

**The Actor and the Playwright: Adaptation on the Early
Eighteenth-Century, English Stage**

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the ways in which classical, neoclassical and Renaissance plays were adapted and staged on the early eighteenth-century, London stage. The plays that became box office successes were generally the ones that best displayed the talents and attributes of popular performers. By understanding the lives and careers of the greatest actors of this generation, and their role in the commercial theatre, we can better understand why the now canonized plays of ancient Greece, France, or the Elizabethan period were modified in ways that most modern scholars find puzzling.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century in England, actors and actresses were becoming public personalities in an unprecedented way. From the time of Thomas Betterton's death in 1709, to the end of the triumvirate management of Drury Lane by Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks and Barton Booth in 1727, there were a handful of actors who can lay claim to being the most well known and respected performers of this generation. In chapter one, I outline what is known about eighteenth-century acting methods and techniques as well as the lines of certain key actors. Chapters two and three explore the genres of tragedy and historical tragedy, emphasizing the importance of the celebrity actress and the recent vogue for she-tragedy. Chapter four is centrally concerned with trends in comedy and farce and the preoccupation with the misadventures of young rakes, fops, cheats and the like.

This dissertation ultimately concludes that by looking at the way contemporary authors adapted the most prominent playwrights of previous generations, we can better understand the theatre of the eighteenth-century. Ultimately, the process of play adaptation was one that was highly influenced by the demands of a commercial, celebrity centered theatre rather than by literary ideals or political ideology.

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Chapter One:

Actors, Actresses and Eighteenth-Century Style

The early eighteenth century is a period known for looking backward for inspiration, yet the drama of this period, although imitative of other dramatic traditions, is surprisingly original. This is due in large part to the cult of celebrity that begins to dominate the English stage at this time. Important actors and actresses had certainly influenced playwrights before, but during the Restoration and eighteenth century in England, actors and actresses rose to new levels of celebrity, exerting unprecedented influence on the dramas that were being written and produced. Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, in their book *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre*, go so far as to claim that:

The increasing cult of individual star performers of both sexes is apparent from Abel Boyer's observation in 1702 that 'Formerly *Poets* made *Players*, but nowadays 'tis generally the *Player* that makes the *Poet*.'"¹

In this chapter, I would first like to discuss what is known about acting style in Restoration and eighteenth-century England, and how the styles of some of the key performers of the period influenced the way in which older plays were adapted for performance. Companies tended to perform between forty and sixty plays each season,²

¹ Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh, *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 79.

² Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays 1675-1707* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 39.

most of them Renaissance or contemporary adaptations or revivals, with about four or five new plays per year. In, *The Player's Passion*, Joe Roach argues:

When an actor takes his place on a stage, even in the most apparently trivial vehicle, and his audience begins to respond to his performance, together they concentrate the complex values of a culture with an intensity that less immediate transactions cannot rival. They embody its shared language of spoken words and expressive gestures, its social expectations and psychological commonplaces, its conventions of truth and beauty, its nuances of prejudice and fear, its erotic fascinations, and frequently its sense of humor.³

In exploring the eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare, Corneille, Racine, and Euripides that are so often labeled “trivial vehicles,” this analysis seeks to get beyond the question of literary value, and to open up a more fascinating one about the influence of the star performer on play adaptation.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century in England, actors and actresses were becoming public personalities in an unprecedented way. Instead of the anonymous individuals whose names almost never appeared on playbills during the Restoration, performers, at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, were emerging as personalities,

Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985),12.

as objects of public curiosity and inquiry.⁴ From the time of Thomas Betterton's death in 1709, to the end of the triumvirate management of Drury Lane by Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks and Barton Booth in 1727, there were a handful of actors who can lay claim to being the most well known and respected performers of this generation. At Lincoln's Inn Fields, James Quin, Lacy Ryan, and Christopher Bullock were the favorites; at Drury Lane, Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks, Barton Booth, and Mrs. Oldfield were the biggest celebrities. Despite attempts by historians to try to find one particular personality that exemplifies this period, no one actor dominated the early eighteenth-century stage in the way that Thomas Betterton did during the Restoration.

Players worked six days a week, with a performance every evening and an occasional command-performance at court. An important performer in the company might have about thirty parts in the course of one season, which were written on scrolls of paper. These roles tended to be of a certain type, and, in *The First English Actress: Women and Drama 1660-1700*, Elizabeth Howe suggests that type casting, or the development of "roles," or "lines," was particularly common.⁵ The top actors in a company had multiple lines, whereas utility actors might have only one that is obvious and the rest were supporting or smaller, less distinctive roles. Traditionally, the posted bill was the most important means of informing Londoners about what was being

⁴ Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 24.

⁵ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actress: Women and Drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

performed, but by 1702, managers started to list theatre offerings in newspapers. The founding of the *Daily Courant* in that same year, which was produced each day, made it possible to give up-to-date and accurate listings, and fed into the emergence of a celebrity driven commercial theatre. The names of actors and actresses were playing a more prominent role in advertising, which indicates the rise of the star performer and the increasing ability of a particular celebrity to draw crowds. In Joe Roach's recent book, *IT*, he credits the increased use of publicity and the mass-media with creating preconceptions of abnormally interesting personalities that become standardized as types such as the "rake," or the "fop," or the "femme fatale."⁶ He claims that the eighteenth-century was the most fertile historical period for the emergence of the public persona. The evidence he cites for his idea are largely the play texts themselves: "When plays sometimes touted the feature-by-feature attributes of the actresses playing the heroines" writes Roach, "and when both prologues and epilogues alluded leeringly to their sex lives offstage, the practice of intimacy in public had clearly arrived."⁷ It is clear that the allure and the fascination with the star performer was a powerful influence in shaping the kinds of plays written for the commercial theatres during this period. The most important names at the beginning of the eighteenth century – Robert Wilks, Barton Booth, Colley Cibber, Anne Oldfield, Mary Porter, James Quin, Lacy Ryan, and Christopher Bullock – made certain roles famous and played them again and again. "The personalities and acting styles of these players left their mark upon new

⁶ Joe Roach, *IT* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 12.

⁷ *Ibid*, 16.

plays and revivals at Drury Lane in the early eighteenth-century,” writes Joanne Lafler, biographer of Anne Oldfield.⁸

It is important to consider that, in most cases, dramatists wrote their plays for a specific company, either Lincoln’s Inn Fields or Drury Lane, and were often aware of the actors available to play certain roles. The shaping of roles in accordance with what were later called the “lines of business” of well-known players within a specific company happened quite often as playwrights were constantly seeking the best material for the leading actors of the day. The plays that became box office successes were generally the ones that best displayed the talents and attributes of the performers. “Persona and personality” Roach claims, “oscillated between foreground and background with speed and innuendo, intensified by the personal chemistry of the starring actors, igniting the precinematic It-Effect and blazing its trail.”⁹ By understanding the lives and careers of the greatest actors of this generation, and their role in the commercial theatre, we can better understand why the now canonized plays of ancient Greece, France, or the Elizabethan period, were modified in ways that most modern scholars find puzzling.

Unfortunately, because what is known about acting during this period is limited, some speculation about acting style and its impact on play texts is unavoidable. But it is

⁸ Joanne Lafler, *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield: the Life and Art of an Augustan Actress* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, 16.

clear that adapted plays were reshaped and restaged with a specific company of actors in mind, and when a particular play became successful it was largely because certain actors memorably performed types that were popular with audiences. In looking at the way Colley Cibber, Ambrose Phillips, or Charles Johnson adapted the most prominent playwrights of previous generations, we can better understand, as Roach puts it, the conventions of truth and beauty, the nuances of prejudice and fear, and the erotic fascinations of the early eighteenth century.

The tradition of actors learning from their predecessors led to the stylization of certain kinds of parts, and successful actors made a good living by creating public personalities for themselves. Colley Cibber, for example, created played many fops; Barton Booth was known as a great tragic actor who played noble and majestic heroes in the tradition of Betterton (*Othello* and *King Lear*, for example); in farcical low parts, William Penkethman, William Bullock, or James Spiller were well known. Marvin Carlson, in his book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre As Memory Machine*, points out that “In theatrical cultures in which theatre companies have operated under detailed and specific rules of organization, this close relationship between actors and predictable types of roles played is often embodied within the organizational legislation of the company.”¹⁰ He then goes on to use the neoclassic theatre of France as an example — specifically the *employi*, a system in which each actor or actress is assigned to a certain type of role — to demonstrate a kind of theatre in which actors would play the same

¹⁰ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre As Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 92.

kinds of roles for the life of their career. Although in the English neoclassical theatre, the assignment of roles was not as strict, there was a strong sense of association between actors and the certain kinds of parts played. In subsequent chapters, I will examine the ways in which play adaptation was influenced by these associations and the natural ghosting, to borrow Carlson's term, that occurred. The familiarity that developed between this relatively small group of performers and spectators influenced both the dramatic structure of new plays and the way older plays were adapted. It is the actor's performances, and the ghosting that occurred from season to season, above all else, that specifically influenced the way in which the early eighteenth-century revamped and re-used classical and Renaissance texts in a commercial setting.

According to Carlson, there are three ways that ghosting can occur with actors: previous interpretations of the role by other actors, previous roles created by an individual actor, and the actor's own life, haunting the stage. I am most concerned here with the influence of previous roles created by an individual actor on the adaptation process, although actor reputation and past performances in a role by other actors were certainly influential as well. For example, in Ambrose Philips's *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester*, a 1723 adaptation of the second part of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, he writes a role for Colley Cibber that is clearly ghosting Cibber's own version of *Richard III* done twenty-three years earlier. The evil and plotting Beaufort who kills his own nephew is a hard to miss reminder of Richard III. Or, the adaptation of Racine's *Iphigenia* by Charles Johnson, entitled *The Victim*, has strong similarities to *The Distrest Mother*

(which is based on another Greek tragedy, *Androamche*). This kind of intentional referencing of past productions was quite common in the theatre.

The fact that there were two main houses, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, is what shapes the landscape of acting and playwriting during this period. The two houses were in fierce competition with each other, and were under pressure to generate performances that pleased audiences, which is a major factor in determining the kinds of actors hired and plays produced. Drury Lane, in large part because of the stable management of the actors Cibber, Wilks and Booth, usually presented more polished performances than their competitors and concentrated more seriously upon legitimate drama, while Lincoln's Inn Fields became known in large part for its variety, its musical interludes and its farcical afterpieces.

Eighteenth-Century Acting: Style

According to Alan Downer's 1947 article, "Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth-Century Acting," all actors, despite different styles, did believe in the same basic set of acting conventions: gesturing with the upstage hand, kneeling on the down-stage knee, and making turns towards the audience.¹¹ Actors learned and practiced the same conventions as their predecessors, according to Charles Gildon's *The Life of Betterton* (1710), and even though evolutions and variations in style certainly occurred throughout the century, actors did rely on tradition as a teacher. All actors attempted to develop stock pieces that they could keep in their repertory, and once an actor or actress

¹¹ Alan S. Downer, "Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth-Century Acting," *PMLA* 58 (1943): 1002.

was established in a part, that part was generally accepted (though not necessarily legally) as owned by that performer. It is almost a certainty that actors were influenced by how a performer from a previous generation played the role.

Philip J. Highfill, Jr. in his chapter "Performers and Performing" from *The London Theatre World 1660-1800*, reminds us that the aim of all actors in the Restoration and eighteenth century was to hold a mirror up to nature. But what does that mean, exactly? Alan Downer's cleverly titled essay "Nature to Advantage Dressed," alludes to the problem of understanding *natural* or *nature* in seventeenth and eighteenth century terms. Roach in *The Players Passion* goes so far as to argue that a contemporary understanding of the word *natural* is so different from what was meant in the eighteenth-century that "it would be difficult to overemphasize how radical that difference is." He points to Michel Foucault's warning that our own "pattern of knowledge" is simply "not valid" for that period.¹² This is not a new idea, and Highfill rightfully claims that what was "natural" was influenced by several factors, including the personality and personal style of the actor, coupled with changes in repertoire, the size of playhouses, and trends in playwriting.

Highfill also suggests that the most important actor during the years of the triumvirate management at Drury Lane was James Quin, who, it is suggested, ushered in a more exaggerated style; Highfill claims that eighteenth-century players were not

¹² Roach, 15.

only consistently extravagant but overattentive to detail.¹³ “Meticulous overaction,” he claims, was widespread during the middle years of the century. In 1716, Dudley Ryder, describing the current style, says, “the manner of speaking in our Theatres in tragedy is not so natural...Persons would call it theatrical, meaning by that something stiff and affected...as if they were reading a book.”¹⁴ Highfill and Downer both suggest that even as the century progressed, the actors famous during the triumvirate period could not be swayed, and the “much admired reforms of Charles Macklin and David Garrick could not persuade some players to abandon their gallery-pleasing excesses.”¹⁵ However, the idea that early to mid-eighteenth-century tragic acting was particularly dominated by the high heroics of Quin is misleading. It is more likely that there was a wide range in terms of style, as Barton Booth and Robert Wilks not only differed from Quin, but they were different from each other – individual personality and the kinds of roles an actor had in his repertoire had an enormous influence on style. As my subsequent chapters will make clear, there were actually multiple tragic actors and actresses who dominated the early eighteenth-century. It is hard to believe that Quin’s style – as important a celebrity as he was on the early to mid-eighteenth-century stage – defines a whole generation. In looking at the repertory and cast lists, the most important roles in tragedy for this period were performed by Robert Wilks, Barton Booth, Mrs. Oldfield, and occasionally Mrs. Porter, at Drury Lane. During most of this period, Quin worked for Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and thus had less access to new tragedies than his

¹³ Philip H. Highfill, Jr., “Performers and Performing,” in *The London Theatre World*, ed. Robert D. Hume (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 163.

¹⁴ Highfill, 164.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 163-164.

competitors. Also, evidence clearly shows that exaggeration or “high heroics” on the tragic stage can be documented all the way back to the early Restoration. Although Thomas Betterton himself was known for “restraint,” and consistently performed tragic parts with dignity and “subdued fervor,” the Restoration period was not devoid of inflated performances.¹⁶ In the preface to his *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), for example, Dryden writes: “the roar of passion, indeed, may please an audience, three parts of which are ignorant enough to think all is moving which is noise, and it may stretch the lungs of an ambitious actor, who will die upon the spot for a thundering clap.”¹⁷ John Crowne, in the preface to his adaptation of *Henry the Sixth* (1681), noted that “when an actor talks sense, the audience begins to sleep, but when an unnatural passion sets him a grimacing and howling as if he were in a fit of the stone, they immediately waken, listen and stare.”¹⁸ And John Harold Wilson, in his essay entitled “Rant, Cant and Tone on the Restoration Stage,” points out that there are numerous plays that burlesque exaggerated acting styles, such as Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (1671), Duffett’s *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), *The Mock Tempest* (1674), and *Psyche Debauch’d* (1675). Restoration comedies also made fun of tragic acting styles; for example, in Powell’s *A Very Good Wife* (1695), Annabella, who is masquerading as a man, pretends to court the Widow Lacy and says, “Hark you, sirrah, hang dog, one word more of this canting, and by all the bones in thy skin, I’ll cut thy ears off.”¹⁹ And in Farquhar’s *The Constant Couple* (1699), Sir Harry Wildair says to Angelica (who is pleading with him not to rape

¹⁶ Ibid, 163.

¹⁷ John Dryden, *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late*, (London: Printed for Abel Small, 1679), preface.

¹⁸ John Crowne, *Henry the Sixth* (London: Printed for R. Bentley and M. Magnes, 1681), preface.

¹⁹ George Powell, *A Very Good Wife* (London: Printed for Samuel Briscoe, 1693), 34-35.

her), "A million to one now, but this girl is just come flush from reading *The Rival Queens*. I gad, I'll come at her in her own cant."²⁰

But what is "cant" or canting? Wilson claims that it was the hallmark of the romantic lover in the Restoration and turns to Steele's explanation from the *Spectator* #147: "One is reminded of Davies' comment on the old Restoration actor, Kynaston, who 'from his early representation of women's characters has contracted some disagreeable tones in speaking, something like whining, or what we term canting.'"²¹ Thomas Rymer also observed in 1693, in his comparison of the Greeks and the contemporary stage, that "[the Greeks] attempted no metamorphosis to turn the drama to an opera, nor did their love come whining on the stage to effeminate the majesty of their tragedy."²² Rant has been described as when "the players run on, without regard either to accent or emphasis."²³ Rant, or cant, was both praised and criticized, and even though this kind of exaggerated way of performing in tragedy often inspired negative comments by critics, it was obviously in demand with audiences. Robert Wilks even complained that, "The taste in general is so depraved, that there is little or no applause to be gained in tragedy, but at the expense of the lungs."²⁴

Downer, in the aforementioned essay, suggests that, "from at least 1692 until the retirement of Booth and Cibber a musical ear and the ability to tone words was a

²⁰ George Farquhar, *The Constant Couple*, (London: Printed for Ralph Smith, 1700), 47.

²¹ Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies* (London: Printed for Thomas Davies, 1785), 3:336-37.

²² Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (London: Printed by Richard Baldwin, 1693), 62.

²³ Downer, 1024.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 1024.

necessary part of the actor's equipment."²⁵ Toning was also a method attributed to the Restoration and early eighteenth-century performer that supposedly died out. Wilson defines "toning" as "a general term descriptive of the cadenced, musical effect sought in dramatic declamation; properly it would include the whining or canting of the romantic lover."²⁶ It is not known how long "toning" might have continued, or if it was a style practiced by all actors (that seems quite unlikely) and to what degree "toning" or "canting" was used. Both Wilson and Downer cite Davies' story about the return of Colley Cibber to the stage in 1736 with *The Papal Tyranny* as evidence that acting styles, by that time, had changed. Davis's says of Cibber's performance:

The unnatural swelling of his words displeased
all who preferred natural elocution to artificial
cadence. The old man was continually urging Mrs. Pritchard,
who acted Lady Constance, to tone her
words.²⁷

Also, in *The History of the Theatres of London and Dublin*, Benjamin Victor recalls a 1742 performance when Cibber revived his "good old manner of singing and quavering out their tragic notes."²⁸ But it is impossible to believe that there was uniformity in style during this period because individual actors were just that – individuals – and

²⁵ Ibid, 1023.

²⁶ Wilson, 593.

²⁷ Davies, 41.

²⁸ Benjamin Victor, *The History of the Theatres of London and Dublin*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for T. Davis, 1761), 2:163.

developed reputations not only for perfecting different kinds of roles but different styles and techniques that coordinated with the kind of play, or even the kind of character, being performed.

According to Roach, Betterton mastered a rhetorical mode of acting that was then carried on by Quin in the first third of the eighteenth-century. Garrick, breaking decisively with the past in 1741, apparently substituted speed, agility, and variety for heaviness and monotony characteristic of the rhetorical style. Roach cites Cumberland's account of Garrick's performance in Rowe's *Fair Penitent* opposite the Horatio of Quin. Cumberland describes Quin as dressed in an old-fashioned periwig and square-toed shoes, chanting out the cadences in a sing-song tone, and sawing the air with his gestures. But this comparison is hardly useful. Quin was much older than Garrick and, later in life, quite large in size; Garrick, thirty years younger and much more agile, was clearly going to be lighter on his feet. The declamatory, ranting style was undeniably a keynote of some tragic acting during both the Restoration and the first third of the eighteenth-century (and Quin was this kind of actor), but the changes that occurred in the 1740s were certainly gradual, and all historians agree that tragic acting in the long eighteenth-century was never perfectly natural. Downer writes that "a certain amount of exaggeration, whether it be cadence, rant, modulation, or vocal claptraps, was countenanced, even demanded, not only by the audience but by the critics. Rant alone the critics decried, yet Macklin himself admitted that it had its uses."²⁹

²⁹ Downer, 1026.

In the following section on actor biographies, I have described the careers of the most important players at the two theatres major London theatres mentioned above: Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields. In looking closely at individual style and the lines of business that developed in the repertory, it becomes clear that style was highly individualized and that the plays that became popular successes were the ones that highlighted the lines of business audiences expected to see. All the biographical information included in the following section on actors is taken from *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* by Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, unless otherwise noted.

Drury Lane

Mr. Robert Wilks

Robert Wilks came to London sometime around 1693, about the time a little know Irish playwright named George Farquhar began to make his mark upon the London stage.³⁰ The two became friends and frequent collaborators, working together for the first time in November of 1699, when Wilks played Sir Harry Wildair in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*. The playwright praised Wilks saying, "Mr. Wilks performance has set him so far above the competition in the part of Wildair, that none can pretend to envy the praise

³⁰ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfill, and Edward Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, Vol. 16 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 108-122.

due to his merit.”³¹ Wilks quickly became a leading actor in the company despite Cibber’s early criticism that he “miss’d a good deal of the loose humor of the Character, which {Powell} more happily hit.”³² Often called upon to speak prologues and epilogues, Wilks had done so well for himself that his main competitor, George Powell, recognized him as a rising star and left Drury Lane for Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Taking on several new roles during this period, Wilks played such favorites in comedy as Mosca in *Volpone*, Sir Charles Easy in *The Careless Husband*, Sir James Courtly in *The Basset Table*, and Farewell in *The Fashionable Lover*, seemingly perfecting the romantic lover. By 1709, he was in a position to succeed Betterton in most leading parts. Even Cibber ultimately says of him that he “never lost an Hour of precious time, and was, in all his parts, perfect to such an exactitude that I question if in forty years he ever five times chang’d or misplac’d an Article in any one of them.”³³

Mrs. Anne Oldfield

Mrs. Anne Oldfield, who often played opposite Wilks in comedy, was the highest paid and most influential actress of her generation.³⁴ According the *Biographical Dictionary*, by 1703, Mrs. Oldfield was earning about 70 to 80 pounds – twice the salary of Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Willis but far less than Mrs. Barry or Mrs. Bracegirdle. She was

³¹ Ibid, 111.

³² Ibid, 112.

³³ Ibid, 114.

³⁴ Information from the entry on Anne Oldfield in *BD 11*: 101-111.

not yet the important celebrity she would become, and Cibber even admits that he at first underestimated Anne Oldfield's abilities. He was not the only one to complain: early reviews were not complimentary. *A Comparison Between the Two Stages* referred to Mrs. Oldfield as "Meer Rubbish that ought to be swept off the Stage with the Filth and Dust."³⁵ A turning point in her career occurred in the summer of 1703, when the company went to Bath to perform for Queen Anne. Cibber rehearsed the part of Leonora in *Sir Courtly Nice* with her but was under impressed until opening night, when she apparently gave the best performance of her career to date. He was inspired to write the role of Lady Betty Modish in *The Careless Husband*. The play found commercial success (performed at Drury Lane in December of 1704) and was the first in a long stretch of plays in which Cibber adapted or wrote original parts to fit the talents of Mrs. Oldfield; Cibber credits her with the play's success.

There are many Sentiments in the Character of Lady Betty Modish that I may Almost say were originally her own, or only dress'd with a little more care than when they negligently fell from her lively Humour: Had her birth plac'd her in a higher Rank of Life, she had certainly appear'd in reality what in this play she only excellently acted, an agreeably gay Woman of Quality a little too conscious of her natural Attractions.³⁶

³⁵ Ibid, 103.

³⁶ Ibid, 104.

After this triumph, between the years of 1705-1708, she went on to play a number of high society women, the most famous of these roles being Silvia in *The Recruiting Officer* and Mrs. Sullen in *The Beaux Stratagem*.

For Mrs. Oldfield and Robert Wilks, the writing of a new comedy, *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar, helped them succeed in a kind of comedy that followed a pattern started by *The Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee*, which Farquhar wrote for Wilks in 1699. In April of 1706, *The Recruiting Officer* became an enormous hit and showcased the Wilks and Oldfield duo and provided ample opportunity for the kind of flirtation and double entendre that became the center of the Oldfield-Wilks stage relationship.³⁷ The success of this play inspired other plays of its kind that also showcased the particular brand of flirtatious banter expected of Wilks and Oldfield. And Mrs. Oldfield had come a long way since those early reviews. There is no doubt that audiences must have agreed with the dashing young officer (played by Wilks) who, in *The Humours of the Army*, says “I’ll take her stark naked, and settle all I have upon her!”³⁸

Mrs. Oldfield also performed often in “breeches roles,” roles in which she cross dressed (a popular convention of the time), and played what are best described as city wives. For example, Mrs. Brittle in Betterton’s *The Amorous Widow; or, The Wanton Wife* and Laetitia in Congreve’s *The Old Batchelor*, where she played a lively “city” wife and

³⁷ Joanne Lafler, *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield: the Life and Art of an Augustan Actress* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 44.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

Wilks the dashing seducer. In *The Chances*, a popular comedy adapted from the play by John Fletcher by George Villiers, the couple play two worldly lovers, Constantia and Don John; but perhaps Oldfield's most famous role is that of Mrs. Sullen in *Beaux' Stratagem*. A slightly new kind of character for her, Mrs. Sullen is a "conventional town-bred lady, plunked down in the country with a bumpkin of a husband who lives only for hunting and drinking."³⁹ The Mrs. Sullen-Archer scenes, especially the seduction in the gallery in act four, and the bedroom scene in act five, were written with the Oldfield-Wilks duo in mind; *The Beaux Stratagem* ran for ten consecutive performances and became an extremely enduring and popular play in the Drury Lane repertory.

Wilks and Oldfield, though they were initially most famous for their work in comedy, were later partnered in undoubtedly the most important tragedies of the period. Addison's *Cato* played for twenty nights in 1712, an unprecedented run for a tragedy, and made the managers nearly twice as much as they usually earned in a good year.⁴⁰ In imitation of the French style, Addison borrows from Plutarch and depicts the last twenty-four hours of Cato's life: Barton Booth played the title role, Wilks played Juba, the young prince who falls in love with Marcia, played by Mrs. Oldfield, and George Powell played Cato's son, Portius.

The new season of 1713-1714, bolstered by a strong ensemble company, was prosperous, and theatre was enjoying an increase in attendance. Most new plays were now running for at least six performances; in February, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* nearly

³⁹ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 110.

duplicated the success of *Cato*, running for seventeen consecutive nights. Mrs. Oldfield played the penitent Jane Shore, Booth played Lord Hastings, and Wilks played Will Shore, the cast-off husband who returns to forgive his wife. In tragedy, she had become quite popular as a virtuous, noble, long-suffering heroine, and her performances in this line, which were a continuation of types performed by her predecessor Mrs. Barry, became a defining characteristic in her stage career, which spanned thirty years. When she died, her loss delivered a severe blow to Drury Lane. Within a year, the company was in serious trouble having not only lost Mrs. Oldfield, but Barton Booth in 1728 and Robert Wilks in 1731. A poem published in the book *Life* by friend Mrs. Margaret Saunders sums up Mrs. Oldfield's contribution to the theatre:

Gay was the pit, whenever she was gay,
Coquets would blush, and jilts would envy bear,
To see themselves so well perform'd in her.⁴¹

Barton Booth

Barton Booth was different stylistically than Wilks, he reportedly lacked range and became known almost exclusively for his work in tragedy. *Othello* was his greatest role, and it is said that he "vitalized the formal rhetoric of Addison's *Cato* [in which he played the title role] and gave a profoundly pathetic impersonation of King Lear."⁴² Although Booth was clearly revered, he is consistently described as inferior to

⁴¹ *BD* 11: 110.

⁴² Information from the entry on Barton Booth in *BD* 2: 211-222.

Betterton; reportedly, he did not have “That Conscious Aspect of Intelligence nor requisite Variation of Voice.”⁴³ Booth must have had a splendid talent, but “something was missing that prevented him from becoming another Betterton...What Booth seemed to be afraid of putting into his acting was humanity; but that was perhaps typical of the transitional period between Betterton and Garrick, which Barton Booth, as the leading tragic actor of his time, exemplified.”⁴⁴ Cibber writes that he “seem’d too much to heave up his Words.⁴⁵” Booth was most known for his gravity, seriousness, and strong voice. Cibber describes his portrayal of Morat in *Aureng-Zebe*:

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
those to make his Spectators laugh while 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 Cold-
ness and unmov’d Delivery, as if he had fear’d
the Audience might take too familiar a notice
of them.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid, 215.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 222.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 218.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 221.

It is interesting that Cibber, who thinks the role should inspire both laughter and admiration, comments on Booth's unwillingness to play it in any way that is not both serious and dignified. He describes Booth's style as cold and "unmov'd." This echoes the idea that Booth was somehow afraid to put humanity into his performances – his style and the line that he perfected – was serious, noble, perhaps even cold. This is obviously in contrast with Robert Wilks who was known as "tender," even in tragedy.

By 1709, Booth was getting quite good parts but still disgruntled enough to partake in an actors' rebellion at the end of the season against manager Aaron Hill. On the afternoon of June 2nd, 1710, several prominent actors, Powell and Booth leading the pack, confronted Hill. The dispute was over Hill's refusing to give actors enough of a say in casting and ultimately limiting the power of his team of seven actors who shared in the managerial duties. In the end, no one was seriously hurt, and the Lord Chamberlain's Office, which heard Hill's story, issued an order to remove Powell and to suspend Booth (among others) from acting. This punishment did not hold, however, because the season was nearly over, and by the fall, the actors were back in favor. But this incident clearly illustrates the importance of getting good roles as a means of building a public following and the importance for actors to be able to establish themselves as public personalities.

By 1710, the management of Cibber, Wilks and Doggett took control. Booth, though not a manager yet, was clearly making a career of playing strong leading man

types, or hot headed warriors such as Hotspur in *Henry IV*. The season of 1712-13 marked a change for Booth in large part because of his portrayal of Pyrrhus in *The Distrest Mother*, which likely led to his being cast as Cato in Addison's play. By this time Booth had also begun to play Antony in *All for Love*, another dignified military hero that Booth played so frequently. Cibber, in his *Apology*, praises Booth's voice:

The tones of his voice were all musical, and he had so excellent an ear, no one ever heard a dissonant note come from him...And his articulation was so excellent, he was heard to the farthest part of the theatre when he almost whispered.⁴⁷

It is said that Booth's style was influential for other actors, especially James Quin and Charles Macklin, who was particularly struck by Booth's performance of Phyrrus:

Booth was making his approach to the throne; which struck Macklin so powerfully, from the grandeur and dignity of his manner, that he thought himself in the royal presence: but where he came to that line, 'Am I the last of all the scepter'd heroes,' he repeated it so awfully impressive, and accompanied it with

⁴⁷ Ibid, 221.

such an air of majesty, that Macklin stood fixt
with amazement; nor could he take his seat
till Pyrrhus left the audience chamber.⁴⁸

Booth was frequently described as having “the deportment of a nobleman.”⁴⁹ When he died in 1733, he was remembered for “his fire as Hotspur, his dignity as Brutus, and his gravity as Cato.”⁵⁰ Cibber described Booth as someone who “seem’d to think nothing valuable that was not tragically Great or Marvellous.”⁵¹

Mary Porter

Mary Porter was never the most important actress of her generation, that title was always Mrs. Oldfield’s, but she was an extremely important one. She played many roles both beside Mrs. Oldfield and without her, outliving her friend as well as her contemporaries Cibber, Wilks, and Booth.⁵² Charles Macklin said of her: “from that great assiduity in her profession, with an excellent understanding and a good ear, she acquired an elevated dignity in her mein, a full tone, and a spirited propriety in all heroic rage.”⁵³ But this was not universally the accepted position about Mrs. Porter. In fact, Chetwood said in his 1749 *General History* that “Nature had been niggard in Voice

⁴⁸ Ibid, 222.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 221.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 220.

⁵¹ Ibid, 221.

⁵² Information from the entry on Mary Porter in *BD 12*: 91-96.

⁵³ *BD 12*: 94.

and Face” and she is described in *Dramatic Miscellanies* by Davies as “tall, well shaped, and of a fair complexion but not handsome and with a voice that was harsh and unpleasing.”⁵⁴ And Tony Aston said “she had a way of drawing out her words (in imitation of Mrs. Barry) which did not become her.”⁵⁵ Perhaps the most unforgiving thing said about Mrs. Porter was Benjamin Victor’s comment in his *History of the Theatres* that she had “a plain Person and a bad Voice.”⁵⁶ Yet, how could all of this be true? She was, at least until about 1720, the second most important woman on the stage at Drury Lane; after 1720, according the *Biographical Dictionary*, she was arguably the most important tragic actress for about eleven more years and her career in total spanned over forty years.

She was first mentioned in cast lists about 1698 at Lincoln’s Inn Fields and probably remained there until the 1703-04 season. She played such roles as Jessica in *The Jew of Venice*, and Emilia in *The Beaux’ Duel* and might have made a salary of about 35 to 40 pounds, just about half of what Anne Oldfield was making but more than Susan Mountfort. In 1705, she began working at the Queen’s theatre and worked there for two seasons in such roles Melinda in *The Recruiting Officer*, and Doralice in *Marriage a la Mode*, among others. By 1710, she was performing consistently under the management of Wilks, Cibber, and Doggett and gained many new roles. Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter, not unlike Barry and Bracegirdle, appeared together time and time again, apparently with no sense of rivalry. This relationship worked so well perhaps because

⁵⁴ Ibid, 93.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 93.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 93.

she seldom played ingénues; for example, in *The Way of the World*, she played Mrs. Marwood instead of Millamant, in *Man of Mode*, Belinda, not Harriet, in Dryden's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, she was the venerable Octavia instead of the glamorous Cleopatra. That said, she did sometimes play the "innocent victim" character, like Desdemona in *Othello* or Iphigenia in *The Victim*. She clearly had a different line than Oldfield in that the characters she played, particularly early in her career, tended to be more passive and less theatrical. An exception to this is, of course, when she played Hermione in *The Distrest Mother*. This casting choice likely occurred because the choice part was Andromache. Mrs. Porter went on later to make a successful career of performing epic heroines in adaptations of Greek plays, where she, most of the time, found great success. In Mrs. Delany's autobiography she writes that, even at this late stage in her career, "the house is crammed whenever she acts."⁵⁷

Colley Cibber

No performer of the period had as significant an influence on the history of adapted plays as actor-manager-playwright Colley Cibber.⁵⁸ In addition to writing original plays, he also adapted and imitated old plays in hopes of finding the perfect vehicle for himself and his fellow company members. The most famous of these is certainly his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, which L. R. N. Ashley, Cibber's biographer, has described as "the most constant Shakespearian vehicle for all the greatest actors who

⁵⁷ Ibid, 95.

⁵⁸ Information from the entry on Colley Cibber in *BD 3*: 211-222.

dominated the English-speaking theatre for a period of a hundred and fifty years.”⁵⁹

Cibber made the play more theatrical by adding speeches and asides to make Richard a more obvious villain, added a love plot, cut some of the ranting speeches by the women, and added lines from Shakespeare’s other history plays. This version was not only played by Cibber to crowded houses for decades, but it continued on long after him; Garrick played it quite often and even competed with Quin in 1746, playing it on alternating nights supposedly as a way to demonstrate the two popular styles of acting tragedy. Other actors later in the century such as John Philip Kemble, George Frederick Cooke, Edmund Kean, and Junius Brutus Booth, used the part as a vehicle to promote themselves. In 1821, Charles Macready attempted to bring back Shakespeare’s original, but it could not hold up against the popularity of Cibber’s version. As stated earlier, the most important actors in a company had multiple “lines,” and Cibber was no exception – not only did he create perhaps the most enduring Shakespearian villain of the eighteenth-century – he also perfected certain kinds of roles in comedy that remained popular in the London theatre throughout the long eighteenth-century.

Despite the success of *Richard III*, Cibber was not terribly successful in other kinds of tragedy. Reportedly, his voice “quavered as he intoned his half sung lines of ‘high heroics’, nor would he ever be an acceptable romantic hero; his impudent pale face, his retrouse nose and vapidly smiling mouth – all these were against him.”⁶⁰

However, he launched his own acting career by writing parts for himself. His *Love’s Last*

⁵⁹ Leonard R.N. Ashley, *Colley Cibber* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

Shift, or the Fool in Fashion (1696) brilliantly established him in the line that began during the Restoration, the “fop”; Sir Novelty Fashion became a favorite with audiences because he was an “egregious dandy, always en cavalier, gossiping and flattering.”⁶¹ Cibber perfected the “fop” and went on to play characters in this line again and again: “a fop with solemn insignificance, creating a series of eccentric coxcombs, drawling and snuff-pinching and mincing through comedy after comedy.”⁶² The success of *Love’s Last Shift* set the tone for Cibber in comedy, an affected accent in which all the O’s were A’s, all sung to what is best described as the “court tune.”⁶³ Vanbrugh’s *The Relapse* (1696) continued this comic character in the creation of Lord Foppington. Cibber not only made this play a success, but also went on to play such fops as the title role in *Sir Courtly Nice* (1703), Sir Fopling Flutter in *The Man of Mode* (1706), Tattle in *Love for Love* (1709), Tinsel in *The Drummer* (1716) as well as other social butterflies whose names also indicate a frivolous nature. He became famous for his enormous wig, outsized lapels, cocked coat tails, and perfumed, lace-trimmed, orangerie gloves; he is described as having “pranced, shrilled, sneered, and fidgeted his way to success.”⁶⁴ Cibber was so important to this period as an actor, manager, and writer, that in his well-known book, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, Odell simply terms these years the “Age of Cibber.”

⁶¹ Ibid, 10.

⁶² Ibid, 10.

⁶³ Ibid, 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 10.

Lincoln's Inn Fields

James Quin and Lacy Ryan

James Quin, the most important tragic actor at Lincoln's Inn Fields, is typically described as rhetorically pompous and occasionally violent.⁶⁵ He had a large following, and the *Biographical Dictionary* even goes so far as to say that had Garrick and Macklin not come along, Quin might well be considered the most important actor of the eighteenth century. Highfill also suggests that James Quin was the most impressive actor of this generation ushering in a more exaggerated style, only to be curbed by Charles Macklin and David Garrick later in the century.⁶⁶ Quin played a large number of roles in tragedy, and most often his line was that of a strong, serious type, like Drury Lane's Barton Booth, and was a man of authority and dignity on the stage. Notable roles he played include title roles in *Othello*, *Tamere* and *Macbeth*, as well as Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar*, and King Claudius in *Hamlet*.

In the 1720s, Quin could also be seen playing Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*, the title role in *Cymbeline*, the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, the King in *Henry IV part I*, Creon in *Oedipus*, and Henry VIII, among others. But although he played many of the same roles, his style was quite different from Booth and Betterton, both of whom were known for restraint. Quin's style was popular yet controversial – it was likely exaggerated and blustering at times. He is described in a popular novel of the times entitled *Peregrine Pickle* (1751); a foreigner visiting the London theatre says this of Quin:

⁶⁵ Information from the entry on James Quin in *BD* 12: 226-242

⁶⁶ Highfill, 163-164.

His utterance is a continual sing-song, like the chanting of vespers, and his action resembles that of heaving ballast in to the hold of a ship...In almost all his most interesting scenes, he performs such strange shakings of the head, and other antic gesticulations, that when I first saw him act, I imagined the poor man laboured under that paralytical disorder, which is known by the name of St. Vitus's dance.⁶⁷

Even though Quin's popular tragic style was both celebrated and critiqued, he was universally praised for his comic Falstaff. He first played the role in *Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1718 at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and then later in both parts of *Henry IV*. He was described as "tall and bulky; his voice strong and pleasing, his countenance manly, and his eye piercing and expressive."⁶⁸ Samuel Foote said, "I can only recommend a man who wants to see a character properly played to see Quin in Falstaff."⁶⁹ These two lines he developed early in his career, the low comedian of Falstaff or the noble, dignified man, a Mark Anthony or an Othello, largely shaped his career and the kinds of parts he was cast to play.

Quin had a long and successful partnership with Lacy Ryan, who had one of the longest careers of his generation, remaining on the stage until 1760.⁷⁰ Ryan's first known role was at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, playing Rosencrantz in *Hamlet* in July of 1710. By 1713, Ryan played such key roles at Drury Lane as Lorenzo in *The Jew of Venice*, Evader in *Cinna's Conspiracy*, Marcus in *Cato*, and Arcas in *The Victim*. By the

⁶⁷ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (London: Printed for the Author, 1751), 1:139-140.

⁶⁸ William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage* (New York: B. Blom, 1916), 335.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 336.

⁷⁰ Information from the entry on Lacy Ryan in *BD 13*: 147-153.

season of 1715-16, Ryan was an important player at Drury Lane, usually playing roles in the line of the good looking, noble young man, or, to use Boucicault's term, the "leading juvenile man." For example, in comedy, he played Young Bellair in *The Man of Mode*, and Frederick in *The Rover*; in tragedy, he played Cassio in *Othello* and Richmond in *Richard III*. But he must have thought he could get better roles at Lincoln's Inn Fields, because he moved there, along with Quin and Charles Johnson, in 1718. He often played parts in comedy that Robert Wilks might have played at Drury Lane, but despite his long and distinguished career, he was never quite as revered as his Drury Lane counterpart. Ryan is described as "something above the middle size; in his action and deportment, rather easy than graceful, but he was often awkward in the management of his head, by raising his chin, and stretching out his neck; his voice was very strong, but harsh and dissonant."⁷¹ *The Biographical Dictionary* claims, that Ryan's tragic acting style probably resembled Betterton and Booth somewhat, but that, like Quin, he clung to the "old way" long after Macklin and Garrick had brought an even more natural style to the stage,⁷² and Davies' *Dramatic Miscellanies* commented that his Sir Harry Wildair lacked the "ease, elegance, gaiety, and spirit" of Robert Wilks.

Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Bullock

Christopher Bullock, like the woman he later married, Jane Rogers, was born into the theatre.⁷³ He was younger than the actors at Drury Lane with whom he would

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 151.

⁷² *Ibid*, 152.

⁷³ Information from the entry on Christopher and Jane Bullock in *BD* 2: 399-403.

ultimately compete; he started in 1707 at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, playing a small role in *The Recruiting Officer*. Over the next couple of seasons, he played Antonio in *The Rover*, and Young Bellair in *The Man of Mode* but also played "skirts parts," parts in which a man would play an older woman, such as Statira in a burlesque of *The Rival Queens*, which was part of that line for which the male Bullocks were known. By the 1710-11 season, his name began to appear on bills and he was becoming more popular, and by 1714, Bullock and his father were convinced by Christopher Rich to come to Lincoln's Inn Fields. As a leading man at LIF, he now was able to play many parts that might otherwise be unavailable to him. He, like Colley Cibber, did particularly well as a fop, a comic servants, or a handsome lover. Fondlewife in *The Old Bachelor*, Trapland in *Love for Love*, Lord Rake in *The Provoked Wife*, and Sir Novelty in *Love's Last Shift* were all standards in his repertory. His writing career had strong similarities to that of Colley Cibber's: he wrote many vehicles for himself, some of which became enormously popular (if not exactly literary masterpieces), and he adapted several plays by turning them into farcial afterpieces. For example, he turned Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters* into a short farce called *The Slip* (1715), creating the role of Trickwell, whose name speaks for itself; he also adapted Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, which became the popular *The Cobler of Preston* (1716). By the 1719-20 season, Christopher Bullock had become a manager at LIF (another parallel with Cibber), and he was adding more roles to his repertory, such as Decius Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Truman in *The Squire of Alsatia*, and Gratiano in *The Merchant of Venice*. Despite his success, he became ill in the season 1720-21 and died shortly thereafter. In 1717, Bullock married the daughter of

Robert Wilks and Jane Rogers. She continued acting and over the next decade, played roles such as Melinda in *The Recruiting Officer*, Euridice in *Oedipus*, Statira in *The Rival Queens*, Belinda in *The Old Bachelor*, Charlotte in *Oroonoko*, Mrs. Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mrs. Sullen in *The Stratagem*, Hellena and later Angelica in *The Rover*, Lady Fidget in *The Country Wife*, and Anne Bullen in *Henry VIII*, among others. Though much younger than Mrs. Oldfield, she played the parts that her more experienced rival played at Drury Lane such as roles as Athenais in *Theodosius*, Rosalinda in *Sophonsiba*, Amintia in *The Sea Voyage*, Selima in *Tamerlane*, the title role in *The Fair Quaker Deal* and Isabella in *The Squire of Alsatia*. She also played Kate in *Henry IV*, Elvira in *The Spanish Friar*, and Marcia in *Cato*, Lady Froth in *The Double Dealer*, Lady Macduff in *Macbeth*, and Portia in *Julius Caesar*.

Capable of playing roles in a variety of lines, she was often cast as either a young coquette, sophisticated woman of fashion, or a pathetic, tragic heroine. Also like Mrs. Oldfield, she became the highest paid actress in her troupe, earning about 100 pounds a year. Chetwood writes of her that she “pleas’d in several dramatic characters, assisted by a graceful Form and Figure.”⁷⁴

Conclusion

It is clear that although all actors had certain things in common that they learned from their predecessors, performers established themselves as individuals and established “lines” that they repeated, with some variation, from play to play. It is the

⁷⁴ Ibid, 403.

establishment of these lines that influences the way older plays were adapted for the early eighteenth-century stage, which was driven by a budding celebrity culture.

Versions of plays by Euripides, Corneille, Racine, and Shakespeare were influenced by the intense form of ghosting that naturally occurred in a repertory company that was relatively small and patronized largely by audiences who saw the same performers in many different roles each season. Important English actors had certainly influenced playwrights before, but during the early eighteenth century, actors and actresses rose to new levels of celebrity, exerting unprecedented influence on the dramas that were being written and produced. In the subsequent chapters, I will discuss the most important adapted comedies, tragedies and political/historical plays of the early eighteenth-century and the actors and actresses that made them popular. Historians tend to either overlook the importance of adaptations, writing them off as misguided revisions of great masterworks, or they focus almost solely on the ways in which adapted plays fall short of the originals. This study seeks to reframe the question.

Chapter 2:

Racine, Corneille and Euripides in England, 1712-1730: Recycling, Reframing, Reusing and the Selling of Classicism in the London Commercial Theatre

Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* features Colley Cibber, surrounded by other people's plays, plotting his next act of plagiarism:

Next, o'er his Books his eyes begin to roll,
In pleasing memory of all he stole,
How here he sipp'd, how there he plunder'd snug
And suck'd all o'er, like an industrious Bug.⁷⁵

Considering the number of plays Cibber adapted from other playwrights, this kind of satire is surprisingly rare. Clearly, it was accepted practice in the early eighteenth-century to revise, adapt, or otherwise borrow from other people's plays, even if the practice was the object of occasional scrutiny. The act of appropriation was at times mocked, but it clearly did not stand in the way of a play's popular success. Colley Cibber, and specifically his adaptation of Corneille's *Le Cid*, was a "cultural symbol for

⁷⁵ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 290.

compromised authorship,” even though he was perhaps the most influential figure in theatre during the early eighteenth century.⁷⁶

A comparison, or rather a negotiation, between French, English, and ancient trends in playwriting dominated theories of playwriting in the Restoration and early eighteenth century. John Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, published in 1668, is the beginning of the debate about the influence of Greek, French, and pre-Commonwealth English drama. Written as a dialogue among four characters – Crities, Eugenius, Lisideius, and Neander – the discussion is concerned with two key issues: a comparison of French and English drama and a debate about the superiority of the ancients or the moderns. The result of this discussion, and the idea that Dryden is advocating, is that French plots are bare, cold, and rigid, too bound by rules, and that the strict separation of genres achieves only superficial beauty. Dryden’s thoughtful and inflammatory document kicks off the debate in England about theatre and what rules dramatists should follow in constructing plays.

English theories about tragedy were primarily based on a French interpretation of Aristotle. Thomas Rymer’s translation of Rapin’s *Reflections on Aristotles Treatise of Poesie* (1674) was enormously influential and many of Rapin’s remarks on tragedy became prominent in English criticism, in particular his comparisons of the French and English. He suggests that the French are justified in admitting love as a subject of tragedy because the passions become “deform’d and insipid unless they are founded on

⁷⁶ Laura Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 194.

sentiments conformable to those of the spectator."⁷⁷ He still admits that it is degrading to tragedy to mingle it with love, "For Love is of a Character that always degenerates from that Heroic Air, of which Tragedy must never divest itself." He writes that "these tragedies mixed with gallantries, never make such admirable Impressions on the Spirit, as did those of Sophocles and Euripides."⁷⁸ But increasing the emphasis on love in tragedy became a key ingredient in eighteenth-century revisions of French and Greek originals, and those plays that failed to do so were not popular with audiences. In championing Rapin, Rymer launched the reputation of a critic who was in some respects not representative of French classical doctrine of his own generation, but who was certainly attractive to the English and became the central document that inspired English neoclassicism. Despite the influence of neoclassical theory on dramatic structure, in practice, most playwrights were highly attentive to what would make for an entertaining and profitable evening of theatre. Cibber, in his prologue to *Ximena* (1712), satirized these pseudo-classical rules, as did Charles Johnson in *The Female Fortune-Teller* (1726); and one of the most popular tragedies of the period, Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714), openly rejects them.

Classical and neoclassical tragedies during this period frequently dramatized a concentration of pathetic situations that exploit maternal or filial pain, or woes in marriage, highlighting feminized moral conflict. It is not surprising then that the plays of Euripides, Corneille and Racine were the most frequently adapted. Scholars have

⁷⁷ Katherine E. Wheatley, *Racine and English Classicism*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1922), 216.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 216.

pointed to many reasons for this increased interest in suffering heroines: the number of women attending theatre increased, the sentimentalization of drama and the rise of the novel as a popular form portraying traumatized women, have all been attributed to an increased fascination with the pathetic and victimized woman. However, few scholars have given adequate attention to the rise of the celebrity actress. Rebecca Marshall and Elizabeth Boutell in the 1670s inspire a significant trend in drama by popularizing a kind of tragedy in which there are essentially two women at the center of a play: one is noble, virtuous and sometimes victimized, and the other is usually a vengeful-woman who is tortured by unrequited love. Eric Rothstein, in his book, *Restoration Tragedy*, describes these types as the lustful villainess and the gentle, vulnerable, virgin-angel.⁷⁹ First made popular by Marshall and Boutell, these character types were revised, with some variation, throughout the Restoration and eighteenth-century. This kind of tragedy waned briefly when Marshall left the stage in the late 1670s, but revived again with the emergence of the Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle in the 1680s. By the turn of the century, Mary Porter and Anne Oldfield, the popular duo of the early-eighteenth century, recycled these lines, making it clear why Euripides, Corneille and Racine were reshaped and rewritten in specific ways. Although it is impossible to point to a single reason for the particularly intense popularity of pathetic tragedy in the early eighteenth-century, it is clear that the talents and acting lines that developed during the Restoration, when actresses were first allowed to perform in the English commercial theatres, were enormously influential. Robert D. Hume, in his book *The Development of*

⁷⁹ Eric Rothstein. *Restoration Tragedy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 39-41.

English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century, states, “a point so far ignored must be strongly emphasized: the vogue and form of the pathetic play was greatly influenced by the availability of suitable actresses.”⁸⁰ And in *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660-1700*, Elizabeth Howe points out that the influence of the actress on the development of drama has surprisingly been almost ignored by theatre historians and that no full scale investigation of this topic has ever been made.

In the adaptations discussed in this chapter, there are multiple layers of revising, rewriting and recycling that occurs – the most obvious are narrative and character recycling. Marvin Carlson, in his book, *The Haunted Stage*, points out that in the case of character recycling, the audience brings with them memories of a kind of character with certain traits; this character continues to demonstrate those traits within different plot scenarios and varying narratives.⁸¹ Carlson provides two possible examples of this: the kind of recycling that occurs in the commedia dell’arte, when certain stock types remain stable from performance to performance, or the reuse of a specific character, such as Shakespeare’s Falstaff, who appears in *Henry IV* parts one and two and then is later picked up again in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.⁸² But the kind of recycling of character types we see in adaptations of classical plays in the early eighteenth-century is the kind most akin to the character recycling that Carlson likens to the modern day television sitcom that utilizes similar types in varying situations. At Drury Lane, the reemergence

⁸⁰ Robert D. Hume. *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 220.

⁸¹ Marvin Carlson. *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 44.

⁸² *Ibid*, 44-49.

of Rothstein's lustful-villainess and virgin-angel types are woven into classical texts again and again. This act of recycling familiar lines and narratives is influenced by the availability and popularity of certain performers, and is what drives the shape of the adapted text during this period. In this chapter, beginning with *The Distrest Mother* in 1712 and ending with Charles Johnson's *Medea* in 1730, I will examine the ways in which classical and French, neo-classical texts are revised and rewritten for the English commercial theatres.

Virtue Rewarded: Actresses and the Evolution of Acting Lines

Within the first two decades after the Restoration, playwrights were looking to create larger roles for women and to include themes of love and unrequited love in tragedy. But it was really in the 1680s that Elizabeth Barry (considered by most historians the first really great English tragic actresses) and the plays written for her by Thomas Otway had enough influence to change the kinds of plays written and thus change the course in the development of late seventeenth-century tragedy. The leading tragic roles in the immediate years after the admission of women on the stage were primarily for men, but about the time Elizabeth Barry became popular, playwrights adapted or wrote original roles for women in large numbers – in particular, noble, virtuous, suffering women. Howe claims that “Elizabeth Barry triumphantly created the pathetic role of Monimia in Otway's *The Orphan* (1680) and her success in part clinched the movement away from heroic drama and started the establishment of ‘she-tragedy’ as a popular

genre.”⁸³ Roles were added to male dominated plays for Barry, such as the pathetic female character Marmoutier in *The Duke of Guise* (1682), or Crowne’s *Darius, King of Persia* (1688), in which she played the suffering Barzana. By 1688, pathetic depictions of women increased with the addition of Anne Bracegirdle who performed alongside Barry in plays like *The Injur’d Lovers* (1688); for the next twenty years, Barry and Bracegirdle dominated the form of female characterization in tragedy as dramatists wrote plays around their lines. Between 1688 and 1706, they were cast in at least thirty new tragedies together.⁸⁴ By the 1670s and 1680s, there had been shift from heroic drama to pathetic tragedy largely because of the techniques and personalities of popular actresses; “she-tragedy” had emerged as a commercially viable genre.

Ambrose Philips’s *The Distrest Mother* (1712), the most successful adapted tragedy of the eighteenth century, is merely a continuation of certain trends that began with plays like Otway’s *Venice Preserved* (1682), or Southern’s extremely successful play, *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), in which Elizabeth Barry played the role of a suffering woman who goes mad. These tragedies often depict women as wives, mothers and daughters; in fact, Barry played “distressed mothers” in at least seven plays during her career. In adapted plays, parts were also added or rewritten to highlight the struggles of daughters and mothers. A notable example is Cibber’s adaptation of *Richard III* in which he rewrites the part of Queen Elizabeth to portray her weeping over her two little princes as they are torn from her side. Scholars have long observed, however, that

⁸³ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 108-109.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 159.

although women were now being given central roles in Restoration tragedy, these roles tended to reinforce images of weakness and vulnerability. Interestingly, however, in the series of adaptations that begins with *The Distrest Mother* in 1712, “she-tragedy” does not necessarily always depict women as victims of male oppression, but rather as either victorious over male oppression or agents of their own destruction. Neoclassical adaptations such as Charles Johnson’s *The Victim*, or Colley Cibber’s *The Heroic Daughter*, for example, represent a change in the direction of pathetic she-tragedy. It became fashionable to change the ending of a drama by Corneille or Racine – something for which Cibber, among others, was seriously chided – and the vogue for happy endings ushers in a curious variation in the way distrest mothers and daughters are represented in pathetic tragedy. *The Distrest Mother* was not groundbreaking in terms of its subject matter or even its form, but it does lead the way in altering the tragic fate of the pathetic heroine.

Ambrose Philip’s *The Distrest Mother*

George Powell, in a letter he wrote the *Spectator* on 1 February 1712, says:

I am appointed to act a Part in the new Tragedy, called *The Distrest Mother*:
It is the celebrated Grief of Orestes which I am to personate;
but I shall not act as I ought, for I shall feel it too intimately to be
able to utter it. I was last night preparing a Paragraph to myself,

which I took to be an Expression of Rage, and in the Middle of the Sentence there was a Stroke of Self-Pity which quite unmanned me. Be pleased, Sir, print this Letter, that when I am oppressed in this Manner at such an Interval, a certain Part of the Audience may not think I am out; and I hope with this Allowance to do it to Satisfaction.⁸⁵

Powell's letter likely created suspense and anticipation, for on the opening night of *The Distrest Mother*, a crowd gathered to see Powell and his fellow company members embody Greek and Trojan heroes and heroines of ancient times. On the same date, Steele describes his sneak peek at a rehearsal several days earlier: "I must confess, though some days passed since I enjoyed that entertainment, the passions of the several characters dwell strongly upon my imagination; I congratulate the age that they are at last to see truth and human life represented in the incidents which concern heroes and heroines." He continues: "It was a most exquisite pleasure to observe real tears drop from the eyes of those who had long made it their profession to dissemble affliction."⁸⁶ It is clear from these comments, the drawing power of this play derives from its dramatization of a pathetic situation.

Ambrose Philips' adaptation of Racine's *Andromache* opened at Drury Lane on March 17th, 1712 and ran for eight consecutive nights. It became the most successful adaptation of a French tragedy on the English stage and inspired a series of other adaptations from French plays over the next several years. None became as popular as *The Distrest Mother*, which remained a part of the English commercial theatre well into

⁸⁵ *Spectator*, February 1, 1712, ed. D.F. Bond. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 34.

the nineteenth century. A popular vehicle for all leading ladies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, actresses for generations desired to play the noble Andromache. But historians have not done justice to *The Distrest Mother* and are so preoccupied with its literary deficiencies that the importance of its stage history has been overlooked.

The Distrest Mother was not a vehicle play per se, though it was born from that tradition. Mrs. Jane Rogers, an important tragic actress of the time, maintained that Ambrose Philips promised the part to her but that once Mrs. Oldfield heard the play, she demanded that she be given the part. Jane Rogers responded by making the argument public and gave a dramatic account in a broadsheet "The Memorial of Jane Rogers Humbly Submitted to the Town." She writes:

A new Tragedy being lately brought to the House, Mr. Wilks sent for me the first publick Reading of it, and the Author seeing me home from the House, was pleas'd to compliment me, with telling me, he design'd the Part of Andromache for me. About three Days after, Mr. Wilks with a great deal of seeming Civility came to me into the green Room, and told me, that he and the author were both asham'd to see me, for having sent for me to the Reading of the Play; for they design'd me the Part of Andromache, which they thought would become me, and was more in my way than any Part I had played in a long time. But that as Mrs. Oldfield had declared, she would not play unless she had that Part, they must oblige her with it.⁸⁷

Apparently some sympathy for her was incited; at Oldfield's benefit at the end of February there was a disturbance at Drury Lane. On March 1st, 1713, a letter describes a

⁸⁷ Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "Theatrical Politics at Drury Lane: New Light on Letitia Cross, Jane Rogers, and Anne Oldfield," *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 85 (1982): 412-413.

mini-riot which caused the managers to shut down the performance. There was a letter entitled "A Justification of the Letter to Sir John Stanley, relative to his Management of the Play-house in Drury Lane," describing a number of grievances: one of them, that Jane Rogers had been turned out of the company without any reason.⁸⁸ Mrs. Oldfield prevailed, even though, at this point in her career, she was mostly known for her work in comedy. She reportedly did not even like to perform in tragedy and according to the prompter Chetwood she said, "I hate to have a Page dragging my tail about. Why do they not give Porter these parts? She can put on a better Tragedy Face than I can."⁸⁹

Despite Mrs. Oldfield's protestations, in her career she became quite successful in tragedy and must have known that in order to become the next Mrs. Barry, she would need to acquire the line of noble, long-suffering heroines. *The Distrest Mother* had tremendous success largely because it had some of the most experienced and beloved actors of this generation, including such luminaries as George Powell as Orestes, Barton Booth as Pyrrhus, and Hermione, played by Mrs. Porter. Philips had at his disposal a solid cast with no weak or inexperienced people and the play was a significant beginning for a new kind of Grecian, she-tragedy.

Racine's *Andromache*, which is a close adaptation of Euripides' version, follows the expected story: Andromache, Hector's widow, is a captive in the palace of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus. He falls in love with her despite his betrothal to Hermoine, but

⁸⁸ Ibid, 416-417.

⁸⁹ Joanne Lafler. *The Celebrated Mrs. Oldfield: the Life and Art of an Augustan Actress* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 111.

Andromache finds marriage to her husband's destroyer repulsive. For the duration of the play, she is faithfully devoted to her son Astyanax and the memory of Hector. Orestes, son of Agamemnon, has come to Epirus as ambassador of the Greek princes to demand the surrender of Astyanax. Upon arrival, he confesses another motive for his trip; he longs to see Hermoine. Orestes is persuaded by her to kill Pyrrhus but the Greek soldiers, at the marriage altar, have already accomplished the task. Now Pyrrhus' widow, Andromache and her son are crowned rulers of Epirus. Hermione, distraught, kills herself. Orestes, as a result of Hermoine's suicide, goes mad.

Other than the new ending, Phillips's changes from the Racine are not significant. He shortened certain speeches that he determined were "long and declamatory," added "curtain speeches" for Andromache (in Racine's version, Andromache speaks the final lines in only one act; in Philips's play, she concludes four acts), and incorporates what have been referred to as "moralizing tirades." Katherine Wheatley, in her 1922 study *Racine and English Classicism*, asks why Ambrose Philips would rewrite the great poetry of Racine and turn it into sentimental, melodramatic prose. Why would he replace the "ruthless speech of Oreste, 'C'est trop gemir tout seul,' with a conventional piece of rant?"⁹⁰ Paul E. Parnell, in "The Distress Mother, Ambrose Philips's Morality Play," offers an answer:

A satisfactory answer must take into consideration the purposes of the translator and adaptor. And the purposes of Philips, a

⁹⁰ Wheatley, 127.

member of the Addison Clique, were those of the group: a desire to improve morals, a belief in middle-class virtue, and an opposition to pure formalism.⁹¹

He observes that Philips has simplified the psychological complexities, increased “emotionalism,” and fine-tuned the didactic message. His observations are accurate but both Wheatley and Parnell overlook the most glaring change in the play – the rewritten ending that makes Andromache a Queen instead of a slave. Johnson’s rendering of Andromache heightens the character of a tender mother, a widow full of veneration for the memory of her deceased husband, and makes her triumphant at the end of the play. *The Distrest Mother* represents a shift in the way the noble, long-suffering heroine of the popular she-tragedy genre was depicted. This time, she does not die, go mad, or succumb to the sexual advances of her captor, but instead manipulates the situation to her advantage. The ending is not tragic for Andromache, who is now no longer a ‘distrest mother.’

In acts four and five, Andromache’s speeches highlight her virtuous and heroic struggles against her terrible fate. Wheatley complains that these curtain speeches give Philips a chance to indulge his taste for static poetry,⁹² but it is obvious that Philips is giving the actress “poetry” to speak. He introduces the use of simile, which Racine is famous for omitting, and clearly centers the audience’s sympathetic imagination on the

⁹¹ Paul E. Parnell, “The Distrest Mother, Ambrose Philip’s Morality Play,” *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring 1959), 111-123.

⁹² Wheatley, 127.

heroine, instead of Orestes or Phyrrius. One example of this is an added scene between Andromache and Cephisia, her servant, in which Andromache appears in her jewels and royal finery, describing a dream of her former husband and a plan to commit suicide after the wedding to Phyrrius, thus avoiding the consummation of the marriage:

Thou may'st remember, for thou oft hast heard me
Relate the dreadful Vision, which I saw
When first I landed Captive in Epirus,
That very Night, as in a Dream I lay,
A ghastly Figure, full of gaping Wounds,
His Eyes a-glare, his Hair all stiff with Blood,
Full in my sight thrice shook his Head and groaned.
I soon discern'd my slaughter'd Hector's Shade;
But, oh, how chang'd! Ye Gods, how much unlike
The living Hector! – Loud he bid me fly!
Fly from Achilles' Son! Then sternly frowned
And disappeared.⁹³

Wheatley condemns this as pandering to the spectacle of ghosts and embracing the macabre.⁹⁴ Yet, this speech is much a more significant a change than that: the description of a defeated Hector brings to life the relationship between Andromache

⁹³ Ambrose Phillips, *The Distrest Mother*, (London: printed for S. Buckley and J. Tonson, 1713), 44-45.

⁹⁴ Wheatley, 129.

and her late husband. In recounting her dream, Andromache's emotional plight is exposed. Previous scholarship has failed to recognize the significance of this change. In this version of the play, her purity has become an erotic fascination of Pyrrhus and her faithfulness to her late husband enhances her allure, driving Pyrrhus almost mad with desire.

In Andromache's curtain speech at the end of Act V, she is brought back on stage for a final monologue in which she says of the newly slain Pyrrhus:

Ill fated Prince! Too negligent of Life!
And too unwary of the faithless Greeks!
Cut off in the fresh ripening Prime of Manhood,
Even in the Pride of Life; thy Triumphs new
And all thy Glories in full Blossom round thee!
The very Trojans would bewail thy Fate.⁹⁵

A few lines later, she adds:

While I live, my Tears
Will never cease; for I was born to grieve.⁹⁶

Her nobility is heightened by her transfer of sorrow from Hector to Pyrrhus, who has been played by the strong and authoritative Barton Booth. She was not conquered by

⁹⁵ Philips, 56.

⁹⁶ Philips, 56.

him, and is not his victim in the end. Yet, she is noble enough to respect, even revere, a great ruler and heroic leader. Philips's *Andromache* speaks for herself, saying:

Give present Orders for the Funeral Pomps;
Let him be robed in all his Regal State;
Place round him every shining mark of Honor;
And let the Pile, that Consecrates his Ashes,
Rise like his Fame, and blaze above the Clouds.⁹⁷

Ironically, she is both empowered and distraught by Pyrrhus' death. As a woman of rank, she mourns for him and the noble position he held; yet, she is relieved of the burden of surrendering to him. Philip's adaptation not only solidified Mrs. Oldfield's role as the leading actress in the company, but skyrocketed both Mrs. Porter and Barton Booth to stardom. All three would go on to have plays adapted with these performances in mind. In addition to *The Distrest Mother*, Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1712), performed later that same year, also influenced the kinds of roles written into the repertory over the next several years.

Colley Cibber's

The Heroick Daughter and Cinna's Conspiracy

Ximения, or The Heroick Daughter, Colley Cibber's controversial adaptation of Corneille's *Le Cid*, found initial success but did not have the lasting power of *The Distrest Mother*. In

⁹⁷ Ibid, 56.

its opening run, the play ran eight nights, like *The Distrest Mother*, but it did not remain a popular favorite throughout the century. Mrs. Oldfield likely played the title role in November of 1712 and certainly did when it was revived again in 1718. In 1713, she chose it for her benefit, indicating that she knew it would bring in audiences. In the prologue to his first attempt at revising Corneille, Cibber says:

As France improved it from the Spanish Pen
We hope, now British, 'tis improved again;
And though lost Tragedy has long seemed dead,
Yet, having lately raised her awful Head,
To-night with Pains and Cost we humbly strive
To keep the spirit of that taste alive.⁹⁸

With the first line of this passage, Cibber defends the act of adaptation by indicating that is it common practice and that Corneille's controversial masterpiece is merely an adaptation of a Spanish play. Although Cibber did write extensively about his goals for the play's structure in a lengthy letter to the reader (the play and the letter were published seven years later), it cannot be emphasized enough that Cibber was first and foremost a manager, a man of the theatre, and an actor himself. He was practical, and the potential for commercial success could not have escaped him. Although he writes of his ideas for the play in literary terms, the play, which emphasizes their respective specialties in tragedy, was clearly written as a vehicle for Oldfield and Booth.

⁹⁸ Colley Cibber, *Ximena or The Heroick Daughter*, (London: Printed for B. Lintot, A Bettersworth, and W. Chetwood, 1719).

In improving Corneille's *Le Cid*, which is the story of Rodrigue and Chimène, two young lovers whose chance of marrying is complicated when Chimène's father insults Rodrigue's father, Cibber rewrites the ending. In Corneille's play, Rodrigue is torn between his love for Chimène and his duty to avenge his father's honour; Rodrigue chooses the latter and kills Don Gomes in a duel. Because it is the honorable thing to do, Chimène asks the King for Rodrigue's head, though she still loves him. Cibber makes the following changes to Corneille's story: he writes a new first act that serves as exposition – he thinks Corneille's "seems defective"; he eliminates the role of the Infanta, who seems "so cold, and inactive and so very little conducive to the main design" and adds the character Belzara as a mate to the disappointed Don Sanchez.⁹⁹ And most astonishingly, he gives the play a truly happy ending by reviving Ximena's father at the end and thus removing any barrier to marriage between the two lovers. Mrs. Oldfield's epilogue, spoken as Ximena, defends Cibber's happy ending:

Well, Sirs!

I've come to tell you that my Fears are over,

I've seen Papa and have secured my lover.

And, troth, I'm wholly on our Author's side,

For had (as Corneille made him) Gormez died,

My Part had ended as it first begun,

And left me still unmarried and undone.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid, xxii.

¹⁰⁰ *The Heroick Daughter*, epilogue.

Although current scholars express horror at the liberties Cibber took with the well-known classic, the play was not unsuccessful, and by changing the ending, like Ambrose Philips did with *The Distrest Mother*, Cibber is clearly tailoring the play to satisfy English taste. The role of a noble daughter caught between her lover and her father is evocative of the role of Marcia in *Cato*. However, in this play, Cibber delivers an even happier ending, by rewarding Ximena not only with the hand of her lover, but also by bringing her father back to life.

However, in the case of *Cinna's Conspiracy*, an adaptation of Corneille's *Cinna* (1641), the same cannot be said. The story of Corneille's play is less well known. The main character, Cinna, played by Barton Booth, is in love with Émilie, played by Mrs. Oldfield. At her insistence, he leads a plot against the Emperor Auguste, and persists in it even when it becomes clear that the blood-weary emperor will abdicate to maintain peace. The conspiracy ultimately falls apart and Auguste pardons the conspirators. His act of clemency wins the hearts of Cinna, Maximus, and even the irreducible Émilie. The play ends on a note of moral and political peace. But in Cibber's second attempt to adapt Corneille, the performances of Booth, and Mrs. Oldfield could not save the play. Although both actors were clearly beloved as a strong, stoic hero, and a noble, suffering heroine, in this tragedy, they did not find success. The play does conform to the recent vogue for heroic women being rewarded at the end, but the story is not nearly as pathetic, nor is there the opportunity to perform heart-wrenching scenes of love or honor. Cibber's changes are minimal, and most scholars agree it is

more of a translation than an adaptation. Canfield says of it: "It is correct, at times elegant, and always worthy...it is through-out dignified, with few of the lapses into triviality which mar the work of so many translators of the same century."¹⁰¹ Perhaps it is because of this lack of 'trivialities' that the play was a failure; it was not sufficiently reshaped to fit English taste. *The Heroick Daughter* met with some success, but *Cinna's Conspiracy*, although it earned the praise of literary critics, did not even see a fourth night.

Charles Johnson's
The Victim and The Sultanness

The Victim, adapted by Charles Johnson from versions of *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Racine and Euripides, as well as Abel Boyer's 1700 English translation also entitled *The Victim*, hit the boards in 1715. Again, questions of plagiarism and theft surround this adaptation. Abel Boyer, incensed by the success of Johnson's play, claims, "My Tragedy, having long lain dormant, was lately revived in the most Irregular Manner that was ever known or practiced either on Parnassus by Poets, or on the Stage by Actors."¹⁰² Johnson's version was almost certainly created at the urging of the prominent actor Robert Wilks. He not only played Agamemnon in Boyer's play fifteen

¹⁰¹ Canfield, 183.

¹⁰² Wheatley, 144.

years earlier, but played an astonishing number of important roles in tragedy such as Shore in *Jane Shore*, Cassio in *Othello*, Juba in *Cato*, Hearty in *The Non-Juror*, Hal in *Henry IV*, Altamont in *The Fair Penitent*, and Jason in *Medea*. Wilks was considered best in “tender” scenes – a different kind of tragic hero than Barton Booth – and he likely gave a soft, pathetic interpretation of Agamemnon. Chetwood said of Wilks performances in general: “Of all the various Passion of Grief, a manly Sorrow is the most difficult to express, and of all the Actors I have ever seen, I must be pardon’d if I give preference to Mr. Wilks.”¹⁰³

Obviously hoping to duplicate the success of *The Distrest Mother* and *The Heroick Daughter*, the play is recycling the virtuous heroine/ jealous vixen lines, but this time, Anne Oldfield played the role that audiences might have expected Mary Porter to play, the jealous and petty Eriphile, and the surprise ending offers a clue as to why. The victim in this play is not, in fact, Iphigenia, but

actually, Eriphile. In this production, Mrs. Porter plays Agamemnon’s daughter, the noble, self-sacrificing daughter reminiscent of Cato’s daughter, and Mrs. Oldfield plays the title character, the rejected lover. The plot of the story is the familiar tale: Iphigenia’s father is compelled to offer her up for sacrifice to placate the goddess Artemis, who has manipulated the winds to halt his ships sailing for Troy. Agamemnon sends for his wife and daughter, telling them she is to be married to Achilles upon arrival at the camp but, when Iphigenia arrives, the truth is revealed; she nobly insists

¹⁰³ W. R. Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage from It’s Origin in Greece down to the Present Time* (London: W. Owen, 1749).

on going through with the sacrifice to help her country and to show obedience to her father. One of the best known stories in Greek mythology, it was also a well known story in England. First translated into Latin by Erasmus in 1506, and later translated into English by Lady Jane Lumley in 1558, it was the first Greek tragedy to be translated into English. There are in fact several versions of the myth: Euripides's tale portrays the goddess Artemis substituting a hind for Iphigenia at the last moment, snatching her away to become a priestess, but Racine and Johnson choose a more obscure version, probably because it would be more palatable to eighteenth-century taste, in which Iphigenia is saved when it is discovered that the oracle refers to different Iphigenia, the jealous Eriphile. A new role of Racine's creation, Eriphile is selected for sacrifice instead, but before she can be killed, she snatches the dagger from Calchas and stabs herself as a victim of unrequited love, "Thus, thus I bleed, the victim of Achilles/ The Son of Thetis strikes the pointed Steel/ Thro' that fond Heart, which only liv'd for him."¹⁰⁴ Before she dies, she has a prophetic vision and curses Achilles: "Haunt him, ye Furies, seize his guilty Mind,/ Let Love, Despair and Love urge him, like me,/ to seek Relief from inexpressive Tortures/ In an untimely Grave."¹⁰⁵ Her suicide, though it solves the central conflict of the play, is pathetic.

Of his version of the story, Johnson says in the prologue: "Our Author backwards looks with grateful Eyes, and on his Fathers Shoulders strives to rise; Anxious to please, he now revives the Dead, and raises Iphigenia's mournful shade;

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 63.

From Greece and France, with equal Care and Toil, Transplants her to Britannia's happy Soil."¹⁰⁶ What is most fascinating about this preface is that Johnson admits that he is writing a new play, a play that transports the story from Greece and France in equal measure to England – he is seeking to make this the English version of the myth. “Looking backwards,” he strives to rise on his “father’s shoulders,” and, in effect, describes himself as writing a new work for, “Britannia’s happy Soil.” The only real difference between the production of Boyer’s play and Johnson’s version is the addition of Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter. The natural ghosting that must have occurred when audiences witnessed these two actresses, who had recently played in the previously mentioned tragedies, likely contributed to its success.

Possibly encouraged by the moderate success of *The Victim*, Charles Johnson did another adaptation of Racine called *The Sultanness* in 1717. Based on *Bajazet*, it did not have lasting success; again, more closely resembling a translation than an adaptation, it did not inspire audiences and like Cibber’s failed *Cinna’s Conspiracy*, which also made minimal changes from the original, and did not find commercial success. Speaking for himself in the Prologue, Johnson says:

Our honest Author frankly bid me say,
'Tis to the great Racine he owes his Play:
When Rome in Arms had gain'd immortal Fame,
And proudly triumph'd o'er the Grecian Name,
Her Poets copy'd what Athenians writ,

¹⁰⁶ Charles Johnson, *The Victim*, (London: Printed and sold by Fred Burleigh, 1714).

And boasted in the Spoils of foreign Wit:
Why then shou'd Britons, who so oft have broke
The Pride of Gaul and bow'd her to the Yoke,
Be blam'd if they enrich their native Tounge
With that which the Gallic Muse has greatly sung?
At least, 'tis hop'd, he'll meet a kinder Fate,
Who strives some Standard Author to translate,
Than they who give you, without once repenting
Long-labour'd nonsense of their own inventing.¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, the introduction refers to it as a translation, implying that he is trying to remain faithful to Racine's play – unlike his intentions with *The Victim* – by presenting it to English audiences almost unchanged. The story is originally that of the Ottoman sultan Murad IV (Amurat, in the work of Racine) who had his brothers and potential rivals Bajazet and Orcan executed; Racine was inspired by this deed, and centered his play on Bajazet. But like his English contemporaries, Racine writes in a romantic subplot, thus requiring less modification on the part of the English in converting it to a commercial vehicle for Drury Lane. Canfield says:

The Sultanness, far more than most Anglicizings of French tragedy in the eighteenth century, is really a translation and not an adaptation, and it is by no means a bad one. Johnson

¹⁰⁷ Charles Johnson, *The Sultanness*, (London: printed by W. Wilkins for J. Brown, 1717).

had had much practice in writing dramatic blank verse in translation from the French, and this shows itself in a production agreeably free from Gallicism and absurdities of style.¹⁰⁸

And she is correct in her observation that the order of the scenes is exactly the same, and the tragic ending is for once allowed to stand as it was designed by the author. In Canfield's view, Johnson shows more conscience and more ability in this work than in almost any other.¹⁰⁹ The changes Johnson makes are best summarized by what he does not do: he does not add, drop or change the order of any scenes. Not surprisingly, the play did not fare well with audiences, and holds an unremarkable place in the history of eighteenth-century English drama.

A Return to the Greeks:

Variations on Euripides

On two occasions in the early eighteenth-century, adaptors broke with the tradition of adapting the French versions of Greek tragedy and Euripides's works were adapted directly: Richard West's *Hecuba* (1726) and Charles Johnson's *The Tragedy of Medea* (1730), which was influenced by Corneille's *Médée*, but more closely resembles Euripides's play. In 1694, Joshua Barnes' translation *Euripidis quae extant omnia*, a complete edition of Euripides in Latin, was published and is the source for both plays.

¹⁰⁸ Canfield, 214.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 213-14.

Richard West's wanted his translation of *Hecuba* to be "an elegant entertainment for polite assembly."¹¹⁰ He openly showed his contempt for the style of tragedy that was popular and aimed to reject current trends with his version of *Hecuba*. It is hard to imagine why he chose this particular Euripides play if he was not prepared for commercial failure. West adapted *Hecuba* with slight, almost insignificant changes: he added no love interest, allowed for the blinding of Polymestor and the murder of his children without sentimentalizing or altering it, and even maintained the chorus in the character of Hecuba's servant. The play was so different stylistically from the tragedies that were popular, it is no surprise it did not find a life on the commercial stage. A humorous anecdote published in a pamphlet in which the author complains about West's "bare" adaptation is quite revealing: the author suggests West might have adapted the play to include a staging of Polyxena's sacrifice in which we actually see her pull down her robe and expose herself. By this action, "Pyrrhus' soul would then be captured by the 'virgin's charms' and Pyrrhus' soul would then be 'captivated' and the sacrifice delayed."¹¹¹ This is clearly an attempt at humor, but an important point is obvious – that the noble, long-suffering heroine who is simultaneously eroticized and rewarded was the kind of character who reigned on the early-eighteenth century stage. In tragedy, other kinds of tragic heroines more often than not failed to fill the seats at Drury Lane or Lincoln's Inn Fields.

¹¹⁰ Hall and Macintosh, 97.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 98.

Had West taken the critic's suggestions seriously and eroticized the ending of the play, the performance of the Epilogue might have had a chance to be heard. Instead, the epilogue was silenced by 'A Rout of Vandals in the Galleries [who] intimidated the young actress (who was Mrs. Porter), disturb'd the Audience, and prevented all Attention."¹¹² Undoubtedly, West was disappointed that the play failed to be "an elegant entertainment for polite assembly." Hecuba's excessive, long-winded speeches of woe were the subject of criticism, and one humorous suggestion even goes so far as to advocate renaming the play, *The Distres't Grandmother*. While this suggestion was clearly tongue-in-cheek, it reveals to historians the impact of Philips's early success and solidifies the notion that all adapted tragedies that came after *The Distrest Mother* (which was continuously performed in the repertory) was subject to comparison.

Euripides's *Medea* also presented very serious obstacles to success on the eighteenth-century stage—how is a woman who kills her children going to be portrayed as an heroic victim? Quite the opposite of the noble, long suffering Andromache, Euripides' *Medea* commits the most horrifying act against her children. In an effort to tailor the Greek masterpiece for eighteenth-century audiences, Charles Johnson does what he seemingly has to do: he rewrites the dramatic ending, thus changing Euripides' *Medea* entirely. In Johnson's *Medea*, *Medea* sends her children safely to Athens, and stabs herself out of despair for the grief she has caused her husband.¹¹³ These alterations are extreme, and remind us for a moment of the kind of honor that is displayed by

¹¹² Richard West, *Hecuba* (London: printed by W. Wilkins and sold by J. Peele and N. Blandford, 1726), iv.

¹¹³ Hall and Macintosh, 93.

Andromache's desire to stab herself rather than consummate a marriage to her husband's enemy. In the early eighteenth-century, as we have seen in other plays, honor was inextricably bound to loyalty to one's country and husband, and by portraying Medea as repentant and self-sacrificing, Johnson hopes to make her palatable to eighteenth-century audiences. Still, the play was an enormous failure despite a reportedly outstanding performance by Mrs. Porter. It is not easy to pin point exactly what caused the play to fail, since the ending of Johnson's *Medea* is re-written with eighteenth-century conventions of femininity in mind: honor, faithfulness to husband and country, and a willingness to punish oneself. We can surmise by looking ahead to Richard Glover's successful production later in the century (1761) that it likely failed because it was not adapted enough.

Johnson had elected to write out the infanticide, but Glover makes another choice for the resolution: Medea will kill her children, but she will suffer from temporary madness, and will not be entirely accountable for her actions. He also rewrites Jason and Medea's relationship to heighten the pathos of the piece – in Euripides, Jason feels that Medea is being unreasonable in her continued desire for him, and should accept his choice of Creon's daughter as a political move – but in Glover's version, Jason rediscovers his love for Medea. Unfortunately, he has already married Creusa, because of pressure from Creon, and Medea, driven into a frenzy, pursues her revenge. Medea's loosening grasp on reality is quickly revealed as she first mistakes her servant for her father Aetes, and then calls for her children to be brought to her: "Go, lead them from

the temple – They will smile, / And lift my thoughts to momentary joy”¹¹⁴. However, she then notices her bloody hands and realizes what she has done – though the servant exclaims “it was the act of ignorance and madness”¹¹⁵ Medea insists “Nor all the tears, which misery hath shed, / Can from the mother wash her children’s blood!”¹¹⁶ When Jason appears, reporting that he has left Creusa, Medea confesses, telling him “madness / Arm’d my blind rage against them, and the deed / Now weighs me down to everlasting night!”¹¹⁷ Here, Jason’s desire to be reunited with Medea adds to the pathos of the scene, and the repeated references to madness, and Medea’s exclamation that she must be punished, serve to distance her from classical versions of Medea. Though Glover has elected to have her kill her children, it is significant that he employs several strategies to make Medea more sympathetic and human.

Both Glover and Johnson seek to diffuse Medea’s guilt, either by eliminating the murders altogether or through the use of a mad scene. Though Dryden had expressed doubt that the classics could be edifyingly rendered into English, these eighteenth-century Medeas stand as striking responses to their arguments. Richard Glover’s version in particular reinvents Medea and gives her significant commercial success with recycled lines popularized by the first English actresses. But Charles Johnson’s 1730 version did not go far enough in this direction, and despite the radical alteration of the

¹¹⁴ Richard Glover. *Medea* (London: printed by H. Woodfall, 1762), 116-117.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 146.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 151-2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 166.

ending, the play as a whole remained somber in tone, with no love interest or pathetic mad scenes.

Conclusions

In the last line of the prologue of *The Distrest Mother*, written by Steele and delivered by Robert Wilks, we learn something important about what the English authors wanted to accomplish by adapting ancient texts:

Our Author does his feeble Force confess,
Nor dares pretend such Merit to transgress;
Does not such shining Gift of Genius share,
And therefore makes propriety his Care.
Your Treat with study'd Decency he serves;
Not only Rules of Time and Place preserves,
But strives to keep his Characters intire,
With French Correctness and with British Fire¹¹⁸.

The adapted Greek and French tragedies that became commercially viable generally adhere to both of these concerns – the plots are streamlined and speeches shortened,

¹¹⁸ Ambrose Philips, *The Distrest Mother* (London: printed for S. Buckley and J. Tonson, 1713), Prologue.

and the protagonists of the plays are pure, honorable and loyal. Whether it be a crowned Andromache, Iphigenia escaping sacrifice to marry Achilles, or Ximena seeing her father live, it is clear that the British taste for virtue rewarded influenced the shape and texture of French and Greek adaptations during the years that Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter held the stage.

In looking back at the patterns that have emerged, it is clear that tragedies that included heart wrenching love scenes and pathetic death scenes were the fashion. The tragedies that lasted were the ones made into “she-tragedies,” with strong women center stage. Euripides, Racine and Corneille appealed to eighteenth-century dramatists because of their dynamic heroines and pathetic situations, but when the endings were not modified to fit contemporary taste, they were not popular in commercial venues; plays like *Cinna’s Conspiracy*, *The Sultanness*, *Hecuba*, and even Charles Johnson’s *Medea*, which suffered few alterations, were not viable. Eighteenth-century authors who found popular success were the ones that subjected their heroines to extensive plastic surgery – eroticizing and then rewarding characteristics such as nobility, loyalty, and faithfulness to male authority.

Chapter Three:

A Gay Confusion of Pleasing Objects: Adapting the Elizabethan History Play for the Eighteenth-Century Stage, 1719-1723

The practice of adapting Shakespeare is something that theatre historians and literary critics have viewed primarily with horror and contempt. George C.D. Odell, author of *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, described Restoration and eighteenth-century adaptations as “rouged corpses.”¹¹⁹ Hazelton Spencer, author of *Shakespeare Improved*, says, “It is, I think, impossible to exaggerate the harm these versions have done, not only in the long career of some of them on stage, but also because they inaugurated the fashion of adaptation. What caused the original vogue is not easy to summarize.”¹²⁰ Spencer would be disappointed if he knew the act of adapting Shakespeare is something that continues today. A contemporary incarnation of this tradition is most obvious in recent film history: movies such as *Hamlet 2000* (2000), starring Ethan Hawke, or *Looking for Richard* (1996), directed by and starring Al Pacino, are clearly vehicles for celebrity actors attempting to generate commercial success. The practice of adapting Shakespeare is alive and profitable just as it was during the Restoration and early eighteenth century; thus it is surprising that early Shakespeare adaptations have

¹¹⁹ George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (New York: C. Scribner, 1920), 37.

¹²⁰ Hazelton Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 77.

garnered venomous responses from twentieth and twenty-first century historians. Hazelton Spencer outlines many reasons for the “original vogue” for adaptation: the influence of neoclassicism and the rules of drama, the invention of new and innovative scenes and machines, and even the influence of politics on drama and the desire to “flatter the court.”¹²¹ He does not make mention, however, of the influence of the acting companies that performed these plays. It is clear, however, that actors and actresses are a significant influence in adapting the Elizabethan historical play for the eighteenth-century stage, a fact that has been mentioned by theatre historians only in passing. Most of the plays in this chapter are a hybrid of two kinds of plays that have roots in the late seventeenth-century: pathetic tragedy, or “she-tragedy,” a form inspired by actresses, and the political/historical plays of the 1680s, of which there are few different types. Robert D. Hume, in *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century*, states: “a point so far ignored must be strongly emphasized: the vogue and form of the pathetic play was greatly influenced by the availability of suitable actresses.”¹²² And in his discussion of the historical/political play, Hume says “history and politics figure prominently in a large number of these plays, though they are a defining element in rather few.”¹²³ This is also true of the cluster of Shakespeare adaptations during the early eighteenth century: historical and political treatises they are, but the influence of acting companies, especially the influence of the actress and the use of plot structures typical of “she-tragedy,” are the defining elements. In this group of adaptations, we

¹²¹ Ibid, 371.

¹²² Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 220.

¹²³ Ibid, 220.

most clearly see the use of the “generalized warning play,” which Hume defines as conveying propaganda and a “warning,” coupled with the pathetic, she-tragedy.¹²⁴

Hazelton Spencer’s observation that it is not easy to see what caused the vogue for adaptation can be answered by looking at the available actors at Drury Lane and Lincoln’s Inn Fields. This chapter continues the study of form and adaptation into the early eighteenth-century and focuses on plays performed at both major theatres during the theatrical seasons of 1719 through 1723, when we see most strongly a renewed popularity in adapting pre-Commonwealth historical plays.¹²⁵ In this chapter, first I will discuss general trends in adaptation and the rise of Bardolatry, and then, in considering each play individually, the influence of the celebrity actor or actress in determining the commercial success or failure of an adaptation. The following texts are considered: *The Invader of His Country* (1719) by John Dennis, *The Tragedy of Richard II* (1719) by Lewis Theobald, *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester* (1723) by Ambrose Philips, *Henry VI* (1723) by Theophilus Cibber, and *Henry V* (1723) by Aaron Hill.

It is important to recognize that the increase in Shakespeare’s popularity did not begin with Garrick, as many historians have argued, but that the rise of Bardolatry actually began earlier. Arthur H. Scouten, in his article “The Increase in Popularity of Shakespeare’s Plays in the Eighteenth Century: A Caveat for Interpreters of Stage History,” tells us that “In the seasons from the Fall of 1719 to the Spring of 1723 another

¹²⁴ Ibid, 220.

¹²⁵ Arthur H. Scouten, “The Increase in Popularity of Shakespeare’s Plays in the Eighteenth Century: A Caveat for Interpreters of Stage History” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1956): 195.

wave of Shakespearian popularity may be observed. It can be seen both in the numbers of plays acted and in the total performances."¹²⁶ He explains this by pointing to the death of heroic tragedy, claiming that it "left a vacancy in the field of tragedy, and it became occupied by the main tragedies of Shakespeare."¹²⁷ Scouten also goes on to say, after examining the repertory of the years in question, that "Garrick could not have been the chief cause of the Shakespearian revival and that instead of one revival there was a series of revivals."¹²⁸ Shakespeare adaptation was not, as many previous historians would have us believe, an act of "violence" upon Shakespeare but, in fact, the period's own way of engaging with, even celebrating, his works. Michael Dobson, in *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship 1660-1769*, describes it best when he says, "This coexistence of full-scale canonization with wholesale adaptation, of the urge to enshrine Shakespeare's texts as national treasures with the desire to alter their content, has long been regarded as a quaint paradox, the rewritten versions of the plays generally being dismissed as at best a bizarre cul-de-sac of literary history, inessential to the 'real' story of Shakespeare's reception."¹²⁹ Although this chapter will undoubtedly make a necessary contribution to the reception history of Shakespeare's history plays, it will also hopefully expand the discussion of the development of drama to include the contribution of performers to dramatic structure.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 194.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 195.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 195.

¹²⁹ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship 1660-1769* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

It must be acknowledged before looking at the relationship between actor and text that the perception of Shakespeare in the early eighteenth century was of an author who lacked refinement. He is continually written about as if he were in possession of an untamed genius. Most certainly, then, his plays are almost universally adapted in ways that streamline and simplify the plot, reduce the number of characters, and aim at sculpting the work of what almost all playwrights of this period considered a great poet. Nicholas Rowe, for example, views adapting Shakespeare as not at all inconsistent with valorizing him—but rather uses the familiar argument that he is merely shaping, even civilizing, what is beautiful in nature. He describes Shakespeare’s writing:

With rough, majestic force he moved the heart,
And strength and nature made amends for art.¹³⁰

Rowe’s idea of Shakespeare was that he was “majestic” and that he “moved the heart,” but that he did not possess the necessary artistry. Rowe says of the Elizabethans in general, “Their words no shuffling, double-meaning knew,/ Their speech was homely, but their hearts were true.” The notion that Shakespeare had a fund of natural genius that merely lacked the sophistication of the eighteenth-century writer was commonplace among the poets and writers of the Restoration and eighteenth century. It is in this way that eighteenth-century authors at the same time revered Shakespeare but justified adaptation. Rowe’s reading of Shakespeare-as-nature is used to justify

¹³⁰ Nicholas Rowe, “On the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare,” *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. Nichol Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 44.

adaptation; the perceived lack of verbal sophistication is valorized, even presented as a kind of guarantee of an appeal to the emotions. Rowe, in a way, compliments the Elizabethan period by implying there is something more free or honest in a drama unencumbered by neoclassical rules: "In such an age, immortal Shakespeare wrote, / By no quaint rules nor hampering critics taught/ Our humble author does his steps peruse;/ He owns he had the mighty bard in view, / And in these scenes has made it more his care / To rouse the passions than to charm the ear."¹³¹ John Dennis repeats this theme when he writes in his preface to *The Invader of His Country*, "Shakespeare's beauties represent Nature, not Art."¹³² In his letter dated Feb. 1, 1710, he describes Shakespeare as "One of the greatest Genius's that the world e'er saw for the Tragick Stage," but he asks the question, "If Shakespeare had these great Qualities by Nature, what would he not have been, if he had join'd to so happy a Genius Learning and the Poetical Art? For want of the latter, our Author has sometimes made gross Mistakes in the Characters which he has drawn from History, against the Equality of Conveniency of Manners of his Dramatical Persons."¹³³ He says that "For want of Art, he has made his Incidents less moving, less surprising, and less wonderful. He has been so far from seeking those fine Occasions to move with which an Action furnish'd according to Art would have furnish'd him, that he seems rather to have industriously avoided them. He makes *Coriolanus*, upon his Sentence of Banishment, take his leave of his Wife and his Mother out of sight of the audience, and so has purposely as it were avoided the great

¹³¹ Ibid, 44.

¹³² Ibid, 22.

¹³³ Ibid, 23.

occasion to move.”¹³⁴ Dennis admits that the scenes with the women could be “moving” and indicates that “We find that a Romance entertains the generality of Mankind with more Satisfaction than History.”¹³⁵ Dennis clearly states a goal: to entertain the “generality of Mankind” by using the pathetic trials of women to appeal to a mass audience.

In his Preface to *The Works of William Shakespeare* in 1733, Lewis Theobald describes Shakespeare’s writing as “a gay Confusion of pleasing Objects, too various to be enjoyed but in a general Admiration; and they must be separated, and ey’d distinctly, in order to give the proper Entertainment.”¹³⁶ It should come as no surprise at all that Theobald viewed Shakespeare’s plays in this way – he saw beauty in Shakespeare’s works, but also believed that they needed to be given order and structure to bloom fully. In the introduction to his *Tragedy of Richard II*, he says “The many scatter’d Beauties which I have long admir’d induce me to think they would have stronger Charms if they were interwoven in a regular Fable. For this Purpose, I have made some Innovations upon History and Shakespeare.”¹³⁷ In the second half of this chapter, I will discuss Theobald’s version of the play, but suffice to say that his adaptation is characterized by a more straightforward plot with fewer ambiguities.

It is true that Shakespeare’s works are significantly altered to simplify and shorten the plots and to regularize them along neoclassical lines; it is also true that the

¹³⁴ Ibid, 25.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 25.

¹³⁶ Lewis Theobald, *The Works of William Shakespeare* (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth, C. Hitch, J. Tonson, F. Clay, W. Feales, and R. Wellington, 1733), preface.

¹³⁷ Brian Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1989), 220.

political climate after the Jacobite Uprising in 1715 made Shakespeare's history plays an appealing choice for playwrights, who expected that plays about traitors, usurpers, and political upheaval would appeal to the public. The influence of politics on drama, and specifically the fear of another Jacobite rebellion, is especially obvious in this series of adapted history plays.¹³⁸ Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields both produced plays that strongly admonished audiences against civil war and reminded them of the dire consequences of weak kings and brutal rebels. But even though eighteenth-century authors were strongly influenced by contemporary politics and the desire to streamline and shape Elizabethan plays, the adaptations ultimately expanded roles for women and prolonged and highlighted the dramatic love stories. Contemporary politics and the desire to "regularize" Shakespeare along neo-classical lines may have influenced adaptation to a degree, but it was the celebrity performer that had the most influence on how the plays were adapted and whether or not they met with success on the commercial stage. The genre of "she-tragedy" has been overlooked in the two most important books on this subject, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* and *Shakespeare Improved*, and is mentioned only briefly in contemporary books about the subject such as Michael Dobson's *The Making of a National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* or Jean Marsden's *The Reimagined Text*. After the Restoration in 1660, the actress was enormously influential in terms of drawing crowds, and the notion of writing plays to create or expand roles for women increased dramatically. The cluster of plays that appeared after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 is indebted to Restoration

¹³⁸ John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 109.

playwright Thomas Otway, the inventor of she-tragedy, as well as to Nahum Tate, author of many adapted texts including *King Lear*, *The Sicilian Usurper*, *The Ingratitude of the Commonwealth*, and *The Island Princess*, among others. These tragedies set the pattern for subsequent approaches to Shakespearean historical tragedies even into the late eighteenth century. Despite widely differing political agendas, adaptations of historical tragedy after 1715 actually repeat the same adaptive strategies of Otway and Tate, which is to highlight the virtuous suffering of the heroine and the honorable nobility of the hero. Theobald's *The Tragedy of King Richard II* and John Dennis's *The Invader of his Country*, each performed in 1719, rewrite Tate's *Richard II* and *Coriolanus* respectively. That said, a close examination of the plays reveals that Theobald's *Richard II* is arguably even more pathos-oriented than Tate's, because Theobald adds a love-plot between Aumerele and Lady Piercy who, like other Restoration and early eighteenth-century heroines, kills herself during the last scene after her lover's execution. Theobald also stages Richard's death immediately following a scene of forced parting from Queen Isabella, with whom he is tenderly in love. She is portrayed as a faithful queen distraught by what has been done to her poor husband. She remains on stage to witness her husband's murder and is then given the epilogue. Similar techniques are employed by other adaptations in this group.

The two versions of the *Henry VI* plays are reworked as sermons about the misery of civil war with a strong dose of she-tragedy. In Ambrose Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* (1723), Lady Eleanor is a blameless paragon who returns from the Isle

of Man in time to pitifully discover her honorable husband's murdered corpse. In *An Historical Tragedy of the Civil Wars in the Reign of King Henry VI* (also produced in 1723), Theophilus Cibber includes a tender new scene between Prince Edward and his wife Lady Anne Neville as well as an extended dialogue between Lady Anne and her distressed sister, Lady Elizabeth, before ending the play with a scene of prolonged suffering by a defeated Queen Margaret. But the only adaptation of this grouping that lasted, and the one that most closely resembles the work of Otway and Tate, was Aaron Hill's *King Henry the Fifth: or, the Conquest of France by the English*. Also produced in 1723, it remained on stage until 1746.

The art of revising a Shakespeare play to highlight a pitiful heroine has an important history: several famous Restoration adaptations were re-shaped or rewritten with actresses in mind. Perhaps the most notorious example is Naham Tate's adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* from 1681. The tragedy was rewritten to highlight the character Cordelia, played by the great Elizabeth Barry. Tate reportedly wanted to "heighten the distress of the story."¹³⁹ Cordelia and Edgar are in love, but her father forbids the match, and thus the action stems from this conflict. The change of the ending from a tragic one in the Shakespeare original to a happy ending in which the King and Cordelia are rescued by Edgar has inspired condemnation from scholars. Shakespeare's heroine has only a few scenes in the play, but Tate's Cordelia follows her poor father, giving Barry many scenes in which she is portrayed as both noble and pathetic.

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actress: Women and Drama 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 119.

If Tate's *King Lear* is the most infamous Shakespeare adaptation of the Restoration, Cibber's *Richard III* is the most memorable from the turn of the century. Cibber's depiction of Queen Elizabeth, played by Mrs. Porter, weeping over the fate of the little princes – "O my poor Children – O my tender babes;/ My unblown flowers, pluck'd by untimely hands"¹⁴⁰-- provides a clear example of how Shakespeare's plays were increasingly being adapted to include scenes in which women are depicted as noble, pathetic heroines. Nahum Tate's 1680 version of *The Tragedy of King Richard II* was suppressed completely. He subsequently tried to rewrite the play, disguising the politics by setting it in Italy, calling it *The Sicilian Usurper*, and softening his critique of the Stuart court by making Richard more noble. This way, he thought, he could get the play past the censors. It did not work, and the play was "silenc'd on the third day," according to Tate's preface. Lewis Theobald, however, was more successful in getting his 1719 version of *Richard II* heard. The play met with some temporary success at Lincoln's Inn Fields with a six night run. Just four years after the Jacobite 'Fifteen, this attempt at staging a rewrite of Shakespeare's history plays is neither surprising nor unique. Drury Lane also produced a political/historical, Shakespearian tragedy entitled *The Invader of His Country*, a rewrite of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, by John Dennis. Also inspired by a Restoration version of the play by Tate called *The Ingratitude of the Commonwealth, or The Fall of Caius Martius Coriolanus*, this play has consistently presented certain problems for producers. This was the last round of alterations of Shakespearian texts to occur before the Age of Garrick; nine of the twelve Shakespeare

¹⁴⁰ Colley Cibber, *The Tragedy of Richard III* (Printed for J. and R. Tonson, S. Draper and S. Watts, 1745), 47.

plays added to the active repertory during these years were significantly adapted, and all but one of these plays was produced by Drury Lane, the theatre company with the stronger company of actors.¹⁴¹

The Invader of His Country

In 1719, Drury Lane decided to go ahead and produce John Dennis's previously rejected version of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Entitled *The Invader of His Country, or The Fatal Resentment*, Dennis's play can be read as a vitriolic attack on the Jacobite 'Fifteen, a group of rebels who, in 1715, staged an uprising in favor of restoring the Stuart line to the English throne.¹⁴² The play maintains its emphasis on the heroic actions of a male protagonist, who was played by Barton Booth. The role was a good match for Booth's serious and stoic, noble-warrior style, and the play also included a strong role for an actress. Volumnia, Coriolanus' patriotic mother, was created by Mrs. Porter. But the play did not contain a role for Mrs. Oldfield, Wilks, or Cibber and remains somewhat didactic in tone. A good example of a "general warning play," it also possesses some small elements of she-tragedy, but it only played for three performances and was not revived. The reasons for this short run are not entirely clear; Dennis, in his dedication to the Lord Chamberlain, complains of a conspiracy on the part of theatre managers. He writes, "My Lord, Coriolanus throws himself at Your Grace's feet, in order to obtain justice of you, after having received as injurious treatment from the

¹⁴¹ Scouten, 195.

¹⁴² For more information on the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, see John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

petulant deportment of two or three insolent players, as ever he formerly did at Rome from the brutal rage of the rabble. He has been banish'd from our theatre by the one, thro' a mistaken greediness of gain, as the other formerly expell'd him from Rome thro' a groundless jealousy of power."¹⁴³ He does not name the players but it might be that he is complaining about Cibber and Wilks, the two actor managers who do not appear in the play. But he also blames the public taste, declaring that "As long as the publick taste is so vitiated as it is at present, bad plays are like to be more crowded than good ones."¹⁴⁴ That said, the play was not entirely unpopular and may have suffered because of unfortunate timing. Dennis had hoped the play would be produced during the previous year, when there was a plan for a supposed double invasion of England:

They were engaged to acting the last winter by their words solemnly given, and the acting of it then had been most seasonable, when the Nation was in the uneasy expectation of a double invasion from Sweden on the north, and from Spain on the west of England. Instead of keeping their word with me; they postpon'd the play, that was writ in the cause of their country, in the cause of their sovereign, whose servants as well as subjects they call themselves."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ John Dennis, *Coriolanus, Invader of His Country: or, the Fatal Resentment* (London: printed for J. Peele, 1721), Dedication.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, Dedication.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Dedication.

It was finally produced, however, in 1719, and he says the box office receipts for the first night were £100, the second night, between £50-60, and the third night brought in £60-70, which indicates that it was not unsuccessful, though, according to Dennis, the managers wanted a play to earn a minimum of £100 a night to be considered financially worthwhile.¹⁴⁶ Dennis makes the argument that the King's arrival in town disrupted audience attendance, saying "I could not prevail with them to put it off for a week longer, notwithstanding it was the most apparently their interest more than mine; because there was a daily expectation of the King's arrival."¹⁴⁷ For reasons that are not entirely clear, managers at Drury Lane decided against scheduling the play again; it is likely that they believed it would not be a financial success. Even Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* was adapted twice after 1660, both times it was presented almost the way Shakespeare wrote it and neither was a commercial success. The title character, though sympathetic in some ways, is less than noble in others, and this probably reduced its commercial appeal; successful tragedies of this period tend to emphasize the heroic. A great fighter for Rome, Coriolanus is heroic, but also "resentful" and embittered when things do not go his way. The main action of the play occurs when he takes his grievances to the enemy and begins to stage a rebellion. Coriolanus's "nobility" is qualified by his questionable betrayal of his home country. Also, there is little in the way of love interest or pathetic suffering, and the few women remain on the periphery. Volumnia, not unlike other important eighteenth-century mothers, is driven by a noble

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, Dedication.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, Dedication.

and patriotic sentiment, but her only real function in the play is to plead with Coriolanus not to wage war on the Romans. Together with his distraught wife (who hardly says a word, and is presented as an almost silent companion to her mother-in-law), Volumnia is so fervent in her love for her country that she is willing to sacrifice her son in the name of Rome: it is at her urging that he risks his life by abandoning his revenge plot against Rome, but, predictably, the play still ends in tragedy. Despite the obvious political message, the play did not do well on either the seventeenth or eighteenth-century stages, and Odell describes it as “one of the dullest in the whole range of the reconstructed Shakespearian drama.”¹⁴⁸ In this instance, Odell’s assessment is quite right.

Richard II

Lewis Theobald’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Richard II* was produced at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1719, also relatively soon after the uprising of the Jacobite ‘Fifteen. It was the only one of this group of adaptations produced at LIF and it did not find a commercial life, which may explain why theatre manager John Rich refrained from producing adapted Shakespearian plays for some time after this.

Theobald makes considerable changes to the play. In the preface, he indicates his intentions, which he describes as “maintaining the Unity of Action, and supporting the Dignity of the Characters.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Odell, 241.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, preface.

For this purpose, I have made some innovations upon history and Shakespeare; as, in bringing Richard and Bolingbroke to meet first at the Tower, keeping York steady to the interest of the King, heightening Aumerle's character in making him die for the cause, and in dispatching Richard at the Tower, who, indeed, was murther'd at Pontefract Castel.¹⁵⁰

Theobald's version is blatantly sympathetic to the deposed Richard, as the prologue makes clear:

Our Author labours in an humbler strain,
But hopes to sooth you with a pleasing Pain;
To move your hearts, and force your Eyes to flow
With tears, drawn from an English Monarch's Woe.
Justly his pen's mistaken Task he'll own,
If you can see a Prince, without a Groan,
Forc'd by his Subjects to renounce his Throne.¹⁵¹

These are the most obvious changes to the play. King Richard, played by Ryan, who was known for such roles as Portius in *Cato*, Hamlet, Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Oroonoko, and Edgar in *King Lear*, is drawn as a sympathetic, even tragic, passivist King who avoids political conflict in an effort to save the lives of his subjects and avoid civil strife. Mention is made of past faults, but there is no concrete reason given for his

¹⁵⁰ Lewis Theobald, *The Tragedy of King Richard II* (London: G. Strahan, 1720), preface.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, prologue.

deposition, and he is rendered as a pathetic victim to overly ambitious rivals – namely Bolingbroke and his followers – who are war-like and aggressive. Richard is also portrayed as deeply devoted to his wife, Queen Isabella, and thus any hint at homosexuality in the Elizabethan version is non-existent in this play. Theobald also restructures the women’s roles. He not only adds an entirely new character (Northumberland is given an intelligent and noble daughter, Lady Piercy, reminiscent of Cato’s Marcia, who is in love with the ill-fated loyalist, the Duke of Aumerle), but he heightens the distress of Richard’s queen. For example, the King’s murder follows a pathetic scene of forced parting from Queen Isabella, who remains on stage to witness the act.

Structurally, this version omits the first two acts of Shakespeare’s tragedy, and sets nearly all the scenes either near or in the Tower of London. The dramatic scenes of Richard in Wales and of Bolingbroke’s siege are moved to the tower, and love scenes between Aumerle and Lady Piercy are interposed throughout. For example, act four is entirely devoted to pathetic love scenes and a plot in which Lady Piercy drops an incriminating paper, which leads to the discovery that the Duke of Aumerle plans to assassinate Bolingbroke, who has been newly made king. Despite Lady Piercy’s pathetic pleading with her father to intercede on her lover’s behalf, Aumerle is put to death. Lady Piercy, upon discovering this news, also kills herself. Bolingbroke is the only one left and delivers a short speech repenting his role in deposing a valid King:

Lords, I protest, my Soul is full of Woe;

And to the Realm my Sorry shall be known,
That I on such Events should fix my Throne:
Tho' Vengeance may a while withhold her Hand,
A King's Blood, unatton'd, must curse the Land.¹⁵²

The play is restructured to be a clear admonition against political upheaval as well as an obvious vehicle for the women. The Queen, played by Mrs. Bullock, was both patriotic and pathetic in her suffering; Lady Piercy, played by Mrs. Spiller, was a noble young woman who ultimately commits suicide, recycling the line of the self reforming, self sacrificing young woman. This combination is the familiar sort of pairing in the Drury Lane tragedies of this period, and it may have been the case that Mr. Theobald had hoped to have the play performed there, though there is no evidence about a preference for either theatre. Mrs. Bullock was the LIF counterpart to Mrs. Oldfield, and also had in her repertory roles in this line, such as Marcia in *Cato*, Lady Froth in *The Double Dealer*, Melinda in *The Recruiting Officer*, Mrs. Sullen in *The Stratagem*, Kate in *Henry IV*, and Anne Bullen in *Henry VIII*, among others. Like Mrs. Oldfield or Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Bullock was capable of playing either a sophisticated woman of fashion in comedy, or the pathetic, tragic heroine, though at this point in her career, she was much less experienced and significantly younger than her rivals at the other theatre. It is impossible to know for sure, but it is likely that the play failed because it needed a supremely gifted company of actors to pull it off. In terms of acting talent, at this point

¹⁵² Theobald, 60.

in the century, LIF was by far the weaker company and, other than a couple of notable farces, they did not attempt to stage another adapted Shakespeare play.

Henry VI: Theo Cibber and Ambrose Philips

In 1723, two versions of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy are reworked as general warning plays about civil war but with a much stronger dose of she-tragedy than Dennis's play provided. Both Ambrose Philips and Theophilus Cibber created new versions of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays for Drury Lane. Possibly inspired by John Crowne, who did two adaptations of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* entitled *The Misery of Civil War* (1680) and *Henry the Sixth, the First Part, With the Murder of Humphrey Duke of Gloster* (1681), Ambrose Philips's play, *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester*, and Theophilus Cibber's *An Historical Tragedy of the Civil Wars in the Reign of King Henry VI* (which Cibber writes as a sequel to Philips's play), also display similar themes. But Ambrose Philips's play, which was performed first in the season, has much in common with *The Distrest Mother* and was staged with many of the same celebrities in its cast including Barton Booth, Mrs. Oldfield, and Colley Cibber playing lead roles. It becomes a durable staple in the repertory of Drury Lane in the 1720s.

Philips's *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester* was acted at Drury Lane from 15th to the 25th of February 1723. Philips had an established, successful relationship with the actors at Drury Lane and had experienced first hand the success that came from writing good parts that fit popular lines of business. Loosely based on Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, part II, Philip's story significantly alters Shakespeare's play, instead imitating his own *Distrest*

Mother more than Shakespeare's Elizabethan version of the Henry VI story. Odell says that "in no way can it be said to be derived from Shakespeare's," noting that there are only 30 lines from Shakespeare in the whole play.¹⁵³

Shakespeare's version begins with the marriage of King Henry VI of England to the young Margaret of Anjou. Margaret is the protégée (and lover) of William de la Pole, Fourth Earl of Suffolk, who aims to influence the King through her. The major obstacle to Suffolk and Margaret's plan to control the young King is the Lord Protector, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who is both popular with the common people and trusted by King Henry himself. Gloucester's situation is complicated, however, by his own ambitious wife, Eleanor, who is most remembered for the dramatic scene in which she goes barefoot in a sheet through the streets as an accused woman. In *Humphrey Duke of Gloucester*, however, the story is predictably streamlined and the focus becomes the power struggle between the two women in a familiar sort of pairing – Margaret, the French Queen, played by Mrs. Oldfield, is portrayed as the she-devil character who fabricates the sorcery claims against Eleanor, played by Mrs. Porter, who is drawn as a virtuous-angel type transformed into a blameless paragon returning from the Isle of Man in time to discover the pitiful corpse of her murdered husband. The play recycles lines well established by this time, and the dynamic between Margaret and Eleanor is reminiscent of Hermione and Andromache, except that this time Mrs. Oldfield played the role of the devious but self-reforming Margaret and Mrs. Porter played the grieving, vulnerable widow, Eleanor. Mrs. Oldfield probably took the role of Margaret because it

¹⁵³ Odell, 249.

is the more complicated character, and the two women occasionally changed lines (as they did in *The Victim* by Able Boyer, for example). Margaret is also appealing because she is a multifaceted character, a choice part to play, because she changes during the course of the story from the smart and plotting mistress of Suffolk, to a conscience stricken woman who is betrayed by her lover. Her story ends in suicide, a common way of resolving plots that involve the reformed-villainess character.

Another bold change made by Philips is the omission of King Henry VI altogether, giving total focus to the actions of Margaret, Suffolk, and Cardinal Beaufort, who is a variation on Cibber's popular villain, Richard III. Philips' play certainly dramatizes a disorderly court complete with corruption, but the modifications in this play highlight the love, rather than the political, story. It is more she-tragedy than general warning play; Philips's emphasis on female suffering, and his choice to keep King Henry off the stage entirely, takes the tale of Henry VI in a new direction that has little in common with the Elizabethan history play. Lady Eleanor, much like Andromache, submits to her punishment for the good of England and her husband. She is the perfect heroine in distress, martyred for the sake of her country and her honorable Duke. Both patriotic citizen and loving wife, Eleanor is an example of idealized femininity instead of a source of disorder or a threat to England's unity, as is often the case in the Elizabethan history play. In *Engendering a Nation*, Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin note that in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, women are seen as "a principal cause of England's problems...fundamental to the play's brutal representation of political

disorder.”¹⁵⁴ Eleanor is “proud, ambitious, and not altogether guiltless of designs upon the throne.”¹⁵⁵ She dreams of being crowned at Westminster and even the warnings of her husband to not dissuade her. Howard and Rackin state that, “In Part II, where the focus is on the internal dissension that threatens England’s unity, Margaret and Eleanor are convenient figures of domestic disorder – unruly women whose transgressive ambitions are inextricably implicated in the political disorder that overtakes the realm.”¹⁵⁶ Even in the case of Margaret, who is one of the triumvirs responsible for bringing down the Duke and Lady Eleanor, she is not guilty of the murder of Gloucester (Cibber’s Cardinal, ghosting his popular Richard III, is the true villain), and in the end, as mentioned earlier, when betrayed by her lover, Margaret reforms and ultimately kills herself in shame. This character is a clear reprisal of Hermione, whose story follows a similar if not identical pattern. Margaret changes from a vixen, scheming traitor to a reformed, shamed woman who is not responsible for the main elements of disorder at court. Her ending is sympathetic, in fact, because, like Hermione, she is so devastated by a lover’s betrayal that she can no longer go on; what is different is that in this case, the devastation of betrayal causes her reformation and a decision to take her own life. Ambrose Philips, together with Booth, Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter, re-creates much of the magic that began with *The Distrest Mother* in 1712.

¹⁵⁴ Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 65.

¹⁵⁵ Adolphus J. Bryan, “Ambrose Philips’s *Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Adaptation*,” In *Studies of W.A. Reade* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc. 1940), 225.

¹⁵⁶ Howard and Rackin, 77.

Cibber's adaptation of the *Henry VI* trilogy is staged as a sequel to Philip's play. There is a certain amount of mystery that surrounds the failure of this production. In 1723, T. Cibber had just been hired to manage the summer company at Drury Lane. On July 5th of that year, the summer company mounted his play, probably hoping to build on the success of Philip's adaptation just months before. But the play ran for only one performance despite the fact that it is a well-made adaptation that contains all of the most popular elements: it streamlines the plot, reshapes the political to highlight a love story, and features a sympathetic Queen driven to extreme distress by the murder of her son, a scene clearly ghosting the plight of Queen Elizabeth (originated by Mrs. Porter) from his father's version of *Richard III*. It also still manages to contain interesting roles for young men: Prince Edward, played by T. Cibber himself, is both sympathetic and compelling, especially in his relationship to his mother, and the role of his father, King Henry, played by Mr. Roberts, is both poetic and tragic. Recycling lines from Shakespeare's *Richard II*, King Henry begins the play with a soliloquy in which he laments his own lack of strength and ambition:

Never had a King less joy in rule than I,
No more misfortune; heaven was pleas'd
To set my cradle on the top of humane glory,
Where I lay helpless, to all storms expos'd.
My childish hand, not able to support
My father's sword, dropt the victorious Point,
And let fall all the laurels that adorn'd it.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Theophilus Cibber. *The Historical Tragedy of King Henry VI* (London: Printed for W. Chetwood, 1724), 1.

But though Henry VI is a weak King afraid of civil war, his queen is loyal, strong and determined. Queen Margaret is clearly written in Mrs. Oldfield's line, though Cibber certainly knew the summer company would act the play. He probably hoped that the young Mrs. Campbell, a fairly new actresses to Drury Lane working in the summer company, was a budding tragedienne in the tradition of Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Oldfield. Unfortunately, she had only played a few roles at this point and had no documented experience as a leading lady prior to this performance. In 1722, she played Dol Mavis in *The Silent Woman* and Teresia in *The Squire of Alsatia*, as well as an extremely small part in Aaron Hill's *Henry V*. It seems her career ended shortly after appearing as Queen Margaret, for she did not appear on the stage after 1724.

It is possible that Mrs. Campbell's inexperience was the reason the play was not repeated. T. Cibber's version put much emphasis on the trials of Queen Margaret, who is full of competence and ambition but she suffers greatly at the hands of brutal usurpers. She raises up an army of twenty-thousand in an effort to save the throne even after her husband has given up. For a time, the rebels are successfully challenged by her efforts, but she is ultimately defeated and the last scene of the play is quite pathetic. T. Cibber, as the son of Colley Cibber and a new manager of the Drury Lane summer company, clearly had an eye for what should work, but with a young and inexperienced cast, he may have overestimated the talent available to him.

Henry V by Aaron Hill

Aaron Hill says his play, *King Henry the Fifth: or, The Conquest of France*, is a new fabric built on Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Yet, of this series of political adaptations, this is the play that is the most successful long term. The only one of this generation's adaptations of Shakespearian history plays to outlive the immediate political context and have a significant life in the repertory of Drury Lane, *Henry V* premiered in 1723 and remained in the repertory until as late as 1746. It is like Ambrose Philips's play in that it can hardly be said to come from Shakespeare's original, completely restructuring the plot by substituting both comic cross dressing and she-tragedy for the war story. This play had many of the best actors at Drury Lane in the cast: Barton Booth played the title role, Robert Wilks, the Dauphin, and Mrs. Oldfield, the French princess.

Undoubtedly disappointing for devotees of the political propaganda play, the emphasis of this adaptation is on a brand new character named Harriett, played by a young new comer to the theatre, Mrs. Thurmond. She is a spurned lover from King Henry's past, bent on getting revenge for the broken affair. This version of the play has Henry followed to France not by his ex-tavern companions but by this disappointed mistress who is also Scroop's niece; she disguises herself as a page and is employed by her royal rival, the Princess Catherine. Princess Catherine herself is horrified at the prospect of being married off to someone she does not love and protests her betrothal to the King of England. The battle of Agincourt, as well as other scenes having to do with the male protagonist's struggles in war, is merely a passing reference, and it is the

incensed women who occupy much of the play's major action. King Henry is of dramatic interest primarily for his indiscretions as a lover, and his conquest of France is merely an extension of his conquest of Catherine, rather than vice versa. The Prologue, delivered by Mr. Wilks, speaks openly about the author's intention of revising the play for actresses:

From Wit's old ruins, shadow'd o'er with bays,
We draw some rich remains of Shakespeare's praise.
Shakespeare! – The sound bids charm'd attention wake;
And our aw'd scenes, with conscious rev'rence, shake!
...Led by such light as wou'd not let him stray,
He pick'd out stars from Shakespeare's milky way.
Hid in the cloud of battle, Shakespeare's care,
Blind with the dull of war, o'erlook'd the fair:
Fond of their fame, we show their influence here,
And place 'em twinkling through war's smoky sphere.
Without their aid, we lose Love's quick'ning charms;
And sullen Virtue mopes, in steril arms.
Now, rightly mix'd, th' enliven'd passions move:
Love softens war – and war invig'rates love.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Aaron Hill, *King Henry V: or, The Conquest of France by the English* (London: Printed for W. Chetwood & J. Watts, 1723), prologue.

The women are preoccupied with negotiating issues of sex, love, and marriage in a patriarchal society reminiscent of Shakespeare's comic, cross-dressing Portia, Olivia or Rosalind. Princess Catherine laments the lack of power women have in love – angry she does not get to choose her husband – she longs for the lover who courted her a year before, Owen Tutor. Not surprisingly, the play's two heroines, Princess Catherine and Harriet, remind us of many of the plays Barry and Bracegirdle played together in the 1680s as well as the plays that included the Oldfield / Porter duo earlier in the century. Mrs. Thurmond, rather than Mrs. Porter, is presumably cast as Harriet because of her experience in comedy and with breeches roles. Known for her performances as Portia in *The Jew of Venice*, Belinda in *The Provok'd Wife*, Laetitia in *The Old Bachelor*, Arabella in *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, Angelica in *Love for Love*, Clarinda in *The Double Gallant*, Lady Leonora in *Sir Courtly Nice*, Narcissa in *Love's Last Shift*, and Sylvia in *The Recruiting Officer*, she was perfectly cast as an attractive, somewhat naïve but assertive heroine. She was also popular as an entr'acte singer; the part of Harriet clearly calls for a comic actress who is both young and beautiful as well as clever and witty.

This play, like Ambrose Philips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester*, also differs from Elizabethan versions of this story and actually challenges the assumption that women are the source of discord and disorder. In fact, the women in this re-write of *Henry V* are not only given more lines and more prominent roles than in the Elizabethan version, the author actually places them at the center rather than the periphery of the story. Princess Catherine is not a victim or an object of acquisition for Henry V, but rather a willing and

active partner in their union, once she realizes he is, in fact, her beloved Owen Tutor. In Act 2, scene ii, she says “No, no, my Charlot! I disdain the motive:/ Love is a flame too bright, too clear, to burn/ As interest bids it: What import to me, / That coward France can shake at sudden danger!/ What are my father’s fear’s to my affections?/ Shall I, because this hot brain’d King of England/ Sweeps o’er our land with war and devastation,/ Shall I, for that, grow fond of the destroyer?”¹⁵⁹ Compare this to Shakespeare’s Katherine who is woo’d in the final act:

KATHARINE

Dat is as it sall please de roi mon pere.

KING HENRY V

Nay, it will please him well, Kate it shall please him, Kate.

KATHARINE

Den it sall also content me.

KING HENRY V

Upon that I kiss your hand, and I call you my queen.

In Shakespeare’s play it is ultimately the acceptance of the patriarchal rule of law that convinces her to agree to marry her royal suitor: if it pleases her father, it pleases her.

¹⁵⁹ Aaron Hill, *King Henry V: or, The Conquest of France by the English* (London: Printed for W. Chetwood and J. Watts, 1723), 29 .

This is a contrast to the role as it is later played by Mrs. Oldfield who, at the discussion of her marriage to the French King, says:

CATHERINE

Am I, because they call my father sovereign,
To be the slave, the property of France?
Can nothing buy their peace but my undoing?
How nobler were it to quell rage with fury!
In arms to check the bold invader's pride,
Meet storm with storm, and buckle in a whirlwind!
Then, if the dire event swept me away,
My ruin, though 'twere dreadful, would be glorious:
But, to hold out a proffer of my person,
Poorly, and at a distance! Hang me out,
Like a shook flag of truce! — Oh!, 'tis a meanness,
That shames ambition, and makes pride look pale!
Where is the boasted strength of manhood now?
Sooner than stoop to this, were mine the scepter,
I would turn Amazon.¹⁶⁰

In this rather long monologue, she challenges the notion that she is to obey her father and questions her role, calling herself a slave and property. She then goes on to suggest it would be better to “meet storm with storm,” and she advocates rising up against the English King, suggesting that she would rather turn Amazon and fight “manhood.”

¹⁶⁰ Hill, 21.

Again, Rackin and Howard point out that, “Domesticated and dependent, the female characters in [Shakespeare’s] *Henry V* are both economically and sexually vulnerable...here, the territory to be conquered is imagined as the body of a woman, and the project of imperial expansion is conceived as a distinctively male activity.”¹⁶¹ By contrast, however, Hill’s play shows both women making a choice to support Henry V; Harriet, though she begins the play by wearing male attire and going on a kind of revenge mission, ultimately forgives her lover and sets out to aid his enterprise. She says to him, “Take then, these letters, and be happy still./They will bring safety to thee; canst thou pardon me?”¹⁶² She nobly gives the King letters alerting him to a treasonous plot orchestrated by Lord Scroop, Cambridge, and Sir Thomas Grey. King Henry now is able, because of her sacrifice, finally to conquer France. Much like Philips’s Margaret, she reforms by taking her own life and is ultimately heroic in the sense that her actions save the King and kingdom while also freeing him to marry the Princess of France. Hill’s invention of Harriet is an obvious recycling of two popular lines of business: the cross-dressing, assertive comic heroine (originally popularized by Shakespeare’s boys) and the suicidal, self-reforming, self-sacrificing heroine of early eighteenth-century tragedy, whose death often unlocks the central conflict of the play. King Henry says, “These letters lay all open: their delivery/ Was the last token of poor Harriet’s love:/How false and slippery are the wills of men!/ Admit the counsel; we’ll take instant care/ To crush this treason.”¹⁶³ Harriet, in some ways, is the orchestrator of her

¹⁶¹ Rackin and Howard, 210.

¹⁶² Hill, 41.

¹⁶³ Hill, 42.

own destiny and of the destiny of the other characters as well; that said, she does not meet with happiness in the end. There is no equivalent to her in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, or any other Elizabethan history play.

In terms of Hill's Princess Catherine, instead of immediately accepting Henry V's hand in marriage like a dutiful daughter, she, at first, boldly rejects him, saying,

Your pardon, Royal Sir! If I offend,
Or seem to wrong the promise of my duty!
I came in forc'd obedience to your will,
T'attend this interview – But if your Majesty
Permits me to declare my secret thoughts
Of England's King, our public enemy;
Then let that duty which I owe my country,
Inspire me to confess, what fix'd aversion,
What rooted hatred, Nature bids me bear
To him, of all mankind the most abhorr'd;
Who brings destruction on to mark his way,
And woos the daughter with the father's ruin.¹⁶⁴

Of course, in what seems a humorous reversal, Princess Catherine changes her mind when she hears the King speak, realizing that he was the Owen Tutor who courted her a year ago. The play ends the way we would expect, with the marriage of Catherine and the King of England.

¹⁶⁴ Hill, 31.

Conclusions

During times of political upheaval, Shakespeare's history plays appealed, on the surface, to eighteenth-century writers, producers, actors, and audiences. That said, when the plots were not modified to fit contemporary taste, they were not popular in commercial venues. Plays like Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Henry VI* parts I, II and III and *The Tragedy of Henry V* underwent major alterations, making them almost entirely new plays that completely change the emphasis on war to themes of love, unrequited love, and marriage. Eighteenth-century authors who found popular success with their adaptations of Shakespeare were the ones that emphasized the honorable and the pathetic and expanded roles for actresses. The female characters in this grouping of historical tragedies have larger roles to play in the overall narrative (except in the case of *The Ingratitude of the Commonwealth*, which failed), and they are no longer depicted as forces of division and disaster, but rather as strong minded and capable of solving problems, usually by self sacrifice. Whether it be a happily married Queen Catherine, or a noble, suicidal Lady Eleanor, it is clear that the British taste for the self reforming heroine also influenced the shape and texture of the adapted Elizabethan history play during the years that Barton Booth, Robert Wilks, Colley Cibber, Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter held the stage.

Chapter Four

For Love and Money: Refining the Comic Character on the Early Eighteenth- Century London Stage

Eighteenth-century comedy in London did not see the same patterns that eighteenth-century tragedy did. During a time in which the most popular tragedies were she-tragedies, adapted comedies of this period were largely marriage plays that maintained a focus on the male protagonist, his schemes and tricks – usually having do to with money – and either satirized marriage or politics or both. The adapted comedies during the Augustan period were not, like tragedy, primarily adapted to showcase the noble or virtuous celebrity actresses, as she-tragedies did so transparently, or even the heroic and honorable male protagonist, which was still occasionally popular. Some of the adapted plays considered in this chapter are not reworkings of “great” dramatic works in the way that we might think of Colley Cibber’s version of Corneille’s *Le Cid* or Aaron Hill’s *Henry the Fifth*, but are instead collage pieces that borrow freely from sources with little acknowledgement or concern for the original play. Not that this didn’t happen in tragedy: Hill’s *Henry V* departs significantly from its Elizabethan predecessor. But in comedy, there is even less consideration of an original or a source. There are a couple of exceptions, which are discussed later in the chapter, such as Cibber’s topical reworking

of *Molière's Tartuffe*, *The Non-Juror* (1717), and Charles Johnson's *Love in Forest* (1723). Many new comic pieces are thrown together, and hastily drawn from multiple sources, including obscure farces and unremarkable comedies; only a few adapted comedies from this period are genuine adaptations in the strictest sense of the word. The plays I will discuss in this chapter fall into two basic categories, plays that are adapted texts of well-known originals, such as those just mentioned, and comedies, some of which were quite popular, that recycle elements of other farces and comedies, but are not actual adaptations of a single, well-known original. The plays considered in this chapter are: Christopher Bullock's *A Woman's Revenge* (1715); two plays by Colley Cibber, *The Non-Juror* (1717) and *The Refusal, or The Ladies Philosophy* (1721); *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718), by Susanna Centlivre; and lastly, three plays by Charles Johnson, *The Country Lasses* (1715), *The Cobbler of Preston* (1716) and *Love in a Forest* (1723).

***A Woman's Revenge* (1715) by Christopher Bullock**

John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604) was a popular play that was performed and adapted several times during the Restoration, the most famous adaptation being Thomas Betterton's *The Revenge; or, a Match in Newgate* (1680), in which Mrs. Barry played the title role. Christopher Bullock's play, *A Woman's Revenge*, is also the story of a jilted prostitute and her revenge scheme against her lover. It was a commercial draw at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1715 with the following cast: Mr. Bullock, Sr. who played Thinkwell, the permissive father of Celia; Freeman, her lover, was played by Mr.

Husbands; Bevil was played by Mr. Thurmond, and the beautiful but vengeful prostitute, Corinna (the Mrs. Barry role), was played by Mrs. Thurmond. The original Jacobean version of the story is that of two friends, Freevill and the Puritan Malheureux, who both love a passionate Dutch courtesan, Franceschina. Freevill is deeply involved with the courtesan but he is about to marry Beatrice and decides to break off the relationship. He introduces her to his friend, Malheureux, who at once desires her. Humiliated, she promises to submit to him if he kills Freevill and brings her a ring Freevill has received from his new love. The two friends pretend to quarrel, Freevill vanishes, and the ring is brought to Franceschina, who informs Freevill's father about what has happened. Malheureux is arrested and condemned to die, but at the last moment, Freevill appears and explains that he has played this trick to cure Malheureux of his unruly sexual passion for the courtesan. She, in turn, is whipped and imprisoned. Bullock's story is quite similar: Freevill is now Freeman, a dashing man about town, who similarly has moved on from his courtesan mistress to a young woman of fortune, Celia. Her father, Mr. Thinkwell, surprisingly approves of the match, though Freeman has no money of his own. Thinkwell encourages the young couple to marry for love and mocks the custom of those aristocrats who broker marriages based on finances. Corinna, the courtesan, is not pleased with Freeman's marriage plans and tries to convince Bevil, Freeman's friend and her current suitor, to kill Freeman in an act of revenge. Bevil only pretends to go through with the murder in order to bed her, but, again, the whole scheme comes undone and he is almost hanged. Rescued at the last moment, he repents and marries a sensible young woman, Miranda, the best friend of

Celia. The play ends in a double marriage, and the vengeful Corianna and her madam, Mother Griffin (played by *Mr. Griffin*), are punished for their evil ways. This version of Marston's play does not change the plot line much: it is still a kind of reform comedy, that pokes fun at uncontrollable sexual desire and advocates for a sensible approach to sex and romance.

Though the story of the four lovers and the prostitute is the dominant one, this version of the play also highlights *Mr. Griffin* as *Mother Griffin*, which was a new role created for this performance and an example of how the lines of specific actors influenced adaptation. Griffin established himself early on in his career as a low comedian and worked for manager Christopher Rich at LIF from 1715 to 1721, before transferring to Drury Lane. Reportedly short and slight, he specialized in broadly comic roles such as Guzzle in *The Cobler of Preston*, Tickletext in *The Feign'd Curtizans*, Shylock in *The Jew of Venice*, Simon Pure in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, and Lovegold in *The Miser*. Skirts parts, roles in which men played old women in comedy, were becoming popular, as in Farquhar's *Twin Rivals* (1702), and Griffin, as a kind of foolish yet sinister madam, likely contributed to this play's commercial success.

This play is a somewhat conventional tragi-comedy with a plot that is similar to Marston's original and the Restoration version, but it does not embrace the sympathetic view of the heroine that was popularized by Mrs. Barry. Given the recent trend in eighteenth-century tragedy to portray tragic heroines as sympathetic (even the "she-devil" characters discussed in chapter 2 played by Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter had

some kind of plausible motivation for their revenge) audiences might expect a somewhat gut-wrenching portrait of the prostitute. In this adaptation, that is not the case: she is a temptress who lures men away from more appropriate romantic partners – a kind of woman that threatens to disrupt the formation of sensible love matches – and who is, in the end, punished for her own excess of passion. The Restoration version with Mrs. Barry as the courtesan depicts her as a sympathetic, if not flawed, tragic heroine: “A Whore! What tho to her that bears it ‘tis a shame, an infamie that cannot be supported? To all the world besides it bears a mightie sound, petition’d, su’d to, worshipp’d as a God, presented, flatter’d, follow’d, sacrific’d to, Monarch of Monarchs, Tyrant of the world, what does that charming word not signifie!”¹⁶⁵ The Restoration Corinna sees herself tragically, even if the play does not ultimately endorse her vision. But in this version of the story, the inclusion of Mr. Griffin as the Madame further degrades the role of the prostitute because it displays a kind of dangerous predatory nature of the whole courtesan business; Mrs. Griffin is drawn as a humorously repulsive, greedy woman who preys on available gallants for economic gain.

In conclusion, when Mrs. Barry played the role, there was a nuanced view of Corinna by the end of the play – the great Restoration tragic actress was known for heart-wrenching performances, even in roles where she was played a revenge seeking, scorned woman. Bullock’s 1715 version modifies the idea of a sympathetic heroine by emphasizing broadly comic elements in the play and cashes in at the box office not by

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Betterton, *The Revenge: or, a Match in Newgate* (London: printed for W. Cademan, 1680), p. 40.

using the suffering female victim line, but rather by emphasizing the comedic male performer as its major commercial attribute.

The Non-Juror (1717) by Colley Cibber

The Non- Juror ran for eighteen consecutive nights in December of 1717

and is one of the most successful comedies of the Augustan period. Cibber, who was already an established writer by this time, dedicated the play to the King:

Your Comedians, Sir, are an Unhappy Society, whom
some Severe Heads think wholly Useless, and other
Dangerous to the Young and Innocent: This comedy
is therefore an Attempt to remove that Prejudice,
and to shew what Honest and Laudable Uses may
be made of the theatre when its Performances keep close
to the true Purposes of its Institution: That is may be necessary
to divert the Sullen and Disaffected from busying their
Brains to disturb the Happiness of a Government, which
(for want of proper Amusements) they often enter into
Wild and Seditious Schemes to reform: And that it
make likewise make those very Follies the Ridicule and
Diversion even of those that committed them.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Colley Cibber, *The Non-Juror* (London: printed for Henry Lintot, 1736), Dedication.

It is clear that Cibber extols the didactic purpose of comedy, and, in fact, of the theatre in general. But it was also Cibber's most controversial play and, according to his *Apology*, made him both several political enemies and extremely valuable political friends. "I borrow'd the *Tartuffee* of *Molière*," Cibber writes, "and turn'd him into a modern Non Juror: Upon the Hypocrisy of the French character, I ingrafted a stronger Wickedness, that of the English Popish Priest, lurking under the Doctorine of our own Church, to raise his Fortune, upon the Ruin of a worthy gentleman, whom his dissembled Sanctity has seduc'd into the treasonable Cause of a Roman Catholic Out-law."¹⁶⁷ Cibber's political intentions are clear.

The actual rewrite of the play is quite similar to the French original in terms of the plot and character's lines – Cibber did not need to do much to make it fit the demands of his company. *The Non-Juror* was an expert vehicle for Drury Lane and had in its cast the expected celebrities: Cibber played the title character, Wilks, the heartsick Mr. Heartly, Booth, Col. Woodvil, Anne Oldfield, the young and intelligent Maria, and Mary Porter, the lacklustre Lady Woodvil. *Tartuffe* becomes Dr. Wolf, a papist spy who contrives to convince Sir John Woodvil that he is a member of the Church of England, but in secret, Dr. Wolf attempts to seduce Sir John's wife, seize his estate and disinherit his son. Dr. Wolf is betrayed by his own assistant, Charles (a character of Cibber's own invention), who has turned into a suitor of Maria, Woodvil's assertive daughter. Like in *Molière's* play, Sir John hides under the table and overhears Wolf making advances

¹⁶⁷ Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), 302-303.

towards his wife. Wolf is now exposed. Charles, however, is given a royal pardon and allowed to marry Maria. Though Cibber cut out *Molière's* Dorine, Cleante, and Madame Pernelle, his greatest change is in the depiction of the Tartuffe character, Dr. Wolf, who becomes an even more predatory villain, and in his expansion of the role of Maria for Mrs. Oldfield. She becomes a central figure in the story with more stage time than any other character. Surprising little has been written about this change in emphasis from the machinations of Tartuffe to the sly Maria who outwits both her father and Woodvil. Ashley briefly notes that Mrs. Oldfield "put a good deal of sparkle into Maria making her more charming than *Molière's* Marianne."¹⁶⁸ In terms of the revised Tartuffe, Dr. Wolf becomes a typical Cibberian villain, ghosting characters like Cibber's Richard III, the Cardinal from *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester*, or even his portrayal of Iago. Several scholars have observed that he possesses a meaner, sharper villainy (hence the name) and that he is actually dangerous and insidious.¹⁶⁹

Cibber went on to become poet laureate of England but alternately had his work shunned for years by some who were offended by the play; for example, *Mist's Weekly Journal* printed a negative diatribe against Cibber and described his play as "stolen, malicious and insulting" by Charles Johnson, Cibber's contemporary and fellow playwright.¹⁷⁰ But it was also quite beneficial to Cibber and is probably why he was awarded the laureateship. John Loftis describes the play as "the most controversial of the political plays at Drury Lane." *The Non-Juror* was clearly a "vigorous effort in

¹⁶⁸ Ashley, 47

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 47

¹⁷⁰ Richard Barker, *Mr. Cibber of Drury Lane* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 108.

support of the Hanoverians” and multiple scholars have noted that Cibber’s villain is more pointed than his French forefather and an obvious and intentional satire of the Jacobites. Though it was written and staged two years after the uprising, the play was still a major success. Describing the political intentions for the play, Cibber writes:

To give Life, therefore, to this Design, I borrow’d the Tartuffe of Moliere, and turn’d him into a modern non-juror: Upon the Hypocrisy of the French Character, I ingrafted a stronger Wickedness, that of an English Popish Priest, lurking under the Doctrine of our own Church, to raise his Fortune, upon the Ruin of worthy Gentleman, whom his dissembled Sanctity had seduc’d into the treasonable Cause of a Roman Catholick Out-law. ¹⁷¹

Although the play is topical, it remained quite popular throughout the century. Like *Tartuffe*, it is a clever domestic comedy about marriage, religion and hypocrisy that remained relevant outside of its immediate political context. Cibber’s smart, tricky Dr. Wolf was ghosting a long line of recognizable villains and the play’s popularity was likely attributable to the celebrity of Colley Cibber and Mrs. Oldfield, just as much as Cibber, the controversial playwright.

Cibber adapted another *Molière* comedy, *The Refusal, or The Ladies Philosophy*, which was first produced in 1721; for reasons that are unclear, it was not one of his most well received plays. Based on *Molière’s Les Femmes Savants*, it is another domestic

¹⁷¹ *Apology*, 302-303.

comedy about marriage; this time, it is not political and the characters are not necessarily recognizable recyclings of obvious character types. Cibber does poke fun at a topical issue of the day, the promoter Sir Gilbert Wrangle, a director of the South Sea Company, but stops short of interjecting anything controversial.¹⁷² The French story depicts two young people, Henriette and Clitandre, who are in love, but in order to marry, they must overcome an obstacle: Henriette's family. Her sensible father and uncle are in favor of the marriage, but, unfortunately, her father is passive in the face of his overly pushy wife, Philaminte, Henriette's mother. Philaminte, supported by Henriette's aunt and sister, wishes her to marry Trissotin, a "scholar" and mediocre poet (with big teeth), who has comedically convinced these three women that he is a fantastic catch because of his intellect and learning. After all, the ladies themselves desire to be "learned" and are drawn as humorously pretentious, with the foolish Trissotin as their protégé. *The Refusal* did run for six nights in February but was finally forced off the stage because "Cibber's Enemies shew'd themselves without much Discretion: for they began to hiss it before they heard it, and I remember very well, began their Uproar, on the first Night, as soon as he appeared to speak the Prologue." The roles were played by the most popular celebrities: Cibber as Witling, Wilks as Frankley, Mrs. Oldfield played Sophroma, and Booth played Granger. It is unclear why the play failed to have a longer stage life. R.N. Ashley observes that "This lively comedy of manners did not deserve

¹⁷² In 1720, speculation on the company's stock led to an economic meltdown, causing many to suffer severe financial consequences. For further reading see John Carswell's *The South Sea Bubble* (London: Cresset Press, 1960).

the cold reception it received in 1721, one due to opposition to Cibber as a person, not as a playwright."¹⁷³

Bold Stroke for a Wife by Suzanne Centlivre

A *Bold Stroke for a Wife* by Susanna Centlivre was first performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields in February of 1718, ran for six initial performances and was revived several times throughout the century. A decidedly popular commercial hit, *Bold Stroke for a Wife* is considered one of Centlivre's best three plays, along side *The Busy Body* and *The Wonder*. The play's relationship to an original source, and even its status as an adaptation, is somewhat complicated. Centlivre herself claims in both the dedication of the play and the prologue that the play is original.

To-Night we come upon a bold Design,
To try to please without one borrow'd line:
Our Plot is new, and regularly clear,
And not one single Tittle from Moliere.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, there is no one text that can claim to be the definitive source; it is more likely that there are multiple sources, two of which are worthy of in-depth consideration.

Dilke's *The Lover's Luck* (1696) and Newberg Hamilton's *The Petticoat Plotter* (1712) have

¹⁷³ Ashley, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Susanna Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (London: Printed for W. Meres and F. Clay, 1724), Prologue.

the most in common with Centlivre's play, which is the story of two young lovers who wish to marry, Anne Lovely and Colonel Fainwell. Unfortunately, she has four guardians, all buffoons in their own way, who must agree if she is to wed with her fortune intact. It is impossible to see how they could actually agree on a match, and thus the game of gaining Anne's hand, and her money, is the action of the play. Colonel Fainwell employs disguise and trickery to convince each guardian that he will make an ideal husband. The "bold stroke" is that of wearing elaborate disguises that mimic the personalities and occupations of each of the guardians. In the end, Col. Fainwell succeeds in marrying Anne Lovely (and her fortune).

Although there is no actual evidence that Centlivre knew of *The Lover's Luck*, it has been suggested as source by John Genest in *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*. The main plot line of *A Bold Stroke* employs a similar story to Dilke's play, which depicts Mrs. Purflew, a wealthy young woman who has two guardians from whom she must gain consent if she wants to marry. Each has chosen a suitable husband for her, but she is in love with Colonel Bellair. Like Centlivre's play, the action is the effort of both Mrs. Purflew and the dashing young Colonel to outwit her guardians. Though Drury Lane's acting company was far superior to that at LIF during this time, *Bold Stroke* was performed by the top LIF actors who had extensive experience in many of Centlivre's comedies. Christopher Bullock, then manager of LIF, his wife, Jane Bullock, and his father, the well-known actor William Bullock, were all in this production, as well as many other Centlivre pieces. The younger Bullock played

Fainwell, William Bullock, Tradelove, and Jane Bullock, Anne Lovely. W. Bullock in particular was well suited for the role – a frequent collaborator with Centlivre (this was his seventh Centlivre play) and Jane often performed romantic roles in the repertory in general and had previously performed in four Centlivre plays, including Isabinda in the successful comedy *The Busy Body*. The extremely funny role of Prim was performed by George Pack who, like Christopher Bullock, played many roles for Centlivre, including Marplot from *The Busy Body*, which was so well received that an offshoot, simply called *Marplot*, was produced. The original cast of *Bold Stroke* also included the established comedian Mr. Griffin as Simon Pure, a role that became a popular choice for well-known comedic actors in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Mr. Griffin, the actual originator of the role of Mrs. Griffin, the elderly madam in *A Woman's Revenge*, which was performed just two seasons prior, was an obvious choice for the Quaker character. Another line that provided somewhat frequent business was portraying the Quaker as a buffoon or a fool: Centlivre had used it before in her 1702 play *The Beau's Duel*, in which the prostitute Mrs. Plotwell (played by Mrs. Lee) dresses up as a Quaker to trick her lover's father into marriage. But despite the resemblance of Centlivre's piece to the plot of Dilke's play, it is also likely that Centlivre was inspired by Newburg Hamilton's farce *The Petticoat Plotter*, which was performed at Drury Lane in 1712 and LIF in 1715. *The Petticoat Plotter* included Christopher Bullock as Mr. Thrifty and George Pack as Plotwell. Centlivre's play varies the plot of Hamilton's farce, which is the story of True-Love, a young man in love with Isabella; she is engaged to Sir Simon-Scrapeall, however, so True-Love dresses as a Quaker (who is also a scrivener) who visits her in

preparation of the marriage documents. When the real scrivener shows up, he is humorously treated as if *he* were an imposter and is thrown out in a blanket.

For readers who expect that because *Centlivre* was one of a few women playwrights working during this time that she would write more enlightened women's roles, *Bold Stroke* will disappoint. Anne Lovely as a part is not particularly expanded or even given more agency than in any other version of this story. As noted in earlier chapters, in the adapted tragedies of the period, we see roles for women enlarged and enhanced (often by male playwrights) to display the tragic talents of actresses, but, again, this is not the case in most adapted comedies. In fact, Anne remains a somewhat passive character who is dependent on the creative, sometimes hilarious, and manipulative actions of her soldier hero. Anne even praises soldiers as defenders of women against "the insults of rude, unpolished foes."¹⁷⁵ It is true that she is the one who demands that Fainwell win her hand with her fortune when she claims that "Love makes but a slovenly figure in that house where poverty keeps the door."¹⁷⁶ But despite this directive, Anne is not the principal actor in the play in the way many Elizabethan and Jacobean cross dressing, comic heroines are. Anne's position within these transactions remains that of a commodity, coveted by Fainwell and traded by her guardians.

In conclusion, the play's structure most closely resembles intrigue comedy, but it also contains elements of farce, as is obvious in the use of various disguises and the

¹⁷⁵ *Centlivre*, I.ii.54-59.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, I.ii.29-31.

emphasis on contrivance and elaborate lies. It also contains elements of the romance comedy and fairytale; Fainwell, like a soldier-Knight, must solve a kind of riddle in order to gain her hand. The guardians, who are referred to by the character Freeman, as “avarice, impertinence, hypocrisy, and pride,” are types, not individual personalities, who block the idealized marriage of the beautiful young heroine and her suitor. The guardians represent various London types: Tradelove, the exchange broker, Prim, the hosier, belong to the “trading” interest championed by the Whigs; Sir Philip and Periwinkle are “lovers and admirers of the past,” members of the “landed” interest who are associated with the Tories. But all four guardians, whether they are merchants or part of the landed class, are targets. That said, the satirical treatment of the guardians is relatively mild and enormously entertaining.

The Country Lasses, The Cobbler of Preston, and Love in a Forest by Charles Johnson

Charles Johnson was a prolific playwright who wrote seventeen plays between 1700 and 1730 and, like Colley Cibber, was infamous for his plagiarism. Probably because the two were rival playwrights, Christopher Bullock accused him of “diverting the town with other people’s writing.” Johnson penned three of the most noteworthy adaptations of this period, *The Country Lasses* (1715), *The Cobbler of Preston* (1716), a farce taken from the Christopher Sly episode in *Taming of the Shrew*, and *As You Like It* (1723), giving it

the more literal title, *Love in a Forest*. Two of the plays are obviously motivated by politics – *The Cobbler of Preston* and *Love in a Forest* – and capitalize on specific political incidents. An established Whig and a frequenter of Button’s Coffee House, a literary hang-out for the Whig crowd, Johnson was vehemently anti-Jacobite.¹⁷⁷

Charles Johnson and actor Robert Wilks were close friends, and Drury Lane produced several of his plays well into the 1730s. In 1711, *The Wife's Relief, or, The Husband's Cure*, was a moderate success; it starred Robert Wilks, Colley Cibber, Thomas Doggett, and Anne Oldfield. In 1712, Drury Lane staged Johnson’s play *The Successful Pyrate*, but John Dennis complained to the Master of Revels that the play glamorized the pirate Henry Every. Nevertheless, the play's controversy helped its attendance, and it was also a moderate theatrical success. But Johnson had his greatest hit with *The Country Lasses: or, The Custom of the Manor* (1715), which was continuously performed into the early nineteenth-century and had six editions and two adaptations by 1779.

Unlike his other two plays, *The Country Lasses* is not an adaptation per se, but borrows a theme from Fletcher and Massinger’s Jacobean play *The Custom of the Country* (1620), itself an adaptation of the Spanish play *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* by Cervantes. The original story depicts Count Clodio, an Italian governor, who, in the story, claims the right to practice *droit de seigneur*, a “tradition” in which in which a Lord of the Manor supposedly spends the first night with the new bride of one of his

¹⁷⁷ M. Maurice Shudofsky, “Charles Johnson and Eighteenth-Century Drama” *ELH*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (John’s Hopkins University Press; June 1943), 131-158.

tenants¹⁷⁸. The Count is in love with Zenocia, but she, against her father's wishes, marries Arnaldo. The young couple tries to resist Clodio's attempt to claim his "right" by attempting to escape but, after a fantastical turn of events, Clodio ultimately gives up his cause and reforms by renouncing his claim to the first night. This plot has little in common with Charles Johnson's play: the business of the *droit de seigneur* is the only connective thread. The two men at the heart of *The Country Lasses: or, The Custom of the Manor*, Heartwell, played by Booth, and Modely, played by Wilks, are opposite types: Heartwell is a good natured, well intentioned suitor for one of the "country girls," while Modely is a kind of rouge character who renounces marriage and is only interested in making a sexual conquest. The two "country lasses," Flora (Mrs. Mountfort), and Aura (Mrs. Santlow), upon encountering their handsome visitors, pretend to be poor country girls. Heartwell and Flora, after much flirtation, fall in love and marry. But Modely, still resistant to matrimony, gets into trouble when he tries to force his advances upon Aura. He is then further tricked when she dresses as a man, engages in a duel with him, and feigns death. Modely is taken into custody, and only later is Aura's trick revealed. The two decide to marry in two years if they still like each other. Meanwhile, though Heartwell has nobly married his love despite her lack of money (so he thinks), he is informed of the terrible news that it is the custom of the manor to give the lord of the estate the privilege of the first night with his bride. Incensed by this custom, Heartwell is understandably furious, only to learn of Flora's

¹⁷⁸ *Droit de seigneur* was a mythological custom, not a real tradition. For further reading on the subject, see Alan Boureau, *The Lord's First Night* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

fortune and that he is now the Lord of the Manor. There is also a farcical subplot, taken from Middleton's *A Mad World My Masters*, that depicts the character Lurcher (played by Mr. Quin), a young man with considerable debts, who tries to pass himself off as a nobleman to his wealthy uncle, Sir John, in an elaborate scheme to trick him out of his fortune. The scapegrace comes to the manor, with his creditors disguised as his servants, and manages to get four hundred pounds from the scheme. His is eventually discovered, but pardoned for his trickery.

Quin was known for playing the trouble maker in comedy: in addition to playing Lurcher, he also played Hotspur and later Falstaff in *Henry IV*, Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, Syphax in *Cato*, the title role in *The Double Dealer*, Guildenstern and later Claudius in *Hamlet* and Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.¹⁷⁹ Booth was not known as a comedian, but Wilks was beloved as the romantic lead and the beautiful Mrs. Santlow, whose career was on the rise in 1715 and who married Booth in 1719, was undoubtedly a draw in this role as she was young enough to pull off breeches roles, which were quite popular. Though she did not ever attain the stature of a Mrs. Bracegirdle or a Mrs. Oldfield, she was known as an attractive singer and a dancer and went on to play a handful of young coquette roles later in the century. The play is not particularly political or even topical, and it is likely that the dashing Wilks and rowdy Quin were

¹⁷⁹ Quin also had a reputation as a troublemaker off stage. His problems with the law reached a peak in the spring of 1718, when he got into an argument with fellow actor William Bowen, who reportedly criticized Quin's performance of Tamerlane. The men fought a duel in which Quin stabbed Bowen, who died three days later. Quin was charged and the case went to trial. He was convicted of manslaughter but did not serve jail time.

the favorites in this particular adaptation. In this story, the humor is primarily found in the misadventures of misbehaving young men.

The Cobler of Preston, which appeared the next year, is described by Loftis as the most controversial of the political plays at Drury Lane.¹⁸⁰ A short farce, the play is Johnson's most obvious political piece. It set off a skirmish with LIF, as described in a pamphlet entitled *Spiller's Jest*s (1729), in which it is related that James Spiller of LIF got a copy of Johnson's play several weeks before it was to be produced (by picking Pinkethman's pocket during a drinking bout, apparently) and that Christopher Bullock prepared a rival farce of the same name.¹⁸¹ LIF did indeed produce an afterpiece with this name in January, just weeks before Johnson's play went up at Drury Lane. Though the detail of the picking of the pocket is somewhat farfetched, it is true that a second rate farce by Christopher Bullock entitled *The Cobler of Preston*, was produced at LIF on January 24th and then later, a longer farce of the same name by Johnson was produced at Drury Lane on February 3rd. Johnson's play satirizes the events at Preston Heath, the site of the first battle between the King's army and the Jacobite rebels, but did not contain any of the regular celebrities, except for Mr. Pinkethman, as Christopher Sly. The story is that of Christopher Sly, who is picked up, drunk, in front of the alehouse and taken to the home of Sir Charles Briton where he is tricked by Spanish servants into believing he is a grandee. The butler, enjoying this game of trickery, dresses in Sly's old

¹⁸⁰ John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 69.

clothes and pretends to be the drunkard himself, successfully fooling Sly's wife. Sly is ultimately carried back to his cobbler's stall (where he encounters a confused wife) and accused of rebellion until he agrees to be loyal, crying "Live King George!" LIF's version rewrites Christopher Sly into Kit Sly, a drunken fool. Bullock's farce, apart from its setting and some veiled jokes at the expense of nonconformist ministers, has nothing to do with the Rebellion: Sly is now Toby Gizzle (played by Mr. Spiller) who is predictably found intoxicated in a field and carried to Sir Jasper's house where cases are tried before him as if he were a Justice. He is scolded by his wife and eventually returned to the field where he was found; asleep, he awakens to beatings by the bar maid for skipping out on his tab, only to discover he is in possession of a purse full of money from Sir Jasper and is able to dispense with his debts. The LIF version of the farce steers clear of the politics of Johnson's original, but was commercially successful all the same.

Love in a Forest contains a more subtle message. Though primarily an adaptation of *As You Like It*, the play is an amalgamation of types of characters from Shakespeare's comedies such as *Love's Labour Lost*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. It contains much of Shakespeare's original language, and is an obvious acting vehicle for the Drury Lane company, particularly Colley Cibber. Johnson indulges in more character recycling than actual textual borrowing from Shakespeare's comedy: Cibber plays a reinvented Jacques, Caelia, Mrs. Thurmond, Mrs. Booth (Hester Santlow) plays Rosalind, Wilks, Orlando, and Booth, Rosalind's father,

the banished Duke. The characters of Touchstone, Audrey, William, Phebe and Corin are omitted, and the role of Caelia is extended. Jacques, who has more in common with a Benedick or a Berowne, falls in love with Caelia and tries to win over Rosalind in order to gain her hand.

Katherine West Scheil, in her recent book *Taste of the Town: Shakespearian Comedy and the Early Eighteenth-Century*, goes as far as to argue that the reason for the title is actually a thinly veiled reference to the Black Act of 1723. This act issued by the Hanoverian government made it a crime to enter the forest in disguise or with a blackened face and to hunt, wound, or steal deer, or engage in any other acts of violence. She theorizes that the law, which is a response to the Waltham deer poachers and a group of bandits known as the Workingham Blacks, was also established and was essential to consolidating Walpole's influence. The Prime Minister's real fear was Jacobitism, not the Workingham Blacks.¹⁸² Scheil also claims that Charles Johnson had a compelling reason to revive *As You Like It*: he was justifying the Hanoverian government's regulation of the forests. Although this is not necessarily untrue, many of the changes made were more than likely primarily inspired by the desire to employ character recycling to make *As You Like It*, one of the Shakespearian comedies that was not revived frequently during the Restoration, palatable for eighteenth-century audiences, especially because the actual plot is essentially the same as Shakespeare's original comedy. Rosalind, like her father, ends up banished from court. She vows to

¹⁸² Katherine West Scheil, "Early Georgian Politics and Shakespeare: The Black Act and Charles Johnson's Love in a Forest (1723)" *Shakespeare Survey*, Vol. 51 (1998): 45-56.

go in disguise into the forest and is accompanied by her beloved cousin, Caelia. As in Shakespeare, she has fallen in love with Orlando (Johnson's play turns the wrestling scene into a duel), and he with her. Orlando, in even deeper trouble with his cruel brother, also finds himself banished in the woods. The chief difference is in the character of Jacques who is introduced in the play as a kind of city gallant, played by Colley Cibber, who hates the forest. He is established as a leading character in the drama as he, after seeing Orlando's love poems on the trees, "catches a tingling." In the end, Orlando's brother dies off stage and Orlando is now restored to his fortune. Rosalind/Gaynemedede promises both her father and her lover to, by magic, produce Rosalind. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is staged for the entertainment of all, during which she removes her disguise and transforms back to her former self. A dual wedding takes place, satisfying the longing of both sets of lovers. The couples return to city life and order is restored.

Conclusions

Strangely, there is a central concern uniting this diverse group of comic adaptations: in all plays, the action centers on marriage and the necessary financial arrangements.

Though many of the plays are topical, even at times political, it is the negotiation of marriage that is the primary concern. In eighteenth-century tragedy, traits like virtue, heroism and nobility are an important part of the landscape of a play and consequently when parts were revised and rewritten for eighteenth-century audiences, the leading characters were often drawn in heroic or virtuous terms with less ambiguity than

audiences were accustomed to on the pre-Commonwealth stage. This, coupled with the rise of the celebrity actress, led to the expansion of roles for women and, in tragedy, are the dominant there were many opportunities for actresses to play honorable, capable, and intelligent women. But in these adapted comedies, where marriage and money themes, the roles for women that emerge are often not as complex, nor are they necessarily given more agency or more complexity than what had previously been offered on the Elizabethan, Jacobean or even Restoration stage. It is partly the tendency towards the idea of moral reform typical of early eighteenth-century comedy that inspired this: women, to be made marriageable, are often tailored, or tailor themselves, in an effort to accomplish a kind of domestic order. Also, in terms of the comic actors of the day, there were a handful of actors who were popular as low comedians, like Mr. Griffin, Mr. Quin, Mr. Spiller or Christopher Bullock, who were popular on stage playing (often hilariously) cheats or rouges.

In the eighteenth-century version of *A Woman's Revenge*, for example, the only independent woman in the story is portrayed as vengeful and dangerous to the institution of marriage, or in *The Refusal*, it is the women's silly pretensions towards being "learned" that threaten to interrupt an acceptable marriage pattern. In some comedies, women do use their "smarts" to restore order to a disordered situation, but then ultimately subordinate it once a normal order is restored. It is Maria, in *The Non-Juror*, after all, who uses her brains to undo Dr. Wolf, and in *As You Like It*, both the Elizabethan and the eighteenth-century version give us a ingenious young woman in

Rosalind who, through wit, disguise and intelligence, negotiates the strange world of the forest and gets her man in the end. Occasionally, the women are simply passive or even pawns for the trickery or low down dealings of adventurous young men, such as in *The Country Lasses* or *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*. Though all of these comedies depict the unconventional, the neat comic endings that follow often reinstate conventional boundaries for women.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation asserts that the process of play adaptation was one that was highly influenced by repertory companies. There is significant evidence that playwrights were keenly aware of the personalities for whom they were writing, often tailoring new works for specific performers. It is not surprising that the lines of business cultivated and developed by important actors would be a highly influential force shaping the adapted text. The process of play adaptation was shaped in part by the intense form of ghosting that naturally occurred in a repertory company that was relatively small and patronized largely by audiences who saw the same performers from season to season. Previous scholarship on play adaptation has failed to take into serious consideration the influence of acting companies on trends in play adaptation, but in doing so, it is possible to understand why old plays were to revised, recycled or renewed in specific ways.

Though literary trends played some role in the way writers adapted old manuscripts, it was more often than not that the adaptor was looking to highlight specific qualities in a character that would fit well with celebrity actors' "lines of business" that were well known to London audiences. After all, this was a competitive, commercial environment and the bottom line at the box office was, in reality, enormously important. As previously discussed, after the Restoration, when actresses were first allowed to perform on the English stage, there was an increase in the number of suffering heroines that appeared in tragedy. Though other factors have been thought

to contribute to this phenomenon, such as the number of women attending theatre or the general trend toward the sentimental in drama, this dissertation demonstrates that it is also attributable to the rise of the celebrity actress. When looking at the careers of performers like Rebecca Marshall and Elizabeth Boutell in the 1670s, it is clear that the lines they established remain consistent refrains ultimately interwoven into many adapted plays (with some variation) well into the eighteenth-century. The lustful villainess and the gentle, vulnerable, virgin types emerged in adaptations of Greek and French plays throughout the Restoration and eighteenth-century, thus changing the emphasis in tragedy from the heroic male protagonist. The popularity of the Barry-Bracegirdle duo in the 1680s (they continued to perform variations on these lines) is a natural extension of this. Many of those roles, as well as new ones, were later picked up by Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Porter. Although it is impossible to point to a single reason for the particularly intense popularity of pathetic tragedy in the early eighteenth-century, it is clear that the inclusion of women on the English stage and the emergence of specific acting lines by well-loved actresses during the Restoration and early eighteenth-century was highly influential.

In looking at the history of Shakespeare adaptation on the eighteenth-century stage, it was not, as many previous historians would have us believe, an act of “violence” upon Shakespeare, but instead a kind of celebration of his plays. The Elizabethan history play in particular was selected for performance during times of political strife, but was actually rewritten to expand the roles for actresses. The cluster

of plays that appeared after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 is indebted to Restoration playwright Thomas Otway, the inventor of she-tragedy, as well as to Nahum Tate, author of the now infamous *King Lear* that recenters the play on Lear's daughter, Cordelia. These tragedies set the pattern for subsequent approaches to adapting English history plays. Despite widely differing political agendas, adaptations after 1715 actually repeat the same adaptive strategies of Restoration playwrights Otway and Tate, which is to highlight the virtuous suffering of the heroine.

Adapted comedy during the Augustan period was not, like tragedy, primarily rewritten to showcase the celebrity actresses, as she-tragedies did so transparently, or even the heroic and honorable male protagonist, which was still occasionally popular. There were a handful of actors who were popular comedians and for whom plays were newly adapted. Colley Cibber, as playwright, manager and actor, fashioned his own acting career by writing parts for himself, perfecting various kinds of "fop" characters, one of which he inserted into Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, or the slinking villain, which he recycled in *The Non-Juror*. During a time in which some of the most popular tragedies were using recognizable lines, adapted comedies continued to be marriage plays that maintained a focus on the male protagonist. Many plays were cobbled together from multiple sources and only a handful were actually recognizable rewrites of a well known play from an earlier era. But though comedies remained somewhat formulaic in nature, there are instances in which parts were created to fit the lines of popular comedians such as Cibber's reworking of Jacques into a kind of urban

fop who is humorously uncomfortable in the forest – a clear example of character recycling. Cibber’s masterstroke of creating his own brand of the city lover adds an element to this play that no other actor could really recreate. Another example is Bullock’s revision of the madam character in *A Woman’s Revenge*, which was played in drag. It is clear that although all actors had certain things in common that they learned from their predecessors, performers established themselves as individuals and performed in lines that they repeated, with some variation, from play to play.

A common observation about eighteenth-century adaptations is that they lack sophistication or literary merit and are thus unremarkable. But by analyzing the careers of the performers that many of these plays were originally written for, it is possible to better understand why a generation that openly revered French, classical and pre-commonwealth English drama, would often produce these works in adapted form. The intention of this study has been to assert that the process of play adaptation in eighteenth-century England is inextricably linked to acting companies. By understanding popular lines of business, it is possible to better understand why play adaptation is an essential part in the narrative of the history of English drama.

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