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JoAllen Bradham

A Good Country Gentlewoman: Catherine Clive's Epistolary Autobiography

Catherine Clive (1711–1785), the great comedienne respected by David Garrick, admired by Samuel Johnson, and adored by London audiences for forty years, has not fared well in biographical study. The only full-length work is Percy Fitzgerald's dated and biased *Life of Mrs. Catherine Clive* (1888). The Queen of Comedy merits a twenty-page treatment in the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800,* and claims one biography in an unpublished doctoral dissertation—P. J. Crean's *The Life and Times of Kitty Clive* (University of London, 1933). From the record of her performances catalogued in the *London Stage,* forming a fairly complete account of her professional life is easy, and from the many anecdotes preserved about her, she continues to demand attention as a vivid and spirited figure. The last part of her life, however, Clive herself narrates through her letters, and the story there reveals not only her gifts as a theatrical creator but also the strength of her insight and interpretation. Front and center in these letters is a good country gentlewoman, an image Clive constructed as artfully as any role she played in her long and acclaimed career.[1] She analyzes the gentlewoman the way actresses analyze parts, and writes letters to fix for herself the characterization. These letters, grouped as a kind of epistolary autobiography, give facts about the actress's life after retirement, but more significantly, they demonstrate the way autobiographi-

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cal writing both creates and illuminates. Clive makes the life and the text simultaneously.

Clive's delineation of her pose of country gentlewoman fulfills the usual expectations of letters: the close-up, intimate details, or the notes on a happening too trivial to merit recording, or even notice elsewhere. But in their creation and concurrent documentation of an image, as well as in their connectedness and art, the letters constitute epistolary autobiography. As a sustained narrative, the letters illustrate Felicity Nussbaum's argument in *The Autobiographical Subject* that "the 'self' is an ideological construct that is recruited into place within specific historical formations rather than always present as an eternal truth" (xii). Nussbaum's terms highlight what Clive achieves in posing as a good country gentlewoman and then in composing the record that publicizes the self she shapes. Louis Renza's suggestion that autobiography is a "charged, condensed narrative through which the autobiographer symbolically reckons with his life" (269) is also helpful here in seeing what Clive does with the writing of her last sixteen years. In retirement, the actress symbolically reckons with the role she was never allowed to play on the stage and presents it, through sustained role-playing, as her closing image. Fleshing out the gentlewoman, the letters script both the actress's conscious creation of the role and her filling in of its many facets. Clive, as autobiographer, is clearly "self-aware, a seeker after self-knowledge" (4), as Estelle C. Jelinek maintains such a writer must be. Jelinek goes on to stress that "autobiography should be an effort to give meaning to some personal mythos" (4), and this effort is precisely the one on which Clive concentrates.

A biographer inclined toward psychological interpretations might conclude that Clive felt a lack in her personal life or in her concept of self and needed the experience of living and projecting the gentlewoman to make up for what she had missed as the completely self-supporting professional woman at a time when such women were rare. On the other hand, a biographer more interested in theatre history and a great, versatile actress's strong need to be recognized for successfully portraying a variety of roles would argue that Clive created and played the good country gentlewoman, not from any feeling of social slight or some longing for the kind of recognition accorded to older women of the gentry, but from the drive of professional ambition. Behind either reading lie the letters which unfold this dream of being the good

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country gentlewoman, an identity Clive claimed in 1749 and enjoyed from 1769 to 1785. The elements that evoke a good country gentlewoman are not the only contents of Clive's letters, of course, for gardening or writing condolence notes do not make up the totality of any gentlewoman's day. The features of the gentlewoman call attention to themselves because the general image of that figure is almost entirely at odds with Clive's personality and reputation, and because the actress specifically stated her determination to play the role.

Tate Wilkinson (1739–1803), the actor who collected and published theatre gossip and anecdotes, labeled Clive a "mixture of combustibles . . . a passionate, cross, vulgar . . . woman" (qtd. in Russell 99), and Thomas Davies (1712?–1785), the bookseller turned actor, found her "formed by nature to represent a variety of lively, laughing, droll, humorous, affected, and absurd characters" (qtd. in Russell 100). The roles she played in her long and distinguished career bear out these statements, for London audiences applauded her as the clever servant, the pompous woman, and the hoydenish charmer, from her early work as Nell in *The Devil to Pay* in 1730 (her debut came in 1728) to her last performances of Mrs. Heidelberg in *The Clandestine Marriage* and Flora in *The Wonder* in 1769. What we cannot find in the stage records of Catherine Clive is the successful playing of a lady—a genuine lady, played straight. She could satirize the gentlewoman, but she could not project gentilesse or noblesse oblige. The sympathetic rendering of a gracious and well-born woman lay beyond Kitty's repertoire.

By both birth and marriage, however, Mrs. Clive might have aged naturally into the gentlewoman had politics and personalities taken a slightly different course. Catherine Raftor (sometimes Rafter) Clive was well-born. According to the *Biographical Dictionary* and its sources, she was the daughter of William Raftor, a lawyer, who was "heir to a considerable estate which was forfeited because of his adherence to the cause of James II" (341). Though this birth defined her as a gentlewoman—certainly of the lesser gentry and perhaps of the greater gentry of large land-holdings—her father's fortune did not reach her, and her marriage with George Clive, who qualified as lesser gentry because of his profession as a lawyer, was fleeting. After their separation, neither remarried. Kitty received no money from her estranged husband, and she wished him well throughout her career.[2] Life, then, did

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not open the usual paths to living as a gentlewoman might; nor did the theatre find Kitty Clive suitable for casting in that role.

Clive was not one, however, to take any omission, denial, or affront passively. In 1734, for instance, when David Garrick realized that she would make an ideal Lucy Lockit to Mrs. Cibber's Polly, Clive refused to give up the part of Polly and created a storm as she maintained her right and her record. Susannah Marie Arne Cibber, younger than Clive and sister of Thomas Augustine Arne and wife of Theophilus Cibber, seemed perfect for the part of Polly at Drury Lane. Clive, however, would not submit to the wishes of Cibber or Garrick or the pretty and talented upstart with connections. She continued to play Polly until the 1745–46 season, when the new Polly, a young woman with talent but no connections, was of Clive's choosing. In 1744, after being barred from performing at both Drury Lane and Covent Garden as a result of the manipulation of managers in the fallout from the Licensing Act of 1737, Clive responded by writing "The Case of Mrs. Clive Presented to the Public." So persuasive was she that she returned to Drury Lane on satisfactory terms and played there until her voluntary retirement in 1769. Kitty Clive had a way of taking matters into her own capable hands and getting what she wanted, and apparently she wanted the experience of projecting the genuinely gracious lady. The epistolary autobiography that resulted leads to a clearer understanding of the thoroughness with which the theatre dominated Clive's life and the strength with which she dominated her art and life.

While still active on the stage and the mistress of many successful roles, Clive wrote Horace Walpole that she longed to play one role only: "a good sort of country gentlewoman." The letter, in the Folger collection of Clive letters, is undated, but the editors of the *Biographical Dictionary* suggest December 1749 as a likely time (354), and the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole* dates the letter Old Style as most probably December 3, 1748 (61). The date matters because in 1747, Samuel Foote published his *Roman and English Comedy Consider'd and Compar'd . . . And an Examen into the Merit of the Present Comic Actors.* Foote's narrative angle is a strange one. At times he writes objectively and describes what he sees and believes; on occasion, he breaks into his fairly formal presentation to give advice, as if he were the professional counselor of the subjects he writes about. When he turns his spotlight on Mrs. Clive, he uses both methods. First he praises

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the actress as "peculiarly happy in hitting the Humours of Characters in low Life. The awkard [sic] Forwardness of a Country Girl, the ridiculous affected Airs of a Lady's Woman, or the pert Behaviour of an intriguing Chambermaid" (41–42). Then Foote shifts from description to counseling, remarking on what he would advise:

> There are Characters in Comedy which require a Delicacy of Figure, and an Elegance of Behaviour; and as both Nature and Habit have denied Mrs. *Clive* the Possession of these Requisites, I would advise her never to think of personating a fine Lady of any Kind or Condition, unless the Author (with a View of rendering the Part ridiculous) has endowed it with some whimsical Peculiarity. (42)

Foote moves then into direct address: "You have already, Madam, a Cast of Characters in which your action will always command the Attention and Applause of an Audience; don't, therefore, suffer an idle Ambition to destroy that Consequence" (42).

In this mixture of description, judgment, and exhortation, Foote told Kitty Clive what she could not and should not do. Almost immediately, she set about doing it; she set about playing the lady in whom nothing would be coarse or ridiculous. In actively assuming the role of gentlewoman in the country, Clive combined all of her theatrical talents. She created "The Good Country Gentlewoman" and played this lead as well as she played any of the array of roles that brought audiences in London to their feet and to hers. Here, there can be no question of intentionality: the role she documents is the "ideological construct" (Nussbaum xii) she chose. In designing her days, Clive sets up the scenario for this role; she directs, costumes, stages, and acts. In writing her letters she practices autobiography, not as actresses of her own time and those of succeeding generations have done by recounting their great days and love affairs, but by tracing the conscious efforts to shape artistically her last days and thus successfully complete her career.

With their theatrical language and descriptions of herself as if she were a person on a stage to be observed and commented on, these letters establish that Kitty saw her retirement as an extension of her years as performer. She writes of having her hair done for her parties just as she had it done for her parts (FSL, Nov. 3, 1770), and she called the long lane about her house and garden "Drury Lane" so that she might refer to her morning constitu-

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tional upon it as "going to rehearsal" (FSL, Mar. 24, 1773). When she writes a list of questions on conduct, she introduces them with the phrase: "I now come to my interrogation. Imprimis" (FSL, Jan., no day given, 1783). The "Imprimis," an echo of the famous proviso scene in Congreve's *Way of the World,* comes from a woman who began her career playing Millamant, shifted with time to Mrs. Marwood, and turned Lady Wishfort into the celebrated character part of her later years. For David Garrick, on January 31, 1776, she poses and composes: "I was sat down to write you an answer to your other letter and as Mrs. Pinchwife says—I intended it should have been a much finer letter than the other" (FSL). Late in life, Clive continues to employ theatrical diction in describing the affairs of a gentlewoman. Just before an important party her protégée, Jane Pope, will be attending, Clive sends a hostess's blessing: ". . . may dinner be well dressed. May the guests all come in good time to partake of it. May no accident happen to poor little Robin Goodfellow in bringing up the sauce" (FSL, Feb. 12, 1782).

The stage and its language never left Kitty, who knew she played a role in retirement at Twickenham. In a 1772 letter she alludes to the old trappings with which a good country gentlewoman would be surrounded and admits she lacks them: "we are aping the old English hospitality as well as we can, but we want a great many plum puddings, with the boar's head with an orange in its mouth to make it the old town" (FSL, Dec. 31, 1772). Determining to play the role, Clive recognized the value of the proper backcloth. In the same letter to Walpole in which she describes her desired role, she begins making arrangements to have the stage dressed properly. Her set will require a garden. I "beg the favour to know who is your gardener," she writes. Then revealing her consciousness of setting, she adds ". . . the character I am most desirous to act well is a good sort of a country gentlewoman at Twickenham; and therefore must endeavor to have everything that's convenient there" (FSL, Undated).[3]

In playing on stage the role of the pretentious lady or the hoyden, Clive would have styled her character by the generally held cultural images of the type, not from a particular model. It seems likely that she followed the same procedure in molding her Good Country Gentlewoman. Finding one source is unnecessary, but seeing how closely Clive's character projects the assumptions and expectations of her time about the gentlewoman helps confirm

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Clive's sharp eye for studying life and her gifts in creating a character. In her introduction to *Eighteenth-Century Women: an Anthology*, Bridget Hill establishes that there was a widely held and readily available understanding of what gentlewomen were supposed to be and do:

> In mothers' advice to their daughters (whether real or fictitious), in letters addressed to young ladies, in treatises on the content and objects of female education, and in guides to feminine conduct and deportment, the duties and responsibilities of young women to their parents, and to their future or present husbands, were laid down. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for a woman of the middle class who could read to remain ignorant of the model to which she was expected to aspire. (16)

Clive, it seems safe to say, had the same understanding of this type that her contemporaries did, and she set out to create a role familiar, recognizable, but not dully stereotypical. Incorporating defining details and appropriate stage business, Clive built her gentlewoman around the assumptions her age held:

—Writing letters;

— Pursuing suitable recreations: gardening, needlework, reading, and parties;

— Giving good advice to younger women;

— Attending to the well-being of family members and the community;

— Manifesting a gracious spirit and demeanor;

— Indulging in gossip and fashion;

— Living a respectable life of religious faith, financial prudence, sexual propriety;

— Emanating charm and wit.

As a standard for the gentlewoman of the age, against whom to measure Clive's performance, Mary Granville Pendarves Delany serves well. Her dates, 1700–1788, include those of Clive, 1711–1785, and thus provide an appropriate frame for the study of the traits cultivated and projected by the actress. Mrs. Delany displayed a demure reticence which Clive neither possessed nor desired; nevertheless, a checklist of the interests and habits of Mrs. Delany provides a useful scale for assessing Kitty's playing of the role Mary lived. Perhaps most conspicuous is Clive's choice to record her new role in letters, a province of the rela-

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tively leisured gentlewoman and one that even advice-giving ministers thought suited to womanly ways. The Reverend John Bennett declared that "to write letters is a very desirable excellence in a woman" (100), a task for which she is better suited than a man. Because they worry about grammar and rules, men write stiff letters, but "not cramped with the shackles and formality of rules, [women's] thoughts are expressed spontaneously as they flow, and become, more immediately, (what a letter always should be) a lively, amusing written, conversation" (100).

Unpublished until well into the nineteenth century, Delany's letters were not, of course, an available model for Clive, but they demonstrate a type the actress and her contemporaries knew. Looking back on the lively letters Mrs. Delany wrote to her circle and those Clive sent to hers, we realize many of the letters could pass as having been written by either woman.

Both Mary Delany and Kitty Clive enjoyed fixing up their houses and gardens, and both wrote about the process. Clive, when she first aimed for the role of country gentlewoman, asked Walpole about setting out a garden and then, when in residence at Little Strawberry Hill, she walked about and regularly enjoyed her garden. From her home in Ireland, Mrs. Delany's description of a garden and of her enjoyment of it is very close to Clive's letters about the garden at Twickenham: "My garden is at present in the high glow of beauty, my cherries ripening, roses, jessamine, and pinks in full bloom, and the hay partly spread and partly in cocks, complete the rural scene. We have discovered a new breakfasting place under the shade of nut-trees" (Delany II: 558). Glorying in the beauty of her surroundings, Clive praises her garden as a source of great pleasure: "it is as beautiful as May; there is quite a mob of primroses and wall flowers all round the garden full blown" (FSL, Mar. 24, 1773).

Such sentiments bloom in scores of contemporary works, both hortative and fictional. Edward Ward's ideal country gentlewoman, described in his paired moral poems *The City Madam, and the Country Maid: or, Opposite Characters of a Virtuous Housewifely Damsel, and a Mechanick's Town-bred Daughter*, is a lover of gardens:

> To the sweet Vi'let, as she walks, she stoops,
> The fragrant Flow'r with gentle Hand she Crops,
> Pleases her Nostrils with its Charming Scent
> Then to her Breast conveys the Purple Ornament. (12)

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"Attention to a garden," the Reverend Bennett proclaimed, was a "truly feminine amusement," where women might find that "inexpressible tranquility . . . which soothes the spirits into [a] kind of cheerful pensiveness" (148). In Sarah Fielding's *The Governess or, Little Female Academy* (1749), Mrs. Teachum, that gentlewoman nurturing the next generation of gentlewomen, regularly sends her charges into the garden so that they can learn from it and the moral tales exchanged there. Trying to control her feelings for Edgar, Fanny Burney's Camilla walks in the garden, and Jane Austen's sensible women regularly take turns amid the flora. In the *Spectator,* a series whose popularity and influence remained undiminished by the time of Clive's retirement, Aurelia, a good country gentlewoman, "passes a great part of her Time in her own Walks and Gardens," abounding in "good Sense" and "consummate virtùe" (No. 15, Mar. 17, 1711. I: 68). Emily Putnam's *The Lady: Studies of Certain Significant Phases of Her History* (1910) quaintly concludes that "the lady's history has in all times been reflected and symbolized by that of her garden" (215).

Handwork and needlework, like gardens, are the fitting pursuits of gentlewomen. Delany was famous for her cut-paper flowers; with her needle Clive worked a bright floral carpet (*Biographical Dictionary* 356). In these activities both women conform to the articles of conduct books and the images of gentlewomen in literature. The strict Thomas Gisborne allows that "Family conversation, needle-work, a book . . . any occupation is found preferable to the tediousness of a constant want of employment" (207). At the beginning of the century, Ward, deeming gardening, needlework, and reading allowable and admirable, praised industry in what others would classify as recreation. The ideal woman stays busy with her sewing:

> No Time can hide in Idleness away
> Her Needle, Bobbins, Knitting Pins, or Reel,
> Some new Device, or the old Spinning Wheel
> Are still Employ'd. (10)

Even the demanding Mrs. Cartwright, in *Letters on Female Education, Addressed to a Married Lady* (1777), found "Reading, needlework, music, dancing, drawing, and every other ornamental and useful piece of knowledge . . . the proper attainments" (45) for gentlewomen. The Reverend John Bennett specified that first among the accomplishments of woman is needlework, for "to

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wield the needle with advantage, so as to unite the useful and beautiful, is her particular province, and a sort of ingenuity which shows her in the most amiable and attracting point of view" (133). Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), who received Samuel Johnson's praise for cooking and sewing as well as translating Epictetus, made shirts for her half-brother Henry. In fiction, as well as in life and moral admonition, finding a gentlewoman who did not sew and expect to sew would be difficult. Richardson's Pamela (1740), skilled in her needle as a servant, retains that talent as mistress of the house; Sidney Bidulph, from Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), sews for pleasure and ornament and, briefly, for an income; and even the spiteful Mrs. Orgueil and the mercenary Mrs. Ratcliff of Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744–1753), far from gracious gentlewomen themselves, insist that managing a needle well remains essential for acceptable womanhood.

Along with needlework and gardening, a third recreational activity acceptable for a gentlewoman was reading. Delany and Clive comment on their reading, which in the case of the latter may depart slightly from the entirely ladylike. Living in Ireland as the wife of Dr. Delany, and thus truly a country gentlewoman, Mrs. Delany confessed her disappointment in reading the *History of Gaudentio di Lucca.* She had been reading *Clarissa,* she wrote to her sister Anne Dewes on November 26, 1749, "and it must have been an extraordinary book that would have been relished after that!" (II: 523). Impressed with the artistry and power of *Clarissa,* she comments on it regularly in letters during 1749–50. To object to it is to raise her ire. Mrs. Dewes "had better have told me who called Clarissa '*fool,*' for I have laid it to the charge of the several, by turns, and only one is guilty! I hope it was *not* Mrs. Dobson. To call Clarissa *fool,* argues a *weak* judgment in the *criticiser*" (II: 561). Clive, the old actress playing the country gentlewoman, reads Bellamy's *Apology* and compares it to *Tristram Shandy* because it seems to be going on volume after volume (FSL, May 30, 1785). Six months later Clive compares Bellamy herself to Moll Flanders (FSL, Nov., no day given, 1785).

Reading as a leisure pursuit for gentlewomen was widely accepted, of course, although titles suitable for a lady varied greatly. Ward insists that "Religious Books [should be] her chiefest study" (7), but Mary Delany read widely in fiction without a blemish on her reputation as an honorable gentlewoman. Bennett

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lists a book—along with a garden, a walk, a ride, and the society of a worthy friend—as the real amusements of a lady (153), but he found only one novel, *Sir Charles Grandison,* admissible to the entirely admirable woman.

Less acceptable than gardening, sewing, and reading are parties and cards, but Mrs. Delany managed both without scandal. Clive, perhaps not entirely a model gentlewoman in her card parties because she played for money and loved to win, enumerates engagements every day and every evening "either at home or abroad" (FSL, Nov. 3, 1770). At one of the card parties she hosted, she was "most extremely fatigued" because she "had been all the morning in setting the [six] tables." So exhausted was Clive, in fact, that she had difficulty in directing the guests, but "General Leister's Lady saw how it was and snatched the paper out of my hand which was to people my tables and settled it all with ease. She is an angelic woman, and I shall love her as long as I live" (FSL, Nov. 26, 1781).

The amusements of gardening, sewing, reading, and attending parties may have brought pleasure to the practitioner, but the gentlewoman had responsibilities to others. One obligation was the duty of older—and presumably wiser—women to guide the young. As an older woman, Delany wrote letters of advice to her niece Mary Dewes, and then to Mary's daughter, Georgina Mary Port, advising them on the proper conduct in social and matrimonial matters. Mrs. Delany also encouraged the young Fanny Burney as she began her career. When Kitty Clive assumed the role of the Good Country Gentlewoman, she created obligatory scenes and adapted real-life people for supporting roles. Most important of these figures was Jane Pope (1743?–1818), an aspiring young actress, whom Clive loved and advised about conduct in professional and theatrical matters. As a good country gentlewoman traditionally gave advice to young women and helped them toward wholesome lives, so Kitty turned, not to daughter, niece, or parlor boarder, but to Miss Pope. Appropriately, Clive gave the young woman, whom she calls "my dear child" (FSL, Feb. 26, 1779), loving admonitions on how to succeed in the theatre and on the stage of life. Central to this counsel is following a "good and virtuous" path that "tho it may not carry you to Twickenham it will set you down in as pleasant a place" (FSL, Feb. 26, 1779). Clive cautions Jane Pope that though she is possessed of "a good understanding and fine principles," she must

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not let her virtues make her vain (FSL, Dec. 18, 1781). In response to Miss Pope's apparent complaint of the popularity of Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), Clive obliquely warns the young woman that she must keep the "vile sensation" of "black envy" "far very far" from her (FSL, Nov. 15, 1782), and two months later Clive coaches Pope on the way to approach Mrs. Siddons and become her friend (FSL, Jan., no day given, 1783). No good country gentlewoman ever advised a daughter more explicitly on how to succeed against a rival in courtship than Clive advised Pope on success against a professional competitor.

Older women giving advice to the young is, of course, a standard literary scene. In fiction, Mrs. Tyrold, Camilla's mother, with dignity, prudence, and divine guidance, helps her daughter toward responsible womanhood. Pamela's mother can convey from a distance the proper standards for a virtuous life. Frances Sheridan underscores that Lady Bidulph's advice, based on excessively narrow standards and incomplete information, directs her daughter Sidney, but directs her toward emotional distress and, for a time, penury. In drama, Catherine Clive's own afterpieces offer humorous treatments of the older woman superintending the young. Mrs. O'Connor, the rich and wise woman of *The Faithful Irish Woman,* modeling preferred moral and social conduct for her niece, proves more helpful than the young woman's own mother. Conversely, Clive's Mrs. Croston, the spiteful sister-in-law of *Every Woman in Her Humour,* in pretending to care for and nurture her nieces, shows everything a mother figure should not be.

Similarly, books of instructions by both men and women stressed the obligation older women bore in guiding the young. Hester Chapone turned the letter of private, familial advice into a public conduct book with her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1774). Though it appeared in 1797, twelve years after Clive's death, Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* summed up the prevailing tastes of the preceding years, especially in the country where moral and social standards were less subject to the whims of fashion. In discussing womanly duties "of extreme and never-ceasing concern to the welfare of mankind" (12), Gisborne states that "modeling the human mind during the early stages of its growth, and fixing, while it is yet ductile, its growing principles of action" is a woman's obligation, "children of each sex being, in general, under maternal tuition

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during their childhood, and girls until they become women" (12–13). After allowing the nine young women in her charge to read a fable about an eagle and a dove, Mrs. Teachum draws a moral for womanhood:

> Now, my good Children . . . if you will pass thro' this Life with real Pleasure, imitate the *Dove;* and remember, that Innocence of Mind and Integrity of Heart, adorn the Female Character; and can alone produce your own Happiness, and diffuse it to all around you. (Fielding 236)

A gentlewoman, however, was responsible for more than advice to young women relatives and protégées. As loving caretaker to members of her own family, gracious minister to the community, and sympathetic benefactress to the poor, a good country gentlewoman drew on the belief that the lady always manifested a "natural gift of being graciously kind" (Ditchfield 169). The self-styled "Well-Wisher-to-Her-Sex" specifies in "Thoughts on Friendship" that the lady who is the genuine friend to and benefactress of humanity has "a *Generous, Grateful, Sweet Temper*" (39). Edward Ward maintains she is "courteous to all she knows" (7). Thomas Gisborne puts this role of kind caretaker as the first of the conspicuous "effect[s] of the female character" by "contributing daily and hourly to the comfort of husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters, and of other relations, connections, and friends, in the intercourse of domestic life, under every vicissitude of sickness and health, of joy and affliction" (12).

Both Delany and Clive extended their help to family members. In addition to her niece and great niece, Delany always expressed her care for her sister Anne; and Clive, when she moved to Strawberry Hill, invited her brother James, who did not seem able to support himself, to come and live with her.[4] Writing November 3, 1770, Clive celebrates the happiness of her brother: "I sometimes think he is going mad his joy is so great at his new kind of life; all my neighbors like him mightily. He goes everywhere with me" (FSL).

Contributing to the comfort of family members was the immediate obligation of a gentlewoman, but giving to and serving others were the means by which she kept her delicate and compassionate sensitivity. If a woman does not give to charity, her "heart forgets, by disuse, the emotions in which it once delighted" (Gisborne 128). In practicing "employments conge-

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nial to female sympathy," a gentlewoman finds what Gisborne terms "gratification":

> The discharge of relative duties, and the exercise of benevolence form additional sources of activity and enjoyment. To give delight in the affectionate intercourse of domestic society; to relieve a parent in the superintendence of family affairs; to smooth the bed of sickness, and cheer the decline of age; to examine into the wants and distresses of the female inhabitants of the neighbourhood; to promote useful institutions for the comfort of mothers, and the instruction of children; and to give to those institutions that degree of attention, which, without requiring either much time or much personal trouble, will facilitate their establishment and extend their usefulness: these are employments congenial to female sympathy. (220)

If Gisborne tends toward the ideal, William Ellis offers an entirely practical appraisal of the duties of a country gentlewoman. The title of his 1750 work declares the subject and the author's qualifications: *The Country Housewife's Family Companion: or Profitable Directions for Whatever Relates to the Management and Good Oeconomy of the Domestick Concerns of a Country Life . . . The Whole Founded on Near Thirty Years Experience.* Drawing on his long familiarity with the ideal wife of a country gentleman, Ellis notes the very distinct obligation to minister to those around her. As a "Model of her Sex," a country gentlewoman made a "wise Distribution of [her goods] in favour of those who had need, and she had no Poor about her that escaped her Knowledge and her Charity; She comforted one and assisted another" (ix).

Having played Cherry in *The Beaux Stratagem,* Clive knew that a Lady Bountiful is a gracious minister to the community. Kindness itself, she attempted to inspire and comfort the ill or the bereaved. "I feel the most sincere concern to hear," she wrote to the Reverend Doctor Franklin upon hearing of his illness, "that you are ill; and very very sorry to find that you think yourself worse than you really are, and by that means sink your spirits; ah my dear Doctor, take care of your spirits whatever you do" (FSL, Mar. 2, 1784). Franklin died a few days later, and Clive writes, to a mutual friend, a letter that belongs in a collection of model letters:

> I read of Dr. Franklin's death in the papers; that miserable family;—it breaks my heart to think of them—I suppose the poor woman will not long survive his loss for there never was two people

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> who lived together with so much affection as they did; I don't believe they ever had a dispute in their lives. . . . When they are a little composed I will write to them, but alas pity is of no consequence to those who are so truly unhappy tho' tis all I have the power to give. (FSL, Mar. 16, 1784)

Pity, for the good country gentlewoman, transcends the immediate circle to minister to the suffering of humanity in general, and Clive's heart and purse went out to the unfortunate: "The great calamities the poor suffer are inexpressible and my heart melts and my eyes run over for them and so share my pocket as much as I can" (FSL, Jan. 22, 1776).

In all her acts, a good country gentlewoman should demonstrate a gracious spirit and demeanor. This graciousness Clive certainly extends to Mrs. David Garrick: ". . . my reply [to Mrs. Franks who had delivered a message] was natural and *True;* that everybody must *love* Mrs. Garrick, when they was acquainted with her; I speak by experience" (FSL, Sept. 22, 1775). She compliments Dr. Franklin: "You have the best of women in the world for your wife (and I believe the most affectionate). Your children [are] dutiful and your daughters handsome" (FSL, Mar. 2, 1784). Within the gracious spirit, friendship and loyalty are essential, and Clive displays them in her management of the role. She inquires about a friend and claims: "I heard of her tenderness that she expressed for me when she thought me no more, and I must be no more when I forget it" (FSL, Dec. 31, 1772).

Less admirable but seemingly omnipresent with good country gentlewomen was love of gossip—especially that having to do with fashion and marriage. In her book *Gossip* Patricia Meyer Spacks analyzes the "traditional connections of gossip with women" (38), and the fiction and drama of the period disclose the sounds of gossip everywhere eighteenth century gentlewomen congregate—or converse in letters. Clive certainly gossips. She gossips when she passes on that thirteen members of the Perrin family "thought themselves bitten by a mad dog," and then adds: "poor Lady Perrin could not have been much madder than she always was—only she never barked" (FSL, Mar. 16, 1784). Living in the country, Clive hungered for news. "Send me all the nonsense you can," she wrote Jane Pope (FSL, Dec. 2, 1776) and scolded her in 1781 for not providing news of herself: "You don't tell me a word about your new part. Pray let me know something of it. I was told it was good" (FSL, Nov. 26). Gossip was censorious as well as genial, for good country gentlewomen were hardly

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perfect, and assuming a position of superiority when gossiping about others was not atypical. Clive snipes, and usually her condemnation comes because of the sexual failings of another. George Anne Bellamy (1731?–1788) is a typical target: "The abandoned Mrs. Bellamy has written to me to desire I would lend her five and twenty pounds which she will return me at Christmas. I really would not give her so many farthings to save her from that destruction that [she] must certainly come to and which she so truly deserves" (FSL, Nov. 1, 1785).

Gossip and fashion merge when Clive passes judgment on the attire of ladies at a "very fine assembly." Scorning the old ladies who dress as if they were young, Clive notes, "I have a right to laugh as I am not such an old fool myself, for I do not recollect that I make myself ridiculous in my dress" (FSL, Nov. 26, 1781). Clive's comments here are in keeping with those recommended by that expert on gentility, John Bennett, who told his young addressee, Lucy: "The sober, aged autumn, is never clad in the cheerful livery of spring" (142). Nor would Clive have made the mistake of trying to impose her own fashion sense on the country. As Thomas Gisborne remarks, "a lady, when she leaves London, ought to be careful not to corrupt the country by the introduction of foolish and culpable fashions" (338). The old actress knew that dressing the part would be essential to her new-found character, and would have been careful to heed Gisborne's injunction not to import a "cargo of modish follies and modish vices." Always careful to observe propriety of dress, Mary Delany included fashion notes in scores of her letters. After attending the Royal Wedding of Anne, Princess Royal, to William Prince of Orange on March 14, 1734, she wrote her sister about all the designs, colors, and textures adorning members of the royal house, but confessed that the women's dress was far more interesting than the men's: "The Prince of Wales was fine, as you may suppose, but I hardly ever remember men's clothes" (I: 437).

Even more popular than fashion as a subject of gossip was matrimony. Clive teased her protégée about marriage and told Miss Pope not to bring the gentleman to see her yet—"I must hear what sort of a man he is before I will let him in" (FSL, July 24, 1773)—suggesting perhaps that gossiping about the suitor was even preferable to meeting him. Miss Pope did not marry, and in 1778, Clive used handwriting as a means of seeking gossip about suitors. Praising the clear handwriting of her friend, Clive first jests: "I am under some suspicion that you have got a sweetheart

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and have been at school to mend your hand that he might understand all the fine tender things you said to him," and then hints broadly of her need for news of romance: "I think you would hardly be so undutiful to me as to admit a lover without consulting me; nothing could excuse you for such a neglect" (FSL, Feb. 26). Clive's gossip about marriage is mild, however, in comparison with that of her contemporaries. Writing to her sister, Lady Mar, in 1723, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, arguably the queen of epistolary gossips, dissects some unfortunate marriages, some unsavory keepings, and some decidedly unattractive sexual partners, tersely concluding "This is (I think) the whole state of Love" (24). But in no time, Lady Mary had additional evidence on the poor state of matrimony: "There is a ridiculous marriage on the point of conclusion that diverts me much. You know Lady Mary Sanderson; she is makeing over her discreet person and £1,500 a year jointure to the tempting Embrace of the noble Earl of Pembroke, ag'd 73" (26).

The gentler Mary Delany does her share in circulating the news of who is marrying or being forced to marry whom. A letter to her sister, dated December 22, 1747, contains two of her best stories. One concerns a woman of twenty-six, who went "off with the schoolmaster of the parish, a clergyman who had been married several years, and his wife a very good kind of woman" (II: 482–83). The second story, featuring "a young lady, youngest daughter to a Captain Johnston here, a very pretty girl just sixteen," had a plot that would have been worthy of Clive's portrayal on stage. The girl

> ran away on Friday night with Sir Robert King, a vile young rake of a considerable fortune in this country. They went off on Friday night; the father pursued and overtook them on Saturday morning, held a pistol at the knight's head, swore he would shoot him through the head if he did not instantly marry his daughter, which rather than die he consented to do. A parson was ready and called in, but Sir R. K.'s servants rushed in at the same time, gave him a pistol, and an opportunity of escaping, which he did, and left the forlorn damsel to return with her father. They all appeared at church in Dublin on Sunday morning, and the girl appears at all public places as unconcerned and brazen as if she had acted the most prudent part in the world. (II: 482)

As Delany's disapproval here suggests, projecting conventional respectability based on religious faith, financial prudence, and traditional standards of sexual morality is the obligation of the

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good country gentlewoman, who is "Discreet, Industrious, and in Nothing Vain" (Ward 12). For such women, according to the 1725 "Well-Wisher-to-Her-Sex," the "first *Essential* [is] *Strict Virtue*. By which I mean, a *native good disposition* of the *Will,* determin'd to perform whatever a well-inform'd *Understanding* shall dictate to be *Just* and Reasonable" ("Thoughts" 32). Acting in this wise way is possible because a gentlewoman possesses "*Rectitude* of Will and *Sound Judgement*" (32) and shows "*Fidelity* and *Faithfulness*" (38). Still shaping moral standards in Clive's time, the *Spectator* advised the gentlewoman to follow a "regular . . . Oeconomy" in enjoying "the Relish of a County Life" (I: 68) and to embody what Annabella, one of Mr. Spec's correspondents (No. 95, June 20, 1711), defined as the gentlewoman: a figure of justice, gratitude, sincerity, prudence, and modesty (I: 405). Kitty Clive conforms to the cultural expectations of respectability in religious, financial, and sexual matters. She regularly thanks God for her good fortune, reminding Jane Pope that "we are not possessed of . . . good qualities *from ourselves*" (FSL, Dec. 18, 1781). Her profitable economy prompts her to give advice. The wise course is to "save every shilling" (FSL, Oct. 6, 1773) and demand "very good security for your money" (FSL, Sept. 12, 1775). Prudent in financial matters, Clive also censures sexual excess and indiscretion. Aghast at George Anne Bellamy's behavior, Clive suggests that Bellamy should have dedicated her *Apology* to the constable (FSL, Feb., 1784).

Such a concern with virtue and respectability could make a gentlewoman a worthy correspondent of even clergymen on moral matters. While still the widowed Mrs. Pendarves, Mary Delany wrote to Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, and to his friend, the Irish clergyman Patrick Delany. Her correspondence with the Dean gained her the literary fame of being Dr. Swift's Mrs. Delany; and her letters to the Reverend Mr. Delany brought him to her side as soon as the death of his first wife was suitably lamented. As for Kitty Clive, her strength and directness with which she addresses the Reverend Dr. Franklin on moral matters are equal to those found in Catherine Willis's "A Letter from a Gentlewoman in the Country, to the Lord Bishop of Bangor," in which for fifteen pages, she charges the Bishop with misinterpretation of scripture.

The spirit of a good country gentlewoman drew from a reservoir of feminine charm, a charm that often appears in an aptly

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expressed sentiment or a witty turn of phrase. "Is there anything half so charming as the nonsense of sensible people?" Kitty Clive writes to Dr. Franklin, when urging him to recollect the "delightful nonsense" they talked (FSL, Mar. 2, 1784). In the same letter she writes wittily of an illness of two years earlier in which she was "as the saying is, almost at Death's Door—but as it stood ajar I did not choose to go in." Not surprisingly, given her background, Clive was extremely aware of how theatrical an attribute such charm can be. Writing to another accomplished performer, David Garrick, Clive looks forward to the summer, when "I hope we shall see each other ten times as often, when we will talk; and Dance; and Sing; and send our hearers laughing to their beds" (FSL, Jan. 31, 1776).

Neither dependent nor passive, more given to confrontation than to nurturing, Kitty Clive hardly bore out the Reverend James Fordyce's 1756 claim that women are excluded from most of the activities of men "by decorum, by softness, and by fear" (81). Her Good Country Gentlewoman comes, then, from traits that could be conveyed through symbols—gardens, letters, the arrangement of houses—as an actress conveys her role with the assistance of props and symbols on the stage, or from lines—such as those of advice and solicitude—that quickly fix an image in the mind of an audience. Since Clive's personality is at odds with the stereotype of the country gentlewoman, the characterization is one achieved largely by the external accumulation of traits. The autobiographical fragment does not qualify, in Nussbaum's phrase, as "the production of . . . written interiority" (xiii), but seems crafted by what we might term, in contrast, "exteriority."

Through neither William Raftor, her father, nor George Clive, her husband, the usual routes, could Kitty Clive grow old as a good gentlewoman. As a thoroughgoing professional woman, however, Kitty did not require a father's wealth or a husband's work to make her way; her talent was her ticket. But irony plays into her life. Her looks, her voice quality, her size, and her general style did not support her in the desired role. Apparently she was neither to live nor to play the role to which a woman of her birth was entitled. But Kitty never stopped with never. Foote had told her "*never* to think of personating a fine Lady of any Kind" (42; italics mine), but she took the role and she made it fit, doing for it precisely what she did for her other roles. One of her most valued talents was expanding roles. In *The Wandering Patentee*, Tate

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Wilkinson notes this capacity; "she made Flora in The Wonder, equal in the estimation of the audience, to the superior characters of Felix or Violante" (II: 31). As she expanded other roles beyond the earlier interpretations, so she expanded the country gentlewoman. As commonly understood, there were three types of country gentlewoman: the wife of a gentleman, at least reasonably prosperous, a figure like Mrs. Weston, the former Miss Taylor, governess to Emma Woodhouse; the widow of a gentleman, someone like Mrs. Delany, Mrs. Boscawen, or even Mrs. Thrale; or the maiden daughter of a gentleman—such as Emma Woodhouse herself before her marriage, or the young and generous Clarissa. In all three cases, at least to begin with, it is the relation to a gentleman that makes a gentlewoman. Lacking this ground, Clive broadens the image. Hers is a professional woman whose independence brings new verve to the old role. Deconstructing the lady and then reassembling the part life refused to let her play, Clive achieved the denied role entirely on her own.

And nowhere is Clive's talent for deconstructing and reassembling the gentle lady more apparent than in her writing. In their theatrical imagery and in their piling up of detail, her self-defining letters show a woman recording the self as she crafts it. In both acts Clive, like Boswell, is conscious and deliberate. She not only creates a role that matters to her, but from her experience in constructing hundreds of roles, she manipulates the essentially theatrical nature of autobiography—a showing-off accompanied with interpretation that is intended to be consistent, illuminating, and flattering. Her fragmentary epistolary autobiography reveals the totality of Clive's creativity, the determination to complete her repertoire, and the care and deliberation with which she integrated set, action, lines, and cameo moments.

Seeing what Clive accomplished is relatively easy. Drawing conclusions from her achievement, however, is less easy. In addition to the question of fulfilling the personal versus the professional dream, there is a second question of the overall image of Clive. One conclusion makes Clive a more admirable person, for the qualities of a good country gentlewoman soften and balance the portrait of her as a fierce spirit that frequently terrified actors and managers alike. The other makes her a consummate actress. The second reading is the more persuasive and supports the idea that Clive played the lady, not from some unmet psychological longing, but because her roster of roles was incomplete without the gentlewoman.

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In neither case, however, can we think of Clive's achievement as an escape. Almost nothing in letters or the many anecdotes about her suggests any dissatisfaction with her life. If she had harbored some secret desire to leave the stage and become a lady, she neither committed that longing to paper nor communicated it in gesture or conversation. She was the object of almost constant observation, and the many tales about her—onstage, backstage, and offstage—would surely include some fragment of her desire for an alternative world if that desire surfaced. When Clive does write to others about how things might have been, any sense of regret or reservation is tempered by acceptance. Apparently she was less than happy her gender excluded her from managing a theatre. "Providence has been very good to you and to me in giving us both every reasonable comfort that we could wish for," she writes to the Reverend Dr. Franklin on March 2, 1784, but their success was not so great "as we might have had if you had been made a bishop and I had been the manager of a theatre." Then, rallying, Clive concludes that "as neither you nor I shall ever, I believe, be much richer than we are at present, the only thing we have to do is to be contented" (FSL). Clive displayed this acceptance even when corresponding with her theatrical friends. An earlier letter, this one to George Coleman on December 16, 1771, conveys her frustration with many of her days in the theatre, but significantly, she ends the comment with a rather elegant figure of speech and a broad joke at herself, both of which blunt any expression of unhappiness:

> I am sure the theatres may truly be said to turn every body's happiness (who has anything to do there) into anxiety, whether it is owing to their vanity and avarice not being easily satisfied I can't tell, than from the villainy of managers to actors, and the villainy of actors to managers. . . . I speak by experience; I have been fretted by managers, till my gall has overflowed like the river Thames, which glides by my door as quietly as my own sweet temper. (FSL)

And expressions of dissatisfaction with her own choices are minor declivities in expressions of happiness: "I am in such good health and such fine spirits that it is impossible for anyone to be happier" (FSL, Nov. 3, 1779), and though she often censors others for mismanaging their lives, Clive records neither regret for the lines her life followed nor deprivation that no husband supported her. Accepted by the circle around Horace Walpole, befriended during her career by the Prince and Princess of Wales, whom the

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Biographical Dictionary terms "her staunch friends" (349), and untouched by any scandal or sexual innuendo, Clive appears to have enjoyed a busy, satisfying, and honorable life.

The art in Clive's designing and executing the image of a gentlewoman and the art in her autobiographical record do not serve the need to "be a lady" or to soften her image, but rather suggest an artist's desire to complete a repertoire. Like Boswell in his journal, Clive is deft at sketching in a character, at writing as if she is chatting with a friend, at turning out a balanced and eloquent sentence when it suits the occasion, at manipulating imagery, and at varying the tone from one of almost sweet piety to one of fierce indignation as she rails at what she sees as wrong. Her art in writing not only suggests the art and the artfulness of her performance, but also suggests that assuming the role of the gentlewoman was the professional dream pursued by the consummate actress who, if she could not play the desired role on another's stage, would make all her world a stage and develop the part under her own direction.

NOTES

1. Most of the letters referred to are in the collection of unpublished Clive material in the Folger Shakespeare Library. I have regularized most of the spelling and punctuation. Clive's letters to Jane Pope passed to Pope's niece Miss Thomas. From these originals, theatre manager James Winston (1773–1843) made the copies now in the Folger. Additional letters in the Folger collection are in Clive's hand. I am grateful to the Kennesaw State College Department of English for a travel grant that enabled me to visit the Folger. The Clive letters reproduced in Percy Fitzgerald's biography are from the Forster Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum (69). Other letters appear in collections of correspondence and biographies of David Garrick and Horace Walpole. R. C. Frushell's bibliography identifies still other letters by Clive held at the Garrick Club, London (237).
2. In an April 14, 1769, letter to Garrick, Clive refers to her long-estranged husband: "You are very much mistaken if you imagine I shall be sorry to hear Mr. Clive is well; I thank God I have no malice or hatred to any body; besides, it is so long ago since I thought he used me ill, that I have quite forgot it. I am glad he is well and happy" (FSL). Writing to Jane Pope at the time of his death in 1780, Kitty explained that George had left her nothing except very clear protection from his creditors. She also copied out the relevant paragraph from George Clive's will:

    And as for and concerning my Wife Catherine Clive whom it is well known has been separated from me for many years I give her no part

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> of what I die . . . possessed of but I give or rather confirm to her everything she shall be possessed of at my death it being my will and intention that she should have nothing to do with my executors and representatives nor they with her.

Clive then writes that "I am obliged to him" for this last clause, since "It must put it out of the Power of his Exe[cutors] to molest or trouble me" (FSL, Dec. 25, 1780). In the opening comments to Miss Pope, Clive refers to George Clive as "Poor Man" and seems to look back free from both bitterness and romantic nostalgia—"his heart was too hard to feel any compunction for the injuries he has occasioned me" (FSL, Dec. 25, 1780).

3. This is the letter discussed earlier. Undated in the Folger manuscript, the *Biographical Dictionary* dates it as December 1749 NS (III: 354), while the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole* dates it as most probably December 3, 1748 OS (40. 61).
4. With his sister's backing, James had attempted a stage career, but his talent fell far below hers. On one occasion, playing a walk-on in *King Lear,* he held the map upside down for Garrick's Lear. This fumble, for which Garrick blasted him, seems fairly typical of James Raftor's theatrical attempts. Samuel Foote said he would rate Raftor "at no more than Three-pence" (45).

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