman, "King Lear," *The Dramatic Censor*, 376.

The litany of unsuccessful performances emphasizes the point that no actress during the period was able to claim the role of Cordelia as her own, nor make use of the role as a means to further her career. The surrogated structure of the play ensured that the period's mongrel *Lear* remained a vehicle for proving the power of male power, authority and above all, male actors.

### III. Cordelia Sanitized

Two adaptations of *King Lear* appeared after the middle of the eighteenth century by two notable male playwrights: George Colman's failed *King Lear* of 1768 and David Garrick's more successful revisions published by Bell in 1773, along with a further revised posthumous edition in 1786.<sup>59</sup> These two adaptations, and their ties to Tate's earlier script, suggest that the generic strategies of the 1681 mongrel *Lear* were volleys in a larger interpretive struggle over women's place in the theater, the family, and society. By the time Colman and Garrick took up their pens to adapt *King Lear*, the social context of the theater had shifted from the days of Tate's coterie audiences. As the middle-class became central to eighteenth-century life, the theaters of the

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<sup>59</sup> George Colman, *The History of King Lear* (London: Printed for R. Baldwin ... and T. Becket, and Co. [etc.], 1768), University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey English Verse Drama database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0392.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0392.xml); David Garrick, *King Lear; A Tragedy* (London: Printed for John Bell ... and C. Etherington, 1774) in *The Plays of David Garrick*, eds. Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann, 7 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1980-1982), volume 3. All citations refer to these editions. Recent scholars hypothesize that David Garrick did not alter Tate's version of the play until after George Colman's failed production in 1768. Arthur John Harris, "Garrick, Colman, and *King Lear*: A Consideration," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22.1 (1971): 57-66, argues that Garrick most likely performed Tate's *King Lear* until the late 1760s. Colman's play has often been considered merely an extension of Garrick's restorations; however Harris offers convincing evidence that Colman's version precedes major restorations by Garrick (63).

1760s and 1770s were no longer aristocratic venues, but rather home to an increasingly bourgeois audience for whom Shakespeare had become much more than a mere playwright. Audiences in this period did not share Tate's gallant attitude that Shakespeare's words were like "a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished."<sup>60</sup> Rather, Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769 had confirmed the cultural ascension of Shakespeare and culminated a period that scholars such as Michael Dobson and Jean Marsden argue saw the page triumph over the stage, as commentators demanded that Shakespeare's plays, having become closely associated with British national identity, be restored.<sup>61</sup> Despite such cultural imperatives, however, adaptations of *King Lear* by George Colman and David Garrick stubbornly clung to key elements of Tate's tragedy with a happy ending. The role of Cordelia, I argue below, proves to be one of the most persistently problematic characters as both Colman and Garrick were unwilling to revert to Shakespeare's text. Rather, the happy ending of marriage was preserved, and Tate's earlier version of Cordelia was revised to conform to a chaste model of middle-class domestic virtue. Garrick and Colman's adaptations therefore reflect a complex set of competing interests that shaped Cordelia's generic arc in this period: middle class sexual ideology, the rise of bardolatry, and the continued need to preserve *King Lear* as a vehicle for representations of male power and pathos, as well as male performers. Taken together the published adaptations by Colman and Garrick, and the generic revisions they enact, are evidence of a pressing need to rearticulate the

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<sup>60</sup> Nahum Tate, "Dedication," *King Lear*, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, 185, argues for the increasing importance of the text between 1730 and 1769, suggesting that "the very nature of this period's adaptations, with their emphasis on identifying Shakespeare with a strictly domestic and therefore private propriety, helped to render the public performance of his works increasingly irrelevant to his status in British culture." Jean Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text*, 9, similarly contends that in the later period "critics located meaning within Shakespearean words, not in the larger dramatic action, and sought to protect this sacred text."

character of Cordelia once again to fit the changing sexual politics of the theater in the last half of the eighteenth century.

In 1768, the debut season of playwright George Colman's tenure at Covent Garden, the newly-installed manager brought out several Shakespearean adaptations specifically fitted for the lead actor William Powell, among them a version of *King Lear*.<sup>62</sup> Colman's adaptation, unsuccessful though it was, offers an interesting and contradictory study in Shakespearean adaptation, proffering, as it does, an oddly patchwork version of Cordelia.<sup>63</sup> Colman purports to ostensibly restore Shakespeare's original play declaring that "Tate's alteration is for the worse" (iii). Colman belittles Tate's outdated understanding of generic decorum, writing that Tate was a man "in whose days love was the soul of Tragedy as well as Comedy" (iii). Despite his derogatory comments about Tate, however, an examination of the play reveals that Colman does not return to Shakespeare's text, nor does he cast off many of Tate's more controversial revisions.<sup>64</sup> Rather, Colman, as I show below, conflates Shakespeare's original text, key portions from Tate, and his own insertions. The result is a compromised Cordelia who lacks the theatrical flair of Tate's

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<sup>62</sup> George Colman, a friend of David Garrick's, began his career at Drury Lane, assuming management of the theater while Garrick traveled in Europe during the early to mid 1760s. Arthur John Harris details this relationship in "Garrick, Colman, and *King Lear*: A Consideration," 57-66. By the late 1760s, Colman had invested in Covent Garden, where by the 1768 season he had defected and was assisting in the new management of the theater. Powell, who was given several Shakespearean roles that season, had experience playing the role of Lear at Drury Lane when Garrick left for the continent in 1763 (Harris, "Garrick, Colman, and *King Lear*: A Consideration," 65).

<sup>63</sup> Colman's adaptation debuted in February of 1768 and ran for only three nights in its first season at Covent Garden with Powell as King Lear and Mary-Anne Yates as Cordelia. The lifespan of Colman's play was only fifteen performances; by 1774, Covent Garden reverted to Tate's version.

<sup>64</sup> Jean Marsden overlooks this treatment of Cordelia, writing, "The only changes Colman makes in the Shakespearean segment of his play (Acts I-V.i) are omissions" (*The Re-Imagined Text*, 94).

surrogated version, yet who is also not fully restored to the army-leading tragic heroine original to Shakespeare; instead, Cordelia becomes a passive paragon, subordinate to the male characters of the play. The point of the revisions seem to be not so much a restoration of Shakespeare, then, but a revision of Cordelia's character to meet mid-century sexual mores, suggesting once again anxieties about the role and the women who played her.

The first half of the play, in which Cordelia famously casts aspersions upon her father's judgment, does indeed revert to Shakespeare's version; gone, most notably, is Tate's amorous courtship between Edgar and Cordelia. In his introduction Colman states that one of the "capital objections" to Tate's play is the love between Cordelia and Edgar, a plot through which, Colman argues, Cordelia "loses on that of real virtue" (ii). Colman thus declares the marriage plot between Cordelia and Edgar "too ridiculous for representation" (iii). Cordelia does not attempt to prove her suitor's affections, since France, whose sincerity is proven by his willingness to take Cordelia after being cast off by her father, now stands in place of Edgar. Further, with this decision, Colman casts off the more titillating elements of Tate's adaptation, presumably to update the role of Cordelia for the morality of middle-class audiences. Gone, then, is the episode of Cordelia's near-abduction on the heath. The threat of rape vanishes. Cordelia's breeches role is expunged. In Tate's version of the play, the subplot of the heath is an erotic and entertaining space in which Cordelia, though unable to navigate the perilous social world, is an object of display; in Colman's adaptation, however, Cordelia is removed from the stage altogether. With the excision of the love plot, Tate is able to sanitize Cordelia, shielding her from any erotic gaze.

The play, however, does not see a wholesale return to Shakespeare's tragedy; Colman's own revisions, and his dependency upon Tate, become clear as the play progresses. Beginning in

the play's fourth act, Colman revises several of Shakespeare's scenes, as Shakespeare's Cordelia returns from France to aid her father's return to the throne. Shakespeare's version of *King Lear* dramatizes a Cordelia who, in the absence of her father's sanity, unproblematically steps into his place of command. In both the quarto of 1608 and the 1623 folio of Cordelia returns from France and, after assessing the situation at hand, immediately commands a "century," a hundred men, to go in search of her father, announcing "He that helps him, take all my outward worth" (folio 1623, 4.3.6, 4.3.10).<sup>65</sup> Cordelia is clearly at the head of the search for her father, and those accompanying her attend to her and defer to her orders.<sup>66</sup> There is no question about who will take the place of Lear in terms of leadership; of this Cordelia is fully capable, and the absence of patriarchal authority is not experienced as a lack. In Colman's version, however, Cordelia gives no such commands. Rather, she becomes emotional, cursing her sisters and shaming them, while declaring pity for her "poor old father," exclaiming: "Let pity ne'er believe it! Oh my heart!" (51).<sup>67</sup> To this, the physician present in the scene acts as a proxy for Lear's male authority and, rather than taking her orders, offers her succor: "Take comfort, madam; there are means to cure him" (51). Refusing sound medical advice, Cordelia instead indulges in a flight of feeling:

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<sup>65</sup> In the 1608 quarto, Cordelia's command is initially delivered in passive construction: "A century is sent forth" (4.3b.6).

<sup>66</sup> A messenger and a physician appear in the 1608 version, and later a gentleman in the 1623 folio. In Shakespeare's versions, Cordelia makes mention of her feelings for her father and her "tears" (quarto 1608 4.3b.17, folio 1623 4.3.17), but follows with commands, telling the men to "Seek, seek for him" (quarto 1608 4.3b.18, folio 1623 4.3.18).

<sup>67</sup> This dialogue is lifted from Shakespeare's version (1608 quarto 4.3a.28-30), though in the 1608 quarto, the dialogue is not performed by Cordelia herself, rather the speech is reported by a messenger to Kent who has observed Cordelia reading a letter concerning her father.



No; 'tis too probable the furious storm  
Has pierc'd his tender body past all cure;  
And the bleak winds, cold rain, and sulph'rous light'ning,  
Unsettled his care-wearied mind for ever.

(51)

When Cordelia orders a century to go and find her father, a mere echo of her forceful command in Shakespeare's play, the doctor replies with a consoling, "Be patient, madam" (51). After the attendants exit, Cordelia indulges in another rant, this speech retained from Tate's adaptation in which she asks to be taken to the "breathless trunk" of her father so that she may "die beside him" (51). Cordelia's seeming authority, then, is cut through with emotional outbursts. Colman's revisions suggest Cordelia, who must be consoled by the nearest patriarchal stand in, is certainly not fit to lead the search for her father, let alone take his place as monarch.

As the play draws to a close, Colman fully embraces significant elements of Tate's production, many of which work to confirm Cordelia's inability to head her family, lead the nation, or to hold center stage. When Cordelia is finally reunited with King Lear in the play's fourth act, for example, she delivers the speech original to Tate, included in Colman's fifth act, in which she longs to "shift my sex" yet realizes that as a woman her only weapons are that of "piety and prayr's" (61). Cordelia's role in *Lear's* tragedy, especially as it relates to the rule of the country, is therefore once again clearly marked: hers is not the leading role. As in the conclusion of Tate's adaptation, which Colman for the most part retains, the end sequence of Colman's play once again underscores Cordelia's position as an object in an economy of male

action and feeling and, through the poetically-just conclusion, dramatizes her subordinate position in marriage. As in Tate, Colman stages King Lear's miraculous prison break, in which he is able to prove his returned strength through the rescue of his daughter (63). After the prison episode, Cordelia is then re-installed in her position as the wife of France. Albany reports to Lear: "Thy captive daughter too, the wife of France, / Unransom'd we enlarge, and shall, with speed, / Give her safe convoy to her royal husband" (70). Yet again, though King Lear exclaims that "Cordelia then is Queen again," it is clear from her previous actions that she understands the limitations of her sex and therefore her role in the affairs of state more generally (70).

David Garrick's later adaptation of *King Lear* proved more successful with audiences than Colman's, perhaps because it was carried in part by the strength of his previous performances as Lear and his established theatrical reputation. As opposed to Colman's adaptation, however, Garrick's script reflects a much more savvy integration of Shakespeare, Tate, and Garrick's own editorial revisions. Most importantly, I would argue, is that Garrick keeps intact the structure of surrogation from Tate's play. Cordelia is relegated to a marriage plot, where her own plight is serially juxtaposed with the elevated main tragedy. Further, the aforementioned speech in which Cordelia desires to "shift" her sex is importantly kept (5.1.67-80), as is her rescue from prison by her father, King Lear (5.4). The conclusion once again frames Cordelia, first and foremost, as a wife and daughter by focus on her marriage to Edgar, condoned by King Lear (5.4.144-148). The combined effect, as in Tate's 1681 version, is to emphasize, Cordelia's concerns with marriage and subordinate position within patriarchal structures – whether family or state; Cordelia's

scenes are, after all, still similarly juxtaposed with scenes of male pathos or martial valor, creating an implicit hierarchical comparison between the two.

David Garrick, however, makes concessions to the sexual politics his own contemporary moment, as far as Cordelia is concerned, in that he mutes much of her playacting and recourse to theatricality from the 1681 play, whitewashing her character to more closely fit current notions of middle-class femininity. For example, though Cordelia is involved in a love plot with Edgar beginning with the play's first act, she does not seek to test his true feelings, as she does in Tate's version. The aside in which Cordelia expresses doubt about Edgar's sincerity and her "suspicion" of the entire "race of men" is cut entirely.<sup>68</sup> In this way, Garrick's adaptation does not worry or challenge the economy of virtue in the same fashion as Tate's play. As such, theatricality is useful in justifying to the audience Cordelia's challenge of her father's judgment (she is simply attempting to make a better marriage), but does not function as a strategic means to ascertain her suitor's authenticity or test men's constancy. Further, Garrick mutes the potential eroticism of the play and the display of Cordelia's sexuality more generally. Cordelia and Aarante still wander the heath in the third act of the play, but they do not do so in disguises (3.3.172). The thrill of bodily display is curtailed. Further, the speech in which Edmund expresses his physical desires for the virtuous Cordelia is toned down considerably; his reference to Jove and Semele remains, but absent is the graphic description of his violation of Cordelia's body (3.2.79-80). In this way, the first half of the play sanitizes and updates Cordelia considerably from Tate's Restoration version.

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<sup>68</sup> Nahum Tate, *King Lear*, 1.1.227.

That Garrick would not have written a plum role for the actress who was to play Cordelia comes as no great surprise given that *Lear* was a successful part of Garrick's own rise to fame. The description of the actress who should be selected to play Cordelia from Bell's edition is especially interesting in that it reinforces physically the emendations Garrick makes textually:

*Cordelia* is most amiable, in principles, and should be so in features and figure: there is no great occasion for strength of countenance, nor brilliancy of eyes; she appears designed rather for a soft, than sprightly beauty; yet considerable sensibility, both of look and expression, is essential.

(6)

Exceptional physical beauty is not of import as far as the casting of Cordelia is concerned, nor is "strength of countenance." The character, then, is not drawn to play to any sexual appeal or any particular strength of moral character. Rather, Cordelia is characterized as "soft" with an emphasis on her "sensibility." The note does not demand that the part of Cordelia be played by a lead tragic actress or even an actress with command of the passions, suggesting, one can assume, that the star role in the play was fitted instead for Lear, and Garrick, himself.

#### IV. Conclusion: Archival Cordelia

The conclusion to this chapter returns to the premise with which it began: a critique of Cordelia from the pen of a woman writing at mid-century, one who herself actively moved within and

commented upon public life. I close by considering author Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespear Illustrated* (1754), a work in which the authors re-imagines Cordelia's character outside of the structures entailed by dramatic genres and instead through the lens of history.<sup>69</sup> While Anne Donnellan's letter to Elizabeth Montagu offered only a snatch of pithy commentary, Charlotte Lennox's writing on *King Lear* extends the premise of Donnellan's letter by conceiving the role of Cordelia far beyond a "whining, love-sick maid." Tate, Colman, and Garrick revised Cordelia around blunted versions of tragedy and comedy, death and marriage. Lennox, on the other hand, in her study of Shakespeare's textual antecedents shifts the conversation about Cordelia from the space of the repertoire to that of the archive.<sup>70</sup> By so doing, Lennox unearths in *Holinshed's Chronicles* a much older, and in her view, far more empowering version of Cordelia, a historical character rather than a dramatic one, whose "Greatness of Soul," as Lennox writes, is unequivocally rewarded both with her life and the undisputed rule of her father's kingdom.<sup>71</sup> By accessing the genre of history, Lennox takes refuge in the archive were she sidesteps the vexing sexual politics presented by theatrical performance.<sup>72</sup> Lennox amends the concept of poetic justice by associating Cordelia's fate with a construction of valorous femininity rather than love

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<sup>69</sup> For an analysis of Lennox's generic experimentation in the novel, see this dissertation's chapter on Lennox's *The Female Quixote*.

<sup>70</sup> As in the previous chapter on Colley Cibber, I draw here on Diana Taylor's theorization of the space of the archive in, among other works, "Performance and/as History," *TDR: The Drama Review*, 50.1 (2006): 68.

<sup>71</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear are Founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for A. Millar, in the Strand, 1754), 3:288, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. All citations refer to this edition.

<sup>72</sup> Though, admittedly, Lennox herself found another set of sexual politics in her attempt at literary criticism; her attack on Shakespeare drew the critical establishment's ire.

or marriage, a kind of role which, as this chapter has demonstrated, it was sometimes difficult for prominent male playwrights to fully imagine for their female co-stars.

As situating Shakespeare's plays within a textual rather than a stage tradition is the overarching project of *Shakespeare Illustrated*, Lennox's section on *King Lear* begins with a reprint of "The History of Leir, King of the Britains" from *Holinshed's Chronicles*. With the absence of the Gloucester subplot, this earlier source material focuses solely on the relationship between Leir and his daughters; by the end of the play, his youngest daughter, referred to alternately as "Cordilla" or "Cordeilla," will head both the family and the country they rule. The exposition remains the same as in the main plot of Shakespeare's stage version: Leir unwisely divides his kingdom between his three daughters, casting out his youngest. The patriarch then finds himself in turn cast out by his two oldest children. The tale in the *Chronicles*, however, reveals a Cordeilla who, though she is shunned by her father and married to Agannipus, a prince of "Gallia," is nevertheless marked by significant financial independence and impressive military prowess (3:275).

For example, after being mistreated by his daughter, Leir leaves his kingdom to seek Cordeilla in France. Here she is given the opportunity to demonstrate her largess:

"The Lady *Cordeilla* hearing he was arrived in poor Estate, she first sent to him privately a sum of Money to apparel himself withall, and to retain a certain Number of Servants, that might attend upon him in honorable Wise, as apperteyned to the Estate which he had borne."

*Holinshed's* Cordeilla is in command of the resources of her kingdom; moreover, she is willing and able to come to the aid of her father, now in a position of supplication, in order to mend the rent kinship structure. Cordeilla is not imagined as a commodity in the marriage market, nor is she subject to her husband's control, her will subsumed into his; rather, Cordeilla acts independently, controlling the flow of resources and diverting them to whom she sees fit, in this case the estate of her father. Linking the governance of family to issues of state, Cordeilla's generous treatment of her father also seemingly qualifies her to rule his kingdom as well. Determined to reclaim Leir's lands, Cordeilla's husband Aganippus raises an army at which point "*Leir and his Daughter Cordeilla with her Husband*" cross the channel and restore Leir to the throne (3:277). While Aganippus accompanies Leir and Cordeilla in their battles, it is Cordeilla alone who is positioned as the "rightful Inheritor" of *King Lear's* kingdom, as Leir explicitly promises "to leave [the Land] unto her" (3:277). Victorious in battle, Leir is restored to the throne and rules for a scant two years, after which the tale concludes with, presumably, Cordeilla ruling in his place.

In her commentary that follows the reprint, it is apparent that Lennox finds the material from *Holinshed's Chronicles* critically appealing; from her archival point of view, she launches a defense of Cordelia's character, as well as a full-scale assault on King Lear's authority. By positioning *Holinshed's Chronicles* as the "Original" text and Shakespeare as the imitator, Lennox cites history as a precedent; the *Chronicles* are the basis for a critique of Lear's treatment of his youngest daughter. Lennox defends Cordelia's silence, for example, writing that she had

“no other Crime but confining her Expressions of Tenderness within the Bounds of plain and simple Truth” (3:286). Lennox notes that in the *Chronicles*, Cordelia is only disinherited for her disobedience, not exiled to France and later hanged (3:287). She argues that Lear’s behavior throughout, therefore, represents “a Judgment totally depraved” and asks “what less than Phrenzy can inspire a Rage so groundless, and a Conduct so absurd!” (3:287). Shakespeare’s Lear, she contends, “acts like a madman” (3:287). While male playwrights’ marginalization of Cordelia acted to emphasize Lear’s pathetic qualities and elevate his tragic standing, Lennox centralizes the figure of the mistreated daughter in order to attack Lear, a character whose behavior she paints not so much as sympathetic, but absurd. She emphasizes here not Lear’s pathetic qualities heroics but his complete lack of judgment, what borders, in her mind, on insanity.

Along with critiquing Lear’s patriarchal authority, another of Lennox’s aims appears to be a renovation of the concept of poetic justice, what she is able to achieve, once again, by giving primacy to the genre of history and the space of the archive. The largest error found in Shakespeare’s tragedy, according to Lennox, is the injustice of the ending he pens. She complains that “the Forces of the two wicked Sisters are victorious, *Lear* and the pious *Cordelia* are taken prisoners, she is hanged in prison, and the old King dies with Grief” (3:290). She continues, “Had Shakespear followed the Historian, he would not have violated the Rules of poetical Justice” (3:291). Just as Tate before her had done, Lennox argues that the events of Shakespeare’s play are “neither probable, necessary, nor just” (3:291). Though she does not mention Tate’s adaptation, her diction echoes the playwright’s famous introduction, he who



found Cordelia's treatment of her father to violate "probability."<sup>73</sup> While poetical justice originated within the dramatic tradition, Lennox cannily relocates the concept to the genre of history and in doing so attempts to redefine the limits of the concept. The resolution of the *Chronicles* is poetically just, then, as it concludes the story not necessarily with a marriage or intended union, but focuses instead on Leir and Cordeillia's military triumph and Cordeilla's ascension to the throne. While male playwrights in the dramatic tradition doled out poetic justice as a felicitous marriage, Lennox widens the understanding of poetic justice to include the events of the chronicle, the ending of which features a Cordelia whose marriage is tangential to her more general "Greatness" (3:288).

Lennox's critique of tragic telos argues, therefore, for a widening of the way in which women's lives are interpreted. By generically repositioning and reclaiming the mechanism of poetic justice, she shrewdly casts off tragedy and comedy as interpreted by male playwrights in favor of history; by so doing, Lennox is able to forward a construction of femininity that is actively involved with the projects of the family and the nation. In *Holinshed's Chronicles* Cordeillia, at the end of the tale, lives – further, she rules. As compared to adaptations by Tate, Colman, and Garrick, Colman, all of which reveal deeply conservative gender politics, Lennox's revisions fly in the face of the rising tide of the nation's bardolatry to argue for a different order of things.

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<sup>73</sup> Nahum Tate, "Dedication," *King Lear*, 1.

Chapter 4: Tragicomedy in the Novel  
The Generic Mandate of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*

This chapter begins with a deceptively simple question: Why is Charlotte Lennox's 1752 comic novel *The Female Quixote* funny? Upon first glance, the story is not an obviously hilarious one, especially from the point of view of the contemporary feminist critic. The novel chronicles the history of Arabella, a bored young woman who acts out the plots found in seventeenth-century French romance novels. Arabella's delusions of grandeur compensate for the lack of power she experiences in her life. Promised in marriage to her cousin and confined to the castle of her father, Arabella's activities are limited to the domestic sphere of courtship and marriage. The script of French romance, therefore, offers Arabella an attractive, yet dangerous, escape. Personating a great heroine of antiquity, she wanders freely, speaks her mind, and commands her lovers. Her family begins to suspect she is insane. Eventually, a clergyman is called; the divine persuades Arabella that her desire for freedom was most likely a fit of lunacy. Remorseful and reformed, Arabella is married to her cousin, at which point the novel ends.

Recounted in this light, *The Female Quixote* might not seem to be a comedy, but a very real kind of tragedy familiar to eighteenth-century scholars. Arabella's history, hyperbolic though it may be, is an echo of women's experience in the period more generally, relegated as they were to separate spheres, denied legal personhood, and subject to the whims of patriarchal will. Arabella's plight might, then, be understood as a fanciful episode in a long history of women's oppression; to laugh at such a character, or to interpret her as a simple object of satire, runs the risk of dismissing the very real

historical realities to which Arabella's story can be likened. And yet, despite the potential clash of tragedy and comedy, Lennox's novel is indeed quite comic. In fact, it is really very funny.

Take, for example, the following scene. Arabella has been promised, along with all of her father's estates, to her cousin, Mr. Glanville. All that is left is the performance of the courtship ritual. Thus far, however, Glanville has been refused by Arabella both verbally and in a letter written in a heroic and grandiose style. Convinced she is in jest, Glanville attempts to enter the closet into which Arabella has locked herself; he finds, however, that Arabella stubbornly refuses to open the door. Believing that the game continues, Glanville plays along with the act. "Well, I shall be revenged on you sometime hence," he declares theatrically, "and make you repent the tricks you play me now!"<sup>1</sup> The line is silly and flirtatious, and Glanville means to continue a charade between two lovers. In this he understands himself, as does the astute reader, as a suitor in a marriage plot. Glanville's playful teasing is essentially comic. He does not intend to assault Arabella; he only wishes to marry her.

Arabella, on the other hand, is not in on the joke, nor the genre. She takes Glanville at his word and interprets his good humor as a threat. Glanville, she thinks, will definitely abduct her. Moreover, he will probably kill someone in the process. It is not marriage that is on Arabella's mind; rather, it is the danger of abduction and rape. Arabella runs on at length about what will surely be a ceaseless persecution; the

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 34. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

enjambéd passage allows Arabella to envision a nightmare scenario of imprisonment heretofore realized in only the most tragic eighteenth-century plays and novels:

*Arabella* not being able to imagine any thing, by these Words he spoke in Raillery, but that he really, in the Spite and Anguish of his Heart, threatened her with executing some terrible Enterprize; she did not doubt, but he either intended to carry her away; or, thinking her Aversion to him proceeded from his having a Rival happy enough to be esteemed by her, those mysterious Words he had uttered related to his Design of killing him; so that as she knew, he could discover no Rival to wreak his Revenge upon, she feared, that, at once to satisfy that Passion as well as his Love, he would make himself Master of her Liberty.

(34)

With the threat of assault looming large, Arabella is convinced that Glanville, as Lovelace before him, will, as the narrator repeats for effect at the conclusion of the chapter, “take away her liberty” (35). Arabella’s life is ratcheted into the highest form of tragedy available to an eighteenth-century woman of her status: the violation of her virtue. Assessing the situation in the direst terms, Arabella identifies herself as a she-tragic heroine akin to Jane Shore or Clarissa Harlowe.<sup>2</sup> It is not the contentment of the

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph. F. Bartolomeo, "Female Quixotism v. 'Feminine' Tragedy: Lennox's Comic Revision of *Clarissa*," in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), asserts that “Lennox’s novel is a rewriting of Clarissa in a comic mode,” 164.

marriage bed that awaits her, but the familiar tragic arc of violence, shame, and ultimately, death.

In the above passage the rival genres of tragedy and comedy are twinned for comic and critical effect; this mongrel structure, perhaps, is the novel's greatest joke. As Arabella's performance of tragedy plays out on a comic stage, the generic friction produces the novel's many laughs and most importantly, a critique of the patriarchal system in which Arabella exists. The scene between Arabella and her lover, and indeed the novel more generally, cleverly asks us to compare and contrast the two plots available to our heroine: marriage or death. In doing so, the savvy reader realizes both the disparity and likeness between the two choices. The heroine's position between two highly unsatisfactory generic arcs suggests a structure similar to what Hegel would later define as modern tragedy: an individual faced with two conflicting values.<sup>3</sup> If comedy is yoked to marriage, and tragedy to death, then the tragicomic double bind in which Arabella is caught is a marriage that is a kind of death.<sup>4</sup> As *The Female Quixote* insistently calls our attention to the competing frames of tragedy and comedy, the novel, therefore, exposes the limitations of a single genre as a means of representing Arabella's particular

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<sup>3</sup> In his lectures on aesthetics, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel addresses the structure of tragedy rather than its emotional effect on spectators. He writes, "The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has *justification*; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other. The consequence is that in its moral life, and because of it, each is nevertheless involved in *guilt*." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, 2 vols., trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 2:1196.

<sup>4</sup> By examining these generic categories, my chapter is in conversation with Susan Carlile, "Henrietta on Page and Stage" in *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s*, ed. Susan Carlile (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh Univ. Press, 2011), 128-141, who has begun to address Lennox in light of her career in the theater.

experience. In this way, Lennox's target becomes not so much her deluded heroine, but rather a culture that systematically stages tragedies for women, yet asks them to perform their roles as happily as comic heroines. For a character such as Arabella, tragedy is comedy and comedy is tragedy; that is, the traditional meanings of genres cannot hold.

Seemingly irresolvable arguments about genre, we should note, have long plagued scholarship on Charlotte Lennox and *The Female Quixote*. Whether situating the novel within feminist histories of women's writing or narratives of the eighteenth-century novel's rise, confusion often circles around the novel's tensely held opposition between the genres of realism and romance, and what this conflict means for a lineage of women writers, the eighteenth-century novel, or both.<sup>5</sup> Such debates run as follows: Though *The Female Quixote* grants access to the tradition of French romance, a genre in which women maintain positions of ideological and narrative power, the eventual reformation of the title character would seem to foreclose the possibility of genre as a space of

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<sup>5</sup> James Lynch, "Romance and Realism in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Essays in Literature* 14, no. 1 (1987): 51-63, gauges Lennox's presumed chastisement of romance, and her ostensible preferment of the realist novel. Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 62, explores the difference a female heroine makes in the novel/romance tradition inherited from continental novels such as *Don Quixote*. Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996), 288, argues that *The Female Quixote* "records" realism's defeat of romance. Doody elsewhere claims that Lennox's novel displays a "generic struggle" between the narrative modes of realism and romance. See "Introduction," *The Female Quixote* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), xvii. Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 164-165, suggests that Lennox's novel works to define broader concepts of fictionality beyond romance and realism; however, her argument does not entirely break free of narratives about the rise of the novel. Helen Thompson, *Ingenuous Subjection, Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), describes the "generic mandate" of the novel as a contest between romance and the realist novel; she argues, however, against the assertion that romance is defeated by realism, suggesting that Doody's claims are a "red herring," 152, 154. Even very recent essays both contest and pay homage to the critical tussle over romance and realism, such as Marta Kvande's "Reading Female Readers," *Masters of the Marketplace, British Women Novelists of the 1750s*, ed. Susan Carlile (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh Univ. Press, 2011), 219-241.

resistance. As part of the novel's rehabilitative program, the quixotic Arabella is advised to lay aside her previous reading material, a cache of poorly-translated French romances, in favor of solidly moral works bearing a strong resemblance to "truth," a categorization ostensibly disavowing the fantasy of female empowerment brought to life in genre fiction.<sup>6</sup> This turn from the French tradition signals what Margaret Doody has called the "repudiation of the romance," a seismic shift from fantastic improbability to the verisimilitude of the realist novel.<sup>7</sup> Arabella's clergyman inaugurates the eighteenth century's preeminent formal mandate in the novel's final pages: "The only excellence of falsehood...is its resemblance to truth: as therefore any narrative is more liable to be confuted by its inconsistency with known facts, it is at a greater distance from the perfection of fiction" (378). To understand the novel's denouement merely as the death of romance poses troubling questions: How can feminist scholars interpret a novel that would seem to simultaneously embrace and expel romance, a genre invested in female agency? And where does this position Lennox in relation to the history of women's writing?

This chapter reframes *The Female Quixote's* "generic mandate" as the irresolvable tension between tragedy and comedy.<sup>8</sup> The ingenuous tragicomic structure of the novel, I argue, can be assessed as a mongrel form that provides the reader with a

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<sup>6</sup> This debate is largely underwritten by Michael McKeon's argument concerning the novel's changing relationship to truth in the eighteenth century in *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), 20.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Doody, "Introduction," *The Female Quixote*, xvii.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Thompson, *Ingenuous Subjection*, 152.

laughter that is fueled by a deeply critical view of patriarchal culture. Further, the successful clash of tragedy and comedy in *The Female Quixote* suggests the viability of generic experimentation as a means to resist the prescriptions of patriarchy. Michael McKeon has argued that in the development of the English novel the “instability of generic categories registers an epistemological crisis, a major cultural transition in how to tell the truth in narrative,” what he formulates in his cornerstone study as “questions of truth” and “questions of virtue.”<sup>9</sup> The mongrel indeterminacy of *The Female Quixote* suggests an epistemological quandary of its own, since the genres available to Arabella fail to satisfy her express desire for independence, mobility, and agency. “My first Wish, my Lord,” she tells her father, “is to live single, not being desirous of entering into any Engagement which may hinder my Sollicitude and Cares, and lessen my Attendance, upon the best of Fathers, who, till now, has always most tenderly complied with my Inclinations in every thing” (41). While the middle of the eighteenth century saw the rise of a paradigm of respectable middle-class womanhood in which femininity and domesticity were closely aligned, there were still few models of gendered experience available to women who sought activity, much less autonomy, outside of the private sphere.<sup>10</sup> Though a character of aristocratic privilege, neither tragedy nor comedy offers Arabella an acceptable framework for asserting herself. In the tragic world of the

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<sup>9</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*, studies the impact of middle-class domesticity on professional women writers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Gallagher is especially attentive to the separate spheres that impacted Lennox's career (145-202).



romance heroine, the danger of assault, violence, and death is ever present. The world of comedy and society, on the other hand, provide patriarchal protection, yet entail an excruciatingly curtailed existence. The novel's genre trouble, therefore, registers a crisis in the available interpretive frames through which to understand Arabella's gendered experience. Susan Carlile has recently argued that Lennox preferred the novel to drama as a means "to effect the most change"; I would like to argue, however, that the mongrelization of tragedy and comedy in *The Female Quixote* flags the limitations of a life lived in a single genre, suggesting instead the potential benefits of generic experimentation and literacy.<sup>11</sup> That is, it is not that Arabella needs to be forced into a tragic or comic plot, a drama or a novel one; rather, there is a need to be able to both recognize and negotiate a multiplicity of genres so as to create alternative trajectories and open up new modes of understanding.

I build this argument by first exploring Arabella's world of tragedy, one that is structured around the plots of tragedy: rape, assault and death. Included in this discussion is an analysis of Arabella's deeply theatrical understanding of herself and her world. For Arabella, the romantic heroines she personates, whether Cleopatra, Julia, or Clelia, offer a model of self that is enticing yet also volatile. The chapter continues by analyzing the mixed reactions of Arabella's audience, those characters who inhabit the world of comedy. I track the increasing instability of Arabella's generic illegibility; as a woman who seeks independence, Arabella herself becomes something of a mongrel. Linking the mongrel form of the novel with the lived experience of its author, the chapter then offers

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Carlile, "Henrietta on Page and Stage," *Masters of the Marketplace*, 128.

an examination of Lennox's own experience in the theater as actress, playwright, and dramatic critic, a career marked by repeated failure, yet an ongoing experimentation with various genres for financial ends. The chapter's conclusion returns to the question of what it is that makes Lennox's novel comic by analyzing form and feeling in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759). In Johnson's fiction, the mixed emotions of mongrel forms are disciplined and, in the end, verboten; Johnson's attitudes, I suggest, underscores the importance of Lennox's own generic experimentation.

## II. The Tragedy of Arabella

In a letter to his friend and correspondent Lady Bradshaigh, the novelist Samuel Richardson conceded that Charlotte Lennox's heroine Arabella was an amiable and winning character; however, he admitted, she "over-acts" the part.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Arabella, is nothing if not dramatic, and Richardson's assessment underscores the idea that Arabella is an actress beyond the pale, one who is improvising in the wrong genre. Throughout the course of the novel's nine books, Arabella is given to stentorian soliloquies and elaborate costumery.<sup>13</sup> Though ostensibly the lead in a comic novel, she aligns herself most obviously with the conventions of tragedy. Arabella's relationship to the genre is always accompanied by the possibility of impending sexual violence; the novel both exploits and critiques Arabella's fear of sexual assault, as well as her hunger for stories of distress and

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<sup>12</sup> *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols. (London: Richard Phillips, 1804), 6:243.

<sup>13</sup> The novel features several set speeches, such as when Glanville recites a "soliloquy" from *Oroondates* in Book I (49). Arabella delivers her own romantic "soliloquy" in Book IV (172-173).

violation, including, most notably, her own. Yet Arabella's personation of tragic romantic heroines is also potentially empowering. Her relationship to the role of heroine allows her, as it had actresses before her, to take center stage, offering her a means of expressing desire, attempting female friendships, and revaluing the world around her.<sup>14</sup> The novel's preoccupation with tragedy is, therefore, a double-edged proposition, suggesting the restrictive nature of a single genre as the sole means of representing the fullness of Lennox's fictional character.

Many of *The Female Quixote's* funniest scenes are fuelled by an intense anxiety about violence against women; while Arabella's fears are comically hyperbolic, they are never, the novel suggests, entirely unfounded. Arabella, for example, comes to suspect her new guardian Sir Charles of harboring a longing for her, fearing that "her Uncle was not insensible of her Charms, but was become the Rival of his own Son" (164). During a meeting in which he hopes to induce her to marry his son, her uncle asks, "Sure, Lady *Bella*, you are not afraid to be alone with your Uncle" (167). To which she replies, "I am not afraid of being alone with my Uncle; and, as long as he pretends to be no more than my Uncle, I shall not scruple to hear what he has to say to me" (167). The moment produces a comically confusing misunderstanding, but also raises a point about the extent of patriarchal will and the core validity of Arabella's fears. Sir Charles may not wish to marry Arabella herself; however, he does wish to broker her into a marriage with his son. The two forms of control are not entirely divorced from each other; in either scenario,

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, this dissertation's chapter on Elizabeth Barry and the role of Cordelia in Nahum Tate's *King Lear*.

Arabella is an object to be violated or exchanged. The scene's two frames confront the reader with both Sir Charles' gentle coercion, as opposed to what Arabella perceives as the threat of incestuous force. The difference is in degree, not kind, as both are echoes of patriarchal violence, suggesting that power operates in ways both direct and indirect. Though Sir Charles has a "smile" (167) upon his face, Arabella is, after all, in all sincerity, "excessively alarmed" (166).

The comparison of various forms of patriarchal control appears repeatedly in the novel, for example, as when Arabella is walking unattended with a number of young female companions. The day wears on and the ladies "express'd their Apprehensions at being without any Attendants" (362). Arabella's imagination running wild, she spies "three or four Horseman" approaching and assumes the men are kidnappers; she then convinces the women to jump in the river in order to display "the Sublimity of your Virtue" (362). The fear being contagious, the entire group then jumps into the river. Though Arabella's hysteria is of fever pitch, it is likened to the fear openly acknowledged by the other women in her group, who express anxiety about wandering out at night without a chaperone. The scene rehearses the idea that punishment comes to women who stray too far from the patriarchal gaze.

Arabella's fear of bodily harm is matched only by her insatiable appetite for commentary on these potential violations, what she anticipates with great pleasure. When Arabella has returned to her castle after a planned escape, for example, she begs to know how Glanville reacted during her absence. To Lucy she says:

However, tho' I forbid you to talk of his Passion, yet I permit you to tell me the Violence of his Transports when I was missing; the Threats he uttered against my Ravishers; the Complaints he made against Fortune; the Vows he offered for my Preservation; and in fine, whatever Extravagances the Excess of his Sorrow forced him to commit.

(109)

The second-hand report of Glanville's violent outbursts are a titillating source of excitement, and Glanville's reactions afford a kind of vicarious pleasure for Arabella. Glanville repeats, satirically, a version of this catalogue back to Arabella much later in the novel when he discusses the violent, yet clichéd, words used to describe either beauty or love: "Wounds, Darts, Fires, Languishings, Dyings, Torture, Rack, Jealousy, and a few more of no Signification, but upon this subject" (149). In this way the novel calls attention to the sexualization of violence as a dated script that is often romanticized.

Arabella's hungry interest in this script is revisited in a later episode when Mr. Tinsel, who has been banished by Arabella for presuming to love her, wishes to apologize and soon finds himself in Arabella's chamber. Arabella, beset with genuine terror at the intrusion, promptly blacks out. When she comes to, she assumes she has been abducted. The moment parodically echoes Clarissa's own blackout that occurs during the rape by Lovelace.<sup>15</sup> What is most notable, however, is Arabella's excitement as she asks Lucy to

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or the History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross, (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 883.

tell her what has happened “between my Fainting and Recovery” (305). Arabella displays the obsession with violated women common to the readers of novels such as Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748); however, Arabella’s desire to hear the recitation of the blackout suggests her obvious naïveté as a reader or performer of genres, as she does not fully understand the implications of the brand of tragedy she performs.

While tragic plots threaten Arabella with violence, Arabella’s personation of heroines such as Cleopatra, Clelia, and Julia suggest the liberatory potential of her relationship with tragic theater. That is, the world of tragedy, though threatening assault at every turn, also offers Arabella a remarkable means of navigating the world around her. Arabella’s understanding of tragedy offers, for example, an alternative register for the expression of desire. In an early episode concerning Cleopatra, Arabella confronts Glanville over the part he has played in supposedly betraying her to a servant caught stealing fish. The scene that follows is all part of an elaborate act. Arabella, as the narrator informs the reader, is not actually miffed so much about the carp-thief, as she is deeply disappointed that Glanville has not shown more dramatic emotion at her absence. She cannot say as much without, “at the same time, confessing she looked upon him the Light of a Lover” (116-117). As such, Arabella stages a diversionary scene as a cover for these feelings, what the narrator refers to as “violence to [Arabella’s] Ingenuousness; and, contrary to her real Belief.” From the outset, then, the Cleopatra episode is framed as all smoke and mirrors, an escalating social drama in which Arabella improvises roles for herself and her suitor in order to displace what cannot be, either in the world of romance or the summer parlor of

her father's castle, otherwise dramatized: that is, an open and ardent desire for her suitor's affections. Glanville, she casts in the role of Coriolanus, whom she characterizes not as tyrant of the Shakespearean stage, but as "the most passionate and faithful Lover imaginable" (115). She then assumes the lead as a sanitized and deified Cleopatra, a role which both calibrates her feelings and directs her action: "I can only, *like* her," she says to her suitor "wish you may find some Occasion of justifying yourself" (115). She delivers, too, one of Cleopatra's speeches in order to dismiss Glanville from the room: "Go, therefore...go," she commands, "and endeavour your own Justification" (115). By playacting in this fashion, Arabella is able to reroute her desire into agency. She is able to direct the action and take center stage, suggesting the potential of Arabella's appropriation to rewrite her otherwise limited script.

Arabella's theatrical understanding of herself her world produces original effects for readers, expressing desire not only in Arabella, but playing into readers' desire for novelty. In the same lover's quarrel with Glanville, Arabella imagines what would have been two disparate dramatic roles onto the same novel stage. The scene that plays out is, as is usual for Arabella, one in which she attempts to elevate the comic to the stature of the tragic. Casting herself as Cleopatra and Glanville as Coriolanus, she brings to the stage reformed versions of the tyrant and harlot familiar from Shakespeare's corpus, coloring the two as a pair of misguided, though ultimately devoted, lovers.<sup>16</sup> While existing alongside Cleopatra in the tradition of French romance, Coriolanus would have

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<sup>16</sup>According to editor Margaret Dalziel, much of the description in the passage of Coriolanus is lifted from La Calprenède's *Cleopatra*, and the pairing of Coriolanus and Cleopatra can be tracked to that romance, the source which Arabella would have been simultaneously citing and revising (*The Female Quixote*, 397).

been regularly brought to life on London stages in a variety of forms throughout the Restoration and eighteenth-century. Nahum Tate's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* ran at Drury Lane beginning in 1682, John Dennis' penned his own version, *The Invader of His Country*, in 1719, and an adaptation by James Thomson appeared in 1745.<sup>17</sup> Inspired by Thomson's version, Thomas Sheridan produced his own adaptation in Dublin in 1752, the same year that Lennox's novel debuted.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Sheridan's play appeared in London in 1754, the same year that Garrick produced his own rival version, reverting to the Shakespearean text.<sup>19</sup> Varying versions of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* would have played on London stages during the first half of the eighteenth century, though the hero never would have been entwined with Cleopatra in a romance. Arabella's rival pairing, therefore, marks her tragicomic staging as one of ingenuity, rewriting performance traditions and producing novelty for readers who also attended the theater.

In the dramatic tradition of tragedy Arabella also finds a source of empathetic identification with other women. As in the theater, the tragic roles played by Arabella functions as part of a dramatic tradition that serves as the connective tissue for a series of performances by various female characters. Arabella's heroines would have been

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<sup>17</sup> John Ripley, *Coriolanus on Stage in England and America, 1660-1994*, (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1998), 54, notes that most of these adaptations run parallel to a rising interest in the Jacobite cause, what played off of the "Jacobean-Roman apprehension which inhabits *Coriolanus*."

<sup>18</sup> Actor-manager Thomas Sheridan played the title role in his adaptation in 1752, what would later appear in London in 1754 (*Coriolanus on Stage in England and America*, 96-97).

<sup>19</sup> Ripley notes that Garrick staged his Drury Lane play as a rival to Sheridan's production at Rich's Covent Garden, and opened one month beforehand (*Coriolanus on Stage in England and America*, 109).



strongly associated with a long history of English stage acting and were roles often taken up or shared by a new class of professional independent women: actresses. Cleopatra, for example, a character appearing with great frequency throughout *The Female Quixote*, had, by 1752, a long and storied association with the tragic stage. In the eighteenth century, the role was perhaps most closely tied to Dryden's blank-verse tragedy *All for Love*, a play first performed in December of 1677.<sup>20</sup> After its initial debut, *All for Love* would be continually staged throughout the century with at least 123 documented performances, besting even Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, as the preferred dramatization, at least up until Garrick's 1759 production of Shakespeare's play.<sup>21</sup> As such, the eighteenth-century stage saw many competing versions of the role of Cleopatra, some appearing on stage simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Boutell premiered Dryden's role in the 1677 production of *All for Love*.<sup>23</sup> Various actresses would subsequently take up the

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<sup>20</sup> John Dryden, *All for Love* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1972), 29, initially played at Drury Lane with Elizabeth Boutell as Cleopatra and Katherine Corey as Octavia.

<sup>21</sup> *All For Love* bears the marks of both heroic and affective tragedy and simultaneously elevates affairs of the state and matters of the heart. In his *Life of Dryden*, Samuel Johnson would refer disparagingly to the play's "romantick omnipotence of Love," a comment as dismissive of Dryden's stage tragedy as the novel's Johnsonian clergyman is of the romance tradition with which we might rightly compare a tragedy such as *All for Love*. See Samuel Johnson, *Life of Dryden*, from *Lives of the English Poets, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. John H. Muddendord, 23 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 2020), 21:395.

<sup>22</sup> Adding to the play's romantic stamp are the two female rivals appearing in the play's love plot: Cleopatra and Octavia. In the season of 1751 *All for Love* and *The Mourning Bride* played often, even in one instance across from each other at Drury Lane and Covent Garden on the same night of April 15. See *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, Part 4 1747-1776, Volume 1, ed. G.W. Stone (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1960), 246.

<sup>23</sup> María José Mora, "Type-Casting in the Restoration Theatre: Dryden's *All for Love*, 1677-1704". *Atlantis: Revista de la Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos*: 27.2 (2005): 75-86, argues that the role of Cleopatra signified differently when played in the early period by Elizabeth Boutell opposite Katherine Corey as Octavia (in which, Mora argues, Cleopatra is figured as the innocent heroine) than it did in the later 1704 production in which Elizabeth Barry stars opposite Anne Bracegirdle (in which Octavia becomes the moral center of the play), reflecting the larger cultural shift from

part, notably Elizabeth Barry, who played the queen in 1704 opposite her long-time co-star Anne Bracegirdle in the role of Octavia. Anne Oldfield, in the late teens, would incorporate the role into her repertoire at Drury Lane, playing against Barton Booth's Antony and Colley Cibber's Alexas. Peg Woffington donned Cleopatra's robes yet again at mid-century, starring in a production of *All for Love* in 1747 opposite Stranger Barry. The continued casting of high-power celebrity actresses such as Barry, Oldfield, and Woffington suggests that the role of Cleopatra in Dryden's tragedy was profitable, popular, and an important part of a serious and successful eighteenth-century actress' repertoire, especially those who, at one time or another, allied themselves with the genre of tragedy. Perhaps this is why competing versions of Cleopatra appeared on the London stage. In 1750, two years before the publication of *The Female Quixote*, for example, the play was performed at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane within the span of a few weeks with entirely different casts; Peg Woffington's Cleopatra played at Covent Garden and Hannah Pritchard's was on stage at Drury Lane.<sup>24</sup>

In Arabella's view, the part of Cleopatra connects and empowers women rather than divides them. The role becomes a site of amiable comparison as the Egyptian queen is brought to life continuously throughout the book. Just as the role of Cleopatra was

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Restoration to eighteenth century. Arabella's worldview harkens back to an earlier paradigm, the Restoration, both in terms of her understanding of the space of theater as an interactive one and her critical sympathies with the character of Cleopatra.

<sup>24</sup> According to *The London Stage*, on March 12 of 1750 *All for Love* was performed at Covent Garden with Peg Woffington as Cleopatra and Mrs. Bellamy as Octavia; on April 2<sup>nd</sup> of the same season, the play ran at Drury Lane with Mrs. Pritchard as Cleopatra and Mrs. Elmy as Octavia (*The London Stage*, 4:1:181 and 4:1:187). These performances occurred, it is important to note, only a few weeks after Lennox's debut in *The Mourning Bride* on February 22 of the same year.

taken up by actresses such as Boutell, Barry, or Oldfield, various women in *The Female Quixote* are, at one time or another, cast by Arabella in the role, usually for the benefit of the woman in question. For example, Arabella repeatedly imagines the mysterious Miss Groves, a character whose interpolated history reads as a seduction narrative, as the unfortunate Cleopatra. Upon hearing Mrs. Groves' story, Arabella immediately recognizes the generic markers of tragedy rather than those of early prose amatory fiction and manifests tears of pity rather than taking part in the "pleasure of scandal" or the morally high ground of scorn (77). In the midst of her grief and fascination, Arabella's responds with:

Your Lady's Case ... is much to be lamented; and greatly resembles the unfortunate Cleopatra's, whom Julius Caesar privately marrying, with a Promise to own her for his Wife, when he should be peaceable Master of the Roman Empire, left that great Queen big with Child, and, never intending to perform his Promise, suffered her to be exposed to the Censures the World has so freely cast upon her; and which she so little deserved.

(77).

Arabella compares Miss Groves' fate to Cleopatra's rather than the fallen women of earlier popular fiction such as Haywood, Manley, or Behn, reconfiguring the emotional register of the tale to fit tragedy's emphasis on pathos.

In chapter six of book five, Arabella again mentions Cleopatra, here however, as an example of great beauty in comparison to Miss Glanville (207). She invokes Cleopatra just as she has also suggested that Miss Glanville is acting the part of the heroine Julia. The part of Julia, however, is the role Arabella has been assigned for her appearance at the ball night at Bath in chapter seven of book seven (271). The allusion to multiple heroines suggests that Arabella's understanding of the casting and recasting of Cleopatra relies upon the mechanics of performance to repeatedly bring the past into present. The number of associations of Cleopatra with different female characters in the novel hints at, I would suggest, the long and varied performance history of the role; that time and history have no fixed point around which to coalesce is no surprise given the theatrical structures which undergird Arabella's worldview. Arabella's interpretive frame is one of simultaneity where Cleopatras (or Julias) of varying contexts and personations abound, much as on the London stage. Further, the interchangeability of these tragic roles, and the willingness of Arabella to assign the same parts to each of the women around her argues for the book's interest in methods by which to establish female friendships between independent and like-minded women.

### III. Comic Audiences

The novel's ancillary cast of characters, those grounded firmly in the comic frame of the novel, serve as a captive, and at times unruly, group of spectators who, like the frequenters of eighteenth-century theaters, interpret, react critically to, and participate in Arabella's productions. Arabella's performances depend upon the novel's diegetic

audience for their meaning. For example, during a tiff with her lover, Arabella threatens the assembled company with a recital of her “whole history” to which Glanville, “not being able to constrain himself,” utters “a Groan, of the same Nature with those which are often heard in the Pit at the Representation of a new Play” (120). This invocation of a theatrical motif confirms the novel’s broader perceptual dynamic: not only is Arabella an actress, but the castle a kind of playhouse, the summer parlor a makeshift stage, and the put-upon Glanville the fractious theatergoer. Audience response becomes the hinge upon which the novel’s jokes swing, as spectatorship is built into the scene’s production of meaning. As a genre-bending figure of mediation, however, Arabella’s performances upend the usual taxonomies of stage drama; she occupies positions tragic and comic, noble and ridiculous. Within the field of theater studies, Michael Goldman has suggested that the “first function” of dramatic genres is to be “recognized,” a cognitive process which, as both he and Marvin Carlson have noted, is deeply tied to the earliest theorizations of drama.<sup>25</sup> Arabella’s transformation of herself into the character of a tragic heroine is therefore nearly always met in the novel with mixed reviews. This discordant clash of laughter and tears signals both the pleasure and pain of Arabella’s performances, a general ambivalence that the text is reluctant to resolve.

Glanville’s attempt to stymie mirth and his willingness to, at times, serve as Arabella’s co-star, suggests the dangerous entertainment of Arabella’s tragic theater. That is, Glanville’s reactions chart the ways in which the denigration of a noble figure to an

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Goldman, *On Drama: Boundaries of Genre, Borders of Self* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2000), 8.

object of ridicule (i.e., the transgression of a generic hierarchy) is both potentially hilarious and morally inappropriate. Glanville is initially willing to play along with Arabella's charades, or to laugh at her foibles, as when Arabella mistakes Edward the carp thief for an abductor. The narrator describes Glanville's reaction: "Mr. Glanville, as much Cause as he had for Uneasiness, could with great Difficulty restrain laughter at this Ludicrous Circumstance" (104). As the story progresses, however, Glanville's reactions border on mortification. He frequently registers his feelings as uneasiness or shame, emotions which, to varying degrees, denote a moral lapse. After Sir George responds to Arabella's chastisements with a few romantic lines, for example, the narrator notes of Glanville: "As diverting as this scene was, Mr. Glanville was extremely uneasy: For though Sir George's Stratagem took, and he believed he was only indulging the Gaiety of his Humour, by carrying on this Farce; yet he could not endure, he should divert himself at Arabella's Expence" (195-6). Later in the novel, Glanville is filled with "inconceivable Shame" in a similar episode with Mr. Selvin and Arabella (312). Though he does not intervene nor attempt to halt the progress of Arabella's adventures, in part because of his desire for her, Glanville's reactions nevertheless serve as a barometer; the further Arabella pushes against the limits of genre, the more confused, strained, and uneasy Glanville becomes.

As Arabella travels beyond the walls of her father's castle to locales such as Bath, Richmond, and London, we begin to see the rising stakes of her generic illegibility. As she enters into society, Glanville is not her only audience member; her comic stage becomes perilously wider and more broadly conceived. Take, for example, Arabella's

debut at Bath. Arabella enters the Pump Room at Bath, having styled herself in full heroine regalia, wearing “something like a Veil, of black Gauze, which covered almost all her Face, and Part of her Waist, and gave her a very singular appearance” (262). Because she has self-consciously modeled herself on the late heroines of antiquity and not the current fashion, her appearance, blurring the lines between theatrical and social performance, poses a considerable conundrum to the group of observers around her, resulting in varying opinions of her attire and her self. The women in the room exhibit alarm and fascination: “Who can she be? Strange Creature! Ridiculous!” (263). The men, meanwhile, are struck with awe at the sight of her figure; the exotic veil, in particular, causes a “great Disturbance” (263). Conflicting reactions continue filter in: “Some of the wiser Sort took her for a Foreigner; others, of still more Sagacity, supposed her a *Scots* Lady, covered with her Plaid; and a third Sort, infinitely wiser than either, concluded she a *Spanish* Nun, that had escaped from a Convent, and had not yet quitted her Veil” (263). Drawn in by her spectacle, Arabella becomes an exotic figure onto which the crowd’s imaginative fantasies are projected. Hinting at the titillation involved in such an endeavor, the narrator slyly directs us also to the Spanish nun familiar from the illicit genre of amatory fiction, compounding the erotic dimension of the crowd’s curiosity.<sup>26</sup>

The audience in the Pump-Room, however, curtails their own fantasies by reading Arabella’s inscrutable resemblance onto their own world. After Miss Glanville informs the company that her cousin is the daughter of a Marquis, the women compare Arabella’s

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<sup>26</sup> Continental nuns would have been familiar to readers who had encountered tales such as Aphra Behn’s *The Fair Vow Breaker* (1689). The convent was an eroticized location in many earlier pieces of amatory fiction, such as Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* (1724).

peculiarities (what the passage claims as her “singularity”) to fashionable, though eccentric, ladies of the present day:

One remembered, that Lady J—T—always wore her Ruffles reversed; that the Countess of ---- went to Court in a Farthingale; that the Duchess of ---- sat astride upon a Horse; and a certain Lady of great Fortune, nearly allied to Quality, because she was not dignified with a Title, invented a new one for herself; and directed her servants to say in speaking to her, Your Honouress, which afterwards became a Custom among all her Acquaintance; who mortally offended her, if they omitted that Instance of respect.

(264)

The interpretative gaze moves from an association of Arabella’s inscrutability with the exotic foreigner, to a parallel fantasy about class status. Arabella’s alignment with aristocratic ladies of fortune elaborates upon the seductive power of crossing genres.

While her appearance generates curiosity and desire on the part of the spectators, Arabella lacks the self-consciousness characteristic of actresses of the period that would allow her to harness that curiosity or use it to her advantage. Her resistance to interpretation is not registered; that is, she is not properly aware of her audience’s reactions. It is this, after all, the ability to successfully perform and interpret genres, that is, perhaps, the point, as we learn in the episode in which Sir George has hired an actual actress to dupe Arabella (368). The actress’s performance is successful in that she



performs tragedy to the life and captures Arabella's attentions, as when Arabella spies the woman's performance:

Through the Branches of the Trees, now despoil'd of great part of their Leaves, two Women seated on the Ground, their Backs towards her, and one of them with her Head gently reclin'd on the other's Shoulder, seem'd by her mournful Action to be weeping; for she often put her Handkerchief to her Eyes, breathing every Time a Sigh, which, as *Arabella* phras'd it, seem'd to proceed from the deepest recesses of her Heart.

(341)

Ultimately, it is the actress who successfully brings the script of tragic romance to life, negotiating the lines between social and theatrical action for financial gain. In the end, Sir George's scheme is discovered, and while he must face the consequences, the actress herself faces none, but slips out of the narrative unmentioned.

It stands to reason that Arabella's necessary reformation could only ostensibly be brought about by someone to whom she is readable; that is, by a character who fully understands the scripts of both tragic romance and comic romance. The novel presents just such a character in the person of the Countess, the one female character who, literate in the tradition of French romance, can fully interpret and empathize with Arabella's performances. In the meeting between the two, however, the Countess is unsuccessful. She first famously outlines the proper generic arc of a novel heroine's life:

I was born and christen'd, had a useful and proper education, receiv'd the  
Addresses of my Lord- through the Recommendation of my parents, and marry'd  
him with their Consents and my own Inclination, and that since we have liv'd in  
great Harmony together, I have told you all the material Passages of my Life”

(327)

Though the Countess's happy ending is in seeming contrast with the “cruel Adventures”  
Arabella perceives the world to be made up of, the comedy of the Countess's restricted  
existence is always a diminutive form of the tragedy of patriarchal assault and entrapment  
that Arabella constantly fears (327). Whether tragic or comic, past or present, there is no  
satisfactory plot for a woman such as Arabella. The narrative, however, refuses to  
reconcile the two genres in this instance. The Countess disappears from the narrative,  
called away, and is replaced with another figure, the divine, a man to whom Arabella is  
patently unreadable.

The novel's conclusion, then, does not resolve the conflict between tragedy and  
comedy, and, I would argue, purposely so. Arabella's cure is instead brought about by the  
clergyman who, when he attempts Arabella's reformation, is left in a state of “not  
knowing how to account for a Mind at once so enlighten'd, and so ridiculous” (367).  
Unlike her interaction with the Countess, Arabella remains a cipher to the doctor: a  
mongrel. He listens to her tale “with a mix'd Emotion, between Pity, Reverence, and  
Amazement” (368). In an attempt to make sense of her, the doctor reframes Arabella's

situation as a contest between realistic and romantic notions. This generic slight of hand sidesteps the question of tragedy and comedy, leaving the two held in tension. Arabella has chosen realism over romance; however the tragicomic structure of the novel remains intact. The novel's ending underscores this point by staging two marriages: one in which Arabella is finally united to her cousin Glanville and Sir George is begrudgingly tethered to Miss Glanville. For Miss Glanville, marriage to Sir George is a triumph. By contrast, for the romantic heroine, marriage is a kind of death, as Doody has pointed out, that represents "the end of all story, and a cessation of power."<sup>27</sup>

#### IV. Arabella on Stage

Though separated by rank and position in society, the author Charlotte Lennox shared with her fictional creation a penchant for generic experimentation. As a professional female author eager to gain financial remuneration for her work, Lennox's career reveals a willingness to write and perform in any number of genres. Her professional activity reveals in particular a strong interest in writing and performing tragic theater, yet also testifies to the difficulties Lennox faced in finding success in this arena. Lennox's career-long involvement with the theater was plagued by failure, a biographical element explored in this section. Lennox's financial struggles and her inability to have her dramatic work performed or published links the plight of the professional female author

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret Doody, "Introduction," xxiv.

with the aristocratic Arabella's experience under patriarchy, adding yet another layer of meaning to the mongrel form of Lennox's most famous novel.

Records show that Lennox appeared on stage in an acting part at least three times in her career.<sup>28</sup> Her debut on the stage occurred on January 29, 1746, where she appeared at Drury Lane as Lavinia in Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*. As Lavinia, a part played previously by actresses such as Anne Bracegirdle, Lennox would have found herself playing the foil to the role of the fallen woman, Calista. Lavinia serves as a liaison between Altamont, Calista's intended, and Horatio, Lavinia's husband. She is a paragon of marital fidelity and virtue. As her husband remarks: "Thou art innocent; / Simplicity from ill, pure native truth, / And candor of the mind adorn thee ever."<sup>29</sup> The part of Lavinia, however, does deliver a comic epilogue to the tragedy, which Lennox may well have performed, a notable instance of the performance of generic mixtures. Though the character of Lavinia frequently asked her husband to "hide me from misfortune in your bosom," the epilogue offers risqué lines such as: "Thus 'tis because these husbands are obeyed / By force of laws which for themselves they made."<sup>30</sup> She proclaims "Had we the pow'r, we'd make the tyrants know / What 'tis to fail in duties which they owe."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, 9:237. *The Biographical Dictionary of Actors* suggests it is "possible" she may have performed at the Smock Alley Theater in Dublin on November 13 of 1754, after the publication of *The Female Quixote* (9:237).

<sup>29</sup> Rowe, *The Fair Penitent*, 1.1.376-378.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.1.380; Epilogue, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Epilogue, 11-12.

Like her novel creation Arabella, Lennox soon found herself following a tragic script, acting the part of a famed heroine in a romance plot in what is suspected to be her last major performance on the stage; she took up the leading role of Almeria in a benefit performance of William Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* staged on February 22 of the season 1749-1750 at the Little Theater in the Haymarket.<sup>32</sup> Not one of Congreve's characteristic comedies, *The Mourning Bride* is what Ashley Thorndike characterizes as a "melodrama, judged by our standards today."<sup>33</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, *The Mourning Bride* was notably of its times, featuring a story of two powerful female rivals: one destined for death, one for marriage, of a piece with other "contending queens" plays popular in the 1750s, such as Dryden's *All for Love* and Lee's *The Rival Queens*.<sup>34</sup> Set shortly after the King of Grenada's defeat of Valentia, the play dramatizes the woes of Almeria who, as a captive, has been married to Alphonso/Osmyn, the son of her father's enemy. Troublingly, there is a rival for Osmyn's affections, the fierce Queen Zara, who also holds the heart of Almeria's father. *The Mourning Bride* ushers audiences through a slew of romantic conventions: a secret marriage, a shipwreck, a war hero in

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<sup>32</sup> There is also record of a performance in Richmond in the year 1748, of which Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 48 Vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1937-1983), 9:74, famously remarked that she was a "poetess and deplorable actress" in a letter to George Montagu written September 3, 1748.

<sup>33</sup> Ashley Thorndike, *Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Zara uses the phrase "contending queens" in dialogue addressed to Osmyn/Alphonso: "To have contending Queens, at dead of Night / Forsake their Down, to wake with watry Eyes, / And watch like Tapers o'er your Hours of Rest." See William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride*, (Cambridge, UK: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 1995), 38. The play's two lead female parts were originated by Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Barry, a point with which Lennox would have probably been aware, and were later played at Drury Lane by George Anne Bellamy (Almeria) and Hannah Pritchard (Queen Zara) in the season 1750-1751, just one year before the publication of *The Female Quixote*. Mrs. George Ann Bellamy went on to play the role to great success later in the season (*The London Stage*, 4:1:177, 4:1:224).

disguise, and a double accidental death. The heroic values of the play are not far beneath the surface of these plot twists: the battle for glory and honor in the empire of love rages still, though warfare itself has ceased. The language of the play best illustrates the intensity of these values, and is at times as high-flown as Almeria's dialogue, particularly the lines of Lennox's role. The character regularly delivers phrases striking in their violence, as when she commands her lover to "hold me not – O, let us not support, / But sink each other, deeper yet, down, down, / Where levell'd low, no more we'll lift our Eyes, / But prone, and dumb, rot the firm Face of Earth / With Rivers of incessant scalding Rain."<sup>35</sup> Almeria's dialogue, though consistently elevated, emphatically conflates love and death, embroidering the two with the imagery of decay and damnation.

The tragic structure of the play, and the heroine's reaction to her compromised position, would have also been of interest to Lennox, as the heroine, Almeria, is caught most distressingly between two competing patriarchal structures. When her father's victory results in the supposed death of her husband, the play places the character between two rival patriarchal systems: allegiance to a father or to a husband. This double bind, a familiar tragic pattern of the period, involves a female held under the sway of two men and results in a fit of madness. Almeria begins to flirt with her delusions in the fourth act of the play, prompting her father to declare, "Wilder than Winds or Waves thy self do'st rave. / Should I hear more; I too should catch thy madness."<sup>36</sup> Though the tragedy is resolved with a *deus ex machina*, the suspension of Almeria's will before her

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 50.

marriage likens her to her rival, Zara whose bondage is more literal, with only the play's ending truly distinguishing the two. In the end, the King discovers all, dresses in Osmyn's/Alphonso's clothes, but then is killed when mistaken for Osmyn/Alphonso. Queen Zara finds his body and drinks poison, and thus, Almeria's marriage to Alphonso/Osmyn ends happily enough for a tragedy.

The epilogue for Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* is, as in Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, notable as it is not tragic in tone. Moreover, the epilogue is written for the role of Almeria: "The Tragedy thus done, I am, you know, / No more a Princess, but in status quo: / And now as unconcern'd this Mourning wear, / As if indeed a Widow, or an Heir."<sup>37</sup> Again, generic play and proto-feminist commentary are intertwined as the epilogue upbraids the critics and makes an appeal instead to the women of the audience: "Your tender Hearts to Mercy are inclin'd, / With whom, he hopes, this Play will Favour find, / Which was an Off'ring to the Sex design'd."<sup>38</sup>

As a playwright Lennox suffered a fate not much better than as an actress; however, her output testifies to Lennox's interest in writing in a wide variety of genres. Eighteenth-century commentator David Erskine Baker noted, "her success in the dramatic walk has not been equal to what she has experienced in her other work," adding that they are "not

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Epilogue.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Epilogue.

worthy of their author.”<sup>39</sup> Lennox was continually thwarted in her attempts to see her plays staged, especially in her relationship with theater-manager David Garrick. The correspondence between the two, what little there is, reveals a polite but occasionally terse relationship running the course of nearly twenty years, one that follows a consistent pattern of supplication and refusal, supplemented on Garrick’s end with a bit of encouragement or, more usually, gentle chiding.

In 1757 Lennox composed the pastoral drama *Philander*, and in her correspondence with Garrick, he offers her, in lieu of an offer to stage the production, a lecture on the “reception of musical drama on the English stage.”<sup>40</sup> The play, though, is interesting in that it is of a highly romantic bent, with a powerful and chaste heroine who eschews marriage in favor of vows to the goddess Cynthia, wishing to serve as the handmaid of Diana. Philander, her would-be lover, urges her to trade in the literal hunt for the scripted and figurative chase of romance. Sylvia, however, longs for liberty: “Beauty’s short conquests soon to bondage turn, / The vanquish’d triumph, and the victors mourn.”<sup>41</sup> In the end, Sylvia must marry or else be sacrificed for breaking her infant vow to Philander; as the character Montano puts it: “This day to be a victim, or a

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<sup>39</sup> David Erskine Baker, *Biographia Dramatica, or a Companion to the Playhouse: Containing Historical and Critical Memoirs, and Original Anecdotes, of British and Irish*, 2 vols. (London: 1782), 1:281, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>.

<sup>40</sup> Duncan Isles, “Other Letters in the Lennox Collection,” *Times Literary Supplement*, August 5 1965, 685. See also: Duncan Isles, “Unpublished Johnson Letters,” *Times Literary Supplement*, July 29, 1965, 666.

<sup>41</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *Philander; A Dramatic Pastoral* (London: Printed for A Millar [etc.], 1758), 16, University of Virginia Text Collection, Chadwyck-Healey Verse Drama Database, [http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck\\_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd\\_V2.0868.xml](http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_evd/uvaGenText/tei/chevd_V2.0868.xml).



bride” – for Sylvia those two are interchangeable.<sup>42</sup> In song she declares “Love has no charms like liberty,” yet she capitulates to Philanders’ self-sacrifice and is eventually married, thanks to Apollo’s intervention.<sup>43</sup> Love and death are conceived symbiotically.

Lennox also offered for the stage *The Sister* (1769), a dramatization of her novel, *Henrietta* (1758). *Henrietta* is a domestic novel that tells the story of a young woman without friends or fortune who attempts to make her own path in the world of London. As Susan Carlile notes, Lennox’s dramatic adaptation of her novel shifts from sister (Henrietta of the novel, Harriot of the play) to brother, Courteney, and critiques patriarchy within the family rather than patriarchy in society more general.<sup>44</sup> In the play two young men, Clairville and Courteney, find themselves in courtship plots: Clairville falls for a disguised young woman who turns out to be Courteney’s sister, and Courteney, in turn, finds himself in love with the haughty Miss Autumn. Miss Autumn’s name alerts us to the fact that she is an older model of femininity: the coquette or the witty heroine of the Restoration stage, a foil to the sensible sister who stands as an emergent model of virtuous womanhood. While the prologue begs the audience not to upbraid Lennox for her quixotic playwriting, the fate of the play suggests that this was exactly the case. Even with the departure from romantic tragedy, Lennox still met with considerable failure. The

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Carlile, “*Henrietta* on Page and Stage,” *Masters of the Marketplace*, 130. Carlile suggests that the play “demotes Henrietta to Harriot” and that ultimately the novel offers a more comprehensive critique of patriarchy than the play (130, 139). While the suggestion that Lennox preferred one genre over the other squares with her success in publishing novels, the generic experimentation of her entire body of work and her repeated attempts to both act in and write for the theater argues against this reduction.

production was staged at Covent Garden where it was subject to a round of uncharitable catcalls upon its premiere, according to Lennox's biographer, Miriam Rossiter Small, because of London audiences lingering animosity over Lennox's treatment of the bard in *Shakespeare Illustrated*.<sup>45</sup> Lennox quickly withdrew the play from the stage. George Colman responded to the catcalling at the opening night of *The Sister*, for which he penned the Prologue: "I do assure you that none of the many trials I have experienced in the direction of the Theatre has given me more real uneasiness than the present event. From this time I abjure all prognostigation [sic] in stage-matters." He adds charitably, "When the Publick come to compare The Sister with some other plays which they have followed & admired...they will wonder at your ill success."<sup>46</sup>

Despite the cold reception of *The Sister* Lennox did not abandon all hope for the stage. She would propose a translation of Racine's *Bajazet*, an oriental tragedy set in the Ottoman empire with, yet again, two women, Atailde and Roxana, contending for the hand of a man.<sup>47</sup> In the role of Roxana she longed to cast the actress Mary Anne Yates: "The haughty, the impassioned, the beautiful Roxana, seems expressly drawn for such an actress."<sup>48</sup> According to her correspondence, she also would have liked to heighten the impact of the death in Racine's original, "by some circumstance of terror and pity, which

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<sup>45</sup> Miriam Rossiter Small, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth-Century Lady of Letters* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1935), 168-183.

<sup>46</sup> Duncan Isles, "Other Letters in the Lennox Collection," *Times Literary Supplement*, August 5 1965, 685. Lennox wrote her own epilogue, though Goldsmith's would later appear in the printed version.

<sup>47</sup> "Mrs. Charlotte Lennox to Mr. Garrick," 4 August 1774, *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1:647-648.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

are not found in the original.”<sup>49</sup> Garrick, however, most likely rejected the idea, as such a project was never brought about.<sup>50</sup>

Lennox’s one success on the stage would finally come with *Old City Manners* (1775), an adaptation suggested to her by Garrick and adapted from Jonson, Chapman, and Marston’s *Eastward Hoe*.<sup>51</sup> The original play concerns the financial and romantic life of a goldsmith, his two apprentices (one good, one bad), and his two daughters (one good, one bad). The virtuous apprentice and daughter (Golding and Mildred) are married while the bad daughter Gertrude is married to a charlatan and Quicksilver turns into a thief. Lennox’s *Old City Manners*, has been assessed as a “respectful adaptation” of the play, with a slight amplification of sentiment.<sup>52</sup> It is not in the romance of aristocratic tragedy, but a comedy about the trading classes, where Lennox finally finds some reprieve from failure; though, it should be noted, Charles Dibdin suggests that the play was performed with “very little applause at Drury-Lane.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 648.

<sup>50</sup> A letter possibly referring to the project is mentioned in Isles’ “Other Letters in the Lennox Collection,” *Times Literary Supplement*, August 5 1965, 685.

<sup>51</sup> From the front matter of Lennox’s adaptation of *Old City Manners* (London: Printed for T. Becket, the Corner of the Adelphi, in the Strand, 1775): “It is with great satisfaction that Mrs. Lennox , takes this opportunity to acknowledge her obligations to Mr.Garrick , for recommending to her the *Alteration of Eastward Hoe*, and for his very friendly assistance throughout this Comedy.”

<sup>52</sup> Richard Allen Cave, Elizabeth Schafer, and Brian Woolland, *Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Theory, Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 168.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Dibdin, *A Complete History of the English Stage*, 5 vols. (London: Printed for the Author and Sold by Him at his Warehouse, 1800), 5:290, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>.

Dramatic criticism also appealed to Lennox, though here too, as intimated in the account of her play *The Sister*, she had a characteristic lack of success. Formally speaking, Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* is significant in that it looks at the genres of novel, drama, tragedy, comedy. Lennox tracks down Shakespeare's continental sources and analyzes the ways in which the novels were converted into texts that were dramatic, as well as comic and/or tragic. The titles of each chapter heading announce, very simply, this concern. The headings begin with, for example, "The fifth Novel of the eighth Decad of the Hecatomythi of Giraldi Cinthio," then follow with "Observations on the Use Shakespear has made of the foregoing Novel in his Comedy called *Measure for Measure*" or conversely, "The Ninth Novel of Bandello," followed by "Observations on the Use Shakespeare has made of the foregoing Novel in his Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*."<sup>54</sup> The titles set the generic dimensions of the inquiry as an exploration of the process of adaptation from romance tradition, what Johnson in the introduction calls "the Books of Chivalry," to the medium of theater and drama's framing of tragedy and comedy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear are Founded, Collected and Translated from the Original Authors*, 3 vols. (London: Printed for A. Millar, in the Strand, 1754), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. All citations refer to this edition.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, viii. Jonathan Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 116, does not make connections with tragedy, comedy, and the stage in his assessment of *The Female Quixote* and *Shakespeare Illustrated*: "In *The Female Quixote*, she is concerned with nothing as much as the question of that text's own genre, placing the implacable romanticism of Arabella (the eponymous heroine) and the quotidian realism of her suitors into an interminable struggle bereft of a common set of conventions or terms."

Lennox's criticism of Shakespeare's plays demonstrates an interest in making visible mixtures of genres, as well as the emotions those genres produce. In her commentary on *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Lennox suggests that Shakespeare was working from a French translation of Bandello's novel, or "what is equally probable, from an English Translation of that French one, both very bad, in some Places rather paraphrased than translated; in others, the Author's Sense absolutely mistaken, many Circumstances injudiciously added, and many more altered for the worse, or wholly omitted."<sup>56</sup> Lennox spends much time parsing the differences between the original Bandello, the translator's version, and Shakespeare's play and concludes that the discrepancies prove that Shakespeare was working not from the Bandello's original Italian novel, but from the Translation. To foreground the generic heterogeneity of Shakespeare, she responds to Pope's suggestion that Shakespeare's plays are a copy of nature. To this she objects, writing instead, "It is certain, that all the Characters in Romeo, excepting, as I said before, Mercutio's, are exact Copies of those in the Novelist; and since he copied them from the Translator, and not the Original, in this Instance Mr. Pope's Observation of other Authors, may be applied to Shakespear, that "His Picture, like a mock Rainbow, is but a Reflexion of a Reflexion."<sup>57</sup> What Lennox seems to be up to here is not so much an outright attack on Shakespeare, but an emphasis on the interconnectedness of genre. By foregrounding Shakespeare's dependence upon the novel, not only for plot points, but for affective force, Lennox highlights the fluidity

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<sup>56</sup> Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated*, 1:89.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:100.

between forms such as stage tragedy and narrative form, here Bandello's novella. Always a clear interest in tragic emotion, she declares: "The plain and simple Narration of that melancholy Event in Bandello is more natural, more pathetic, and fitter to excite the Passions of Pity and Terror, than the Catastrophe of the Tragedy, as managed by Shakespear, who has kept close by the Translator."<sup>58</sup>

This series of disappointments in the theater is enough to signal a pattern in Lennox's career, what we can read as an economically motivated desire to bring plays to stage and repeated difficulties in doing so. In a letter to David Garrick written in August of 1775, Charlotte Lennox, at the end of her career, muses on her history of bad luck in the theater: "I am not indifferent to theatrical rewards;" she writes, "could I but obtain them, they would assist me to bring up my little boy and my girl; but having once failed, when I had to a certain degree pleased myself, and several others whose judgment I relied on more than my own, I am grown diffident, so diffident that, if I have any genius, I dare not trust it."<sup>59</sup> However, trying her hand at so many different genres suggests a frustration with genre and an acute awareness of stage conventions and marketability. Though she was known as a mother of the novel, she would seek success in others, as a single genre was not able to satisfy her financial needs – or imaginative enterprise.

## V. Johnson's Astronomer

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 1:94.

<sup>59</sup> "Mrs. Charlotte Lennox to Mr. Garrick," *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, 2:77.

Lennox's novel famously ends with the intervention of the Johnsonian doctor, a denouement that has become central to debates about realism and romance. Samuel Johnson's fiction, however, is relevant also to questions regarding mixed genres, the dramatic subsets of tragedy and comedy, and the emotions to which those forms are bound. Though he frequently addressed genre in his writings on Shakespeare, Johnson's attitudes concerning mixed genres and emotions are present in *Rasselas* (1759), published seven years after Lennox's *The Female Quixote*. Johnson's story focuses on Rasselas, a Prince of Abyssinia, and his quest for his choice of life; however, it is the inset tale of the mad astronomer, a character that I interpret as a response to Lennox's mongrel Arabella, that implicitly responds to *The Female Quixote*. The view of genre and gender Johnson offers, I would suggest, is far more fixed than Lennox's novel. As Jonathan Kramnick notes, "Johnson is well aware that his understanding of the 'literary' is not Lennox's."<sup>60</sup> As I show in this concluding section, Johnson's fiction curtails the kind of ambiguous tragicomedy and mixed emotions apparent in the mongrel form of *The Female Quixote*.

The mad astronomer episode is introduced by the chapter "The History of a Man of Learning," in which Rasselas declares to his tutor Imlac his intentions to spend his time in a state of "literary solitude."<sup>61</sup> Imlac offers as a cautionary tale the short history of a scholar who, due to his isolated study, comes to suffer from delusions of grandeur, what manifests in an occasional bout of madness in which the astronomer falls under the misapprehension that he possesses the ability to control heavens, the fluctuations of the

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<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past*, 124.

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Johnson, *History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 98.

weather, and the changing of the seasons. After the relation of the specifics of the astronomer's illness, the question the text then poses is how the characters in the frame story should react to the spectacle of the astronomer's insanity. As in Lennox's novel, mixed emotions at first abound. The emotions of the three principal characters are briefly described as follows: "The prince heard this narration with very serious regard, but the princess smiled, and Pekuah convulsed herself with laughter."<sup>62</sup> Class and gender hierarchies offer a predictable organizing schema: notably, it is the women, the princess and her maid, who indulge inappropriately in mirth, finding comedy in the tragedy of the astronomer.

Unlike in Lennox's novel, mixed feelings are not allowed to persist; rather, they are immediately disciplined by an authority figure. Imlac's reprimand concerning the primacy of reason might be read as being addressed to the fair sex more broadly: "Ladies, said Imlac, to mock the heaviest of human afflictions is neither charitable nor wise. Few can attain this man's knowledge, and few practice his virtues; but all may suffer his calamity. Of the uncertainties of our present state, the most dreadful and alarming is the certain continuance of reason."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, it is the servant character, Pekuah, who furthest violates the laws of decorum, going so far as to laugh at what has been marked in Imlac's narration as a noble character whose madness should be viewed sympathetically. While the astronomer exhibits variations of many of Arabella's follies (rather than men's hearts, the astronomer suffers from the delusion that he can control the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



heavens), the astronomer, along with his profound mind and his dedication to relentless study, is the personification of a masculine tradition of academic study and scientific discovery. According to Imlac, “His comprehension is vast, his memory capacious and retentive, his discourse is methodical, and his expression clear.”<sup>64</sup> Imlac additionally cites the strengths of the astronomer’s character, among them “benevolence” and “integrity.”<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the astronomer’s belief in his power to control the weather is not secretly observed or ferreted out by ancillary characters, but is disclosed to Imlac as a hefty obligation, one spiked with the self-aware caveat that “I have sometimes suspected myself of madness.”<sup>66</sup> Though his isolation marks him as an outcast, the astronomer is always an ennobled figure, the denigration of which would amount to a transgression of a generic, gendered, and social hierarchy. As such Imlac’s chastisement of the women is due in large part to the astronomer’s social position within a gendered tradition of learning and study.

Imlac’s conditioning of the women’s own gendered and class position then serves as a dress rehearsal for the spectacle of the astronomer they will witness later in the novel. Allowing no ambiguities to persist, Imlac maintains that such matters require the strictest sobriety. In his regulation, the women are immediately and effectively brought round to their senses: “The princess was recollected, and the favourite [Pekuah] was abashed. Rasselas, more deeply affected, inquired of Imlac, whether he thought maladies

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 102.

of the mind frequent, and how they were contracted.”<sup>67</sup> Rasselas, the model of the party, notably feels the incident most deeply and seeks to extend the dialogue.

The mad astronomer episode in *Rasselas*, in its very direct disciplining of errant emotional response, also becomes intimately linked to questions of theatricality and genre, a practice the episode frames as particularly dangerous. Though the advantages and disadvantages are carefully weighed in Lennox’s novel, here they are verboten. The manifestation of the astronomer’s illness is initially regarded by the company as a kind of theatrical production, a point further developed with a lecture from Imlac addressing the relationship between reason and fancy and the dangers of insanity which any triumph of fancy over reason presents. Here it is once again the women who are most in need of correction as they respond, somewhat remorsefully, with a series of confessions which liken their own activities to the astronomer’s disease:

I will no more, said the favorite [Pekuah], imagine myself the queen of Abyssinia. I have often spent the hours, which the princess gave to my own disposal, in adjusting ceremonies and regulating the court; I have repressed the pride of the powerful, and granted petitions of the poor; I have built new palaces in more happy situations, planted groves upon the tops of mountains, and have exulted in the beneficence of royalty, till, when the princess entered, I had almost forgotten to bow before her.

(105-106)

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 104.

Imagination, especially as it relates to playacting is dangerous and linked, at least in this conversation, with gender and performance. Pekuah's imagining of herself in the role of a princess, one in which she is of an elevated status, might be compared to the kind of thought process performed by a character such as Arabella in likening herself to various queens of antiquity. She is a lowly servant aspiring to a high and noble character. As such, Pekuah's occupation of an alternative subject position is yet another hierarchical transgression (here: class, gender, generic), a low character transposing herself into a position of power. The act of imagining oneself into a role, even if never physically realized, has real world consequences as Pekuah nearly forsakes deference to the princess which she is bound to serve.

The princess too relates her own indiscretions in a confession which is even more clearly framed as theatrical event, though in this instance, it is a noble character who seems to be stricken with a case of genre envy:

And I, said the princess, will not allow myself any more to play the shepherdess in my waking dreams. I have often soothed my thoughts with the quiet and innocence of pastoral employments, till I have in my chamber heard the winds whistle, and the sheep bleat; sometimes freed the lamb entangled in the thicket, and sometimes with my crook encountered the wolf. I have a dress like that of the village maids, which I put on to help my imagination, and a pipe on which I play softly, and suppose myself followed by my flocks.

Like Pekuah, the princess generically re-imagines herself, here as the lowly shepherdess of the pastoral. The flight of fancy entails the material trappings of theater, such as a village maid dress and a prop, a pipe. So immersive is the theatrical fantasy and so deeply submerged is the princess that, as she admits here, her senses adapt, and she begins to hear the “winds whistle” and the “sheep bleat.” Such hallucinatory overtones suggest a sensory engagement that is tied to mind and body and therefore deeply unstable. The confession’s final image of the flock following the princess on her pastoral escapade slyly gestures at the power of her delusional theatrical practice, shades of Arabella’s plunge into the Thames.

In contrast to the women’s admission of their flirtation with madness and its twin, theatricality, is Rasselas’ own “visionary scheme” which is worth noting if only for its difference:

I have frequently endeavoured to image the possibility of a perfect government, by which all wrong should be restrained, all vice reformed, and all the subjects preserved in tranquility and innocence. This thought produced innumerable schemes of reformation, and dictated many useful regulations and salutary edicts. This has been the sport and sometimes the labour of my solitude; and I start, when

I think with how little anguish I once supposed the death of my father and my brothers.<sup>68</sup>

(106)

Rather than imaging himself as another or occupying an alternative or vicarious position related to class, gender, or genre, Rasselas instead projects the scheme for a government of his making. Absent are the playthings of the theater, as his fantasy becomes part of the discourse of rulership, revolution, and systems of government, aligning him with a masculine tradition of law governance and the genre of law. In this sense he is implicitly likened to the astronomer's belief that he controls the heavens. Rasselas' confession intimates a certain wariness of masculine ambition and imagination; however, directly imagining oneself as another becomes, at least in this instance, a gendered activity practiced by Pekuah and Nekayah rather than Rasselas.

Put into context with her contemporaries, Lennox's novel would seem to trouble the kinds of generic and social categories which writers such as Johnson worked to settle. Lennox is slow to levy her authorial position or literary authority as we see in Johnson's personation of Imlac. Instead, she exploits the friction produced by mixtures of tragedy and comedy to produce laughter as well as patriarchal critique. Her method is not direct, but employs the structure of a double bind to both satirize and criticize. It is the language of double speak rather than direct address. As Susan Staves has suggested, the novel was at times a "claustrophobic discursive space," in which women's writing could be

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 106.

confined “to a rather narrow domestic sphere and to observations about life suited to virtuous young ladies.”<sup>69</sup> We may interpret Lennox’s own vast body of generically experimental works, then, as persistent attempt to pry open the spaces in which women, both real and fiction, wrote and imagined.

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<sup>69</sup> Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 289, explores women authors’ work in the genre of history.

Chapter 5: Genres of the Moment  
Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*

To the interested onlooker, Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1761) presents a complicated picture of time. In the center of the canvas stands eighteenth-century actor, playwright, and theater manager David Garrick, flanked on either side by incarnations of antiquity: Melpomene and Thalia, the classical muses of tragedy and comedy.<sup>1</sup> Garrick was the actor of his moment, celebrated for his au courant style; on Reynolds' canvas, however, he is positioned between fleshy, female embodiments of the past.<sup>2</sup> On Garrick's right, the comic mistress seductively tugs at his garments, leading him into the brightly-lit day of a pastoral scene; on his left, the tragic dame firmly grasps his wrist, beckoning the actor into stony darkness.<sup>3</sup> Garrick's position between ancient rival muses suggests he is simultaneously the foremost actor on the London stage and an irresistible Parnassian ladies' man; he woos audiences

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Walpole's notes indicate that the pose can be attributed to David Garrick: "Reynolds has drawn a large picture of three figures to the knees, the thought taken by Garrick from the judgment of Hercules." This quotation is taken from Walpole's *Book of Materials*, held in manuscript at the Walpole Library, Yale University, and cited in David Mannings and Martin Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds, A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 209.

<sup>2</sup> By 1761, Garrick was a celebrated actor, having garnered praise for both tragic roles such as Shakespeare's Richard III (first performed 1741) and Hamlet (first performed 1742), as well as amorous beaux such as Ranger of *The Suspicious Husband* (first performed 1747) and Archer of *The Beaux Stratagem* (first performance 1742). See George Winchester Stone, Jr. and George M. Kahl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Pres, 1979), 473-572.

<sup>3</sup> The muses are painted in the style of two Renaissance artists, Reni (Melpomene) and Correggio (Thalia). See Heather McPherson, "Garrickomania: Art, Celebrity and the Imaging of Garrick," *David Garrick (1717-1779): A Theatrical Life*, 48, Folger Shakespeare Library, 48, <http://www.folger.edu/Content/Whats-On/Folger-Exhibitions/Past-Exhibitions/David-Garrick/Garrickomania-Art-Celebrity-and-the-Imaging-of-Garrick.cfm>.



Figure 2.1: Edward Fisher, Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy (1762), Mezzotint

Harvard Art Museums/Fog Museum, Gift of William Gray from the Collection of Francis Calley Gray, G151

Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College



both contemporary and ancient.<sup>4</sup> The past accumulates around and through Garrick, giving weight and, as his bemused expression intimates, levity to his meaning in the present.

Compounding the canvass's temporal resonances, the actor's pose echoes Hercules at the crossroads, the hero choosing between vice and virtue.<sup>5</sup> He models the stance of the proficient classical orator.<sup>6</sup> Caught between Melpomene and Thalia, Garrick treads the thresholds of comedy and tragedy, night and day, past and present, antiquity and modernity. The actor, the painting seems to suggest, transcends time. Put another way, the actor is timeless.

To note the temporal complexity of Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* is to enter into recent conversations about David Garrick's celebrity; much has been made of late of the actor as a man of his decidedly contemporary moment. Heather McPherson has uncovered the self-commodifying promotional images, such as theatrical portraits and prints, through which Garrick's cult-like fame, what she terms "Garrickomania," was established.<sup>7</sup> Acting, McPherson observes, is an "ephemeral art," and she suggests it was Garrick's ability to negotiate his public

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<sup>4</sup>The elevation of a portrait subject through classical allusions is common practice in Reynolds' portraiture, though the handling of the classical past in *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* is, I argue, especially complex. Reynolds discusses the representation of the subjects of his portraits in the third lecture from his *Discourses on Art*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 52-53.

<sup>5</sup>In paintings of Hercules at the crossroads, the hero stands between two paths and is forced to choose between the roads leading to virtue and vice; the options are typically personified as two women. David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds, A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 209, offers the origins of the pose: "The *Choice of Hercules* derives from a tale by the Greek Sophist, Prodicus, a contemporary of Socrates, and its pictorial history can be traced, as Panofsky showed (1930), back to the Middle Ages. Lord Shaftesbury's treatise published in 1712 discussed the correct classical presentation of the subject and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, which contains the original story, was a recommended school textbook in this period, all of which helped to make Reynolds' picture easily comprehensible to his contemporaries." For an extended consideration of Garrick's pose in the context of Hercules, see David Mannings, "Reynolds, Garrick, and the Choice of Hercules," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17.3 (1984): 259-283.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Kroll, *Restoration Drama and "The Circle of Commerce,"* 9, writes: "Since for Cicero and Quintilian the orator serves to mediate between law and equity in the state, it follows that the competition between tragedy and comedy in the actor's training represents that symbolic function."

<sup>7</sup> Heather McPherson, "Garrickomania: Art, Celebrity and the Imaging of Garrick," 1-94.

image in various forms of existing and emerging media that allowed him to establish cultural permanence.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Stuart Sherman makes a convincing case for David Garrick as a “*now* performer.”<sup>9</sup> Sherman theorizes the mutually informing temporalities of the playhouse and the daily cycles of press and periodical culture, persuasively arguing that Garrick was one of the first performers whose “present and future fame” was shaped by both spaces.<sup>10</sup> McPherson’s and Sherman’s scholarship importantly emphasize the here and now through which eighteenth-century actors like Garrick managed their fame, situating players within the context of the eighteenth-century’s emerging media, technologies, and commercial forms, whether periodicals and newspapers, engravings and reproductions, or cheaply made memorabilia.<sup>11</sup> As studies of the novel have shown, attention to cultural history proves useful in conceptualizing the elevation of texts, authors, and cultural practices not simply as the work of single authors or individual performers, but as part of a project of a broader “market-driven media culture,” to use William Warner’s phrase.<sup>12</sup>

In these discussions of Garrick’s celebrity, however, time is not typically considered beyond present and future tense. Sherman, for example, suggests that it is the “shared ephemerality of the press and playhouse” that “makes them worth new mapping.”<sup>13</sup> On the other

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Sherman, “Garrick among Media: The “*Now* Performer” Navigates the News,” *PMLA* 126.4 (2011): 966-982.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 966.

<sup>11</sup> Sherman points to Garrick as the “first performer to work full-time at the newspapers’ new nexus of fame and ephemerality,” (*Ibid.*, 968).

<sup>12</sup> William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: the Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750*, viii. See Warner’s discussion of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* as a “media event” (178).

hand, while McPherson catalogues Garrick's representation alongside Melpomene and Thalia, the significance of the modern actor's relationship to the ancients is overlooked.<sup>14</sup> The distant past lies tantalizingly beyond the critical horizon. Antiquity, that upon which a painting such as *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* depends for its lasting import, is eclipsed by the dizzying light of modern commercial culture.

While, as these scholars have demonstrated, the celebrity system of the eighteenth-century theater responded to and organized itself around new media and technologies, the temporal drama of *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, what is played out by Garrick's pose between two ancient muses, suggests that the modern practice of an actor maintaining a public image relied, at least for Garrick, upon much older generic structures. The classical past, as embodied by the muses Melpomene and Thalia, is not a "common grave" for David Garrick.<sup>15</sup> Rather, the image of Garrick standing between the two muses is one that became closely aligned with the actor's celebrity and, more importantly, what lies beyond fame: immortality. Garrick would become nearly synonymous with the muses Melpomene and Thalia during the eighteenth century and beyond. *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* was reproduced as a mezzotint and distributed by the actor as his personal calling card while traveling on the continent in 1764.<sup>16</sup> By

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<sup>13</sup> Stuart Sherman, "Garrick among Media," 968.

<sup>14</sup> Heather McPherson, "Garrickomania," 50-54.

<sup>15</sup> According to Sherman, Garrick's status as a "now performer" allowed the actor to negotiate "his profession's hitherto all-consuming common grave and to enjoy, in defiance of detractors and of precedent, not only the present but the future too" ("Garrick among Media," 980).

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds' painting became a mezzotint by Edward Fisher in 1762. Tim Clayton, "Figures of Fame: Reynolds and the Printed Image," *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), notes that prints were typically promotional tools and indicated "widespread demand for an image of the sitter," 51. Garrick distributed prints of Reynolds' painting on his 1764 visit to Paris. Clayton's research shows that Garrick

the end of the eighteenth century, the painting claimed the top spot on a list ranking the importance of Sir Joshua Reynolds' major works.<sup>17</sup> The classical muses even followed Garrick to his grave: Melpomene and Thalia appear on Garrick's monument in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, where they weep for him still, mourning the loss of their favored thespian.<sup>18</sup>

In this chapter I work to deepen existing discussions of Garrick's celebrity by bringing the competing temporalities of past and present simultaneously into view. To do so, I undertake an examination of the rich contexts surrounding *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, attending to both the pamphlet controversy that occupied Garrick in the early 1760s, as well as the widespread theorizing of tragedy and comedy among those in Garrick's circle of acquaintances (Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Elizabeth Montagu) in the later part of the decade. Objects of analysis include pamphlets and prints, notable for their impermanence, as well as forms of aesthetic writing, such as the essay and the preface, with aspirations to literariness and longevity. In either case, tragedy and comedy acted as genres that, while wedded to antiquity, were also appropriated to articulate what was for David Garrick and his circle a pressing set of eighteenth-century concerns related to lives lived in the public eye. Specifically, I argue that the representations of the muses of comedy and tragedy in Reynolds' painting, and indeed Garrick's association with tragedy and comedy in eighteenth-century theatrical culture

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requested six prints of the Reynolds portrait, as opposed to single prints of his character images (Lear, Hamlet, Jaffier), (51-52).

<sup>17</sup> James Dallaway, *Anecdotes of the Arts in England; or, Comparative Remarks on Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, Chiefly Illustrated by Specimens at Oxford* (London: 1800), 521-522, Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. Reynolds' portraits are listed by popularity. *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* is ranked first; *The Tragic Muse* is ranked sixth.

<sup>18</sup> The inscription, written by Samuel Jackson Pratt, an actor, focuses primarily on Garrick's relationship with Shakespeare: "Shakspeare [sic] & Garrick like twin stars shall shine, and earth irradiate with a beam divine."

more broadly, functioned as a means to negotiate the contemporary realities of public life and social life, namely issues of actors' rank and sexuality.

As figures whose class status and sexuality were a matter of public concern, actors were in precarious positions in the eighteenth-century's shifting social and sexual landscape. Peter de Bolla, for example, explores the question of actors' uneasy and shifting relationship to social rank in his essay on the legal case of Dublin theater manager and actor Thomas Sheridan.<sup>19</sup> As de Bolla points out, the term "gentleman," centering around questions of origins and ancestry, was malleable in the period and Sheridan's case was significant in that it brought to the fore the "uncertainty surrounding...the 'subject status' of the actor."<sup>20</sup> De Bolla points to Sheridan, and actors in the period more generally, as a "precursor of the divided subject"; that is, actors both were and were not the gentleman they played on stage.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Kristina Straub has written about actors' sexuality in the period, what she characterizes as "sexual shadiness," and the way in which an actor's sexuality proved a "contested site" in the emerging masculine dichotomy, a cultural shift in which heterosexuality was positioned as a norm against which homosexuality stood as deviation.<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, Straub locates a "crisis of representation" just after midcentury which saw flare-ups of homophobia in the theater as a reaction to binary

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<sup>19</sup> Peter de Bolla, "'A Submission, Sir!' Who has the Right to Person in Eighteenth-Century Britain?" in *Land, Nation and Culture, 1740-1840: Thinking the Republic of Taste*, ed. Peter de Bolla, Nigel Leask, and David Simpson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 148-168. For a critique of de Bolla's exclusive focus on actors, see Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, 172.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, "'A Submission, Sir!,' 165.

<sup>22</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 47.

understandings of gender.<sup>23</sup> By midcentury actors were more likely to be accused of sodomy, what Straub as a “discursive impetus to ‘masculinize’ the theater, to expel the ambiguities that were increasingly subject to disconcertingly unambiguous labels.”<sup>24</sup>

The representation of tragedy and comedy as female muses in Reynolds’ painting, I argue throughout this chapter, acts as a means to shore up Garrick’s claims to a class position (gentleman) that is figured as timeless rather than new or emergent; Garrick’s generic liminality dramatizes a model of masculine sexual potency. In other words, the representation of Garrick and the muses both offers viewers a powerful performance of the classically knowledgeable gentleman and, by gendering genre in the bodies of the muses, underscore his assured masculinity. Garrick’s position between Melpomene and Thalia becomes a way to both acknowledge and assuage anxieties about players’ class and sexual status, and ultimately, to positively revalue the actor as a divided subject. As Richard Wendorf points out, the painting of Garrick marks Reynolds’ “fascination with the divided self”; indeed, it is through this pose involving the classical genres of antiquity that Garrick refigures the actor’s liminality as cultural and national centrality.<sup>25</sup>

In making this assertion I am indebted to the work of performance theorists who have long considered the complex temporality of the playhouse, actively theorizing the theater’s

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 148. The temporal puzzle of the painting also resonates with comments by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12, concerning the temporality of nation formation: “If nation-states are widely conceded to be “new” and “historical,” the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. Anderson’s study addresses more generally the “the objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists” (5).

complicated relationship to past, present, future. Underlying the analysis in this chapter is the work of Marvin Carlson who writes of theater as “among the most haunted of human cultural structures.”<sup>26</sup> Carlson’s grounding emphasis on the “ghostly quality” of performance offers a reminder of the way in which the theater, by its very structure, is always engaged in acts of cultural remembrance and is therefore especially attuned to the temporal flow between past and present.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, in her study of performance and utopia, Jill Dolan writes of the “simultaneity” of time, the way in which the theater can potentially dramatize a space of collapsed past, present, and future in order to construct what, Dolan notes, German philosopher Ernst Bloch has called “the three dimensions” of temporality.<sup>28</sup> Or, as Tracy C. Davis pithily remarks in a reading of *Macbeth*, “the present brokers past and future.”<sup>29</sup> Carlson, Dolan, Davis, and others do not emphasize the past at the expense of the present or future; rather, their attention to temporal dimensionality opens up discussion of all aspects of time in the present space of performance.

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<sup>26</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theater as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2005), 13. Dolan’s analysis of Ann Carson’s *Blanket*, as well as contemporary adaptations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Euripides’ *Medea*, theorizes competing temporalities. These performances, she notes, “begin with the particular – with classic stories, with ancient mythologies, with an extended moment of American history – then insistently extend it to a more complex universal, one that doesn’t require transhistorical agreement on the importance of a tragedy or a character or an event, but that can recognize and feel and acknowledge the consequences of an action in its moment and the various, complicated ways it resonates in some of our own” (162).

<sup>29</sup> Tracy C. Davis, “Performative Time” in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2010), 142. Davis writes: “Temporal concerns which manifest in *Macbeth*, and possibly all drama, as the opposition of past and future held tenuously at odds in the present moment become, in performance, not only a reminder of human beings’ temporal ontology, but also an experience of it” (142).

Joseph Roach models just this sort of an approach within eighteenth-century studies in his writing on Sarah Siddons as represented in Sir Joshua Reynolds' 1784 portrait *The Tragic Muse*.<sup>30</sup> Roach discusses the "patina" of Siddons' skin as the physical accumulation of the past; that is, "the ancient tragic mask re-created in the modern female countenance."<sup>31</sup> In Roach's analysis, antique tropes work powerfully on the actresses who bring the past to life; tragedy has a "sacralizing" effect on female players such as Siddons, just as comedy works to "profane" the muses of comedy.<sup>32</sup> Roach acknowledges how actresses made use of classical motifs to manage their public and private personae and negotiate the fraught discourse on actresses' sexuality, noting that "tragedy coalesced as the genre of the high-culture virgin and comedy that of the popular whore."<sup>33</sup> Roach both illuminates our view of Sarah Siddons' longtime association with tragedy, and leads to us to similar questions about David Garrick's own relationship to gender and genre. If a leading actress such as Siddons strategically donned the mask of tragedy in order to circumvent gendered double binds, what then do we make of Garrick's own gendered and generic alliances? Were the muses of tragedy and comedy, Melpomene and Thalia, similarly necessary for the articulation of the actor David Garrick's own legitimacy?

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Roach, *It*, 146-173.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 146, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Roach contends that "strongly held generic preferences shaped the apotheosis of [Siddons'] late career: tragedy sacralized its objects and its agents; comedy, at which Mrs. Siddons did not excel, was its (and her) profane foil" (*It*, 147).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.





Figure 2.2: Inigo Barlow, Monument to the Memory of David Garrick Esq. (1797)  
Courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library

## II. Mongrels in the Play-and-Pamphlet War

David Garrick had scores of detractors throughout his career; however, it is his long-running and very public feud with Irish critic and self-appointed arbiter of taste Thaddeus Fitzpatrick that presents the most immediate context for Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*.<sup>34</sup>

While Fitzpatrick has been consigned to the dustbin of history, during the 1750s and 60s he rose to notoriety as a very vocal critic of David Garrick and Drury Lane, engaging in what scholars such as Leslie Ritchie have termed the "play-and-pamphlet war."<sup>35</sup> Fitzpatrick was a gentleman who had income from his deceased father; given his upbringing and education, he harbored pretensions to taste and critical authority. While the conflict between Garrick and Fitzpatrick is most frequently linked to the Half-Price riots of the 1760s, Leslie Ritchie's scholarship proves the dispute began as early as 1752 at a performance of *Harlequin Ranger*, at which Fitzpatrick threw an apple at the actor Henry Woodward.<sup>36</sup> As Ritchie points out, *Harlequin Ranger* was a play that mocked the novel tastes of the town, especially the spectacles put on by John Rich at Covent Garden; in retaliation for this slight, Fitzpatrick, apparently a fan of such entertainments, lobbed an apple onstage. Ritchie analyzes the class and gender implications of the debacle, arguing that the incident stemmed from the way in which the theater called attention to the

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<sup>34</sup> Garrick often found himself embroiled in public quarrels. Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 47-68, discusses the charges of homosexuality brought against David Garrick, Isaac Bickerstaff, and Samuel Foote.

<sup>35</sup> Leslie Ritchie, "Garrick's *Male-Coquette* and Theatrical Masculinities" in *Refiguring the Coquette: Essays on Culture and Coquetry* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2008), 164. Ritchie questions the assignment of the first name "Thaddeus" to the critic Fitzpatrick (184, n.2).

<sup>36</sup> Leslie Ritchie, "Garrick's *Male-Coquette* and Theatrical Masculinities," 165. For a description of the culminating events of this feud see "A Short Account of the Life and Writings of David Garrick, Esq." in *The Poetical Works of David Garrick* (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1968), xxviii-xxxi.

“performativity of genteel masculinity.”<sup>37</sup> The snafu at the theater, in other words, was a power struggle over whose taste was more legitimate: those who were born gentlemen (such as Fitzpatrick) or those who, like Garrick or the player Henry Woodward, simply acted the part. In this section, I wish to build on this existing scholarship on the play-and-pamphlet war by tracking the course of the feud in the 1760s as issues of generic decorum became a prime concern for Garrick and his detractors. Garrick, of course, not only acted as a gentleman on stage, but frequently as a tragic hero, and it is as much Garrick’s relationship to tragedy, as I show in this section, that Fitzpatrick attacks during the years following the 1752 performance of *Harlequin Ranger*. I interpret Fitzpatrick’s commentary on Garrick and tragedy as, in the words of Peter de Bolla, a response to the mixing of “the vulgar – say common players – with the polite,” that is “the miscegenation of rank.”<sup>38</sup> Fitzpatrick’s fixation on Garrick’s vacillation between classical genres, tragedy and comedy, offers an aesthetic cover for attacking Garrick’s ambiguous class status. While throwing an apple at a stage halted the performance at Drury Lane on an evening in 1752, Fitzpatrick’s commentary on tragic decorum, I demonstrate, becomes a temporally disruptive force, as the critic’s invocation of classical generic decorum intervenes into the present moment of Garrick’s playhouse performance.

By the turn of 1760, the splenetic Fitzpatrick had taken to publishing weekly unflattering reflections on David Garrick, primarily addressing the actor’s inability to maintain the dignity of tragedy in *The Craftsman, or The Gray’s Inn Journal*; the papers were then collected and

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<sup>37</sup> Leslie Ritchie, “Garrick’s *Male-Coquette* and Theatrical Masculinities,” 165.

<sup>38</sup> Peter de Bolla, “‘A Submission, Sir!’ Who has the Right to Person in Eighteenth-Century Britain?,” 160.

republished in 1760 in the provocatively titled volume *An Enquiry into the Real Merit of a Certain Popular Performer*.<sup>39</sup> The introduction of the collected volume advertises the publication as an intervention into Garrick's acting career in hopes that the actor will take the offered advice to heart, resulting in a "more correct study of the capital parts of tragedy" (iv). The invocation of "study" has implications pertaining to Garrick's claims to gentility: Thaddeus, not Garrick, is the learned critic well-versed in the dramatic tradition. The world of the study and the stage, however, are not so much split by Fitzpatrick's commentary as drawn together, or rather, a hierarchy is enacted in which the study claims authority over the stage. It is through his critical commentary on genre that Fitzpatrick hopes to correct Garrick's performance in the theater. The epistles that follow, penned presumably by Fitzpatrick, who wrote as "XYZ," are a series of scathing critiques of Garrick's violation of the dignity of tragedy, specifically targeting his performance as Pierre in Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, and in the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. For Fitzpatrick, Garrick's dithering between genres marks his lack of taste, his inability to properly interpret the dramatic tradition, and most importantly, his waning physical prowess. Fitzpatrick portrays Garrick as a man whose time has passed; the declension of his physical powers renders him effete. Fitzpatrick writes that "altho' your discernment may still be exquisite and your face-expression good; yet are your powers dwindled, your execution become defective, and your novelty worn out" (vii). The result, Fitzpatrick suggests, are lapses in generic decorum. Garrick presents "low cunning" instead of "noble confidence" (4). Some of his speeches betray a "glaring want of weight" (4). The author chides, "I could not avoid thinking, that I was present at

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<sup>39</sup> Thaddeus Fitzpatrick, *An Enquiry into the Real Merit of a Certain Popular Performer* (London: Printed for M. Thrush, 1760), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. All subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

an additional scene in the Beggar's Opera" (6), a ballad opera notable for its comic novelty and relative newness rather than its tragic import and weighty relationship to the past. Juxtaposed with the "immortal Shakespeare, Otway, and Rowe," Garrick's floundering performances make no such claim for his place in a dramatic genealogy (2).

Fitzpatrick's focus on Garrick as an actor past his prime, unable to adhere to generic decorum is in some ways an odd inverse of previous laudatory discourse on the actor. Henry Fielding, for example, describes Garrick in his novel *Tom Jones* (1749) as an actor who could have his way with both tragic and comic roles, and as such bore a striking resemblance to figures from ancient history. The narrator opines:

As Garrick, whom I regard in tragedy to be the greatest genius the world hath ever produced, sometimes condescends to play the fool, so did Scipio the Great, and Laelius the Wise, according to Horace, many years ago; nay, Cicero reports them to have been 'incredibly childish.' These, it is true, played the fool, like my friend Garrick, in jest only; but several eminent characters have, in numberless instances of their lives, played the fool.<sup>40</sup>

Fielding likens contemporary celebrity to a revered classical past by situating Garrick's comical roles within a classical lineage of Roman men of antiquity: a Roman general and a Roman statesman. Further, Garrick's dalliance with comedy is characterized not as a declension of his powers, but as an action in line with a militant brand of masculinity. Fielding writes a few lines

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 285.

later: “The passions, like the managers of a playhouse, often force men upon parts without consulting their judgment.”<sup>41</sup> Garrick’s judgment is not brought into question because the invocation of “force upon” (as if to force oneself upon) resonates as an act of sexual supremacy. Earlier descriptions of Garrick’s acting likewise positively portrayed the flair Garrick brought to serious tragic roles as his facility with tragedy and comedy is naturalized. A commentator writes in 1753 of Garrick’s portrayal of Hamlet, that “there were gleams of gentlemanly gaiety, that sat upon his general gloom, as the bright border of the sunbeam upon a watery cloud.”<sup>42</sup> Rather than the warlike Romans invoked by Fielding, the commentator makes use of natural imagery such as sunbeams and clouds in order to suggest that Garrick’s blending of tragic and comic affects, what is characterized as “gentlemanly,” is as natural as the sun shining through an overcast sky. The celebration of Garrick’s mastery of tragedy and comedy from these commentators suggests the embrace of a manifold and highly performative manliness as Garrick becomes a blank slate onto which commentators draft fantasies about masculinity, whether a classical militarism or the figure of the natural gentleman.

In the case of Fitzpatrick, however, it is Garrick’s wavering between genres that calls into question the actor’s authority. Just as praise of Garrick’s virtuosic generic maneuvering could establish a sense of the actor’s timelessness, so could it be relentlessly employed to revoke that status and emphasize the fleetingness of Garrick’s time upon the stage. One of the epistles, dated April 16, 1760, narrates a trip to the theater with a man and his rather dim-witted companion; in this episode the unlearned simpleton thinks not much of the famed tragedian. The punchline

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons. Interspersed with Anecdotes of Actors and Authors*, 2 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 1:122.

comes at the end of the letter as the author writes, "next to the fascination of seeing a tragedy character sustained with accuracy and judgment, is the pleasure of seeing it humorously travestied" (8). The moment is a parodic reversal of past praise of Garrick, such as the character Partridge's experience in seeing Garrick at a performance of *Hamlet* in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, as Garrick is unable to convey the effects of tragedy to even the most unlearned spectator.<sup>43</sup>

While the letters relay these playhouse anecdotes as evidence, Fitzpatrick employs an additional strategy to further establish his critical authority over Garrick. Fitzpatrick displays an almost painful attention to detail in which Garrick's speeches from specific performances are dissected down to the very syllable, Fitzpatrick writing to the critical moment. In noting Garrick's inaccuracies in *Hamlet*, for example, the author goes so far as to list twenty of the "mutilated" lines, claiming that to reprint all would "encroach on the time and patience of your readers" (20-22). The same treatment is given to Garrick's performance in *Richard III* (28-33). The result reads as a laundry list of inaccuracies in which Garrick's failed performances are forced back upon him in a sustained critical assault, what seems to effectively halt the past performance – or at least render it disjointed.<sup>44</sup> Garrick mentions Fitzpatrick's criticisms in a letter written in January of 1762 to an unnamed friend, referring to Fitzpatrick as "the one in

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 752-755. Vanessa Cunningham, *Garrick and Shakespeare*, 151-155, discusses Garrick's attempts to make *Hamlet* less comedic.

<sup>44</sup> Laurence Sterne parodies this style of grammatical criticism in a passage from the third volume of his novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767): "And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night? 'Oh against all rule, My Lord, Most ungrammatically!'" Quoted in Stone and Karhl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography*, 150.

particular who wrote against me for stopping injudiciously in this line in Hamlet.”<sup>45</sup> Garrick returns to his past performance and reviews each line, attempting to defend himself. Regarding, for example, the line “I think it was to See - my Mother’s Wedding,” he writes, “I certainly never *stop* there, (that is, close ye Sense) but as I certainly, *Suspend* my Voice, by which your Ear must know, that ye Sense is suspended too – for Hamlet’s Grief causes ye break and with a Sigh, he finishes ye – Sentence – *My Mother’s Wedding* – I really could not from my feelings act it otherwise.”<sup>46</sup> As Garrick and Fitzpatrick tussle over the meaning of past performances in pamphlets and letters, the memory of performance itself is revisited, revised, and amended.<sup>47</sup> In this way Fitzpatrick’s commentary on tragic decorum is able to retroactively intervene into the time and space of the playhouse.

### III. Engendering Garrick’s Defense

While Garrick’s correspondence responded directly to Fitzpatrick’s attack, other documents from the period defend the actor through a conflation of gender and genre. *The Muses Address to D. Garrick Esq, with Harlequin’s Remonstrance*, for example, is composed of two letters: one written to Garrick from Melpomene and Thalia, and the other by the creature Harlequin, “that

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<sup>45</sup> *The Letters of David Garrick*, ed. David M. Little and George M. Kahrl, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), 1:350-351.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> An earlier commentator, writing in *The Present State of the Stage in Great-Britain and Ireland; And the Theatrical Characters of the Principal Performers, in Both Kingdoms, Impartially Considered* (Dublin: Printed for William Smith, 1753), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, defends Garrick on temporal grounds: “’Tis true, that sometimes he pauses in Places, where, critically speaking, there is no pause, in order to collect his Breath, to give additional Force to what ensues,” 22.



Offspring of Folly and Absurdity, that Monster unknown to Nature and the Ancients, that Enemy to the *Muses* and Common-Sense” (6).<sup>48</sup> The first epistle, penned by the muses themselves, consistently buoys Garrick’s status as a gentleman as the Parnassian pair are characterized as representatives of a past classical tradition and a present English one, both of which are defined by an alliance with nature, taste, learning, and virtue. Melpomene and Thalia write to Garrick directly and praise him for restoring order to England’s stage and its audiences, a group of spectators whose passions are maintained “by Goodness, Honour, and Patriotism” (6). Garrick’s dominance is confirmed by the women’s shared admiration: “Not partially inspired by *One* of us,” they fawn, “but to shew our Influence more effectually, you possess us *Both*” (7). As with the portrayal of Garrick in *Between Tragedy and Comedy*, the pamphlet foregrounds Garrick’s desirability as the muses’ express their attraction to the actor; however, the language indicates that the pamphlet is not simply concerned with desire, but also power: namely, Garrick’s. Noticeably, Garrick is not possessed by the muses; rather, he possesses them.

The pamphlet’s second letter works to further define the relationship between Garrick and the muses by introducing his third devotee, Harlequin, the muses’ grotesque foil and a sycophantic admirer of the actor.<sup>49</sup> Gender and genre confirm Harlequin as Garrick’s perverse

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<sup>48</sup> *The Muses Address to D. Garrick, Esq; with Harlequin’s Remonstrance* (London: Printed for W. Nicholls, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1761), Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Group, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> All citations refer to this edition of the text. Garrick’s biographers, George Winchester Stone, Jr. and George M. Kahrl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography*, 151, attribute the pamphlet to Garrick’s “humorless” enemies. Previous commentators, however, such as nineteenth-century commentator Percy Fitzgerald, attribute the verses to Garrick himself. See Percy Fitzgerald, *The Life of David Garrick, From Original Family Papers, and Numerous Unpublished Sources*, 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Brothers, 18, Catherine St., Strand, 1868), 2:15-16. Given the positive representation of Garrick’s relationship to the muses in the pamphlet, I side with Fitzgerald.

<sup>49</sup> Harlequin is not explicitly associated with Fitzpatrick, though the creature’s admiration of Garrick mirrors Fitzpatrick’s own early friendship with the actor. Harlequin’s foreignness also aligns with Fitzpatrick’s Irish roots and his pretensions to theatrical taste.

other. As opposed to classical learning, Harlequin claims to be illiterate, a statement that undercuts his pretensions to genteel “Taste” (11). Not of Parnassian or English origins, the creature traces its ancestry instead to “a Family who have long been Favourites to the Sovereigns of the *Goths* and the *Vandals*” (12). While the muses are identifiably women, Harlequin resembles a “Species of Monkeys” (15). As for his opinion of the muses, Harlequin renders illicit the gender play of Reynolds’ painting and the pamphlet’s first epistle. The creature accuses Melpomene and Thalia of having prostituted themselves to “*Virgil, Sophocles, Terence,* and many other Beggars of *Greece* and *Italy,*” as well as the English authors Shakespeare and Milton (16).<sup>50</sup> Turning the question to Garrick himself, Harlequin asks the actor, “have they not boasted of Favours from *You?*” (16). In a burlesque of Garrick’s titillating relationship with the muses, the letter ends with the leering proposal that Harlequin take the women’s place; he concludes with the lewd line “Scratch you my A-----le, and I’ll claw your Elbow” (23). Harlequin, then, is defined throughout the letter by his difference, what extends to a whole host of categories. The letter betrays bad taste and false learning; the creature is also foreign and perhaps not even human. Most pointedly, however, Harlequin’s desire for Garrick, what is framed as perverse and unnatural, is contrasted with Garrick’s relationship with the muses as the creature becomes, as the muses suggest, the “Monster” over which Garrick and the muses of tragedy and comedy ascend (6).

Granted, that the anonymous pamphlet forcefully juxtaposes Garrick’s positive qualities with a degraded “other” is not, in and of itself, a particularly striking revelation. John O’Brien

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<sup>50</sup> Harlequin specifically accuses the muses of being “Prostitutes” (16).

has written extensively and persuasively about Garrick's cooptation of the Harlequin figure, arguing that the actor both embraced and expelled characteristics of the harlequinade during what O'Brien terms the "institutionalization" of pantomime.<sup>51</sup> As O'Brien notes, "Harlequin stands as a timeless Other to an emergent sense of British nationhood that had its own embodiment in the figure of Shakespeare."<sup>52</sup> The move is a familiar one in Garrick's career, as he had a history of parodying effeminate masculinity, and is indebted to an older understanding of male sexuality. What is interesting, however, is how this anonymous pamphlet brings to light the way in which these conversations about contemporary concerns, such as class and social mobility, as well as emergent notions of gender, took shape around conversations concerning dramatic form.

In the same year, 1761, Garrick himself attacked Fitzpatrick in a poetic satire published as *The Fribbleriad*, a poem dedicated and addressed to XYZ, the penname of Fitzpatrick. Garrick's direct poetic response to Fitzpatrick relies on a similar gendered logic as the 1761 anonymous pamphlet for its satirical force. That is, Garrick responds to Fitzgerald's tirade about genre by focusing instead on Fitzgerald's failed gender performance. Garrick maligns the critic primarily by questioning his inability to perform, not the proper tragic roles, but the proper gender and sex roles, imagining the critic as a hermaphrodite character known as a fribble. Howard Weinbrot provides a lineage for the word "fribble," noting that "by the 1670s it denoted male sexual inadequacy, and may already have implied the homosexuality that became a

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<sup>51</sup> John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 211. O'Brien cites Garrick's 1775 play *The Theatrical Candidates*, in which Harlequin runs for office alongside "the more 'established' candidates" Tragedy and Comedy (210).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

standard meaning in the eighteenth century."<sup>53</sup> Like the figure of Harlequin, the fribble held special meaning for Garrick, having played the role of "Fribble" in his play *A Miss in her Teens* (1747) fifty-nine times over the course of his career. George Winchester Stone, Jr. and George M. Kahrl make note of the way in which Garrick attempted to define how the part would be performed after his own time on the stage.<sup>54</sup> According to Stone and Kahrl, "Garrick knew how he would identify the 'fribble' character not only by dialogue and description and action, but by the way he planned to pronounce a number of words. He made sure succeeding actors would do the same by the spellings he dictated for his printed text – "crateer" for creature, "mesiter" for master, "serous taalk" for serious talk, and 'hooman nater' for human nature."<sup>55</sup> For Garrick, then, gender was a highly theatrical affair and the performance of the stereotype of the fribble was one in which he was very much invested. In his attack on Fitzpatrick, then, it is the lack of performance ability for which the critic is disparaged.

Garrick's primary satiric strategy is to inquire into the gender identity of the anonymous "Scribbler, X, Y, Z": "Whether a *wit*, or a *pretender*? / Of *masculine* or *female* gender?" (lines 15-16). Without any distinguishing characteristics, the writer is therefore characterized as both: "Nor male? nor female? ---- then on oath / We safely may pronounce it both" (lines 74-75).<sup>56</sup> Throughout the poem, the nameless critic is referred to as "it" and "that mixture base" (line 79).

By rearticulating Fitzpatrick's attack on genre through the language of gender, Garrick

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<sup>53</sup> Howard Weinbrot, "Rochester's Fribble Revisited," *Notes and Queries* 29.6 (1982): 523-524.

<sup>54</sup> Kahrl and Stone, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography*, 209-210. For number of performances, see *Ibid.*, 656.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> David Garrick, *The Fribbleriad in The Poetical Works of David Garrick*, 2 vols. (Bronx, NY: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), 1:21-32. All citations refer to this edition of the text.

powerfully juxtaposes his own generic liminality with the transgendered Fitzpatrick. Kristina Straub notes how the poem positions Garrick "in opposition to ambiguous or suspect forms of masculinity," and indeed, Fitzpatrick's inability to properly stage his sex casts David Garrick's own theatrical facility in a positive light.<sup>57</sup> Joseph Roach obliquely gestures at the resemblance between the hermaphrodite and the actor when, writing of Diderot's theorizations, he opines that the actor "stand[s] in relation to moral character as the hermaphrodite does the sex: the best actors 'are fit to play all characters because they have none.'"<sup>58</sup> In spite of this likeness, or indeed because of it, Garrick promotes his position between genres (his ability to take on multiple roles) over the critic's gender incoherence.

Fittingly, the main opposition in the poem is the character Churchill, based presumably on Charles Churchill, Garrick's real-life friend and defender who, "like Hercules stands, / Unmask'd his face, but arm'd his hands; / Alike prepare'd to *write* or *drub!* / This holds a *pen* and that a *club!*" (lines 57-60). The pose is characterized as the epitome of "manhood's feats and plans" (line 73). A different pose of Hercules would be assumed by Garrick himself in his *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, further legitimizing Garrick's genre play (read as genius) by setting it off against Fitzpatrick's gender troubles (read as effeminacy). In Churchill's 1761 *The Rosciad*, he confirms the characterization, taking aim at Fitzpatrick's gender identity as well as his Irishness: "Nor *male* nor *female*; neither and yet both. / Of neuter gender, though of Irish

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<sup>57</sup> Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Roach, *Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Press, 1985), 136. Roach's quotation comes from Diderot's *Le paradoxe sur le comédien avec recueilles presentees par Marc Blanquet* (Paris: Editions Nord-Sud, 1949), 48.

growth<sup>59</sup> Churchill mocks Fitzpatrick's presumption to know of "genius and of taste, of play'rs and plays" and proclaims that the critic – referred to as "it" - shall "Live without sex, and die without name!"<sup>60</sup> In Churchill's estimation, Fitzpatrick has fast become not simply hermaphroditic, but like the creature Harlequin, monstrous.

The remainder of Garrick's poem details the meeting of a party of fribbles as they discuss how best to eliminate Garrick from the stage; they plan to disrupt the performance within the playhouse. The poem turns to questions of generic decorum, perhaps in an attempt to refute Fitzgerald's earlier critique of the Garrick's relationship to tragedy in *An Enquiry into the Real Merit*. In the *Fribbleriad*, however, it is not the actor's declining powers that are the target of criticism. Instead, the poem zeroes in on the response of the audience: the fribbles decide to respond improperly to tragedy and comedy in order to bring the action of the playhouse to a screeching halt:

At Lear will laugh, be hard as rocks,  
And fit at Scrub like barbers blocks:  
When all is still, we'll roar like thunder;  
When all applause- be mute, and wonder!

(lines 363-366)

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<sup>59</sup> Charles Churchill, Thomas Parnell, and Thomas Tickell, *The poetical works of Churchill, Parnell, and Tickell*, 4 vols. (Cambridge and Boston: The Riverside Press and Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1880), 1:25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:25-26.

According to the poem, the fribbles' greatest threat to Garrick, and weapon against him, is to usurp the authority of the actor and break with tragic decorum in their response to the stage. The improper emotional response of the fribbles runs alongside the group's illegible gender performance. Just as the fribbles cannot act proper gender roles, neither do they –willfully or not - follow generic decorum in their emotional response to the stage. The passage re-imagines the scenario of a disrupted playhouse in *An Enquiry into the Real Merit*, though assigns blame not to the actor who is unable to properly perform tragedy, but to the audience member who improperly emotes. Further, Garrick amplifies the homoeroticism of the poem as the fribbles plan to attack Garrick and, in a moment of ecstasy, “stabs, and wounds, where most it likes” (line 372). By the end of the poem, however, Garrick concludes safely within the familiar classical context of Garrick as Caesar and the fribble as Brutus: “*He* as a Roman, gave the blow; / I as a FRIBBLE, stab your foe” (lines 372-373).

As the escalating attacks in these pamphlets and poems intimate, the feud between Garrick and Fitzpatrick did indeed reach a critical mass that played out in and around the theater at Drury Lane in the Half-Price riots of 1763, a series of events also impacting Covent Garden. Fitzpatrick and his associates had taken to disturbing the peace at Drury Lane by distributing pamphlets that contested Drury Lane's admittance policy; that is, they clamored over the standing rule that full price must be paid for admission to Drury Lane no matter when audience members arrive.

Assembling a gang, Fitzpatrick was able to disrupt performances of *The Two Gentleman of*

*Verona* and the tragedy *Elvira*.<sup>61</sup> The heads of Drury Lane eventually relented to the demands of the crowd and amended the admission policy. Despite the temporary success of the Half-Price riots, however, it is Fitzpatrick, the anonymous pamphlet-publishing critic, who is ultimately erased from history. In an account of the men's relationship in William Cook's *Memoirs of Charles Macklin* the author describes the entire affair between Fitzpatrick and Garrick, reducing it to a "trifling dispute with Garrick at a club they belonged to."<sup>62</sup> Cook refers to the Shakespeare Club both men were members of an incident in which the club proceedings were brought to a halt due to Garrick's absence. No mention of the Half-Price riots are made, only Garrick's indispensability as a proxy for Shakespeare. Of Fitzpatrick's ongoing feud with Garrick, Cook adds that "the town laughed at these impotent attacks."<sup>63</sup> In this Cook echoes the sexual language of Garrick in the *Fribbleriad* who wrote of Fitzpatrick's "*Malignity with impotence*" (line 94).

Given the debates about genre, sexuality, and rank that circulated during the play-and-pamphlet war, Reynolds' *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* stands both as a painting concerned with the past and a painting very much of its moment. Garrick's position between the two muses, Melpomene and Thalia, is a marker of his theatrical authority and masculine prowess. There is nothing weakening about the actor's liminality; rather, because tragedy and comedy take female form, gender and genre signify in tandem. That the two figures are classical muses confirms Garrick's mastery as an actor and his privileged relationship to classical

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<sup>61</sup> Accounts of this riot can be found in "A Short Account of the Life and Writings," *The Poetical Works of David Garrick*, xxix-xxx.

<sup>62</sup> William Cook, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin, Comedian: With the Dramatic Characters, Manners ...* (Printed for J. Asperne by T. Maiden, 1804), 244.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*



tradition; conversely, that tragedy and comedy are also women in the flesh intimates Garrick's dominant position. Any ambivalence about Garrick's wavering relationship to genre or his waning physical powers is assuaged by the surety of the fleshly, female muses. Horace Walpole's description of the scene is particularly resonant in that respect: "[Tragedy] exhorts him to follow her exalted vocation, but Comedy draws him away, and he seems to yield willingly, though endeavouring to excuse himself, and pleasing that he is forced."<sup>64</sup> While Garrick's hand is forced by the comic muse, Thalia's sway is figured as an enticing source of pleasure. The actor's desirability resonates in both contexts; Garrick's pose is a successful performance of both generic and gendered scripts. A liminal position between genres is framed as one that is desirable rather than degraded, empowering rather than effete. *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, interpreted within the context of the play and pamphlet war, marks Garrick's lasting triumph over Fitzpatrick and suggests that Garrick's association with the muses of tragedy and comedy was an effective strategy for combating recurrent questions about the place of players in public life.

#### IV. Shakespeare and Tragicomedy in Garrick's Circle

The use of classical generic structures, tragedy and comedy, to negotiate contemporary social categories was not limited to the periodical and pamphlet press. The later 1760s saw a spate of essays in the actor David Garrick's circle by critics who were interested in theorizing tragedy,

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<sup>64</sup> Cited in Mannings and Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds, A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 209. Walpole continues: "Tragedy is a good antique figure, but wants more dignity in the expression of her face. Comedy is a beautiful and winning girl – but Garrick's face is distorted and burlesque" (209). The passage is taken from Walpole's *Book of Materials*, held at the Walpole Library, Yale University.

comedy, and mixtures of the two, especially as they related to William Shakespeare. Three essays in particular, Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), Sir Joshua Reynolds' unpublished essays on Shakespeare and tragicomedy, and Elizabeth Montagu's *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769), offer what I argue is an important aesthetic context for understanding the representation of classical genres in *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*. The growing importance of David Garrick's relationship to both tragedy and comedy resonates strongly with William Shakespeare in this period since, as Heather McPherson points out, "Garrick (like Shakespeare) triumphed in both genres, he was not actually obliged to choose."<sup>65</sup> As Vanessa Cunningham reminds, "The contribution made by Shakespeare to the growth of Garrick's reputation is hard to overstate."<sup>66</sup> In the following analysis of the writings on Shakespeare and genre in the later 1760s, I find that, much as in the play-and-pamphlet war, critics engaged in the project of Shakespeare's elevation were intrigued by, even fixated on the playwright's relationship to the genres of tragedy and comedy and especially mixtures of tragedy and comedy. Moreover, these critics, like Fitzgerald and Garrick, made use of conversations about classical genre to express concerns and formulate ideas about contemporary identity, bringing ancient motifs to bear on the social reality of the present.

Longtime friends, Samuel Johnson and David Garrick both had lasting interests in William Shakespeare. Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*, published in 1765, is a document that, in many ways, mirrors the complicated temporalities of Reynolds' painting of Garrick in *Garrick*

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<sup>65</sup> Heather McPherson, "Garrickomania," 48.

<sup>66</sup> Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick*, 4.

*between Tragedy and Comedy*. From the *Preface*'s outset, Johnson makes the claim that Shakespeare, having outlived his own century, now qualifies for the "dignity of an ancient."<sup>67</sup> Johnson's opening concern with Shakespeare's historical transcendence is in step with the middle part of the century's growing bardolatry. According to Michael Dobson's *Making of the National Poet*, Johnson's *Preface* appears during the "culminating phase" of Shakespeare's canonization in the eighteenth century (1735-1769) in which, Dobson argues, Shakespeare came to exceed the limited time and space of the playhouse.<sup>68</sup> The performance of Shakespeare's plays were becoming mere appendages to the text, and by Garrick's Jubilee in 1769, Dobson claims, Shakespeare had left the hustle and bustle of the stage for the refuge of the closet and middle class domesticity.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, for Samuel Johnson in his *Preface*, Shakespeare's plays are no longer flickers on a stage that come to life nightly; rather, Shakespeare's works have lasting and universal permanence. As a "faithful mirror of manners and of life," Shakespeare's dramas are, Johnson suggests, anchored in the past, yet simultaneously resist linear chronology in that they always also reflect the present (355). This structure of collapsed time underlies most of the *Preface*, but comes to the fore most notably when Johnson comments upon the practice of reading as opposed to acts of performance. In a discussion of the unities he writes, a "play read affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident that the action is not supposed to be real;

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<sup>67</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare in Selected Writings of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Peter Martin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2009), 354. Subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 13-14. Dobson argues that by the 1760s Shakespeare's authority as an author exceeded the authority of his texts, thereby lessening the need for adaptations.

<sup>69</sup> Dobson argues: "Instead of reading the script to recapture the performance (as with previous playhouse texts, published 'As they were Acted'), one can now safely use the performance as an incidental gloss on the reading, if one bothers to look up at all" (*Making of the National Poet*, 210).

and it follows that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of a drama than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass in an hour the life of a hero or the revolutions of an empire” (368). For Johnson to seemingly elide the differences between textuality and performance shores up his own authority as a literary critic (that is, his authority extends equally to page and stage) and chimes neatly with Dobson’s characterization of this period of Shakespeare’s elevation. Most interesting, however, is the way in which Johnson here makes the case for a kind of deep time that extends from page to playhouse. This field of temporality, neither linear nor chronological, is capable of containing the vicissitudes of both textual and theatrical practice, resonating, perhaps, with a kind of time that, as Joseph Roach has theorized in his discussion of the “deep eighteenth-century,” is “three dimensional.”<sup>70</sup>

Given the *Preface*’s fixation on Shakespeare’s timelessness, it may come as no surprise that Johnson’s central formal preoccupation is Shakespeare’s habit of “mixing comic and tragic scenes, as it extends to all his works” (358). In the *Preface*, Shakespeare’s mixtures of tragedy and comedy are the primary signs that mark the playwright’s universality. Ancient writers, Johnson tells us, selected either comedy or tragedy, the “two primary modes of imitation” out of the “chaos of mingled purposes and casualties” (358); Shakespeare, however, has “united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition” (358). Though traditional criticism would seem not to approve of such, Johnson does so, we learn, because it more closely approximates nature; he argues that the “mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alternations

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph Roach, *It*, 13.

of exhibition, and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life” (359). Drawing on the discourse of realism, mixtures of tragedy and comedy are most useful in moral instruction because they combine elements of both genres and, as a mirror held up to nature, approximate reality; Johnson’s employment of the term “mingled” rather than “mixture” hints that such blending contains the potential to be associated with gentility. Johnson discusses such “mingled” dramas later in the preface when he again characterizes the tragicomic stamp of Shakespeare’s plays as primitive and universal:

The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance that combined them; but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase, nor suffers decay. The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes, without injury, by the adamant of Shakespeare.

(361)

Shakespeare’s compositions are not mixed by chance, nor are they the result of individual whim. Rather, the tragicomic results in the reflections of a kind of unchanging and primitive nature that renders Shakespeare’s plays’ “adamant” against currents of time.

While mixed genres are closely related to time in Johnson’s *Preface*, the tragicomic also signifies as a marker of social mixing and class mobility, what in turn is figured as natural. For example, Johnson suggests that Shakespeare’s mixed compositions are preferable to Addison’s neoclassical tragedy *Cato*. Johnson writes, “Voltaire expresses his wonder, that our author's

extravagancies are endured by a nation, which has seen the tragedy of *Cato*. Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men” (371). Shakespeare’s mixed compositions, then, position him with the middling classes, “men,” rather than the elite poets who cling to neoclassical dogma. This valorization of social mixing extends to various sections of the *Preface*, as when defending Shakespeare’s humble education, Johnson again invokes “mingling” when he writes that “Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet; he that would know the world was under the necessity of glean[ing] his own remarks by mingling as he could in its business and amusements” (375). Perhaps most importantly, the idea of social mingling and mingled genres extends to the reader of Shakespeare: “He that will understand Shakespeare must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufacturers of the shop” (373). While Johnson argues for the likeness of page and stage he also works to extend the meaning of Shakespeare’s plays from the privileged domain of the closet to parts of the wider world, such as “sports of the field” and “manufacturers of the shop.” Mingled genres become a way both of characterizing Shakespeare as universal, as well as a symbol of the emerging class mobility of the eighteenth century, of which Johnson and his friend Garrick would have been a part.

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Sir Joshua Reynolds was, like David Garrick and Samuel Johnson, a man of his society’s moment. The painter was known for his mixing and mingling in society, a practice reflected in his portraiture, what Richard Wendorf calls a “*transactional* view of portrait-painting”; that is, Reynolds’ methods were reliant up the “social matrix of portraiture, on the dynamics of the

sitting,” and on “collaboration rather than confrontation.”<sup>71</sup> Reynolds also, however, aspired to aesthetic criticism, as his *Discourses on Art*, a series of lectures written for the Royal Academy between 1769 and 1790 proclaim. While the bulk of Reynolds’ lectures focus on the visual arts, the artist also wrote during this time a never-published defense of Shakespeare’s practice of mixing tragic and comic scenes.<sup>72</sup> The fragmentary nature of the essay suggests Reynolds’ desire to recuperate Shakespeare’s characteristic blend of tragedy and comedy, yet the difficulty he faced in doing so. As Richard Wendorf notes, the argumentative force of Reynolds’ defense follows Johnson’s own 1765 *Preface to Shakespeare*. Reynolds’ notes for the composition even reference Addison in the same vein as Johnson: “Cato is cold; Shakespeare the contrary.”<sup>73</sup> Yet Reynolds still carries on in his own efforts, Wendorf points out, “as if he had to work out a specific argument to his own satisfaction.”<sup>74</sup> As such, Frederick Hilles calls the work an “essay in embryo”; however, the essay is worth examining both because of its similarity to and difference from Johnson’s writing on Shakespeare’s tragedy and comedy.<sup>75</sup> As in Johnson, Reynolds is interested in positioning Shakespeare as a timeless figure for the ages, a move that defends the playwright’s exceptional mixing of tragedy and comedy, as well as mingling in society more general. In this way social mixing is encoded in the practice of generic mixing. Unlike Johnson, however, who does not distinguish between theatrical experience and private

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 135.

<sup>72</sup> Though unpublished, Reynolds’ fragments on tragicomedy are certainly written after 1765, as Reynolds quotes Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare throughout.

<sup>73</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (New York: McGraw-Hill/Yale Univ., 1952), 123. All citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Painter in Society*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits*, 123.

acts of reading, Reynolds is very invested in the way in which live, theatrical performance of tragedy and comedy had the potential to civilize, and in turn elevate, the spectators of live playhouse audiences.

In the first unpublished essay Reynolds' topic is, as he states, the vindication of Shakespeare's "mixing tragedy and comedy."<sup>76</sup> Like Johnson, he is concerned with Shakespeare's timelessness, defending Shakespeare's break with a tradition of classical learning that "have universally condemned this mixture," (126) and positing in its place an alliance with nature and the feelings of mankind. While Shakespeare is out of sync with critical tradition, Reynolds' suggests, he finds place in "the history of man" (128). The effect is, again, a kind of temporal flux, or deep time, in which Shakespeare occupies not one time, but all times. As if to underscore the point, Reynolds writes that "Shakespeare is like a picture full of anachronisms-geographical blunders, forgetfulness of his plot, and even sometimes character- but he produces a high-valued picture because his mind is intent upon the general effect" (128). Also like Johnson, Reynolds appeals to the "natural unsophisticated feelings of mankind" and emphasizes Shakespeare's humble origins, thematizing his mixing of genres as a kind of social mixing (126). A genius such as Shakespeare means a retooling of hierarchical rules and codes.<sup>77</sup> Those codes exist, Reynolds argues, conjuring shades of Garrick in *Between Tragedy and Comedy*, since "few

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>77</sup> Reynolds follows neoclassical aesthetics in his definition of genius in his *Discourses*. Pope's line, "to snatch a grace beyond the reach of art," is referenced in Reynolds' first *Discourse* (17). Reynolds expounds upon his understanding of Pope's line in an *Idler* paper 76 written for Samuel Johnson's periodical, in which Reynolds emphasizes a model of genius that is constituted by the breaking of poetic law. Reynolds' writings in Johnson's periodical can be found in *Idler 76, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 2:236.



writers are capable of writing both comedy and tragedy” (126). Reynolds portends the coming of Shakespeare in a sentence of epic length:

But if there should arise a genius of such magnitude and comprehension equal at least to any of those great men who first suggested to the critics this idea of separating comedy and tragedy, who is equally capable of carrying both to their highest excellence, who could have no prejudice in favour of rules which he never knew, but whose sagacity and general knowledge of human nature served in their stead, and who from the circumstance of his life had been always to the theater and from his great sagacity knew the art of captivating the audience, drew his rules therefore from nature herself and not a second hand, it may be a question worthy the consideration of critics whether this civilized age does not demand a new code of laws and a thorough examination of those principles on which the contrary practice is founded.

(127)

For Reynolds, Shakespeare’s genius is established through his circulation within the social sphere, as the genius is he who had “always been to the theater,” rather than learned primarily from books. This is what, according to Reynolds, a “civilized age” demands.

Unlike Johnson, Reynolds is especially attentive to issues of live performance, as he sees tragedy and comedy as a means to further polish and “civilize” society. He argues throughout for “the admission of that monster (as it is often called) of tragicomedy into civilized society” (138). This interest in genre as civilizing force extends beyond the unfinished essay. In a commonplace

book, Reynolds scribbles a heading entitled "Speaking of Plays" in which he writes: "To read and get by heart the comic and tragic poets makes a man eloquent in his speech & stile, we acquire a gracefull [sic] manner of speaking and acting in publick, we throw aside the boyish fears and discard the clownish bashfulness we accustom ourselves to a distinct clear manner of speaking a courtly and gracefull [sic] gesture."<sup>78</sup> In this way tragedy and comedy are genres that, once learned, improve one's social performance and ability to function in society, making widely available a "courtly" style. In his unpublished essay the theatrical spectator becomes prominent in his discussion of artistic reception; much of the defense of tragicomic mixtures revolves around civilizing the response of the audience. Reynolds argues that "the contrast required to sorrow is mirth. From those opposites, artificial and opposed to each other, proceeds, as in music from discords, that harmony which is the delight of the soul."<sup>79</sup> Reynolds offers an example in which an assembly is regaled with a melancholy tale and then a merry one. He writes: "after you have heard a long melancholy story of a murder attended with pathetic circumstances, but such as do not any more refer to yourself than a theatrical representation, after the conversation has for some time taken this turn, would a live entertaining or even merry story come amiss or be ill received by the company?"<sup>80</sup> Again, Reynolds frames the telling of tales as a theatrical, and hence social, experience with an active audience. The relief of the general audience, and the tending of the passions, is the aim of the story's construction.

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<sup>78</sup> Frederick Hilles, *The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936), 209.

<sup>79</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits*, 136.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

Reynolds also composed another critical document on Shakespeare, tragedy, and comedy, this time a seven-paragraph passage, what is sometimes referred to as the “missing part” of his previous essay.<sup>81</sup> While many of the same ideas are articulated or briefly expanded, Reynolds’ return to the topic of tragicomedy demonstrates a profound interest in mixed dramatic genres. Reynolds’ second essay appears in a reprint of Malone's edition of Shakespeare (1790), in a note on Rowe's *Some Account of the Life etc. of William Shakespeare*.<sup>82</sup> He again defends Shakespeare’s mixtures of tragedy and comedy, arguing that the critics who have maligned the genre have formed their opinions in the "closet" rather than from lived experience in the social world – presumably visits to the theater.<sup>83</sup> As in his unfinished essay, Reynolds refers to the "animal parts" of the human mind, citing that not to mix tragedy and comedy would be to aspire to an ideal that audience members are incapable of achieving.<sup>84</sup> The theater would seem to be a tool for the upwardly mobile as the theater accustoms the mind to "find its amusement in intellectual pleasure," thereby "polishing" the rugged corners of the mind.<sup>85</sup> Reynolds suspects that the “rigid forms to be observed in tragedy, of admitting nothing that shall divert and recreate, is formed upon what we ought to like if we were endued with perfect wisdom and taste.

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<sup>81</sup> Arthur Sherbo, “Sir Joshua Reynolds,” *The Birth of Shakespeare Studies: Commentators from Rowe (1709) to Boswell-Malone (1821)* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1986), 134.

<sup>82</sup> Arthur Sherbo, “Sir Joshua Reynolds,” 134-135. As Sherbo notes, Reynolds composed an earlier version of this essay in a two-paragraph defense of tragicomedy that was published by Frederick Hilles in *The Literary Career of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 102-104.

<sup>83</sup> Sherbo, “Sir Joshua Reynolds,” 135.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

But that is not the case. We are governed by our passions as well as our reason."<sup>86</sup> In this way, following tragic and comic codes becomes a means of socializing and civilizing, and a means of social advancement.

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The Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu was an acquaintance of David Garrick, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Samuel Johnson, and Montagu visited Reynolds' studio during the composition of *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, most likely in December of 1761.<sup>87</sup> Her interest in Shakespeare, tragedy, and comedy in her 1769 *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, however, differs substantially from the essays composed by Reynolds and Johnson. In a letter to Elizabeth Carter in October of 1766, Montagu comments on Johnson's *Preface*:

It has been lucky for my amusement, but unfortunate for the publick, that he did not consider his author in a more extensive view. I have so much veneration for our Poet & so much zeal for the honour of our Country, & I think the Theatrical entertainments capable of conveying so much instruction, & of exciting such sentiments in the people, that if I am glad he left the task to my unable hand, I dare hardly own it to myself.

(Montagu, *Selected Letters*, 173)

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<sup>86</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portraits*, 134.

<sup>87</sup> David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds, A Complete Catalogue of his Paintings*, 209, references a letter from Montagu to Mrs. Vesey from 1761 (Huntington Library MS. MO 6362); Montagu was visiting the studio at the same time that a Lord Bath was sitting for his picture and Laurence Sterne was also expected to be in attendance. Montagu invites Mrs. Vesey to join her, adding, "where you may see the historical picture in which the Muse[s] of Tragedy & Comedy are disputing for Mr. Garrick?"

Like her contemporaries Johnson and Reynolds, Montagu's concern is associating Shakespeare with the ancients and proclaiming his universality, as well as, of course, defending Shakespeare against the French. However, Montagu is decidedly uninterested in a defense of mixed genres or aligning social and generic "mingling"; instead, Montagu is sympathetic to the neoclassical prohibition of mixed genres and the traditional valuation of tragedy over comedy. She valorizes the power of performance over the written word and addresses the figure of the tragic muse, a gendering of genre absent in the writings of Johnson and Reynolds. These differences are, I believe, related to the different position from which Montagu, as an aristocratic woman circulating in the public sphere, wrote. As Elizabeth Eger has argued, women writers often positioned themselves in relation to Shakespeare in order draw out his "distinctively feminine" qualities such as sympathy, character, and moral philosophy.<sup>88</sup> Montagu's theorization of Shakespeare, tragedy, and comedy rethinks gendered authority and the contemporary issue of women's mixing in the public sphere, a part, perhaps, of what Elizabeth Eger identifies as women writers' "feminine understanding of Shakespeare's genius."<sup>89</sup>

Throughout her essay Montagu focuses on and defines repeatedly the genre of tragedy, especially in its relation to the passions. She writes:

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<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Eger, 'Out rushed a female to protect the Bard': The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, No. 1/2 (2002): 130.

<sup>89</sup> Eger, 'Out rushed a female to protect the Bard,' 135. Fiona Ritchie, "Elizabeth Montagu: 'Shakespeare's Poor Little Critick,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 58, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 76, does indeed point to Montagu's positive emphasis on dramatic performance and how this differs from Samuel Johnson's assessment of Shakespeare, though Ritchie does not specifically fix on Montagu's valorization of tragedy fact.

A tragedy is a fable exhibited to the view, and rendered palatable to the senses; and every decoration of the stage is contrived to impose the delusion on the spectator, by conspiring with the imagination. It is addressed to the imagination, through which it opens itself a communication with the heart, where it is to excite certain passions and affections; each character personated, and each event exhibited, the attention of the audience is greatly captivated, and the imagination so far assists in the delusion, as to sympathize in the representation.<sup>90</sup>

Montagu emphasizes the importance of the material elements of theater in its relationship with the text of the play, as the two conspire to create a wholly immersive experience for the spectator, one that operates on spectators' passions and sympathy as the imagination is linked to the heart. In this way drama is always characterized as far more powerful than other genres, including narrative –what she reads in French drama as a “tissue of declamations”- in its effect on the feelings (Montagu, *Essay*, 12). The live action of a dramatic spectacle trumps words that are merely written. Montagu makes a noteworthy claim when she deviates from the Johnsonian stance on performance, arguing that “the more we revert from the stage to the poet, the less we shall be affected by what is acted” (Montagu, *Essay*, 14).<sup>91</sup> It is the spectator's passions that are

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<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare in Bluestocking Feminism, Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 1:10. Subsequent citations refer to this edition of the text.

<sup>91</sup> Montagu criticizes Johnson in a letter to Elizabeth Carter written in 1766: “I think he has not in his criticisms on the plays; pointed out the peculiar excellencies of Shakespeare as a *Dramatick* poet, this point I shall labour as I think he there excels everyone” (“Selected Letters,” *Bluestocking Feminism, Writings of the Bluestocking Circle*, 1:170).

worked upon by the drama, according to Montagu, and perhaps why Montagu fixes so specifically on the genre of tragedy.

Montagu's correspondence indicates that she was certainly concerned with the performance of tragedy, and Montagu herself often visited the theater. In a letter to her husband Edward Montagu, written in January of 1759, she gives way to a burst of theatrical criticism on a performance of *Antony and Cleopatra*, writing,

I was at ye play last night where I was poorly amus'd. Ye piece tho Shakespeare is a very bad one, ye character of Cleopatra absurd & unnatural & ye whole piece bombast & stiff with few of those touches of genius which usually adorn even ye indifferent pieces of writing. Mr Garrick has been at vast expence [sic] for dress & scenery, but that will not to people of taste make amends for ye defective performance. I had not read this play for many years & could not think it possible Shakespear [sic] wd [sic] write & a modern actor revive such trash.

(Montagu, "Selected Letters," 1:149)

Though scholars discuss multiple reasons for the play's failure, it is the character of Cleopatra that Montagu singles out for particular censure, a part that was played in this performance by Mary Anne Yates, whom Montagu particularly objects to as "absurd and unnatural."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick*, 102, details the trials and tribulations of this production, including the opinion that Garrick was miscast as Antony and that Yates was "not ready for the part."

Montagu's comments suggest an active concern for the dignity and propriety not just of the tragic genre, but of the performing female tragedienne and the passions she inspires.

Montagu focuses on the power of tragedy to the exclusion of nearly all other genres, especially comedy. No comedies whatsoever are analyzed, reviewed, or even mentioned in Montagu's *Essay*. Comedy is so neglected, in fact, that it is almost entirely absent, the word appearing a scant six times, as tragedy becomes almost wholly synonymous with Shakespearean drama. This fixation on tragedy and its performance is echoed in Montagu's correspondence. In a letter to George Lyttelton written in October of 1760, she reviews a number of tragedies, praising *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*.<sup>93</sup> Not only is comedy excluded in her essay on Shakespeare, however, the sphere of comedy and the domestic concerns that the genre characteristically dramatizes have a weakening effect, in Montagu's writings, on both tragedy and the Tragic Muse. Montagu addresses this danger most frequently when writing of noble plots that devolve into domestic affairs. Montagu asks her reader if it would not offend an audience's good sense if "the noble frankness of the son of Achilles, and the crafty wiles of Ulysses, which are so finely exhibited in the tragedy of Sophocles, and so deeply interest us in the dispute for the arrows, were all neglected," and instead, she suggests, focused on the affairs of love (Montagu, *Essay*, 15). Later, Montagu again asks, "Would the poet would be excused by pleading the effeminacy and gallantry of an audience, who would not endure so unpleasing an object as a wounded man, nor attend to any contest but about a heart?" She adds, "let not example teach us to fetter the energy, and enervate the noble powers of the British muse," scoffing at the idea that tragedy

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<sup>93</sup> Montagu, "Selected Letters," 1:160.



would be “thus converted into mere amorous ditty” (15-16).<sup>94</sup> While Montagu is delimiting the purview of tragedy by dismissing domestic affairs, she is also, in the same gesture, enlarging the realm in which that muse claims authority: specifically public affairs in which women’s presence and actions were not typically sanctioned. Her invocation not just of a tragic muse, but a “British” muse, allies the figure with a brand of nationalism.

Given the de-emphasis on the comic tradition, the blending of the two genres is also not celebrated in Montagu’s *Essay*. She is uninterested in making an extended defense of tragicomedy in order to theorize Shakespeare’s timeless genius as Reynolds and Johnson do. In fact, she seems to merely re-iterate tragicomedy as a potential threat to the power of the passions. In Montagu’s reading of *Henry IV Part I*, for example, though she must write positively of the tragicomic form in her defense against the French, she betrays marked equivocation:

[*Henry IV, part I*] is indeed liable to those objections, which are made to Tragi-comedy. But if the pedantry of learning could ever cede from its dogmatical rules, I think that this play, instead of being condemned for being of that species, would obtain favour for the species itself, though perhaps correct taste may be offended with the transitions from grave and important, to light and ludicrous subjects: and more still with those great and illustrious, to low and mean persons.

(Montagu, *Essay*, 38)

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<sup>94</sup> Montagu defends the tragic muse in her analysis of *Julius Caesar*: “If we blame his making the tragic muse too subservient to the historical, we must at least allow it to be much less hurtful to the effect of his representation upon the passions, than the liberties taken by many poets to represent well-known characters and events, in lights so absolutely different from whatsoever universal fame, and the testimony of ages, had taught us to believe of them, the mind resists the new, that the mind resists the new impression attempted to be made upon it” (*Essay*, 1:108).

While Montagu does her part in defending *Henry IV* from charges of generic illegitimacy, she relents somewhat in her assessment of “that species.” Montagu later continues her commentary on tragicomedy by simply repeating the French complaints against the form: "On the French Parnassus, a tragi-comedy of this kind will be deemed a monster fitter to be shewn to the people at a fair, than exhibited to circles of the learned and polite" (Montagu, *Essay*, 38). What is noticeably missing from her essay is a positing of tragicomedy as that which most realistically depicts life. Indeed, she explains the tragicomic bent of the *Henriad* not as a sign or marker of genius, but as a result of the general public’s assessment of the character of Hal – that he was a popular character, but that his wild excesses were not unknown. His faults, therefore, "would have been greatly heightened, if they had appeared in a piece entirely serious, and full of dignity and decorum" (Montagu, *Essay*, 39). The emphasis is placed on character and the political historical circumstance of the play’s composition rather than a discourse on realism or male genius.

Perhaps the most powerful alliance for Montagu is that among tragedy, theatricality, and feminine genius, as when she writes of the Tragic Muse. In her introduction Montagu quotes Pope, who writes the following of the task of the prologue to Addison’s tragedy *Cato*:

To the Muse of Tragedy, therefore, Mr. Pope has assigned the noble task,  
To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,  
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart;  
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,

Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold.

(Montagu, *Essay*, 11)

While Pope does not specifically invoke the tragic muse in the prologue to Addison's neoclassical tragedy, Montagu conjures her here and assigns to her the effect of tragedy Pope describes in *Cato*, a tragedy often remarked upon for its emphasis on heroic masculinity. The tragic muse's dominion is "strong-working sympathy," as Montagu notes a few lines later. Notable, however, is also the final line of the quotation from Pope, in which the poet commands the Muse to "be what they behold"; that is, the muse becomes not only the inspiration of male genius, she who inspires virtue, but also a living embodiment whose ontological status ("to be") is predicated on being viewed as a work of art. Following these lines, the tragic muse is on hand at nearly every turn in Montagu's commentary, whether in her extended attacks on Voltaire or in readings of *Hamlet* and of *Julius Caesar*. Not confined to the *Essay*, Montagu mentions the muse in a letter to Elizabeth Carter in October of 1766 when she writes, "The dramattick art is ill understood, a cold dry logician is address'd to, is invoc'd, as the Muse of Tragedy, from a few barren precepts the Poets are to produce the various, the strong, the affecting characters of dramattick poetry."<sup>95</sup> She laments that the logician, a figure of academic rationality, comes to stand in the place of the true "Muse of Tragedy," a figure Montagu elsewhere defines as the embodiment of feeling. This was at a time when, as Shearer West has argued, the actual bodies of actresses were becoming more and more open to scrutiny.<sup>96</sup> In this way the tragic muse becomes

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<sup>95</sup> Montagu, "Selected Letters," 173.

<sup>96</sup> Shearer West, "Body Connoisseurship" in *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776-1812* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 150, identifies Sarah Siddons as "both object and agent of the changed

an empowering figure for women and their authority in the public sphere; as Barbara Johnson remarks in a reading of Locke, “Woman is fine in her proper place (in private), but among the 'serious affairs of men' (in public) a 'real' woman is 'a disruptive scandal.’”<sup>97</sup> The tragic muse, however, creates not so much a “disruptive scandal,” as transcendence.

What the discussion of genre in the writings of Johnson and Reynolds suggest is that tragicomedy offered critics, specifically male critics of the middling classes, a durable sign for theorizing their gendered authority. Johnson and Reynolds both follow a pattern in which they naturalize a discourse on mixing and mingling, thereby reinforcing not only Shakespeare’s authority but, in turn, their own. Much as in the feud between Garrick and Fitzpatrick during the play and pamphlet war, discussions of genre invariably offered commentary on the changing social categories of the 1760s. What these contexts, the play and pamphlet war and the writings on Shakespeare among Garrick’s contemporaries, ultimately reveal about *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, I believe, is that Garrick’s relationship to genre in the painting has to do with a specifically gendered experience of masculine authority, one that paradoxically hinges upon his relationship to the personated women of antiquity in the painting. On the other hand, for Elizabeth Montagu, discussion of mixed genres did not hold the same appeal as they did for Reynolds, Johnson, and Garrick, nor were they vehicles for expressions of gendered authority.

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reception of the actress.” West also reminds that during the last half of the eighteenth century, “observers more and more frequently focused attention on the bodies of both male and female performers,” (154). This increased attention to bodily matters is explained by the expansion of patent theaters, upswing in breeches roles, changes in theatrical fashion, and the “intensification of visual stimuli through public art exhibitions,” (154-155). By the end of the century, the body of the actor/actress as it related to gender, size, age, was “scrutinized more closely for breaches of theatrical decorum” (156).

<sup>97</sup> Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction*, (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1994), 55. Johnson writes: “It is as allegory that women have most often been admitted into public art,” (54).

Tragicomic mixtures were dangerous for women of a certain class status, given comedy's association with sexuality. Instead, in Montagu's writing there is an emphasis on the sacralizing power of tragedy and a model of personation, that of the classical muse, through which female performers, such as Sarah Siddons in Reynolds' portrait *The Tragic Muse*, might gain public authority. For an actress such as Siddons, inhabiting the person of the muse of antiquity recuperates both theatricality and the femininity to which theatricality was often tied. Gill Perry argues in *Spectacular Flirtations* that the model of the muse posited an interaction which could both "enable social and artistic elevation and threaten it," and in the case of Siddons, the elevation was ultimately successful because of the lack of scandal in her private life; that is the multiple dimensions of the picture (real and allegorical, private and public) produced a synchronous effect.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Gill Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations*, 40-41. Gill Perry, "Ambiguity and Desire: Metaphors of Sexuality in Late Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Actress," *The Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture: 1776-1812* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 63, has elsewhere argued that the private lives of actresses have been subject to the "trope of ambiguity."

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