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'Most Women have no Character At All': Female Playwrights and the London Theatre

1760 - 1800

by

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Doctoral Thesis

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Abstract

The eighteenth century saw a remarkable increase in the number of works written by women, and also the number of women who made a living by writing. For the first time, being a writer was a viable career choice for a woman, and it was possible to support a family by writing, despite the backlash some individual writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, faced for their work.

This thesis will focus on the work women did in the eighteenth-century theatre, and how they reconciled the demands of being a professional writer with their society's gender expectations. By analysing a variety of play texts written by different women, I will show that they engaged critically with ideas about female virtue, the marriage market, and women's participation in the literary scene, the working world, and national politics. The plays of this period are relatively under-researched, and often do not appear at all in critical studies of eighteenth-century literature. My aim, therefore, is to rectify this situation, and to join other critics in rediscovering this interesting and vital era of female playwriting.

By combining close analysis of the texts themselves with research into their historical context, and biographical information about the authors, this study shows that, far from being simply superficial entertainment, the theatre of this time was a place which represented and reflected society as a whole. Working within the structural restrictions placed on them by legislation and tradition, female playwrights found ways to express their thoughts on current events, and encouraged their audiences to form their own opinions.

My focus is mainly on stage comedies written for the three licensed London theatres, Drury Lane, the Haymarket, and Covent Garden. The comedy genre is especially interesting as it often allowed playwrights to disguise their serious and sometimes subversive content behind jokes and sarcasm. Female writers especially were very inclined to choose this genre over others, and several of the most popular comedies of the late eighteenth century were written by women. The main focus of this thesis is the lives and works of the following playwrights: Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mariana Starke, Elizabeth Griffith, Sophia Lee, and Frances Brooke.

The careers of these women showcase the experiences of female writers in the world of the London theatres. As successful authors, they created a brief moment towards the end of the eighteenth century when womens' voices could be heard and acknowledged in a public space, and in which discussions about morality and femininity were simply about women, but were held by women themselves.

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Attending conferences has been one of my favourite memories of the last three years, and I have met so many fellow academics who have been generous with their time, shared their research, and commiserated about writer's block. I am very proud to be part of such a supportive community, and look forward to making more of those memories in the future.

I am also grateful to Deirdre O'Byrne, for her support when I was teaching my first undergraduate seminar. Her engagement with the students and her constant readiness to answer any questions or concerns made her a pleasure to work with as a colleague.

Special thanks to my family, and especially my parents, who have supported my academic studies from the beginning. I am very lucky to have them. They are my moral support, and never tired of listening to my random facts about eighteenth-century writers.

This project would not have been possible without my academic supervisors, Carol Bolton and Nigel Wood. They have both contributed so many ideas and suggestions, and always tolerated my tendency towards German efficiency. I am grateful for Nigel's deeply impressive knowledge of eighteenth-century theatre, his enthusiastic support for my topic, and his always helpful and inexhaustible book recommendations.

Carol was incredibly supportive from the very first meeting, and truly made me feel like part of an academic family. Going to her office always felt like visiting a friend. Without her encouragement, advice, and always constructive criticism, this thesis would not have been finished.

This thesis is dedicated to two women who were at home in the theatre: my grandmother Ilse Lippold, and my tutor Julia Swindells, who took me on my first visit to the eighteenth-century playhouse.

Prologue

'Most Women have no Character at all'[1] - in Frances Burney's play *The Witlings* (1779), almost an entire Act is spent discussing this line. Lady Smatter interprets it as a comment on female morality, and immediately defends her own unblemished reputation. Mr. Codger tries to contradict her, believing that the quote refers to a lack of personalities in women. The scene encapsulates the eighteenth-century theatre's preoccupation with womens' characters: in the sense of their public reputation, their personal abilities, and the fictional characters they wrote about and portrayed on the stage.

This thesis is an exploration of female playwrights' work in the London theatres, and the ways in which they negotiated their own, and society's, expectations about their characters. In the second half of the eighteenth century, women writers were attaining an increasing presence in the British theatre. For women of that time, they lived a uniquely public life, in which their writing was performed, heard, witnessed, commented on, and criticised by an impressive number of people. Michael Simpson writes that,

> the theater is a microcosm of English society in which this large body can inspect itself, directly as a self-reflecting assembled presence and indirectly through the social articulations of the spectacle that it witnesses on stage.[2]

Since this is the case, reading female-authored plays gives us an invaluable insight into what eighteenth-century women were concerned about and interested in, and what society's attitude was towards them. Focusing on the period of around 1760 to approximately 1800, I have analysed plays written by women, many of which have been forgotten since their lifetimes. Hannah More wrote her first play, *The Search after Happiness*, in 1762, while Elizabeth Inchbald's last play, *To Marry or Not To Marry*, was performed in 1805. These two plays neatly bookend the period in which female playwrights were at their most active and

[1] Frances Burney, *The Witling*s, in Peter Sabor and Tristanne J. Cooke (eds) *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney* (London: Routledge, 2016), Act 4, l. 47. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
The line is a slight misquotation from Alexander Pope's 'Epistle to a Lady', where it reads as 'Most Women have no Characters at all'.
[2] Michael Simpson, 'Re-opening after the Old Price Riots: War and Peace at Drury Lane', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Col. 41, No. 4 (1999), 373-402, 373.

successful in the British theatre.[3] The main cast, for the sake of this thesis, consists of Frances Brooke (1724 - 1789), Elizabeth Griffith (1727 - 1793), Hannah Cowley (1743 - 1809), Sophia Lee (1750 - 1824), Elizabeth Inchbald (1753 - 1821), and Mariana Starke (1762 - 1838). Other important figures include Hannah More (1745 - 1833), Frances Burney (1752 - 1840), and Joanna Baillie (1762 - 1851), but since they were less closely associated with the London theatres, I have cast them in supporting roles.

The overarching question that informs my research is, 'What was it like for a woman to work in the eighteenth-century theatre?' This question reflects that writing and performing drama was (and is) a deeply personal experience. It is always informed not just by the writer's own experiences, but also by their personality, values, and background. In my analysis, I preserve precisely that focus on individual experience in order to avoid generalisation, and to present these women as individual people rather than as a homogenous group without distinctions. My thesis examines women's work in the broader context of the theatre, rather than looking at playwriting in isolation. This is because the writing intersected with, and was informed by, other theatre-related work, such as acting, management, and publishing. Often, these women did not restrict themselves only to playwriting, but instead were involved in other activities that were closely related to and associated with the theatre: Elizabeth Inchbald was an actress, Frances Brooke managed a theatre, and Elizabeth Griffith wrote critical commentary on Shakespeare. In order to present a complete picture of these women's lives, their other work has to be taken into consideration too.

The plays of this period are relatively under-researched, and often do not appear at all in studies of the eighteenth century, or are only mentioned in passing. The main focus of literary criticism has been the Romantic poets and novelists. Marilyn Butler's otherwise excellent book *Romantics, Rebels & Reactionaries* (1981), for example, only recognises Inchbald as a novelist. Jeffrey Cox writes that:

> We still [...] have little sense of the actual power women held in the theatre and drama of the day, with the scholarly work on women writers of the period focusing

[3] Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 119.

> on the lyric and the novel along with the production of journals and travel writing and the scholarship on the drama retaining for the most part a focus on the male canon.[4]

While it is true that much more has been written about women novelists, in the last decades there has been increasing academic interest in the lives of eighteenth-century women, and many critics have made important contributions to scholarship in this field. Female playwrights have been recognised as an important part of eighteenth-century studies, although they cannot be said to have become part of the canon yet. Critical works that examine the plays of female writers with a view to reposition them in the canon and that I have found particularly useful for my understanding of the period include Ellen Donkin's *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (1995) and *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (2002), by Misty G. Anderson. Donkin is concerned with the female experience of the theatre world, and her analysis of both the professional and private writings of female playwrights is incredibly insightful. The book refers to a variety of topics associated with the theatre, such as dealing with managers, being reviewed in the newspapers, and rivalries with other writers. She describes playwriting as 'something of a loophole; it allowed women to push the system considerably further than it was prepared to go'.[5] My thesis takes its starting point from Donkin's book, given her focus on the same time period and sharing a similar point of view; however, I see my own research as building and expanding on her work. While Donkin gives a comprehensive overview of the topic, there is scope for more work on individual writers as well as appreciation of their identity as a community. Specifically, I include a more detailed analysis and close reading of the play texts themselves, as Donkin only has limited space to do this in her book.

In *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy* (2002), Anderson begins her analysis slightly before the period of my study, and therefore provides excellent contextual information on the female playwrights who paved the way for those in this thesis. Anderson's chapters on Aphra Behn (1640 - 1689) and Susanna Centlivre (c. 1670 - 1723)

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[4] Jeffrey N. Cox, 'Baillie, Siddons, Larpent: Gender, Power, and Politics', in Catherine Burroughs, (ed.) *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23-48, p. 23.

[5] Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

show the beginnings of female comedy, and give an idea of the playwrights who were sources of inspiration and role models (and sometimes bad examples) for later writers. She sees female playwrights as engaged in a constant negotiation for their place on the stage:

> Female playwrights were able to keep their audience, but they had to negotiate for their comic authority in prefaces, prologues, and letters, where they argued for their right to entertain people for profit.[6]

Anderson also engages comprehensively with comedy as a genre, and the various conventions which became attached to this form of drama in the eighteenth century. With regard to the depiction of marriage on the stage, Anderson provides detailed information about the legal framework within which marriage and divorce existed, and what kinds of problems this could cause for women. Her chapter on Inchbald focuses particularly on the economics of marriage, and the issue of property ownership. This was particularly useful for my own analysis of marriage on the stage in Chapter Two of my thesis.

I have also consulted biographies and works on individual playwrights, where they exist. Angela Escott's book *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley* (2011) has been an invaluable resource for my research on that particular playwright. Escott combines a great deal of biographical information about Cowley with an analysis of her plays, and shows how events in her life may have had an influence on her writing. While the book is committed to showing Cowley's experiments with all the different genres of drama, there is a great deal of focus on her comedies as these were her most successful plays. Escott also discusses less researched areas, such as same-sex relationships and female public speaking in debate clubs or salons; topics that are often not included in critical works about this period of history. These aspects of female experience are often more difficult to write about, since there are fewer official sources and references in play texts may be disguised. Escott's dedication to including them in her analysis nonetheless encouraged me to do the same in my writing. I believe it is important to incorporate all aspects of womens' lives, rather than only writing about established subject areas.

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[6] Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 4.

In order to immerse myself in the historical background of the period, I have consulted a great number of books on different aspects of eighteenth-century life. There are several essay collections about the theatre during this time, such as Catherine Burroughs' *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840* (2000), Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn's *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730 - 1830* (2007), and Julia Swindells' and David Francis Taylor's *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737 - 1832* (2014). For more background on the theatre specifically, I have also used contemporary accounts such as David Garrick's *Private Correspondence* (1831) and Elizabeth Inchbald's *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald* (1833), as well as a variety of London newspapers.

For information about gender roles and expectations, Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), and Betty Rizzo's *Companions Without Vows*: *Relationships among Eighteenth-century British Women* (1994) have been very helpful. In my chapter on women's work, I have used Catherine Gallagher's *Nobody's Story*: *The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670 - 1820* (1994), Betty Schellenberg's *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Britain* (2005), and Bridget Hill's *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (1996). For some background on eighteenth-century politics, relations with the British colonies, and the slave trade, Betsy Bolton's *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage* (2001), Carol Bolton's *Writing the Empire* (2007) and George Taylor's *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789 -1805* (2006), among many others, provided great insight into this complex topic.

My own research aims to build on this already existing scholarship, and add to our understanding of women's work in the theatre. While there are many critical works which focus on one particular playwright, or one specific issue, I have brought together a wide variety of approaches, topics, and contextual information to create a comparative analysis with a wider perspective. By doing this, I aim to show how interconnected the world of eighteenth-century women writers was, and how much they shared important characteristics and concerns. Specifically, as women in a public space, they were very aware of the expectations attached to female virtue. Following the trajectory of their careers in the theatre reveals how they first responded to the public's demands for respectability, explored

the consequences of this in the context of their personal relationships and professional achievements, and turned female morality into a tool which could help women make a difference, rather than aligning themselves with contemporary ideological pressures that expected women to adopt passive roles. Many eighteenth-century commentators and conduct book writers expected women to be retiring, modest, and unambitious, and being a woman who actively sought public recognition was seen as unladylike. Female playwrights, by making the stage a place for education and the discussion of morality, demonstrated that women could actively participate in public and political life, and be no less virtuous.

Making women's dramatic works the main focus of my study is intended to change current perceptions of this literary period. Accordingly, most of my chosen texts have female authors, and I have only compared them to male writers when this was necessary for my analysis. Jean Marsden points out the contradiction that:

> On the one hand, the eighteenth century was a time when record numbers of women were both writing and publishing their work. On the other, notwithstanding this prolific record, later generations of readers defined the period as predominantly masculine.[7]

Especially since the period 1760 - 1800 coincides with the beginnings of the Romantic movement, most critical attention has traditionally been focused on the male Romantic poets of that time, who often constitute our only example of late eighteenth-century literature. Though recent scholarly work has re-evaluated female poets and novelists of the period, the same level of attention has not been accorded to female dramatists. By restoring some well-deserved focus to female playwrights, we can eventually provide a more complete picture of the literary diversity of this era, including a wider variety of genres and writers.

In terms of my critical approach to the plays, I have mainly focused on two different aspects. Firstly, a close reading of the texts themselves. Close reading reveals a great deal about the writer's personality; for example, Elizabeth Inchbald's tone tends to be very ironic, and this needs to be taken into consideration when reading her plays. In comedy especially, the

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[7] Jean I. Marsden, 'Beyond Recovery: Feminism and the Future of Eighteenth-Century Literary Studies', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2002), pp. 657-662, 657.

phrasing and timing of sentences is very important, and has an impact on how the audience reacts. In addition, the words themselves are often very revealing. Which words are used, for instance, to refer to women? How is marriage described? And how do female characters talk about other women? Given how vital a good character was, especially for women, the words used to describe people could have a great impact on them and on how other people viewed them. In my close reading I show the differences between the authors' styles of writing, and investigate whether there are any similarities in how they use certain tropes or themes. In addition, paying close attention to the words themselves often reveals hidden meanings, which were used to share an in-joke with audience members or to smuggle a piece of writing past the censor. By finding out which jokes and phrases are shared between different plays, we can determine what audiences in general considered funny, and which stock characters or statements were widely accepted as a part of comedy or as a dialogue about women.

However, close reading alone would not provide a complete picture of the plays and the people who wrote them. Therefore, I have combined it with research into the political and social background of the period, as well as biographical information about the playwrights themselves. Because the late eighteenth century was a time of political turbulence, it saw a great deal of change in social attitudes. The American War of Independence (1775-1783), the French Revolution in 1789, and the Irish Rebellion in 1798, all contributed to a political landscape which was unsteady and unpredictable. Together with contemporary debates about relations with the British colonies, and the transatlantic slave trade, these events caused many writers to actively question their country's past and future actions. While plays were supposed to be politically neutral, in reality they were greatly affected by what was happening in the real world. Understanding the social and political context is therefore vital for an understanding of the many allusions, contemporary jokes, and references which would have been obvious to the eighteenth-century audience. Similarly, biographical facts about the authors also enhance our understanding of their work. Personal experiences and opinions impact on the writing of a play, whether the writer intends it or not. It is therefore helpful to know about the playwright's background before analysing their portrayal of family life, work, or marriage. A look at the biography of a writer can also explain why they chose to focus on a particular issue, or why certain problems are frequently mentioned in their plays. A writer who had struggled to support her family, such as Inchbald, for instance, might

specifically focus on working women, or on the issue of women obtaining and owning property. Relatively few of my chosen playwrights actually had an official biography written about them, and for some, such as Mariana Starke, only the most basic facts about their lives are known. This information, or lack of information, can tell us something about the reception and status they had in their own lifetime and shortly after their deaths. It also reveals attempts to present their lives in a particular way, or to safeguard their 'character'. Inchbald's autobiography and some of her letters, for instance, were destroyed on the advice of her priest because her writing about herself was considered too egotistical. Her biographer, James Boaden, edited the remaining material according to his own image and opinion of her character.[8] While the analysis of biographies does not form a major part of my thesis, some reference to them is necessary in order to present a complete and clear picture of the context in which the plays were produced. The combination of close reading and historical background makes it possible to write about the major defining events and debates of the late eighteenth century, and show in detail how they were interpreted in plays of the time.

For the sake of brevity, I have had to restrict my research in some ways. Firstly, I only focus on plays which were performed at the legitimate London theatres. Due to the 1737 Licensing Act, theatres that wanted to perform full-length, spoken-word plays had to obtain an official license. During the years 1760-1800, there were three licensed theatres in London: Drury Lane, the Haymarket, and Covent Garden. My selection of plays is therefore confined to those which were performed at these playhouses. By concentrating only on the officially licensed theatres, my analysis will show what kinds of plays were accepted by the 'legitimate' playhouses, and how playwrights interacted with the additional restrictions that the Licensing Act placed upon them. It is impossible to analyse every play performed at these theatres in the space of this thesis, and I have taken several other factors into account when selecting texts. All the women writers I feature here have written more than one work, to allow for comparison between them and to provide more evidence of their opinions and character. I have also tried to avoid excessive repetition by omitting play texts whose plots and characters resemble each other too much - in other words, I have only analysed those works which bring something new to my discussion.

[8] Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell you What: The Life of Elizabeth* Inchbald (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), pp. 4 -6.

I have also chosen to focus mainly on comedies written by women, rather than plays in any genre. Comedy was the form chosen most frequently by women writers - Inchbald, for example, published seventeen comedies to her one tragedy, and Cowley produced two tragedies compared to at least twelve comedies. Critics like Susan Carlson see these women as participating in a 'comic countertradition', which had been introduced by Aphra Behn.[9] While I will be demonstrating that eighteenth-century female playwrights were not always pleased to be compared to Behn, and sometimes actively disassociated themselves from her, it is certainly true that women had a history of writing comedy for the theatre.[10] However, in the late half of the eighteenth century, there were unprecedented numbers of women writing stage comedy. Their combined voices transformed comedy from simple entertainment into something which had the potential to influence society and politics. Because a play is relatively quick to write (unlike a novel for instance), it was the ideal genre if a writer wanted to comment on current events. Carlson also writes that 'Comic dramas are the products of literary, ideological, and social systems, products that change with the age and the theatrical production.'[11] If we want to observe eighteenth-century society, and the interests of London theatre audiences therefore, stage comedy gives us an opportunity to do so. I have referred to tragedies, novels, and other forms of writing where relevant, but comedies have remained the main focus. In the eighteenth century, stage comedy conformed to relatively strict rules, and writing it was not always easy. Female wit, then as now, often attracted criticism, sometimes from other women as well as men; it was also accompanied by an anxiety that being witty might damage a woman's reputation. Elizabeth Montagu commented that:

> Wit in women [is] like a sword without a scabbard it wounds the wearer and provokes assailants. I am sorry to say the generality of women who have excelled in wit have failed in chastity.[12]

Apart from the potential moral judgements, there was also an existing formal structure which had to be observed in writing comic drama. Most comedies consisted of five Acts

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[9] Susan Carlson, *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 160.
[10] See Chapter Three.
[11] Carlson, *Women and Comedy*, p. 6
[12] Elizabeth Montagu, qtd. in Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, 'What Will Mrs. Grundy Say? Women and Comedy', in *Criticism*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (1996), 69-84, 71.

(with the exception of interludes and afterpieces, like Cowley's *Who's The Dupe?* (1779) or Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* (1784)), and ended in one or multiple marriages. The marriage plot, perhaps most famously featured in Shakespeare's comedies, was a long-standing tradition, and one which female playwrights did not challenge. Most plays also relied on stock characters; female figures that reoccur often in these texts are the virtuous young heroine, the witty coquette, and the old-fashioned elderly aunt. Male characters often fall into the categories of the noble, rational love interest (who, towards the end of the century, was frequently a soldier), the rake, and the absent or overbearing father. Stock comic character include the pert maid, the rustic who is ignorant of city life, and the middle-class, middle-aged pseudo-intellectual. From this summary of common features, eighteenth-century comedy can at first glance appear formulaic. In order for the audience to recognise shared jokes and comic subjects, it was necessary for a playwright to use these features. Because a stage play takes up a relatively short amount of time, the comic characters have to be established from the beginning, so that the audience is able to laugh right from the start. Comedy relies on well-known jokes, because they provide a shared experience both among the audience itself, and between the audience and the playwright. However, the necessity of working within these established rules made it more difficult for female playwrights to include new or controversial content in their works. Anderson writes that ‘Comedy, more than any other literary mode, is a form in which an author can find herself struggling over generic expectations and the limits of her comic contract with the audience’.[13] My analysis shows that women found a way to work within these 'generic expectations', and at the same time include contemporary and often controversial subjects. Rather than ignore the established rules entirely, which would have resulted in their plays not being performed, they skillfully subverted them from within, often writing about their characters' wedding and challenging the marriage plot simultaneously.

My chapters are designed to show the variety of issues women were writing about, all from within the form of stage comedy. Chapter One outlines the framework female playwrights encountered when they decided to work for the theatre. Because playwriting could not be done in isolation, they had to engage with an established system of managers, critics, actors, and audiences. Female playwrights and actresses in particular were often questioned about

[13] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 21.

the morality of their presence in the theatre. The commercial structure of the theatre heavily influenced what could be shown on stage, and who would be part of the creative process. Donkin points out quite rightly that it also determined who became successful, and whose works were preserved to be studied today:

> the fact that they were produced at all meant that they had already negotiated a range of social prohibitions successfully before the fact of production. In fact, because the system was so tightly controlled, it is probably more accurate to think of these women as the *designated* survivors of the system, the ones chosen to succeed.[14]

It is likely that there are a number of forgotten eighteenth-century playwrights who did not succeed, and who are therefore inaccessible to modern critics. As far as it was possible, however, I have included female playwrights with varying backgrounds, levels of fame, and individual ways of negotiating the system.

In Chapter Two, I show these playwrights engaging with the comedic marriage plot, and portraying personal relationships on stage. Since romantic and familial relationships were often seen as women's domain, it is unsurprising that they are one of the main features of women's comedy. By analysing their portrayals of marriage, I show that female playwrights engaged with a large variety of issues surrounding this subject, such as gender inequality, property ownership, arranged marriages, and divorce. Legislation introduced in 1753, known as the Hardwicke Marriage Act, had affected the rights of married men and women, and many plays reflect these changes. Frequently, the plays question the morality of the issues cited above, and many playwrights used the stage as a way of teaching other women how to make moral choices in their own relationships. Carlson has pointed out that female playwrights often had a different perspective on the topic of relationships:

> They object to the traditional focus on falling in love rather than the sustaining of love and the correlative emphasis on young heroines who idealize romance and are idealized for their innocence, youthful beauty, and absence of thought.[15]

[14] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 3.

[15] Julie A. Carlson 'Remaking love: Remorse in the theatre of Baillie and Inchbald' in Burroughs, *Women in British Romanticism,* pp. 285-310, p. 299.

Consequently, this chapter features analyses of many different relationships, not simply those between the young hero and heroine. I show that, within the framework of the traditional marriage plot, female playwrights also made time to explore such topics as female friendship and rivalry, age differences, and same-sex attraction.

Chapter Three focuses on the professional aspects of being a playwright. In order to be successful in the eighteenth-century theatre, a woman had to balance her reputation as a respectable lady with the need to further her literary career. Elaine Showalter writes in *A Literature of their Own* (1982) that:

> almost no sense of communality and self-awareness is apparent among women writers before the 1840s. [...] The early women writers refused to deal with a professional role, or had a negative orientation towards it. [...] Moreover, they did not see their writing as an aspect of their female experience, or as an expression of it.[16]

Showalter's statement shows that, until very recently, even feminist literary critics did not consider eighteenth-century women writers as professional authors. At least in the case of female playwrights, however, this view does them a disservice. They used the stage to explore what it meant to be a female artist, and also to highlight other women's work. By chronicling the development of different women's writing careers, and comparing them with their portrayals of working women on stage, this chapter paints a picture of how female playwrights saw themselves, and their role in the literary marketplace. The success of a writer may have in some measure depended on her support network and lucky chances, but women in the eighteenth century made informed choices about their professional careers, and their plays reflect this.

In my last chapter, I show women engaging with contemporary politics. While a strong argument can be made that any writing women did for the public stage was already political by definition, in this section I explore the possibilities of being openly political in the London theatres. The Licensing Act of 1737 had restricted playwrights' ability to feature political content, but in practice this did not prevent it completely. My analysis shows that, on the contrary, some plays were entirely political. Contemporary events such as the abolition

[16] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (London: Virago, 2009), p. 15.

movement, the Warren Hastings trial of 1788, and of course the French Revolution, affected what was performed on stage, and how women wrote about politics, a subject they were supposed to have no knowledge of. Analysing these plays also reveals how women connected the issues of gender roles, female virtue, and politics in their writing, a connection most famously made by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Having had to prove their own character and morality to gain and maintain access to the stage, female playwrights now used that access to debate the very issue of female morality. Thomas Gisborne writes in his *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797) that women are best suited to 'unbend the brow of the learned, to refresh the over-laboured faculties of the wise, and to diffuse throughout the family circle, the enlivening and endearing smile of cheerfulness'.[17] Rather than subscribe to this view of female virtue, which casts women as minor characters designed to support men's lives without having any ambition for themselves, female playwrights provided a different perspective. Turning it from a passive to an active virtue, they demonstrated how women could use the eighteenth-century's preoccupation with female morality to participate in a political landscape at a time when they had no official means of participation.

Combining my research into these different issues with detailed analysis of a wide selection of play texts, this thesis demonstrates how women took to the stage in the eighteenth century, and made the London theatres into a space where women's' voices were heard. Through their fictional characters, they displayed their own 'character' as women writers.

[17] By contrast, among the natural abilities of men he counts among others, 'The science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy; the conduct of government in all its executive functions; the abstruse researches of erudition; the inexhaustible depths of philosophy', Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1797), pp. 21-22.

Chapter One: The Theatre in the Late Eighteenth Century

The theatre can sometimes appear as its own small world with its own rules, that anyone entering this environment for the first time would have to become acquainted with. In the eighteenth century, the theatre was in fact governed by two sets of rules; the official government regulations for playhouses, and an internal structure perpetuated by the managers, actors, writers, and audience members who kept the theatres running. For a female playwright, deciding to offer one of her plays for performance meant having to interact with and (mostly) observe those rules. In order to analyse women's writing it is vital to understand the conditions they wrote in. This chapter therefore considers the external factors that had an influence on a playwright's work, from management of the theatre itself, through official legislation, interactions with the eighteenth-century theatre audience, and literary criticism.

Patrons and literary daughters: Theatre management

If we want to understand the world of the eighteenth-century theatre, it is essential to consider the people in charge of the theatres. Managers played an important role in the day-to-day running of the theatre; while they may not always have been the actual owners of the playhouse, they arranged all the different elements needed to keep a theatre in business and to stage productions. This, of course, included the selection of writers and plays to feature in the programme. Having a good relationship with the manager was therefore an important concern for any playwright. In this section, I will be introducing the complexities and complications which could arise from this relationship for female playwrights, and I will also showcase some different styles of management, as well as providing background information on some of the best known managers of the time.

The amount of surviving correspondence between authors and managers, and the frequent references to a specific manager's support or interference in play prefaces and dedications

means that, for a playwright in the eighteenth century, the theatre manager was an absolutely vital figure. If women writers wanted their work to be staged at one of the legitimate theatres, they had no choice but to engage with a system of management that sometimes helped them (though at a cost), sometimes hindered them, and was at best, unpredictable. David Francis Taylor sums up the importance of management neatly:

> We must conceptualize the theatre manager not simply as an historical figure but as a *nexus*: the intersection point for the range of human agents, expertise, material practises, and ideological pressures (not least property, profit, and the public) that shaped dramatic performance.[18]

While this chapter will touch on many of the aspects of dramatic performance separately, it is important to keep in mind the person at the centre of it all, especially when analysing the power structures present in the theatre, and represented in women's' plays.

The best-known theatre manager, both during the second half of the eighteenth century as well as today, was undoubtedly David Garrick. As manager of Drury Lane from 1747 to 1776, for almost thirty years he had a great deal of influence over the plays presented to the public, the actors who starred in them, and the playwrights who wrote them. His influence was certainly recognised in his own time; William Whitehead, the Poet Laureate, told him that 'A Nation's taste depends on you'.[19]

Garrick's talent as an actor is undisputed, and probably engendered an interest in the stage in some prospective playwrights. Hannah More for example travelled to London specifically to see him act in *Zara* and *King Lear*. But it was in his capacity as a manager that he had the greatest impact on the lives of female playwrights. It is thanks to him that Hannah Cowley had her first play, *The Runaway* (1776) staged, and More received his support while working on her tragedies *Percy* (1777) and *The Fatal Falsehood* (1779). While there were, of course, other theatres they could apply to, Garrick seems to have been a woman playwright's best chance of getting her work staged. Ellen Donkin shows that, under his management, Drury

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[18] David Francis Taylor, 'Theatre Managers and the Managing of Theatre History', in Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 70-88, p. 75.
[19] Qtd. in Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition: Stage Comedy in Garrick's Day* (London: Prior, 1980), p. 138.

Lane produced 292 performances of plays by women, compared to Covent Garden's 111.[20] Quite why there is so much difference between the two theatres is unclear; but it appears that Garrick was simply more willing to take a chance on an unknown female writer than his counterparts at other theatres. Cowley's *The Runaway* was certainly a risky investment: she was an unknown writer with no previous experience in drama at the time. There was no way to predict it would run for seventeen performances and pave the way for her later career, but Garrick had an instinct for new talent.[21]

However, this willingness to stage new works only developed in Garrick's later career. At the beginning of his management, he produced mostly well-established plays, relying on classics like *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. The plays by female writers which were shown during this time were written by those of a previous generation, such as Susanna Centlivre (c. 1667-1723). His biographer implies that this was not just due to understandable caution on the part of a new manager, but also to a lack of new talent at the start of Garrick's management:

> With the accession of such a man as Garrick to the management of a theatre, a new order of things might be expected to arise; genius, sure of being appreciated, would naturally shake off the slumber of despondency, and, rousing its faculties, struggle against the fame of former writers. The genius *could not be found*;— it was dreaming over the classics, and creating only school-boy imitations. [...] Finding no *character* among the living, he raised the dead, and rendered Shakspeare, and Jonson, and Fletcher contemporaries and brothers to himself.[22]

It is to the credit of the new generation of playwrights who emerged in the 1760s and 1770s, then, that they seemed to offer something new to the theatre and therefore secured Garrick's interest and patronage.

The women writers Garrick eventually championed certainly felt they were much indebted to his support. Hannah More lamented after his retirement:

[20] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 61.
[21] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 62.
[22] David Garrick, *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the most Celebrated Persons of his Time,* ed. by James Boaden, 2 vols (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), I, p. xxvi.

> Who shall supply his loss to the stage? Who shall now hold the master-key of the human heart? Who direct the passions with more than magic power? Who purify the stage; and who, in short, shall direct and nurse my dramatic muse?[23]

Cowley anxiously reassures herself of his continued good will in a letter in which she almost aggressively demands his support: 'Behold me then, Sir, in all the arrogance of such hopes, again soliciting your friendship, your esteem. Nay, I demand them as a right —and I swear I will never give up the claim'.[24]

Another playwright, Elizabeth Griffith, makes it very clear that she depends on him for her income; in a letter to him she stresses that he is an position to make life easier for her family: 'I have reason to hope that with your assistance, without which I well know no piece succeeds, I may again retrieve my dramatic fame, which is, I own, a wish that sits, perhaps, too near my heart'.[25]

Griffith's crediting of Garrick with absolute power over the drama is excessive; but it does show that writers recognised the importance of being on good terms with the manager. Especially in the case of female writers, sending letters to influential people like Garrick was the only way they could, in modern terms, 'network'. Prospective male actors and writers could attend male clubs, and go to coffee-houses, where they would meet others who worked in the theatre and introduce themselves to managers, but for a woman who wanted to keep her respectable reputation, this was not an option. The beginning of Garrick's own theatre career was launched due to skilful networking. His biographer writes that:

> [He] got introduced to managers, he became the coffee-house acquaintance of players,— he studied their profession infinitely more than the Statutes, became the faithful mimic of their various manners, and wrote criticisms upon their performances, which gave him the newspaper celebrity of diurnal wit.[26]

He did all this while still officially working as a wine merchant with his brothers. We can see how his situation differs from that of the female playwrights he was later to support; he had an independent income (though he was reportedly not a very good wine seller), and he had

[23] Hannah More, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, ed. by William Roberts (London: Seeley and Burnside,1835), Vol. 1, p. 64.
[24] Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, p. 225.
[25] Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, p. 56.
[26] Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, p. v.

access to the male dominated spaces which housed the current generation of writers and actors and educated the next generation. It is to his credit that on his assumption of the managerial role, he remembered the importance of giving advice and assistance to aspiring writers. He was seen by most as a good manager, and his friendship with many of the actors and playwrights may have simply resulted from their relief at finding someone reliable who was willing to support them.

Garrick's positive influence on theatre culture became particularly obvious after his retirement, when there was no one of equal talent and experience to replace him. Donkin stresses that this especially affected the women he had encouraged:

> the extent to which these women had been nourished and promoted by Garrick would make itself clear in the period following his retirement and death. In all areas the playwrights experienced setbacks. Editorial assistance was non-existent.[27]

Happily for the writers, this situation did not persist, as other managers, most notably George Colman (1732-1794), took on the role of editor and producer. But it is fair to say that other managers' involvement and willingness to invest both time and money into new female playwrights did not go quite as far as Garrick's. However, as beneficial as Garrick's interest could be, there was also a negative side to the playwrights' complete dependence on him. When he did not personally approve of a playwright he could use his influence to undermine her, as was the case for Frances Brooke.[28] Even for those women he supported, his status in the theatre world had disadvantages. As a result of their anxious attempts to secure his friendship, it is likely that they neglected to find other acquaintances who could have been equally helpful to them. They did not know the managers who stepped in after Garrick's retirement, and had to forge entirely new relationships with them to fill the void he left. Rather than networking with each other, several female playwrights vied for his attention; this is understandable when we consider that Cowley, for instance, owed him her career, but it is interesting to speculate what could have happened if they had decided to support other writers rather than see them as rivals. In the conflict between Hannah More and Hannah Cowley, Donkin states that:

[27] Donkin, *Getting Into the Act*, pp. 64-65.

[28] Brooke had satirised Garrick in her novel *The Excursion* (1777). In retaliation, Garrick used his influence to prevent her from getting translation work, and probably also interfered with her managerial and playwriting endeavours.

> one important consequence of his mentoring was that the literary daughters found themselves in competition with one another for the attentions of the father. [...] Cowley identified the source of the trouble as another woman playwright, instead of Garrick's mentoring, and the relationship of that mentoring to theatre in eighteenth-century England.[29]

At least part of their disagreement was based on Cowley's resentment at seeing More's close relationship with Garrick, which seems to have been based more on their personalities rather than on their professional work together; it is understandable that Cowley, who was arguably the better playwright,[30] felt that her talent was being slighted. The negative side of depending on a manager like Garrick for support was that it could feel like patronage rather than collaboration; and as Donkin's description of the playwrights as 'daughters' shows, this could result in a patronising relationship, in which the manager held all the power.

In some cases, the manager's power caused him to regard his employees as property, rather than co-workers. This is especially apparent in accounts of Thomas Harris's management of Covent Garden from 1774 until his death in 1820. Many biographies, including his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* claim that Harris was well liked, and he certainly seems to have been good with money, having a background in trade.[31] However, some often overlooked passages from commentators of the period show that his conduct towards his female co-workers was less than professional. For instance, journalist and theatre critic John Taylor recounts Harris' conduct towards Elizabeth Inchbald, who had visited him to discuss one of her plays:

> Mr. Harris, who was a handsome man, and had found so little difficulty among the theatrical sisterhood under his government, thought that he might be equally successful in an attack on Mrs. Inchbald; but, instead of regular approaches, he attempted to take the fort by storm, and Mrs. Inchbald found no recourse but in

[29] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 60.
[30] Based on her considerably larger output of plays and popular success.
[31] Joseph Knight, 'Harris, Thomas (*d.* 1820)', rev. Nilanjana Banerji, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Vol. 25, pp. 469-470.

> seizing him by the hair, which she pulled with such violence that she forced him to desist.[32]

The language Taylor uses is very revealing; firstly, he implies that Harris regularly slept with actresses (and presumably female writers) working in his theatre, and that this was regarded as a normal occurrence. Whether it is actually based in reality is impossible to tell. It may be true, but it may equally be a rumour founded on the perception of the theatre as a place of loose morals. Secondly, it is strange that the only time Taylor speaks of the actual violence of the incident, it is attributed to Inchbald, who was defending herself, not to Harris who tried to rape her. And finally, the way Taylor writes about the attempted rape makes it sound rather too much like an amusing anecdote from the life of a playwright. Later, Taylor describes how Inchbald ran into the theatre's Green Room after she had escaped Harris, and relates how the shock of the event had brought back her recurring speech impediment. Neither Harris nor Taylor are taking these (apparently regular) attacks on women associated with the theatre very seriously, and of course there is no mention of Harris ever facing any consequences.

Unlike Garrick, who, while he could be fairly patronising, at least seems to have regarded the women's bodies as off limits, Harris apparently took it for granted that as soon as they worked for him, they became his property. Sophia Lee hints at something similar to Inchbald's experience in the preface to her play *The Chapter of Accidents* (1780). Harris had been ready to accept her play until he was told her name and gender, after which he refused it. Lee instead took the play to George Colman at the Haymarket, who eventually staged it. In her preface to the play, Lee writes about Harris' refusal, 'I learnt that merit merely is a very insufficient recommendation to managers in general! and as I had neither a prostituted pen or person to offer Mr. Harris, I gave up, without a trial, all thoughts of the Drama.'[33] Her reference to 'merit' not being enough, and the phrase 'prostituted', very much imply that Harris had asked for something she was not comfortable agreeing to. Her conflation of a 'prostituted pen or person' hints at the fact that the experience of trying to stage her first play had shown Lee that writing for the theatre as a woman could have its dangers, and that some managers regarded not just the play text but also its author as their property. Despite

[32] John Taylor, *Records of my Life,* 2 vols (London: Edward Bull, 1832),I, p. 399.
[33] Sophia Lee, *The Chapter of Accidents* (London: Cadell, 1782), Preface, p. ii. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

Harris' obvious disregard for the privacy of his female employees, Covent Garden theatre did stage quite a few plays by female writers in the period between the 1770s and 1790s. Inchbald apparently refused to be frightened off, and had several of her plays staged during Harris' management, including *Wives as They Were, and Maids as They Are* (1797), which tellingly features a male character who believes his wife to be his property. Cowley submitted many of her plays to Covent Garden, writing almost exclusively for this playhouse, having left Drury Lane after Sheridan's mismanagement of her farce *Who's The Dupe?* (1779). Possibly Harris left her alone because she was a married woman, compared to Lee who was single, and Inchbald who was widowed. Evidently Harris' financial talent made up for his personal views however, or it was Covent Garden's status as one of the largest and most respected theatres that made both Cowley and Inchbald return to it.

As mentioned above, an alternative to Harris' Covent Garden theatre was the Haymarket, managed by George Colman the Elder from 1777 to 1789, and subsequently by his son until 1805. Colman had been mentored by Garrick in the 1760s, but rather than taking over Garrick's Drury Lane, had decided to manage the Haymarket instead.[34] Colman had been a playwright himself, his successes including *The Jealous Wife* (1761) and *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), on which he collaborated with Garrick. Three of the playwrights mentioned in this thesis had their first plays staged by Colman: Lee's *Chapter of Accidents*, Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* (1784), and Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (1788). Colman is mentioned in very complimentary tones in their prefaces, and his readiness to share his knowledge and experience of the theatre with the new writers is emphasised. After detailing her problems with Harris, Lee goes on to say: 'What pleasure do l feel in retracting the general aspersion cast upon managers, when I speak of Mr. Colman', and describes how he helped her prepare the play for the stage: 'He gave me the benefit of his judgment and experience, both in heightening and abbreviating the business, with every attention in casting and getting it up; generously uniting to the name of Manager that of Friend' (Preface, p. iv). Similarly, Starke also mentions:

> the unnumbered obligations of this kind I have received from Mr. Colman, whose attention and studied arrangements of every thing that could conduce to the success of the piece as manager, is beyond any expressions [...] Without whose kind

[34] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 78.

> patronage and encouragement I had never presumed to have become a canditate [*sic*] for public favor.[35]

As well as apparently assisting generously with editing the texts, Colman also wrote the Prologues for both Lee's and Starke's play. This would have been helpful for a playwright who was just starting out, given that Colman was already a respected and well-known figure in the theatre world at that time. The language that both Lee and Starke use to describe their relationship with Colman emphasises the friendly and professional nature of his management - he is characterised much more like a co-worker than Garrick, who is addressed in more admiring and deferential tones. This picture of Colman's way of working may explain why several women writers decided to offer him their first attempt at a stage play; as a safe pair of hands, he could be relied on to do his best to ensure the success of the play, and not to take advantage of the playwright. However, if we look at the list of plays by women writers during this period, we can see that, while their debuts may have been produced at the Haymarket, most of their subsequent plays were staged at either Drury Lane or Covent Garden. Especially Elizabeth Inchbald's decision to go back to Harris' theatre after having had a success with *The Mogul Tale* at the Haymarket may be hard to explain. However, it is likely that she and other writers wanted to move on to the bigger and more prestigious playhouses after having gained some experience at the Haymarket. Donkin also suggests that Inchbald made use of the professional rivalry between Harris and Colman in order to get more of her plays produced: after having established her reputation as a successful writer, she could offer her work to one manager, and then threaten to take it to another theatre if it was not accepted.[36] She and her fellow playwrights had to be businesswomen as well as authors, and the larger theatres would have offered a better financial deal even if it came at the price of having to work with a less pleasant manager.

What we can gather from this comparison of the three most prominent theatre managers of the time and their management styles is that, while Garrick was working, it was fairly impossible to avoid his influence. He was a good choice for an aspiring woman writer if she was willing to accept his patronage and therefore a rivalry with other playwrights who aspired to the same status. After Garrick's retirement, the theatre scene changed, and the

[35] Mariana Starke, *The Sword of Peace*, *or, a Voyage of Love* (London: Debrett, 1789), Preface, p. viii. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
[36] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 120.

support of a manager was less assured, so that the most successful playwrights switched playhouses according to who could offer them the better terms. Colman was ready to assist writers in a professional capacity and to accept plays from first-time writers, which must have offered many of them their first 'break' into playwriting, as well as giving them a positive impression of his good management. Harris was apparently only willing to stage plays by women after they had already proved their worth elsewhere, but then his theatre represented a prestigious platform and a sound financial investment.

So far, we have only seen how women dealt with the various demands and ways of working with their male managers. But did women ever take a hand in managing a theatre themselves? There is evidence that playwrights at least had a say in the casting and direction of their plays (as evidenced by Inchbald's presence in the Green Room at rehearsals), but managing an entire theatre was a different kind of task. During the time period this thesis is concerned with, the three great London theatres were consistently managed by men. However, another venue, the King's Theatre, also called the Haymarket Opera House, was the exception. Frances Brooke and Mary Anne Yates became managers of the theatre in 1773, and ran it, as far as we can tell, successfully.[37] Unfortunately, not much is known about their management style, or what their relationship with their employees was; but there is record of a very telling incident which illustrates the opposition female managers had to face, presumably not just once in their careers. Frances Brooke had herself attempted to become a playwright several years earlier, but when she offered her work to Garrick, he rejected it. Turning instead to other forms of writing, Brooke became a successful novelist and periodical writer. Her book *The Excursion* (1777) includes a satire of Garrick. The year before she took over the Opera House, Brooke again offered a play to Garrick, as well as to Colman, in the form of her comic opera *Rosina.* Both managers rejected the play, a strange coincidence that leads Donkin to speculate that there was a secret understanding between them to exclude Brooke from the London stage.[38] It is hard to tell if this was the case or not, but given what we know of Garrick's influence it is not difficult to see that if he had indeed wanted to sabotage Brooke's chances, he could easily have done so. Certainly, *Rosina* was not rejected because it was unstageable; it was finally performed years later in 1782 at

[37] Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 277/278.
[38] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 51.

Harris' Covent Garden, to great success. By that time, of course, Garrick had retired, which may have had something to do with Brooke's sudden access to the more prestigious London playhouses.

In the light of her frequent rejection by the established managers, Brooke's decision to run her own playhouse becomes easy to understand, especially if she suspected that her identity as a female author and critic had something to do with Garrick's animosity. While Brooke and Yates never succeeded in obtaining a license to stage regular, full-length, spoken-word plays, they very competently staged operas at their new venue until 1777. This proved that, firstly, a theatre under female management was possible during this period, and secondly, that a collaboration between a writer (Brooke) and an actress (Yates), both with extensive experience in their fields, could be incredibly fruitful. Their license restricted them to operas, which of course made it impossible for them to be in direct competition with the other three theatres, and once again, Garrick probably had a hand in this. Felicity Nussbaum writes that 'there is some evidence that Garrick actively sought to interfere with their being granted a license.'[39] That he would try to undermine the Opera House like this shows not just how far his animosity towards Brooke went, but also that he apparently feared her and Yates enough as rival managers to actually try and eliminate them as competition.

Theatre Regulation and Censorship

Brooke's management of the Opera House gave her first-hand experience of the strict legislation surrounding the eighteenth-century theatre. Because all managers and playwrights had to work within them, a short analysis of the guidelines dealing with licensing and censorship is required here.

In 1737, the Licensing Act had set out to regulate the theatre scene, by allowing only officially licensed venues to stage full-length, spoken-word plays. In London, this originally meant Drury Lane and Covent Garden, followed later by the Haymarket.[40] One of the

[39] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 278.
[40] For the full text of the Licensing Act, see Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), Appendix C.

provisions of the Act was that any new play, as well as any re-staging of an older play, had to gain the permission of the Examiner of Plays before it could be performed. This restriction placed playwrights under pressure to produce inoffensive texts which would pass the censor's control easily; political content in particular was supposed to be restricted by the Act. Most critics agree that, while arguments about the quality of drama and the moral decline of the stage were presented by many commentators of the time, the real reason for the passage of the Act was anxiety about political opposition. Matthew J. Kinservik writes that, 'The banning of non-patent theatres and the establishment of pre-performance review of play texts were harsh measures meant to silence the political opposition to Sir Robert Walpole's ministry'.[41] Vincent J. Liesenfeld adds that the Act was also meant to prevent any plays which made fun of the royal family, and especially the king, from being staged.[42] It is easy to see how these concerns, first becoming apparent in the 1730s, were still valid in the last decades of the century, and how the events of the American and French revolutions would have increased the anxiety over politically charged plays.

Given these considerations, it would be logical to assume that playwrights, and especially female playwrights who wanted to preserve their reputation, would have steered clear of any political content in their writing. However, the examples in this thesis demonstrate that the opposite is true. References to political events are found in many, if not most, plays. Chapter Four analyses several of these plays, showing just how frequently women engaged with contemporary political discussion. The effect of the Licensing Act was not to eradicate all political commentary, but rather to change the way it was presented. Because their works had to be approved by the Examiner, playwrights made their political and sexual scenes less obvious, and more hidden behind sentimental or comic material. This has been interpreted as a lack of boldness and over-reliance on sentimentality, which has sometimes lead critics to view these plays as less valuable than the drama preceding the Licensing Act. Kinservik writes that:

> the law has served as a convenient marker for theatre historians and literary scholars, dividing the good drama that came before it from the bad that came after. [...] The

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[41] Matthew J. Kinservik, 'Reconsidering Theatrical Regulation in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (eds.), *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance 1660 - 1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 152-171, p. 152.
[42] Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of* 1737, p. 129.

> logic behind this division is that governmental censorship inhibits free expression, and, consequently, diminishes the quality of new plays.[43]

He also, quite rightly, says that making this division is very reductive. I would argue that the Licensing Act did indeed restrict free expression, but that this enhanced the quality of many plays by forcing the playwrights to find new ways of expressing themselves. Comic writers in particular used a wealth of comedic devices, such as puns, satire, and sarcasm, which could be passed off as simple entertainment but actually contained messages about social and political issues. The ways they did this of course vary from writer to writer; while Inchbald is mostly distinguished by her heavy and sometimes pessimistic sarcasm, Cowley relies more on witty but pointed dialogue.

Generally, the Act was only one symptom of the changing nature of authorship in the eighteenth century. I discuss this topic in more detail in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting here that playwriting was regulated not just by official laws and rules, but also to an extent regulated itself. Managers, writers, and actors certainly had their own expectations about how the theatre should be run, and the audience could be equally influential. By supporting certain plays and writers, and boycotting others, they could essentially vote on which themes or genres would be presented at the theatre during the next season.

'Ask but the town, said I, they'll all agree': The Audience

Having gained the support of a manager, succeeded in securing the approval of the Examiner of Plays, and therefore the staging of her play, a female playwright now had what all writers need: an audience. The late eighteenth-century theatre audience is a very difficult entity to characterise. Because there are few verified figures, we can only guess at how many people would attend the theatre on an average night, and the percentages of people of a certain gender or social class who could be found there. We do know that the first Covent Garden

[43] Kinservik, 'Reconsidering Theatrical Regulation ', p. 152.

theatre, opened in 1732, had a seating capacity of around 1400 people.[44] When Drury Lane theatre was rebuilt in 1794, its seating was increased to accommodate 3600 people.[45] While it is extremely unlikely that those seats would have sold out every night, potentially a play could be watched by an impressive number of people. If writers wanted to influence public opinion, they therefore had a good chance of reaching a large number of the population by writing a successful play. If they wanted to draw attention to issues such as education, marriage, or Britain's relationship with its colonies, the theatre was the ideal forum for it. Since this potential for influencing public opinion was undoubtedly the reason for the strict theatre regulations of the time, authors had to be careful in how they addressed their audience. Failing to reach them, or displeasing them in some way, could after all mean financial ruin for an author. For the purpose of examining gender roles in the theatre, female playwright's interactions with the women in their audience are especially interesting, as this section will show.

The links, quite literally, between the writer and the audience, are of course the actors on stage. While this thesis does not have the space to analyse attitudes to actresses in the eighteenth century in detail, much has been written about them, and Felicity Nussbaum's *Rival Queens* (2010) presents some excellent case studies of actresses' lives during this period. Nevertheless, I will examine the role of actresses from another point of view: that of the playwright. Actors were, after all, the people who spoke the writer's words on stage, and therefore represent an important intermediary stage between the author and her audience. Other critics have pointed out that merely the presence of women on the theatre stage can be read as a vital change in the representation of the genders. Laura J. Rosenthal writes, for example, 'Contemporary responses [...] remind us of the continuing volatility of the female body on stage - a result, at least in part, of the actress's indirect challenge to gender expectations'.[46] While this is undoubtedly true, I will be focusing on the much more direct challenge of the words actresses spoke, and how the audience received them. To do this, we

[44] F. H. W. Sheppard, 'Covent Garden Theatre and the Royal Opera House: Management', in *Survey of London: Volume 35, the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden* (London: London County Council, 1970), pp. 71-85.
[45] Mark Fox, 'History of the Theatre' <http://www.reallyuseful.com/theatres/theatre-royal-drury-lane/history> [accessed 20 February 2017].
[46] Laura J. Rosenthal, 'Entertaining Women: The Actress in Eighteenth-century Theatre and Culture', in Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 159-173, p. 159.

need to examine an important part of the eighteenth-century play, the epilogue. Epilogues, sometimes written by the playwright, sometimes by a friend or associate, represented a great opportunity to speak directly to the audience on behalf of the author, and they were frequently delivered by women. Unlike the prologue, often spoken by a male actor, and frequently featuring an apology for the author's gender or inexperience, epilogues were potentially more challenging as well as more humorous. They could deliver a message not connected directly to the plot of the play - prologues normally set the scene and tone for what follows, but some epilogues veered away from what the audience had just seen on stage in order to comment on other issues. In some ways, the epilogue created a greater connection between the audience and the stage than the actual play, since the actress spoke directly to the viewers rather than to her fellow actors. Often, it was also the place to comment on the author herself. The epilogue to Elizabeth Griffith's *The Platonic Wife (*1765) satirises the poetic aspirations of the playwright:

> Our Sappho took a nap— you'll say you know it;
> Is that uncommon in a modern poet?
> But let that pass— When borne on fancy's wing,
> To the smooth brink of the Castalian spring,
> She quaff'd so large a draught, it turn'd her brain
> As mad— as some of you are with champaign—
> Straight she began to rave 'bout *inspiration!*
> *Plot— diction— moral— sentiment—* and *passion.*[47]

The image of the writer as both dreaming and drunk undermines her professional status - it shows her as a madwoman who does not know what she is talking about, which casts her play as a 'woman's comedy', a novelty item which is only amusing because a woman wrote it. It is also, however, very obviously a satire. The overblown poetic language and classical imagery (later on in the epilogue the writer encounters Pegasus) make it clear that this is not to be taken too seriously. This is especially the case when applied to Griffith, whose plays were relatively conservative. Best known for her *Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances* (1757), which was based on her relationship with her husband, the description

[47] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Platonic Wife* (Dublin: Wilson et al., 1765), Epilogue, pp. 75-76 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

of her as a stereotypically wild Romantic poet is blatantly untrue. Given that authors frequently were in the audience of their own plays, this is perhaps an attempt to make fun of Griffith directly, by satirising her as a type of writer she had never been or wanted to be. However, the classical imagery may also be intended as a compliment - it puts Griffith on a level with classical Greek and Roman authors, who were admired and emulated in the eighteenth century. The fact that a woman speaks this part is equally significant - it was a common criticism that women were not educated in the Classics, and would therefore not understand references to them. Since the joke is based on an understanding between the actress and the writer, this epilogue assumes that both they, and their audience, have the requisite knowledge to appreciate the comedy. In this way, the actress speaking these lines is supporting her author. A similar show of support happens in the epilogue to Griffith's *A Wife in the Right* (1772), in which she is represented as the nervous owner of a ship she has just sent out to sea, and the actress asks for the audience's good wishes for the voyage's success.[48]

Appealing to the audience is of course a common feature for plays, with some epilogues outright demanding their applause. An interesting aspect of this is the number of epilogues which speak specifically to female members of the audience. After Inchbald's *Wives As They Were, and Maids As They Are*, the actress Miss Wallis, who played the 'modern' Miss Dorrillon, addresses them directly:

> Well, female critics, what's the sentence, say—
> Can you with kindness treat this saucy play,
> That gives to ancient dames the wreath of praise
> And boldly censures those of modern days?[49]

While this is a rather dubious summing up of the actual message of the play, the epilogue asks for a kind of collaboration between women in the audience, the actress who is speaking, and Inchbald as the writer. That the women are addressed as 'critics' shows how important the audience's approval really was: it holds the same weight as the opinion of

[48] Elizabeth Griffith, *A Wife in the Right*, (London: Dilly, 1772), Epilogue. p. 92 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
[49] Elizabeth Inchbald, *Wives As they Were, and Maids as they Are* (London: Robinson, 1797), Epilogue, p. 95 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

newspaper reviewers in making a play successful. Since Inchbald herself also worked as a theatre critic, choosing this word not only draws attention to women's ability to judge a play's value, but also reinforces the connection between Inchbald and her audience.

The community of female audience, actress, and playwright therefore has not just a symbolic value of mutual support but a very real bearing on the commercial success of the play, and by extension, the actresses' and the writer's income. Nussbaum argues that appeals in epilogues had a good chance of actually procuring financial and social support from wealthy women who might be attending the theatre. She states that, 'the interactions between actresses and their female audience were central to the eighteenth-century theater as women clustered in networks of patronage to provide clothing, endorsements, substantial remuneration, and a developing critical appraisal of the drama'.[50] In this instance, Nussbaum is only considering interactions between actresses and the audience, but I suggest that this view of a mutually beneficial network should be expanded to include female playwrights. While they may not have received as many material gifts of clothes and jewellery as some actresses did, the approval of influential women would have benefitted them just the same, especially when we consider how important a good reputation was for a woman working in the already slightly dubious environment of the playhouse. Being able to dedicate a published play to a reputable upper-class lady, or to count her among the subscribers for a future work, would have given playwrights a very useful air of respectability. A circle of influential female acquaintances could also help a playwright with the publication of her work after it had been performed. For instance, Griffith published her *A Wife in the Right* by subscription in 1772,[51] and the impressively long list of subscribers includes several women, many of them members of the aristocracy ('The List of Subscribers'). Having been unsuccessful in the theatre, the play did very well as a published text. Given that the printed text was essentially the same as the staged version, one cannot help but wonder if its sudden success was due partly to the show of support from Griffith's subscribers. It can be argued therefore that the epilogue's appeal to women in the audience was not only an attempt to create an air of community and collaboration, but also a

[50] Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 150
[51] Elizabeth Griffith, *A Wife in the Right*, Betty Rizzo (ed.), in *Eighteenth-century Women Playwrights,* Derek Hughes (gen ed.) 6 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), IV, p. 204. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

calculated move to increase the play's financial and literary success. Some epilogues were after all written by the playhouse's manager, who would also have benefitted from procuring a community of supporters for his playwright.

Another remarkable occurrence in the dialogue between stage and audience was the blurring of lines between fiction and reality. More than once the actress speaking the epilogue draws attention to the fact that she is a real woman, a working actress, who has been playing a fictional character. In the epilogue to Cowley's *More Ways Than* One (1783), Miss Younge, who played the witty coquette Miss Archer, ends her speech:

> Where have I got to! whence thus glib my tongue!
> Am I Miss Archer, Venus, or Miss Younge?
> Be what I may, amongst my friends I rank ye,
> Applaud Miss Archer, and Miss Younge shall thank ye![52]

Taking on both the roles of her stage character and her own persona as an actress, Miss Younge encourages the audience to identify the real woman with the character. She therefore takes on Miss Archer's quick wit and fearlessness, as well as her community spirit (in the play, Miss Archer protects the naive Arabella from her would-be kidnappers), which is emphasised by her calling the audience her 'friends'. This blending of fiction and reality would have suggested to the audience that the stage and real life were not completely separate things, and the double Miss Younge/ Miss Archer persona suggests both that a real woman could take on the characteristics of a play's heroine, and that fiction could influence the character of a person in real life. Especially to the women in the audience, the idea of being able to become like the clever Miss Archer must have been appealing. We can see that an actress speaking the epilogue was not just a witty summing-up of the play, but could present a role model for others to emulate. It is no coincidence that Joanna Baillie, though she did not have many of her plays produced herself, intended the stage to be a place of education.[53] Not that everyone who wrote and worked for the theatre at this time had the same intention and clearly thought-out plan that Baillie proposes in her *Introductory Discourse*. Baillie presents a careful analysis of the state of stage comedy during her lifetime,

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[52] Hannah Cowley, *More Ways Than One* (London: Evans and Davies, 1784), Epilogue, p. 97. [line numbers omitted from text] All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
[53] Joanna Baillie, *The Complete Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832), p. 19.

and lays out her ideas for a more realistic, representative, and educational theatre. However, the educational and representational aspect of women on stage was a highly effective result of an increasing number of actresses and female playwrights who made careers for themselves in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Anderson writes that a succession of women writers used the stage as a way to interest their audiences in a variety of issues:

> Behn, Centlivre, Cowley, and Inchbald found in comedy a narrative where the economic future, erotic possibility, and public visibility of women merge, and they were able to engage generations of theatergoers in their versions of that story.'[54]

Utilising the theatre to speak about these issues has the advantage of being quietly influential, and ironically, of working indirectly: rather than for instance *telling* the audience how to gain influence, it simply *shows* them witty, successful women who can act as role models. For female playwrights who had to keep their public character in mind at all times, it was an ideal mode of exerting their influence. Educating their audience, especially on moral issues, was an interest many of them shared. However, few of them would have wanted to write an outspoken essay about their opinions on morality and society - this would have been too bold, and might have damaged their image of gentility. Using fictional characters in plays, and specifically epilogues, instead of heavily moralistic forms of discourse enabled them to share their views and entertain audiences while still maintaining their respectable reputation. Equating the popular actress Miss Younge with a self-assured, funny young woman would have helped members of the audience who might have resisted openly didactic texts to accept that women in the public sphere could be intelligent and charming, and invite people to laugh *with* instead of *at* her.

Interestingly, in the epilogue quoted above, Miss Younge also considers taking on the persona of Venus, the goddess of beauty. This may be a veiled reference to the objectification that actresses like Younge would have faced due to their life in the public eye; reviews often reduced the actress to her looks, rather than her talent. Younge's dropping of the Venus character in the next lines suggests that she did not want to use this focus on her

[54] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 1.

beauty to gain applause, appealing instead for the audience's approval of her as an actress and a comedian.

In a society in which successful women were rarely in the public eye, we cannot underestimate the influence that actresses speaking lines like these had on other women in the audience. There is evidence that actresses had an enormous effect on the tastes and opinions of the public, as their style and costumes were frequently copied. The most successful actresses of the age had a lasting effect on women's fashion: Frances Abingdon (1737-1815) for example is credited with inventing the Abingdon Cap, a style of bonnet preferred by her and made fashionable by many other women who adopted the same style. Her power over the tastes of her audience was recognised during her lifetime, with a contemporary commentator writing of her:

> In the same manner that the philosophical disciples of antiquity imposed silence on the inconsiderate scholars, by observing, *our master has said thus*; so it is sufficient for the beauties of London to observe Mrs. Abingdon has worn such a thing, to shut the mouths of their fathers and their husbands.[55]

One senses that he writes half-mockingly, but his comparison of Abingdon with classical philosophers is telling. In the same way philosophers taught their view of the world to their students, actresses are influencing the opinions of their supporters. Abingdon in this case is not only infringing on male authority (as evidenced by the silenced 'fathers' and 'husbands'), she is also establishing a new way for women to view themselves.

Rosenthal argues that actresses not only enabled women to view themselves differently, but that they established an entirely new way of being a woman, which hinged on their place in the public eye. Combining the focus on their beauty and their reputation for loose morals with their ability to deliver witty lines to the audience, actresses could present a role model very unlike the idealised female characters in novels and poems of the time. Rosenthal writes, 'while moralists in the period may have divided women sharply between the virtuous and the disreputable, the theatre offered a third possibility of glamorous, independent women with a mixed sexual reputation'.[56] Of course, that reputation could be harmful to

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[55] Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *A Picture of England: Containing a Description of the Laws, Customs, and Manners of England*, (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1791), p. 70.
[56] Rosenthal, 'Entertaining women', p. 163.

their careers, and some of them specifically tried to avoid it altogether, like Sarah Siddons, or to escape from it in later life, like Mary Robinson.[57] However, given what we have established about the theatre's ability to blur boundaries, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it may have been one of the first spaces in which the strict division between the 'proper lady' and the 'whore' was challenged publicly and on a relatively regular basis.

If we combine the cultural power of actresses with the wide appeal of the theatre, and add the potential of the stage as an educational space (as recognised by Baillie), we can see how the portrayal of women on that stage was of enormous importance. As critics like Anderson and Nussbaum have described at length, the simple fact that women were present on stage in the theatre was already a great improvement, because it meant that female audience members saw themselves represented. What I am arguing in this thesis however, is an addition to this theory: that the way in which women represented themselves on stage was even more important. This is why analysis of the epilogues is so instructive; because many of the plays written by women were explorations of what it meant to be a virtuous woman, the epilogues, consciously or unconsciously, often took up that theme. They made it into a dialogue about gender roles between the actress and the audience, in which they could have a say in how to define themselves. The epilogue to Cowley's *A School for Greybeards, or, the Mourning Bride* (1786) for instance contrasts two views of marriage, the formal ceremony which is seen as old-fashioned, and the modern marriage which is a pleasure rather than a business arrangement:

> In former times, when folks agreed to wed,
> The silent Bride, by silent Bridegroom led,
> Up to the Altar marched in solemn state,
> All was demure, and stupidly sedate;
> Impressed with awe, while neither dared to speak,
> A Wedding was - a mere *Ballet Tragique*.
> But now, we're past the ages of Romance,
> And Wedlock is a kind of - Country Dance,
> Where man and wife with smiles each other greet,

[57] See Jeffrey N. Cox's description of Siddons' acting style: 'Siddons's power on stage seems to come from embodying women whose power is passive, or, to put it another way, her power seems to arise with her ability to portray women whose sexual power is evident but contained' (Cox, 'Baillie, Siddons, Larpent', p. 37).

Take hands, change sides, and part as soon as meet.[58]

Neither example is entirely presented as the perfect model (while the modern wedding is certainly more appealing, it is also shown as potentially temporary and frivolous), but just like the characters in the preceding play, in which two women have to choose between marriage for love and the more socially acceptable match arranged by their fathers, the audience is asked to make a choice. The presentation of alternative views of marriage encourages them to reflect on established social conventions.

Similarly, in the epilogue of Griffith's *The School for Rakes* (1769) (this time presenting different models of behaviour for men), Catherine Clive (1711-1785), an incredibly influential actress, has a fictitious discussion with the playwright about the appropriateness of women talking about politics:

I told the scrib'ling dame,
This part of Winifred, is much too tame:
Ask but the town, said I, they'll all agree,
That a tame character will not suit me:
I hate such lifeless, water-gruel stuff;
Quicken her well with politics and snuff:
Small quantities of both will be but teizing;
Give them enough, and set the town a sneezing.[59]

The choice of words in this section sets up a marked contrast between the 'tame', 'lifeless' character that we are told Griffith intended and Clive's preferred version which is both political and lively. The audience would have inferred from the play they had just seen that Clive's opinion prevailed, as her character Winifred is notably outspoken on political matters. Clive pulls the audience onto her side by claiming this would also be their choice; in speaking the line 'Ask but the town, said I, they'll all agree', she simultaneously acknowledges the power of the audience to approve or disapprove a play and creates a kind of companionship

[58] Hannah Cowley, *A School for Greybeards, or, The Mourning Bride* (Dublin: Porter, 1787), Epilogue, p. 65 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

[59] Elizabeth Griffith, *The School for Rakes* (London: Cawthorn, 1795), Epilogue, p. 112 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

between them which, in this fictional discussion, could influence the playwright's decisions. Presumably, the audience would also have taken kindly to being cited as a supporting group with good taste by Clive, who was at the time of this play at the height of her fame.
Of course, not all epilogues are quite so liberal, and some attempt to lecture the audience rather than present them with a choice. Griffith's *The Double Mistake* (1766) is summed up by a critique of the play's most outspoken and eccentric female character, Lady Bridget, who is set up as a bad example:

> Nor does Aunt Bridget merit better quarter,
> Who, scorning to abide by female charter,
> Invades a province, to our sex deny'd,
> Aiming at knowledge with a pedant's pride;
> When, after all our boast, we find, at length,
> To know our weakness is our surest strength,
> One path of science only, wise men say,
> Is left for female learning - to obey.[60]

The audience is here presented with an example of how not to be a woman - Lady Bridget is to be avoided as a role model, and the advice of 'wise men' to be followed instead. This is an instance of the stage being used quite openly for didactic purposes, in that the epilogue straightforwardly tells women what to do rather than showing them what it is possible for them to do. Undoubtedly, this conservative message might have been popular with some of the more traditional-minded newspapers of the day; but given the eighteenth-century theatre audience's famous unruliness and dislike of authoritarian measures, we have to question whether it was effective. As mentioned earlier, many critics argue that the technique of lecturing the public (whether employed by conservative or liberal writers) was less likely to succeed than simply presenting an entertaining role model on stage. Add to this that Lady Bridget, while certainly not always sympathetic, is one of the more compelling and entertaining characters in Griffith's play, and I find it difficult to believe that the audience would have chosen the epilogue with its rather patronising tone over Lady Bridget's funny

[60] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Double Mistake* (Dublin: Leathley et al., 1766), Epilogue. p. 76 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

lines as the aspect they remembered from their evening at the theatre. It is therefore possible that the Epilogues' chastising of Lady Bridget is at least partly ironic, and is simply meant to distance Griffith as the playwright from her character. In this way, Griffith would have been able to present a controversial figure like Lady Bridget without having to fear any consequences for her personal reputation.

Having evaluated the audience's experience in the playhouse, and the potential for collaboration between playwright, actress, and audience, we can see how the viewers of a play, and specifically the women among them, must have played an important part in the conception and production of a play, and how this inclusion of the audience could have wide-reaching and long-lived consequences. One can easily imagine that young women especially would have felt a connection to the women on stage, both to the characters of the play, and to the actresses themselves. If we believe contemporary commentators, this connection could prompt women to challenge the male authority figures in their lives. The observation about Abingdon's influence of course only refers to fashion, but establishing a personal style can be seen as a step towards greater independence. For many women, the influence of the theatre and the actresses they saw may have ended with a change in their wardrobe; but it is not too great a step to assume that for some women, the representation of educated, clever female characters on stage helped them to make other changes in their lives.

'The rigid moralists who directed the newspapers': Critics and Reviews

With the first performance of her play over, and the audience addressed in the epilogue, a playwright had to prepare herself for the newspaper reviews. Due to the popularity of the theatre, newspapers constantly reported on the plays and actors currently to be seen at the main playhouses, and a new play might be reviewed by several different papers. In this section, I will be considering the role of reviews and their potential impact on the playwright, as well as exploring how the reviewers themselves commented on women working in the theatre.

Greg Kucich writes about the type of review typically received by female playwrights:

> contradictory judgment typifies the kind of reception women dramatists of the Romantic era generally receive in the reviewing press, where they are welcomed to a degree uncommon for women writers in other literary genres and simultaneously warned to curb their efforts.[61]

This impression of a cautious welcome to the literary scene, but a welcome within certain limits, describes the experience of most female playwrights during the latter half of the eighteenth century. It is true that playwrights were frequently less harshly criticised than novelists, since novels were often regarded as an improper genre for women.[62] On the other hand, reviewers cannot help but draw attention to the author's gender in almost every case, so that the reviews also become evaluations of the femininity and morality of the writers. Consequently, many reviews spend very little time actually critiquing the writing and staging of the play, choosing instead to examine the characters and their language for signs of impropriety. Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault* (1793), for instance, was reviewed relatively positively in *The World,* but the writer objects to some of her more ambiguous lines: 'The language is what might be expected from so elegant an Author—but if it were deprived of a few expressions which *may* be converted into a *double entendre*, we should like it the better'. The reviewer goes on to explain the objections to such language in Inchbald's play: 'We say *may*, because there are a set of beings, who to the disgrace of British gallantry, grasp at any thing; which by the horrible additions of their conceit, may be rendered a matter of imputation on the decency of the female Author'.[63] Note how the possibility of a risqué expression is immediately converted into a threat to Inchbald's reputation; this is not even an open statement she has made herself, but an interpretation of what she has made her characters say. This over-cautiousness clearly shows how thin the thread was on which the public character of a female writer hung; one misinterpreted line too far, and she might be condemned in the press. We can also see how Kucich's theory about the mixed reception of women's writing applies here. The reviewer is partly complementary of Inchbald's writing, mentioning her reputation as an 'elegant [...] Author'; but in the same paragraph advises her to edit her play so as to prevent indecency. It either does not occur to the reviewer (who is

[61] Greg Kucich, 'Reviewing Women in British Romantic Theatre' in Catherine Burroughs (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 48-79, p. 49.
[62] See Gisborne, *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, pp. 215-217.
[63] *The World*, January 30, 1793, Issue 1900.

extremely likely to be male) that Inchbald might have intended the double entendre, in which case he severely underestimates her writing ability and humour; or this is a veiled warning not to try something like this again. Inchbald, however, seems to have been unconcerned by this criticism. The *True Briton* published an even more severe review of *Every One Has His Fault*, in which the writer describes the play as 'highly objectionable', and then complains about her perceived political agenda, stating that: 'In several sentences the *Democrat* displays a cloven foot'.[64] In an effort to claim influence over writers, the newspaper very shortly afterwards reported that, as a result of this criticism, Inchbald had edited the play so as to not offend the sensibilities of the reviewers.[65] Inchbald herself however replied publicly in another paper, denying that she had changed any lines of her play:

> my accuser having, in this day's paper, taking a different mode of persecution, saying, I having expunged those sentences which were of dangerous tendency, the play can now no longer be its own evidence. — I am, therefore, compelled to declare, in contradiction to this assertion, that not one line, or one *word*, has been altered, or omitted since the first night of representation.[66]

She also cites the audience's approval of the play, which the reviewer of *The True Briton* had grudgingly acknowledged, showing clearly that she valued the opinion of the public more than that of one critic determined to draw her into a political discussion. Everything in *The True Briton*'s reviews is calculated to damage Inchbald's career as a writer; had the accusation of political sympathies been taken seriously, she would have been seen as contravening the Licensing Act, which might have affected future opportunities to stage her work. The insinuation that she had edited her play aims to damage her integrity as a playwright, and therefore her professional respectability. Fortunately Inchbald was confident enough to expose these allegations publicly, and she knew enough about the workings of the press to use one newspaper against another. Presumably by the time she commenced her career as a playwright, she had had experience of being reviewed as an actress. She also went on to become a theatre critic herself in her later working life, taking an active role in

[64] *The True Briton*, January 30, 1793, Issue 26.
[65] *The True Briton*, February 1, 1793, Issue 28.
[66] *The World*, February 2, 1793, Issue 1903.

publishing her own views on drama in her commentaries on plays in *The British Theatre* (1806-1809).

While few reviewers were as aggressive in their criticisms of female playwrights as *The True Briton*, there is a notable tendency to label their work as 'women's comedy'. In other words, the review judges the play differently from a male-authored play, based simply on the gender of the writer. While this was not necessarily a conscious judgement made by reviewers, it was a well-established feature of the newspaper review, and as such was not questioned by the reviewers themselves.

It is obvious how much gender was in the background of the critics' minds when writing, simply from the tone of their reviews. There is a frequently adopted air of 'gallantry' which pervades comments on women's works. We can see this even in *The True Briton* review, otherwise so critical of Inchbald, where the reviewer appeals to 'British gallantry' not to interpret the double entendres as in any way risqué. Kucich notes that the way in which the playwrights were addressed and named in reviews was a result of this attempt at chivalry: 'this chivalric mode represents them as so many “fair authors,” “Ladies,” “Misses,” and “Inventresses,” whose gender identity renders them fundamentally weak and in need of deferential treatment'.[67] The playwrights' names are, of course, also mentioned (in the case of plays where the name of the author was public knowledge), but it is almost as if they have a second name in addition to their own, which marks them as decidedly female while at the same time diminishing them. It is a particularly problematic form of misogyny, because it appears, on the surface, to be complimentary. It leaves the women no reasons to object to it, as complaining about being titled an 'elegant Author' or a 'Lady' would have been viewed as strange and capricious. Not to mention the fact that the writers were often named similarly in the prologues and epilogues to their own plays, which appealed to the male critic's and audience's protective instinct by painting the women as being in need of lenient judgement. The prologue to Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault* describes her as a 'supplicating Fair-one',[68] an unlikely title for Inchbald, but a sign that the 'gallant' tone was common when speaking about female writers. In the case of prologues and epilogues, it can

[67] Kucich, 'Reviewing Women', p. 62.
[68] Elizabeth Inchbald, *Every One Has His Fault* (London: Robinson , 1793), Prologue. p. 4 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

be argued that these phrases were used to gain an advantage for the author, as they were calculated to earn them praise and compliments. In reviews, however, they are more often used to lower the reader's expectations of the play. Naming the author as a 'lady' tends to imply that she is an amateur who has tried her luck on the stage (whereas naming her 'the author' or 'the writer' would have given her a more professional status). The issue of labeling women's work as less professional than men's will be discussed in Chapter Three in more detail, but in the context of newspaper reviews the most important consequence of this implication is that it places the play into the category of an accomplishment similar to embroidery or playing the piano; one that is ornamental, but not taken as seriously as male achievements. As Donkin states, 'Women's writing – even if it was acceptable – was considered to be worth less, both artistically and economically, than men's', meaning that it was not considered to be on the same level as male writing, and therefore could not be fairly compared to it. [69] This resulted in women's plays being always judged in their own separate category, rather than being reviewed objectively and in comparison to their male contemporaries of the theatre world.

Whether intentional or not, this instant categorisation was limiting for female playwrights. Misty G. Anderson writes that 'Prologues, prefaces, and reviews had created the "woman's comedy", and subsequent critical elaboration of the category left them either to celebrate or to distance themselves from it'.[70] Note that Anderson sees the category as being partly 'created' by the critics, making it a self-perpetuating phenomenon: women's comedy was defined by critics and writers, which made other critics comment on it, establishing a series of conventions which were then applied to female writers generally. The reason I would describe this labeling as limiting, is that it left women writers no choice but to engage with it. Writing a play which defied those conventions would have been difficult because they were so well established, as well as controversial, because it would undoubtedly have caused the author to be described as unfeminine. However, conforming to the supposed rules of the women's play was also problematic, as the category immediately implied that the play was naturally of a lower quality than a male-authored work. Thus a reviewer of Sophia Lee's *Chapter of Accidents* dismissively comments that it 'carries the general marks of a *woman's play*; abounding in much love, much sentiment, great entanglement, but little character and

[69] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 89.
[70] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 10.

observation'.[71] The comment provides us with some of the terms reviewers used to define women's comedy: the implication being always that it is more superficial and frivolous, and depending on emotion and 'sentiment' to keep the audience's attention. It was hard to escape from these kinds of accusations, as 'sentiment' was simultaneously also seen as the proper subject matter for women to write about. The elements of Lee's play which are decidedly unsentimental, like the heroine's comments on society's unfair treatment of unmarried women, should realistically exonerate her of the charge of writing a superficial text. However, these elements only created a different kind of criticism, the accusation of being indecent, noted also in the criticism of Inchbald above.

The issue of appropriate writing was obviously a great concern for critics, since many reviews contain evaluations of a play's morality as well as its quality as a piece of literature. Taking Lee's *Chapter of Accidents* as an example again, we can see that its story of a woman who becomes a wealthy man's mistress deeply worried the reviewer of *Lloyd's Evening Post*, who wrote:

> the Plot of this piece [...] is evidently open to the most glaring objections; the principal, however, [...] is the situation of the heroine; a situation which has never before appeared on the Stage in the interesting light in which it is attempted to be placed here, though it is exceedingly common in those seductive engines of female dishonor, "Sentimental Novels".[72]

Evidently the critic agreed with the idea that the theatre could be an influential place of education for women; but this influence becomes a negative thing when the stage is seen as morally dubious. Casting Lee as a potentially corrupting figure, the reviewer takes it upon himself to protect the public from her play. The review shows that the link between the playhouse and loose sexual morals was still easily and quickly made where women writers were concerned. It also shows that reviewers saw it as part of their job to evaluate whether a piece of writing was morally and politically wholesome, so that the propriety of the play is just as important as the actual text and the acting. This gives us a good idea of how closely connected play text and morality were in reviewers' eyes, to a degree that it was virtually impossible to separate them. Today, we might perhaps describe a play as well-written or

[71] *London Evening Post*, August 5-8 1780, Issue 9100.
[72] *Lloyd's Evening Post*, August 7-9 1780, Issue 3609.

clever, even if we did not approve of its message. But for eighteenth-century critics the aesthetic and moral value of a play were not entirely separate things. The written work was always an extension of and comment on the writer's own character, and this was especially true for women writers. Kucich writes that:

> This practice of textual embodiment, coupled with charged genderings of the stage [...] as a site of feminine materiality in itself became so forceful as to render women’s dramatic writings, at times, virtually indecipherable from their female minds and bodies.[73]

Of course, this 'embodiment' meant that any criticism of the play was also a direct criticism of the playwright - it was personal, not just literary. It is no wonder then that some writers, including Lee, were deeply affected by the reviewers' questioning of their moral fitness, and that it had an effect on their choice of a less public genre in their later career. Doubtless, the awareness of potential criticism also informed how and what they wrote for the theatre, leading them to avoid certain topics or expressions because they knew that the critics would pick up on it. Lee was clearly still affected by the initial reviews *The Chapter of Accidents* had garnered in 1780 over twenty years later, when she remembers in her introduction to one of her novels (*Life of a Lover*), being ‘so severely censured by the rigid moralists who directed the newspapers’, and still felt the need to justify her choice of topic.[74]

In general, the eighteenth-century theatre was not the easiest place to work in, given that so much of an author's success depended on external factors. As established earlier, management styles could vary wildly, and personal animosities or preferences could influence whether and how a play was staged. Playwrights had to rely on the continued support of their audience to make a living, and even if they succeeded in making a career for themselves, a bad review could still damage their reputations. Given all these factors, we have to admire those writers who persevered, and went from submitting their first play to a theatre manager to becoming household names. Female writers in particular had to face and overcome eighteenth-century gender roles in order to become professional authors. Having considered these difficulties, Donkin considers it a surprise that ‘there were any women

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[73] Kucich, 'Reviewing Women', p. 60.

[74] Sophia Lee, *The Life of a Lover, in a Series of Letters* (London: Robinson, 1804), p. vii. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

playwrights at all'.[75] However, I would argue that their plays point to literary talents, knowledge of their audience, and an engagement with what it meant to be a woman writer in the eighteenth century, that should at least partly explain these women's' successes.

One of the great strengths of female playwrights was that they could and did draw on their own experiences for their plays. Those experiences, as in Lee's case, were not always positive, but it was particularly their negative encounters that produced the most biting satire, the most pointed jokes. Having described the environment and people that female writers worked with, we can now go on to analyse in detail how they represented their experiences and their ideas in writing. To begin with, I will concentrate on their representation of relationships, as speaking about romantic relationships was after all supposed to be both a woman's purpose and a popular aspect of dramatic comedy. As I will demonstrate, female playwrights cleverly used these expectations of their gender and this genre to examine and question society's preconceptions.

[75] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 1.

Chapter Two: Women and Personal Relationships

In this chapter, I will be examining the different kinds of personal relationships represented on stage by female playwrights. Because of the established difference between the public and private spheres, and women's supposed suitability to speak about more domestic concerns, many if not all plays written by women during the late eighteenth century focus on relationships to some degree. Marriage is of course the most common feature, as comedies traditionally end with at least one wedding.

'Feelings - romantic Nonsense!': Courtship and Marriage

The importance of marriage as a theme in comedies of the time cannot be exaggerated. In many plays, the entire plot is based on some aspect of marriage, such as in Inchbald's *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are* (1797), which contrasts two different approaches to married life, or Cowley's *A School for Greybeards* (1786), in which a member of the heroine's family spends the entire play trying to match her with the most suitable husband. Because of the heavy reliance on marriage as a driving force of the plot, and the romantic concerns of the characters, women's comedies are frequently criticised for being sentimental or frivolous. Anderson comments that, 'At the level of content, marriage stories contrasted with the heroic themes of "great" literature, and at the level of popular function, their status as mere commercial entertainment opposed an abstract and masculine category of timeless art.'[76] In other words, their writing about marriage put female playwrights into a literary category which automatically denoted their work as less valuable.[77] Anderson rightly opposes this category of the 'masculine' ideal of art dealing with greater human concerns, and the gendering of domestic comedy as female and therefore less important. However, while it is easy to ridicule the over-valuation of marriage in these comedies, it is important to

[76] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 30.
[77] Of course, male writers also wrote about marriage and relationships, but as a rule this did not impact on their status as a writer, and did not define their careers.

remember that for many women, being married really was one of the main concerns in life. It was vital not only socially, but also financially, especially for middle-class women who were prevented from learning a trade, but would also not inherit enough money from their family to live comfortably on their own. Viewed as a 'career' option, marriage was a serious business in the lives of women and their family members, and these plays reflect this concern. Inchbald in particular often emphasises the financial aspects of marriage. Her *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they* Are centres around two interwoven plots. Firstly, Sir William Dorrillon returns from India to visit his daughter Maria, who has not seen him since she was a child. Maria Dorrillon is one of the 'Maids' of the title; she is 'modern', outgoing, witty, and has a group of suitors she flirts with but does not take seriously. She is described as a 'heedless woman of fashion' (I, 1) and Dorrillon is extremely dissatisfied with his daughter's character. The second plot concerns Lord and Lady Priory. Lady Priory is a 'wife as they were'. She is under the strict control of her husband, who refuses to let her leave the house, talk to other women, and sometimes even locks her in her room (I, 1). Lord Priory (and Dorrillon) see this treatment as the perfect way to educate a woman, and believe that this is how all marriages worked in the past. The contrast between Lady Priory, who belongs firmly to an antiquated view of a woman's role, and Maria Dorrillon, who represents the modern woman, is what makes this play so fascinating. It provides Inchbald with an opportunity to explore the different ways women and men deal with the conflicting and changing expectations of female behavior and relationships.

One of the main themes of Inchbald's play is the marriage market. Through Maria, Inchbald explores the economic realities facing a single woman during this period. Maria has a number of financial problems: her father is absent and cannot support her, she has borrowed money from friends in the past and therefore cannot ask them for more help, and she likes gambling without being very successful at it. She also, because of her social class, has no knowledge that would enable her to earn a living on her own. Consequently, she ends up in debtor's prison in the last act of the play, and is only released when Dorrillon offers to pay her debts and, in the process, is revealed to be her father. Maria and her friend Lady Mary Raffle show very clearly the dilemma a middle-class woman could find herself in during this time. Unable to find work which would allow them to support themselves without losing their reputation, and not wanting to rely on male acquaintances for money, they are left without means to pay for the lifestyle expected of them. Marriage, in this situation, is

entirely an economic consideration for them. Hearing about Maria's gambling debts, Lady Mary suggests: 'Why don't you marry, and throw all your misfortunes upon your husband?' Maria replies: 'Why don't you marry? For you have as many to throw' ; to which Lady Mary retorts that it would make better financial sense for Maria to marry, as her suitor Sir George earns ten thousand pounds a year (I, 1). This discussion shows that marriage is not a question of personal preference for them; they do not expect to choose a husband based on affection or matching personalities, but strictly on economic considerations. In this light, it is significant that both Maria and Lady Mary only get married after they have been rescued from financial distress by men. Lady Mary is released from prison by Sir George, who assumes at first that he is helping Maria. Lady Mary takes advantage of the confusion by leaving quickly and not letting him explain the situation (5, 3). Maria is rescued by her father, who had initially handed her over to the officers who arrested her. She refuses his money twice; both times because he imposes a condition she cannot accept. First he asks her to change her behaviour, and along with it, her character. When she says she cannot promise that because she is uncertain she will be able to keep that promise, he demands that she move to the country. This, she shrewdly comments, 'is giving me up the first condition, and then forcing me to keep it' (5, 2). When he finally offers her the money without conditions, she asks for it to be used to help her father, who she believes is in difficulties. After this quite melodramatic scene, Norberry, a family friend, finally reveals that her father has been with her all along, at which she, suddenly becoming uncharacteristically sentimental and taking on the role of the romantic heroine, faints.

This prison scene brings about a complete change of tone in the play. The revelation that Mandred (the pseudonym Sir Dorrillon uses) is her father causes Maria to undergo a quite significant transformation. Whereas before she was assertive, witty, and never afraid to contradict either Mandred or others, after this scene her lines have been reduced to three sentences until the end of the play. With one of these sentences she hushes Lady Mary because Lord Priory is about to speak. The second sentence is a last attempt to regain her former independence: Sir George asks her (once again) if she will marry him. She replies, 'No - I will instantly put an end to all your hopes' (V, 4). What sounds like quite a resolute refusal is instantly contradicted and reinterpreted by her father, who tells Sir George that Maria has consented to marry him after all. When George asks Maria 'And what do you say to this?',

she has a very significant last line, the last words of the play: 'Simply one sentence - A maid of the present day shall become a wife like those - of former times' (V, 4).

It appears very much as if Maria's financial situation, made very real by her stay in the debtor's prison, convinces her of the necessity of marriage. Whereas before she had been able to joke about marrying a wealthy suitor, it suddenly becomes her only option; she is subdued and literally loses her ability to see marriage as a joke, because she becomes almost speechless. Marrying Sir George seems like an exchange of her freedom and wit for financial security, something which Inchbald makes abundantly clear by having her characters state exactly how much money George is worth earlier in the play. His wealth is what compensates her, and it is unlikely she would have chosen him if he could not offer her the security of money. According to Daniel O'Quinn, 'Maria Dorillon's actions in the marriage market are therefore founded on the assumption of equal compensation. A woman only subordinates herself to a man if she is sure of adequate recompense in the institution of marriage'.[78]

Susan Carlson describes marriage as one of the 'limitations' on comedy: 'the women of British comedy have exercised their wit and wisdom while checked by comedy's institutionalized limitations on their autonomy: sexual objectification, isolation, and marriage'.[79] This is definitely true in Maria Dorrillon's case: she goes from witty, vivacious heroine to silent wife because economic circumstances and patriarchal society, embodied by her father, demand it.

Maria's case is a classic example of how the marriage market works. She exchanges her status and beauty for money and future security. This exchange features frequently in plays of the time, although it does not always end up being the heroine's choice in the end. In both Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (1788) and Cowley's *Who's the Dupe?* (1779) for example, friends and family assume for most of the play that the respective heroines will eventually choose to participate in the marriage market because it makes the most economic and social sense. However, in those plays the women marry for love rather than money at the end - a much more optimistic ending than the fate Inchbald writes for Maria Dorrillon.

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[78] Daniel O'Quinn, '"Scissors and Needles": Inchbald's Wives as They Were, Maids as They Are and the Governance of Sexual Exchange', in *Theatre Journal*, No. 51 (Summer 1999), 105-125, 120.
[79] Carlson, *Women and Comedy*, p. 11.

The other representation of marriage in *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are* is no less pessimistic. It is based on the idea that marriage was a much more serious and strict affair in earlier times, in which wives were completely under the control of their husband. The embodiment of the wife of former times is of course Lady Priory - arguably the most interesting character in the play. At first she may strike the reader as rather dull, since she appears to confirm too much to the stereotype of the obedient wife. She hardly speaks, takes no part in the gambling, drinking, and socialising that occur in the play, and spends most of her time in her room. Because such submissiveness is very uncharacteristic for a woman in a comedy, it is reasonable to assume that the audience would have wanted her to break out of her silence and become more assertive. In this regard, however, Inchbald very much goes against comic convention: the dramatic rebellion against Lady Priory's abusive husband, which the audience would expect and wait for, never comes. As Anderson remarks:

> Comic logic all but demands that the jealous Lord Priory be taught a lesson when his oppressed wife bursts forth into a wider community, where she can escape into the arms of a worthier man. This plot, however, never emerges, in spite of a string of opportunities for Lady Priory's revenge.[80]

From a dramatic point of view, Lady Priory's plotline is profoundly unsatisfying. This, however, is what makes it so interesting. Why did Inchbald decide to give her this story, and not one that would have been more accessible and more gratifying to her audience? One reason may be that the environment Lady Priory lives in simply does not allow for such an easy solution. The 'worthier man' never actually materialises; Bronzely, who develops an attachment to Lady Priory, and tries to run away with her, is a notorious rake and turns the potentially romantic act of eloping together into an attempted kidnapping and rape. He is also clearly attracted to her unavailability, which he sees as a challenge, rather than her actual person. She demands that he return her to her husband, which he eventually does. Her insistence on being taken back can be interpreted as a rather unsatisfying return to the status quo, but ironically it is during this scene, when she has just been abducted by Bronzely, that Lady Priory changes. It is a very subtle change; and it is not expressed in a grand gesture or great speech, but in a quiet, very domestic way. When Bronzely tries to

[80] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 196.

frighten her by emphasising her vulnerability, saying 'Lady Priory, you are in a lonely house of mine, where I am sole master', the stage direction has her respond like this: 'Lady Priory calmly takes out her knitting, draws a chair, and sits down to knit a pair of stockings' (V, 1). Her refusal to be scared, or even to actually react to him, suddenly puts her in a powerful position. She abruptly raises her status, which completely confuses Bronzely. She notices his confusion, and makes her position even stronger by pointing out his own vulnerability: 'Ah! did I not tell you, you were afraid? 'Tis *you* who are afraid of *me*' (V, 1). Bronzely has expected her to play a part, that of the damsel in distress who needs to be rescued; she refuses, and thus confuses both him and the narrative.

Lady Priory's strategy of silent (or almost silent) resistance continues in the last act of the play. While she returns to Lord Priory and marriage, she does not say what he wants her to say anymore. When he asks her to declare that she hates Bronzely and loves her husband, she stays speechless (V, 4). This does not, of course, amount to the 'revenge'[81] the plot demands, but it is significant. Lady Priory recognises that she cannot leave her marriage without inviting consequences that would make her situation worse, and so she decides to stay and play the part of the silent wife her husband demands of her. But now she uses this very demand for silence against him by refusing to say what he wants to hear. The only substantial statement she makes about her marriage confirms that this adherence to traditional gender roles is indeed a choice: 'to the best of my observation and understanding, your sex, in respect to us, are *all tyrants*. I was born to be the slave of some of you - I make the choice to obey my husband' (IV, 2). She sees that her situation would not be improved by choosing another man, and that she does not have the choice to choose no man at all, because that would leave her without any financial and social support. Her only option, the only thing she really has control over, is her speech, and she uses the lack of it very effectively to confuse the men who are, objectively, in control of her. In this light, perhaps Maria's lapse into silence at the end of the play may be interpreted as a similar strategy: she has also recognised the necessity of conforming to the status quo of marriage and resorts to Lady Priory's silent resistance.

In this regard, the strategies used by both the characters and their playwright are remarkably similar. Inchbald makes her play conform to the traditional conventions of

[81] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 196.

comedy in terms of form, but there is a hidden rebellious strain that undercuts the play's surface plot of marriages and women being 'tamed' into monogamy. This results in a play that is, formally and in terms of setting, a domestic comedy, but which is not actually very funny. The expected conclusion in marriage reads more like a sad ending than a happy one, and the audience is left disappointed at some level with the actions of the characters. Comedy is shown as unable to alleviate the reality of women who have to choose marriage out of financial necessity, and Maria and Lady Mary's wit ultimately fails them. Anderson argues that Inchbald's decision to make the women silent and serious at the end of her play is a sarcastic comment on her view of real-life society: ‘Perhaps the final joke of the play is that there is no joke that can moderate the power of husbands and fathers.’[82]

Hannah Cowley's *School for Greybeards* also engages with the power of husbands and fathers. Set in Portugal, it concerns the engagements of two young women, Antonia and Viola. Antonia has agreed to marry the much older Gaspar (a marriage designed to raise her financial and social status), because she believes that her former lover Henry has been banished from the country. Viola's father has picked Octavio as a future husband for his daughter based on his own opinions and preferences; however, her mother Seraphina is aware that Viola is already in love with another man, Sebastian. Both wedding plans, orchestrated in both cases by patriarchal figures, would put the women in a marriage of convenience, not love. But this is prevented in Antonia's case by Henry coming back in disguise to reveal that he and Antonia were already betrothed, and in Viola's case by the intervention of her mother. Seraphina (herself much younger than her husband) pretends to be her daughter and distracts Octavio so that Viola can elope with Sebastian. At the end of the play, both women finally marry the men they actually love. The play is loosely based on Aphra Behn's *The Lucky Chance* (1686), but Cowley changes aspects of the plot so that her play, unlike Behn's, does not include a rape scene.[83]

Throughout the play, Cowley makes it very clear that Gaspar's proposed marriage to Antonia is a classic example of the 'assumption of equal compensation', as he essentially buys her beauty and youth with his wealth.[84] The promise of money, he assumes, is enough to

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[82] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 192.
[83] Angela Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley: Experiments in Dramatic Genre, 1776-1794* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), p. 50.
[84] O'Quinn, '"Scissors and Needles"', p. 120.

reconcile her to the marriage. When she is unhappy about it, he sends her a box of jewels and tells her maid Rachel to remind her of the social status this will bring her:

> Gaspar: [I]nstead of all this airy Nonsense, you should give her substantial ideas, and should say - "d'ye see Ma'am what a Fine House you will be mistress of? - d'ye see Ma'am how many Servants of us are at your command? - and this rich casket of Jewels Ma'am, which my Master presents to you - how many Ladies will envy you these Jewels? (I, 2)

The idea that jewellery could change Antonia's mind is very much based on the assumption that women should choose a husband for his wealth, and plays into the stereotype of women being both greedy and shallow, so that their feelings are easily manipulated by shiny jewels. His reference to other women's jealousy also contributes to this, as it implies that women judge each other by their appearance only, and that a woman's aim should be to outdo others in this regard. It shows that he does not know Antonia's character at all; she does not care for his gift and is clearly only marrying him because of social pressure and despair over Henry's disappearance. Gaspar is obviously uninterested in knowing Antonia's personality. The only thing he focuses on is her beauty, and he repeatedly tells her to smile when she expresses her doubts about the engagement (I, 2).

While Inchbald's Maria Dorrillon sees marriage for money as an unfortunate necessity, Cowley's Antonia is much more emotionally affected by it, and is characterised as on the brink of despair for much of the play. She is frequently said to be crying, and hardly speaks when Gaspar is present - only in later scenes with Henry does she have any substantial lines. Cowley deliberately portrays Gaspar as the most unsuitable husband for Antonia, by making him vain, superficial, and dismissive of feelings, ironically the exact qualities he attributes to women. He also, like Lord Priory, has a vision of an idealised past in which women were much less complicated. When Antonia tells him she cannot change the way she feels, he comments, 'Feelings - romantic Nonsense! When I was a youngster, Women had no such word in their Vocabulary' (I, 2). Frequent references to his past and his present age indicate that the age difference between them is a major problem, and the title of the play implies that men like Gaspar have to realise the inappropriateness of their wish for a young bride. Henry, whom Antonia eventually marries, is clearly much closer to her in age, and also more compatible in character. Angela Escott argues that age difference in marriage, the so-called

January-May marriage, was something Cowley particularly focused on, stating that not only was it 'a familiar convention in comedy, but Cowley employs it with a consistency that indicates a particular resistance to this aspect of her society'.[85] It is possible that Cowley sees the age difference as increasing the already existing inequality between husband and wife, because it puts the husband in a much more father-like position, emphasising the patriarchal nature of the arrangement. As Escott says, the January-May marriage is a common trope in comedy, but while some other plays see it as a ridiculous example of an old man's vanity, in *Greybeards* it is a serious threat to Antonia's happiness; while Gaspar's delusions about himself are clearly funny, his behaviour towards Antonia is close to being abusive.

Cowley also shows the ridiculousness of the January-May marriage in the second couple of the play, Seraphina and Alexis. Seraphina, played by the accomplished comic actress Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829), is undoubtedly the comic heroine. She is secretly in charge of most of the plot developments, single-handedly arranging her daughter's marriage to Sebastian while putting on performances for both her husband and Octavio. She has found that she can outwit (and out-talk) her husband, which gives her a certain amount of power. In a sense she is Cowley's spokesperson against marriages like Antonia's, as she openly challenges Gaspar's and Alexis' ideas about the marriage market:

> Seraphina: 'Tis very odd now that these Ancients, high in the State, should take it into their venerable noddles, that a Youthful Bride is a proper appendage to their Dignity, and fancy that it requires no more wit to govern a young wife, than to govern a realm! (II, 1)

Her description of the wife as an 'appendage' draws attention to Gaspar's view of Antonia as a kind of accessory that raises his social status in the eyes of other men. Seraphina is very aware that her husband married her for the same reason, but is determined to govern herself. To achieve this, she uses the only thing truly hers, her beauty, to influence others. She takes her daughter's place when Octavio comes to visit them (from which we can deduce that she and Viola must look similar in age), and flirts with him so successfully that she can talk him into eloping with her. She also plays the role of the dutiful, pretty wife with Alexis, who therefore does not suspect her of anything until she reveals her plans at the end of the play. In this way, her reliance on her physical attractiveness of course makes her part

[85] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 53.

of the 'beauty for status' exchange that forms the basis of the marriage market. But much like Lady Priory, Seraphina is very aware of her situation, and determined to make the best of it. Unlike Lady Priory, she is also determined to have fun in the process. While her deception is partly planned to ensure the happiness of her daughter, the audience also gets the distinct impression that Seraphina simply enjoys tricking the men in her life into doing what she wants. In fact, she sees the ease of doing this as one of the advantages of her marrying an older man: 'When we marry Greybeards, it is with the pious design of always having our own way' (II, 2). It is, however, telling that she does not want the same fate for her daughter Viola. This may hint at the fact that Seraphina sees herself almost as a 'wife as they were'; she is part of an antiquated way of seeing marriage embodied by the two 'Greybeards', Gaspar and Alexis. For the new generation, Viola and Antonia, she wants a marriage based on love and equality, however much fun she herself has in gaining power through beauty and wit. She wants her daughter not to have to resort to these methods, because the power balance in her marriage will already be much more equal from the start.

It is very obvious that Seraphina herself is not in love with her husband, in fact she sees her lack of attachment (apart from to her daughter) as an advantage. Her support of Viola's relationship makes it clear that she does not object to women genuinely falling in love, but rather to the idea that they should fall in love with someone chosen for them. In a scene with Octavio, where he believes her to be Viola, he tries to persuade her that she is in love with him:

> Octavio: Why my charming Viola, I have your Father's sanction, so you may as well set about falling in Love with me; - you must you know fall in love with somebody.
>
> Seraphina: Upon my word I dont *[sic]* see any necessity for it. - Why must I?
>
> Octavio: Why! why because it is the custom with all the world.
>
> Seraphina: Oh I live in the world and know better; - fall in Love indeed! (IV, 1)

Octavio embodies a way of viewing women that reduces them purely to romantic objects, who 'must' fall in love with somebody because that is their function. He also implies that they can choose to fall in love with someone, but only with their guardian's sanction. This makes love a patriarchal way of controlling women - it gives them 'love' as their defining

talent, and then proscribes how they should use it. Seraphina recognises this and simply refuses to participate in this conceit, thereby confusing Octavio because she goes 'off-script'. Cowley employs a similar strategy as Inchbald in *Wives as they Were*, by making her female character aware of society's and the audience's expectations of a woman's behaviour, and then making her do exactly the opposite. Lady Priory does it silently and Seraphina with a lot of witty remarks, but the result is the same: they disrupt the narrative and draw attention to the ridiculous conventions which are applied to women in society, and in comedy.

Julie A. Carlson argues that women like Seraphina pose a particular problem because they do not participate in the romance narrative: ‘fallen women are not the real problem, even for a culture obsessed with female chastity and marital fidelity in women. Women who are uninterested in falling, especially for men, are’.[86] Because Seraphina sees the role she is meant to play so clearly, she also recognises Octavio's attempt to persuade her by using standard romantic language and traditions. In fact, she turns exactly those customs against him when she declares that she wants him to plan an elopement with her, which distracts him from the fact that Viola is meeting Sebastian at the same time. The scene in which they meet in the garden to run away together is one aspect Cowley changed from the Behn play she used as inspiration. Substituting the elopement for the rape scene in *The Lucky Chance* tells us a great deal about the intention behind Cowley's play. Instead of a scene in which a woman is victimised, she puts in a scene entirely orchestrated and planned by the woman, and intended to help another woman find happiness. Seraphina is in control for the entire scene; she explains later that she had no reason to be worried for her safety: 'A woman, who respects herself Octavio, is safe in every situation; - she ne' er incurs risk, who has sense of Duty for her Guard!' (V, 5)

The secret meeting in the garden and the elopement are romantic conventions which frequently occur in plays and novels of the period; but in this instance Seraphina again disrupts the standard narrative because she stages a fake meeting that is never intended to end in marriage. This shows again that she is aware of the romantic conventions surrounding marriage, but not susceptible to them. Because of this, she undermines the men's plans for the arranged marriages - but in a sense, she also undermines the two younger women's weddings. Seraphina is easily the most entertaining and interesting character of the play,

[86] Carlson, 'Remaking love', p. 298.

which puts the audience firmly on her side. Her constant cynical commentary on marriages and the inequality that frequently occurs in them would therefore necessarily influence the audience's view of the two final marriages between Viola and Sebastian and Antonia and Henry. Seraphina's clear and practical attitude to relationships questions the young women's' romantic view of their men, especially since neither of them have actually known their husbands for very long before their marriage. Mary Poovey has pointed out that romantic love matches like this can often give women a false sense of power:

> Romantic love, in other words, seems to promise to women in particular an emotional intensity that ideally, compensates for all the practical opportunities they are denied. All that it can actually yield, however, is the immediate gratification of believing that this single moment of apparent autonomy will endure, that the fact that a woman seems most desirable when she is most powerful will continue on in marriage and in society.[87]

In other words, while the marriage of the two women to the men they have chosen seems like a happy ending, there is no guarantee that they will not end up like Seraphina: married to a man who is mainly interested in her beauty, and forced to use the traditional conventions of marriage against others in order to gain any kind of influence. Clearly this is a better prospect than the January-May marriages they faced at the beginning of the play, but it is not quite the fantasy romantic ideal that they are expecting.

Comparing the two different representations of marriage in these plays, it becomes clear that marriage was very much a problematic proposition for women in the late eighteenth century. On the one hand, it was necessary as an investment for the future, and to ensure lasting social status, but on the other hand women became increasingly aware of the problems that came with such an arrangement. As a consequence, we can see female playwrights turning to critical examinations of marriage in their plays. The playwrights were in a similar position to the married women they portray - marriage was a necessary part of their plays because this was demanded by comic convention and audience opinion, but it may not have always been how they really wanted to end their plays. Especially in Inchbald's case, her female characters often decide on marriage very suddenly, as if it is an afterthought that has not occurred to them during the rest of the play. This makes some of

[87] Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 237.

her marriage endings unconvincing, and sometimes, as in the case of *Wives as they Were*, actually makes the ending less than happy. Julie A. Carlson writes that 'Inchbald's female characters work to align marriage with independence, and beauty and love with women's middle age',[88] and to an extent this is true. However, Inchbald shows very clearly that the women have to pay a price for that independence, as Lady Priory does, and sometimes they do not succeed at all. It is of course possible that Inchbald's own experience with marriage had some influence on her view of it, as well as her concerns about inequality. Her marriage to Joseph Inchbald (1735-1779) was, by all accounts, a marriage of convenience rather than love, and they had 'frequent disagreements', probably about financial matters.[89] This explains her determined focus on finding independence in marriage, and her realistic view of the financial situation of young middle-class women.

Cowley takes up exactly the same concerns (which in itself is remarkable), not only in *School for Greybeards* but in many other plays. Escott states that, 'Most of the marriages in Cowley's plays are unhappy ones', but I would argue that she portrays not so much unhappy marriages as realistic ones.[90] Her way of writing about them is much less sardonic than Inchbald's; Seraphina is a much more joyful character than Lady Priory, for example, even though they are in a similar position. What Cowley focuses on is that some form of equality is required for a good match, and that marriage cannot be relied on to magically solve all of her female characters' problems. Her perspective is realistic in the sense that she acknowledges that marriages like Seraphina's do happen, and that, unless external circumstances change, they will continue to happen to other women. It is significant how much other women are invested and involved in her female characters' marriages, showing that Cowley believed women had some agency for effecting a change. Female community starts to become an alternative or remedial kind of relationship to marriage with a man. The recognition of how much influence external factors like money, family pressure, and societal values have on the supposedly personal business of love and marriage is a common thread in many female-authored comedies of the time. Even plays which do present marriage as the fairy-tale happy ending (like Lee's *Chapter of Accidents*), make some reference to the sometimes unreasonable demands placed on women by society and custom. Therefore,

[88] Carlson, 'Remaking love', p. 295.
[89] Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What,* p. 32.
[90] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 50.

these plays present an intriguing paradox, endorsing marriage as the 'proper' ending for women, but at the same time becoming increasingly aware and critical of the problems associated with that idea.

'Unbind them again': Divorce and Separation

While all domestic comedies end with a marriage, the plot for female characters does not always end with their wedding. Several playwrights also feature a divorce or separation plot, in which the marriage clearly has not worked out as expected. Divorce is an especially interesting issue in these plays, as it engages with contemporary laws and concerns. The so-called Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753 had regulated both marriages and divorces, and critics like Anderson have argued that this legislation presented women with a strange contradiction: on the one hand, they could potentially cite the Act to support any claims they might have against their husband; on the other hand, the law was firmly favouring men. This was because 'The evolving body of eighteenth-century marriage law both promised greater equality under the law for married women and made married women all but invisible as legal subjects in their own right'.[91] Divorce was technically possible, but it involved large sums of money to be paid by the person seeking the divorce, and since married women were rarely in control of their own finances, this put divorce out of reach for many of them. The issue of money of course also made the possibility of divorce dependent on class. Rebecca Probert notes that the 1753 Act had little impact on the way poorer families married (or separated), but that it gave both the husbands and the families of middle- and upper-class women more control over their marriages.[92] This makes sense as wealthier families would have had more property and money at stake in a marriage, and therefore would have tried to exert control over their daughters' future weddings.

[91] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy,* p. 48.
[92] See Rebecca Probert, 'Control over Marriage in England and Wales, 1753-1823: The Clandestine Marriages Act of 1753 in Context', in *Law and History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2009), 413-450, which provides a detailed analysis of the economic background of the Act.

The plays reflect this Catch-22 in their portrayal of separations. On the one hand, divorce is clearly an option, as it does occur in the plays, but it is not a good choice for any of the female characters. As we shall see from closer analysis, separations are rarely if ever permanent, and while they last, they cause the wife a number of problems. To illustrate this point, I will be examining two plays, Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault* (1793), and Griffith's *The Platonic Wife* (1765).

The basic plot of Griffith's play is that Lady Frankland has decided to separate from her husband because she feels that their marriage is not romantic enough and this makes her feel neglected. While she lives apart from Lord Frankland, she socialises with a number of female acquaintances, Emilia, Lady Fanshaw, and Clarinda. Lady Fanshaw and Clarinda are, however, false friends who are secretly trying to ruin her reputation, in order to sabotage any future relationships or reconciliation with her husband. Emilia is her real friend, but she is the target of Mr Frankland, Lord Frankland's nephew. He wants to prevent his uncle from reconciling with his wife so that he will eventually inherit his fortune. He also wants to marry Emilia for her money. Lady Frankland also has two potential suitors, Sir Harry and Sir William, but their extravagant and demanding professions of love eventually become too much for her and she returns to her husband at the end of the play.

The Platonic Wife engages with two main issues: the precarious position of a woman who is separated from her husband, and therefore also lacks financial and social security, and Lady Frankland's expectations of romance, which led to the separation in the first place. This question of whether her marriage to Lord Frankland is romantic enough is an interesting one. The play clearly implies that she was taught to expect overtly romantic gestures by reading about them in books; Griffith introduces her to the audience by showing her reading Alexander Pope's 'Eloisa to Abelard', and she complains to Emilia that real men never match up to what she has been led to expect by fiction. Lady Frankland says, 'I assure you Emilia, I almost wish I had never learnt my letters; for the delicate and refined sentiments which books have inspired me with, have only served to disgust me with almost all mankind' (I, 4). Her insistence on fairytale romance could very easily paint her as a demanding and self-centred character, but Griffith instead makes it clear that Lady Frankland is simply inexperienced. In the same scene she reveals that her husband was chosen for her by her parents, and she has obviously never given any thought to what she wanted from a

relationship until she decided to separate from him. This makes her sympathetic in the eyes of the audience, especially as her inexperience and naiveté is constantly exploited by other characters. Lady Frankland at first believes in the 'romantic love' narrative mentioned earlier, the idea that a woman should marry and afterwards will live a perfect life in the manner of a romantic novel. What Griffith shows instead is that this narrative is misleading, and not in any way representative of reality.

Critics differ in their interpretations of Griffith's play. Susan Staves for instance argues that *The Platonic Wife* teaches women not to have expectations in marriage, and shows them to be in need of protection:

> *The Platonic Wife* yields a double moral: overtly, Lady Frankland must learn that she is not entitled to have her demands for romance within marriage met and that she requires the protection of her husband to live with happiness and reputation; covertly, however, the play suggests that as soon as a good woman relinquishes her demand for romance within marriage as an entitlement, her husband will give her romance, indeed, romantic adulation as a free gift.[93]

This interpretation certainly makes some good points, but I feel that it paints the play as having a more conservative stance than it actually does. Staves' comment on women's need for protection is justified, but only when applied to the fifth act of the play. This final act does indeed contain some very conservative ideas about married and separated women, and suggests that women like Lady Frankland would do best if they obeyed their husbands. When Lady Frankland decides to return to her marriage, Emilia comments:

> My heart exults at finding yours so sensible of duty. O, Lady Frankland, you have indeed escaped from many dangers yet unknown. Nor can a wife e'er find a place of safety, but under the protection of that heaven-appointed guard, her husband. (V, 1)

Considered in isolation, this quote in combination with the ending of the play, in which husband and wife are reunited, and the morally questionable characters are punished, does indeed point to a conservative agenda. It is possible that this was Griffith's intention; however, when compared to the other four acts, the last one stands out as having a very

[93] Susan Staves, 'Elizabeth Griffith: October 11, 1727 - January 5, 1793', in Paula R. Backscheider (ed.), *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 89: Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Dramatists, Third Series* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989).

different tone and moral outlook. While moralistic statements about the sanctity of marriage are found frequently in Act Five, the rest of the play is decidedly more sceptical about this issue. Characters like the cynical Clarinda, but also Lady Frankland's behaviour, introduce an element of doubt about the validity of the traditional marriage narrative. That is to say, they occasionally make comments which make the audience think about the established rules of both marriage and stage comedy, leading to a potential questioning of those rules.

Concerning the point about a woman's reputation only being safe if she is protected by a man, a scene in Act Two contradicts this, as it shows Emilia being secure in her own character:

> Mr. Frankland: You stand at present on the brink of ruin, and have no other place of safety, that l can see, but these arms, to take refuge in.
> Emilia: Then sure my case is desperate indeed. But what danger, Sir, what ruin am l threatned with?
> Mr. Frankland: With one of the greatest misfortunes that can possibly befal an innocent young woman — the loss of reputation, madam.
> Emilia: My character, Sir, is far above the reach of malice, nor has the tongue of slander ever yet pronounced by name. (II, 1)

We can see clearly here how Mr. Frankland is trying to bully Emilia into marriage by using the threat of a ruined reputation - a common concern for women of the time, and one which usually works in fiction, because ladies like Emilia are *supposed* to be concerned for their reputation above all else. Griffith surprisingly has Emilia completely invalidate that threat by rendering it void - she is not concerned about her reputation, because she knows herself to be morally inviolable. Coming from the character in the play who most conforms to the stereotype of the innocent, persecuted young heroine, this is a significant inversion. It shows Griffith's readiness to question established comedy plots and invent new narratives instead.

Another strain of critical commentary on marriage comes from Clarinda and Lady Fanshaw. Right at the beginning of the play, they introduce us to Lady Frankland's separation as if it were a positive thing:

> Lady Fanshaw: [...] next to the felicity of widowhood is that of being separated. However there are, my dear, some material differences: While the tyrant lives to whom we have been bound, we never can forget we have been slaves. There are, besides, some other disagreeable circumstances which attend a separation, from which, thank Heaven, my state is free.
>
> Clarinda: You mean, I suppose, the power a husband has of withdrawing alimony, in case of indiscretion, and forcing the wretched wife upon certain moyens de vivre, whether she will or no. (I, 1)

Their discussion of Lady Frankland's situation brings up two interesting aspects. Firstly, they regard her as being 'free' now, implying that marriage is a confining state for women. Lady Fanshaw's references to 'slaves' and 'tyrant[s]' also paints an extremely negative picture of gender relations in marriage, and parallels Inchbald's Lady Priory describing herself in the same terms. Unlike Lady Priory, these characters see separation as the remedy for women's inequality. Secondly, they introduce the disadvantages of divorce by referring to contemporary legislation. Clarinda's lines about alimony immediately characterise her as being primarily concerned about money (which is continued in the rest of the play), but as much as this points to her superficiality, she has a point. That she is sympathetic to the wife who has been left without a way to support herself is uncharacteristically compassionate of her, and she phrases it as a general statement about separated women in a way that implies this is a common occurrence. It is noteworthy that the right to withhold alimony is only accorded to the husband, and that Clarinda's coy comment about 'certain moyens de vivre' points to prostitution being one of the only ways of earning an income left to a divorcee. This is not to be taken as a statement of fact in all cases, of course; but it opens up an interesting point about how important financial matters were in cases of separation. We have already seen that money was a great concern on the marriage market, but we could equally well speak of a 'divorce market'. The principle behind it is the same: the woman's beauty and virtue has a certain monetary value, but if she is unfaithful this value is lost to the husband. He is therefore entitled to cease payments, and find another woman who has not lost her value. The divorced woman, who does not own any material goods or property of her own, is left having to sell the only thing she has: her physical beauty. This is of course a rather bleak view of relationships (and one that is proven wrong by Lady Frankland

eventually), but the very fact that Griffith has Clarinda and Lady Fanshaw talk about this at the beginning of her play tells us that this was at least a possibility for many married women. Like most of the issues of the marriage market, the financial concerns of divorce also apply mainly to middle-class women who cannot rely on a wealthy family or a learned profession to support them after their separation.

To go back to Poovey's view of the wedding as an illusionary moment of power for married women, her argument that marriage while it lasts disguises problems is relevant here: 'the model of private gratification that romantic love proposes can disguise the inescapable system of economic and political domination only by foregrounding the few relationships that flatter our desire for personal autonomy and power'.[94] Divorce then shatters that illusion, and the 'system' behind it becomes foregrounded. Hence why practically all the characters in *The Platonic Wife* are so concerned about Lady Frankland's circumstances (though not all of them for caring reasons): she is in a very real danger of being lost in that system. Griffith's solution can be interpreted as rather weak and reactionary, as Lady Frankland resists any temptations from other suitors, therefore retaining her value and eventually learning to be an uncomplaining wife. However, when we look beyond the basic plot of the play, it is clear that Griffith is very much aware of the problems associated with that narrative, and that she uses her secondary characters to subtly question the system in which Lord and Lady Frankland operate. Her motivation is not to openly rebel against that system; that would be a fatal move for a female playwright reliant on her audience and access to the public stage. Instead, her goal is to show the potential dangers of that system. Griffith's 'Advertisement' to her work supports this theory of the play being intended as educational. She writes about Lady Frankland's naiveté: 'It is a simplicity, not a coquetry; it is the error of a delicate and elevated mind, unacquainted with the manners of real life, or the general frame of the human heart' ('Advertisement'). Lady Frankland's sentimental view of how marriage is supposed to work prevents her from seeing the reality of women in her position, until separation and its problems make her aware of it. In that sense, Clarinda and Lady Fanshaw, though decidedly not the heroines of the play, are very much its realists.

The combination of domestic comedy with elements of realism is what makes these plays so interesting. Elizabeth Inchbald, even more than Griffith, combines her sentimental plots with

[94] Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, p. 237.

an almost ruthless look at the situation of divorced women in the real world. A perfect example of this is her play *Every One Has His Fault*. First staged in 1793 at Covent Garden, it was one of Inchbald's more successful plays, with Anderson estimating that it earned her about £700.[95] The popularity of *Every One Has His Fault* is particularly surprising when we consider its subject matter. While there is a sentimental plotline concerning a married couple called the Irwins and their struggle to survive and be accepted by Mrs. Irwin's father after they have married for love, a large part of the play centres around Sir Ramble and his former wife, Miss Wooburn.

The Rambles embody the legal side of marriage. Sir Ramble basically forced his wife into the separation through his behaviour, admitting that 'Lady Ramble, at the time I parted with her, had every possible fault both of mind and person, and so I made love to other women in her presence; told her bluntly that I was tired of her' (II, 1). His blunt admission is not only cruel, but also references the fact that infidelity was one of the few legal grounds for granting a divorce. The Rambles' plotline in the play is concerned with legal matters throughout. Anderson writes that this is a crucial change to the usual comedy format, as 'Inchbald's comedies displace courtship and marriage with legal evidence and divorce'.[96] It is exactly this displacement that we can see beginning in Griffith's play, and which Inchbald develops into a major part of her work. Its grounding in the legal issues surrounding a separation gives it a touch of realism that sets it apart from the usual elements of the romantic comedy, and shows an increasing concern with what happens after the traditional happy-ending marriage.

Inchbald uses quite specific aspects of the legal system to anchor her play in real life. Firstly, the Rambles' divorce is only possible because they married in Scotland, where the wife could divorce the husband, and not in England where only the man could apply for separation, leading Ramble to exclaim, 'Blessed, blessed country! That will bind young people together before the years of discretion – and, as soon as they have discretion to repent, will unbind them again!' (II, 1). This distinction points out the inequality inherent in the English system under the 1753 Act, which would have prevented Lady Ramble from applying for a divorce. That they married in Scotland also implies that the marriage was not

[95] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 26.
[96] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 174.

thought suitable by her family, since it was common for English couples to elope to Scotland where the family's consent was not required for a wedding. His reference to 'young people' and repentance shows us that Inchbald is concerned with married women in later life, and with what happens to the young comedy heroines after they are married. Much like Cowley does in *A School for Greybeards*, Inchbald tells her audience that marriages may not always work out as intended, and that this often results in the woman being disadvantaged.

It is clear that the Rambles' marriage was not based on real affection, but on Miss Wooburn's appearance and her wealth. Her estates become the driving force of their story. At their marriage, Sir Ramble gained control over them, but as part of the divorce settlement she gets her fortune back. Miss Wooburn, however, is the dutiful wife even after her divorce, and insists on giving up the claim to her money when she learns that Ramble is in financial difficulties. She shows that a woman in this period can never be truly in control of her fortune: first her money belongs to Sir Ramble, then she is under the influence of Lord Norland, who is her guardian, and if she marries for a second time it will once again be part of her husband's estates. Indeed, part of her reason for giving it back to Ramble is that she does not want her future husband to have financial claims on him. Most of the play is spent in discussions over who should own her money, putting the financial aspect of divorce in the foreground once again. Inchbald's focus on laws and money verges on being obsessive, and it certainly does not contribute to the play's humour. Lisa A. Freeman writes about 'Inchbald's almost relentless anatomisation both of the fiscal circumstances undergirding each marriage and of the extent to which women are regarded as property in these marriages'.[97] In this way, Inchbald shows that legal and financial matters, rather than romantic or comedic plots, are the ruling feature of these characters' lives.

Miss Wooburn's character is almost inseparable from her money; it is her distinguishing feature as well as the 'quality' that other characters notice most about her. Sir Ramble and Norland in particular are much more concerned with the future fate of her fortune than with her personal happiness.

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[97] Lisa A. Freeman, 'The Social Life of Eighteenth-century Comedy' in Moody and O'Quinn, *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730 - 1830,* pp. 73-86, p. 84.

She is reluctant to marry again, but Norland wants to marry her off as soon as possible. Again, the reason is a legal one; he does not like her status as a divorced woman. He tells her: ‘What are you now? Neither a widow, a maid, nor a wife. If I could fix a term to your present state, I should not be thus anxious to place you in another’ (III, 1). It is not enough for her to be just a woman, she has to have a title which indicates her marriage potential to other men. As it is, she has a title which indicates her separation from a man, instead of her belonging to one, although it seems as if Norland does not recognise the status of divorcée as valid at all. When she objects to Norland’s choice of Mr. Harmony for her next husband, another issue comes up: the fact that women were not supposed to choose their husbands, but they were chosen for them by other men. Norland comments: ‘where is the woman who marries the man she would choose? You are reversing the order of society; men, only have the right of choice in marriage’. He goes on to say: ‘Were women permitted theirs, we should have handsome beggars allied to our noblest families, and no such object in our whole island as an old maid’(III, 1). This prediction is interesting, as it implies that women would prefer to marry 'beggars' for love rather than marrying for money. Miss Wooburn confirms this, since she does not care for her money herself, and therefore wants to give it away. A scene reminiscent of this occurs in Griffith's play too, when Lady Frankland speaks about her expectations of romantic love, and Emilia comments:

> Oh for Heaven's sake dear lady Frankland, don't run on at this rate! l vow I am frightened lest you should tempt me to throw away myself and fortune upon some beggar in pursuit of these same transports, which, after all, l do not believe are to be found any where but in the heated imagination of some poet or romance-monger. (I, 4)

This 'fear' of an unsuitable marriage that is financially unsound clearly runs deep, and the fates of both Lady Frankland and Miss Wooburn show that it is not a realistic option; both of them leave their marriages for a while, but end up returning to their husbands at the end of each play.

What we can see from the examples in Griffith's and Inchbald's plays is that divorce was a feature of late-eighteenth century relationships, but that it was not socially accepted or

morally sound enough to be portrayed positively in stage comedies of the time. There was an increase in divorce rates towards the end of the century,[98] meaning that more married couples did see it as an option, but perhaps social opinion did not warm to it quite as quickly. However, playwrights obviously felt they had to comment on it, implying that it was a common enough occurrence to make a relatable story for a wide portion of the audience, and for people of different social classes. The fact that divorce is treated at length and very seriously in these plays tells us that the writers were aware of the social and financial consequences it could have, especially for the wife. It also marks a departure from Restoration comedy's more light-hearted views of both infidelity and separation, and a move towards preoccupation with legal problems faced by women. It is not unreasonable to trace this back at least partly to Hardwick's Act, since it did introduce legislation and tighter regulation, and in the process disadvantaged women to a considerable degree. While both playwrights explore the social dimension of separation, we can see some interesting differences in their focus. Griffith shows how much societal expectations influence the supposedly private realm of personal relationships, and she also shows reactions from other women to Lady Frankland's separation. This focus on female opinion and sociability is interesting, implying as it does that the attitude of other women can be much more influential than male opinion. Lady Frankland is mostly swayed by the views of Lady Fanshaw, Clarinda, and Emilia, and finally makes up her own mind to end the separation. Clearly this influence is by no means always positive, given that two of the women actively plot against her. But by showcasing not only Lady Frankland's, but also her female friends' views on her divorce, Griffith is telling her audience that the wife's side in a divorce is not to be ignored, because there are wide-ranging consequences for her.

Inchbald also shows how divorce has affected Miss Wooburn, but chooses to focus much more on the practical aspects of separation rather than the social dimension. Miss Wooburn's agonising over what to do with her money is affecting, and takes place for most of the play; it is clearly an important plot point for Inchbald. In the end, Ramble and his former wife remarry, but the audience senses that he has not changed, and that the question of her estate still hangs between them, so that a happy future for them is unlikely. Indeed, Miss Wooburn's return to her marriage feels like a defeat, a step she takes because

[98] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 172/ 173.

her social circle pushes her towards it, and because it is the easiest road: her uncertainty about both her title and her property is taken away, since the right of decision-making reverts to her husband. While other characters in *Every One Has His Fault* do get the happy ending demanded by comedic convention, Miss Wooburn is decidedly not one of them, and Inchbald does not even attempt to make her story more appealing. One would be inclined to attribute this to her anger at women's' inequality in marriage law, and Anderson certainly sees it that way: 'The ability of comic heroines to trade, negotiate, and act as economic agents balances the threat that Inchbald renders all too clearly; by the end of the eighteenth century, British women had lost legal authority in marriage'.[99] Given what we have seen of Inchbald's pessimistic view of relationships so far, this is a valid interpretation. However, it is also possible that her negative portrayal of divorce is influenced by her own Catholicism, which had a bearing on her decisions throughout her life.[100] While her characterisation of the divorced woman is nothing but sympathetic, it is possible that the Catholic Church's view of divorce may play into her view of divorce as potentially life-ruining. Certainly, her play depicts the status of a divorcée as incredibly problematic.

Marriage and its counterpart, divorce, are the main focus of late eighteenth-century comedies. This heavy reliance on marriage plots stems from tradition, as the wedding ending had been established as a necessary feature of comedies for centuries. But apart from being traditional, it was also still relevant to women and men of the Georgian era, given the changes in marriage law and the social pressures that accompanied an impending or existing marriage. If we look at the historical background, it is not surprising that female playwrights were writing about these themes. However, the fact that both marriage and its failure were such well-established, common plot devices has caused these playwrights to be accused of being unoriginal, in that they do not invent a different ending for their characters. This is certainly understandable; objectively, the focus on marriage is repetitive. However, as my analysis of some of these plays has shown, subtle changes do occur. For a woman writer, overthrowing the entire system of comedy drama and its prevalent marriage plots would probably have been a financial disaster and, in many cases, also not what she wanted to

[99] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 66.
[100] For instance, Inchbald destroyed the autobiography she was writing on the advice of her confessor; see Jane Spencer, 'Inchbald, Elizabeth (1753–1821)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14374> [accessed 10 May 2017].

achieve. Instead, from Griffith through Cowley to Inchbald, we can see a more understated questioning of the system starting to occur. Several of their characters question elements of eighteenth-century marriage and divorce, and, in so doing, draw the audience's attention to its associated problems. There is a definite tendency to be increasingly sceptical of the romance plot being forced on women. Anderson writes about Inchbald's comedies that they, 'pressed on the generic limits of the form as it verged into tragicomedy. The dominant theme of her oeuvre was the drive toward community and reconciliation'.[101] While I would argue that Inchbald's sense of humour is often too dark to allow for much 'reconciliation', the idea of community is an important one, and not just limited to her work alone. At the same time as they were questioning existing relationship models, female playwrights were increasingly interested in other forms of community, especially for women. This section of my thesis has shown them pointing out the problems of positing marriage as the only worthwhile relationship; succeeding sections will examine how they explored alternative personal relationships.

Female Communities and Female Friendship

Having examined how female playwrights represent romantic relationships between men and women, I will now move on to different kinds of relationships: those between the women themselves. Connections between women can take several forms in the plays and I will examine three different ways in which they interact with each other. The first will be female friendships and supportive communities of women, which is particularly relevant when thinking about a group of women writers. Secondly, I will be examining instances of rivalry between women, which was a relatively common feature of stage comedies, as well as having real-life precedents among the playwrights themselves. And lastly, it is important to consider relationships that go beyond friendship, and open the possibility of romantic connections between women. These varying models of relationships are something female writers especially explore at length in their writing, and it is interesting to see how they characterise the women who take part in these relationships, as well as drawing on their

[101] Misty G. Anderson, 'Women Playwrights' in Moody and O'Quinn, *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre,* pp. 145-158, p. 153.

own experiences. I will also be arguing that we can discern a movement away from a central marriage plot and towards an exploration of other possible relationships for women, which points towards a more critical view of, and engagement, with the rules of stage comedy.

To begin with, I will be discussing Hannah Cowley's play *A Day in Turkey* (1792). A musical comedy, in which the scenes are interspersed with comic songs, it was first performed at Covent Garden under the management of Thomas Harris. The form of the musical comedy was a novelty at this time, and part of an ongoing experimentation with different genres in an effort to hold the theatre audience's attention. Two versions exist of this play, the original 1792 one, and a later, slightly revised version. I will be using both texts, referring to relevant differences and revisions.

A Day in Turkey takes place during the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792),[102] which had been over for only a few months at the play's first performance. The Prologue explicitly refers to this, anchoring the play firmly in a contemporary setting and drawing attention to its political content. This frames the story, which mainly takes place in the harem of the Turkish Bassa Ibrahim, where an international cast of characters is gathered through the recent conquests of war. There are three main female characters. Alexina is a captured Russian noblewoman, whose main aim it is to avoid Ibrahim's attentions and be reunited with her husband Count Orloff, who, without her knowledge, is also captured at the start of the play. Paulina is another Russian captive, but of lower social standing than Alexina. Lauretta is an Italian slave (renamed Zilia and given Georgian nationality in the later revised version), who is essentially in charge of the harem, thanks to her knowledge of harem politics and her ability to devise amusing plots involving the other characters. The play's male characters, other than Ibrahim and Orloff, include Mustapha, a harem guard, who, although loyal to his master, is kind to the women and helps them in any way he can. Azim is his evil counterpart, who abuses his power over the harem inmates and plots Alexina's destruction. Finally, there is A La Greque, Orloff's French servant, who has just come from revolutionary Paris to experience life in Russia and is captured along with his employer.

The plot is a mixture of laughing and sentimental comedy; Ibrahim is intrigued by the reputation of the beautiful Alexina, and wants to woo her. However, she is determined to

[102] Spencer C. Tucker, *A Global Chronology of Conflict: From the Ancient World to the Modern Middle East* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), p. 966.

return to her husband, and Lauretta/Zilia therefore makes Ibrahim think that Paulina is Alexina, instructing her in how best to capture his attention. Mustapha helps in this scheme, while Azim does everything in his power to hinder it. Meanwhile, Orloff and A La Greque both try to enter the harem, Orloff to reclaim his wife and A La Greque to look at the women. Finally, after a series of incidents including an attempt to kill Ibrahim, Alexina's imprisonment, and A La Greque hiding under Ibrahim's sofa, the confusion between Alexina and Paulina is cleared up. By that time Ibrahim has fallen in love with Paulina and she with him, which prompts him to henceforth live monogamously and reunite Alexina and Orloff. As is obvious from this short summary, the plot is not in itself remarkable. The confusion between character identities, the efforts of a young woman to preserve her virtue, and the happy ending in marriage are all fairly standard elements of eighteenth-century comedy.

In examining Cowley's creative innovation, however, my particular interest is not in the heterosexual relationships between Alexina and Orloff or Ibrahim and Paulina, but the more unusual, and more ephemeral connections between others in the harem. In particular, the harem represents a community of women. It is, of course, in some ways an enforced community, as several women are made to live together in a specific, often prison-like, space; but Cowley shows the women as a collaborative group who enjoy each others' company. This is not the way in which female groups were always shown in literature of the time (as we shall see later), especially not when the women are technically rivals for the attention of one man. But in *A Day in Turkey*, the women are shown dancing and singing together as soon as there are no men around:

> This is Freedom's precious hour,
> Welcome airy sportive Mirth!
> We'll enjoy thee whilst we've power,
> Give to all thy whimsies birth!
> First Slave: Thank our stars, we have again escaped from restraint, and, for one hour, our actions and our minds are free.[103]

[103] Hannah Cowley, *A Day in Turkey, or, The Russian Slaves* (London: Robinson, 1792), IV, 2 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

At this point in the celebratory song, A La Greque appears over the harem wall, causing the women to run off. We can see here a kind of female utopia, in which the women, for a short time, possess complete freedom to do what they want. Left alone, they live in harmony, because the rules which usually govern interactions between men and women, and women and women, do not apply any more. A La Greque's male gender represents the sudden return of the rules, which startles them. Immediately after his appearance, Zilia/ Lauretta engages in an overly flirty exchange with him, which eventually puts both him and the women in danger. It is an unusual conceit that the women, who realistically have been taken from their homes to be locked behind the harem walls, think of themselves as free in action and mind. But throughout the play, Cowley shows that these women can make their own kind of freedom through their intelligence and initiative, informed by an understanding of human character.

Zilia is the prime example of this freedom. She seems to understand both harem politics and gender expectations so well that she can manipulate her fellow characters into following her own plan. Daniel O'Quinn even describes her as the 'playwright/manager' of the piece, which makes her Cowley's representative in the play.[104] If this is true, then Cowley is demonstrating her mastery of stagecraft, and plays on the audience's expectations of both the oriental play and its heterosexual relationships. Zilia makes her intentions very clear: 'I'll weave a web of amusement to crack the sides of a dozen gloomy harems with laughter— Mercy! what a sleepy life wou'd our valiant Bassa and his damsels lead, but for my talents at invention' (II, 1). She assumes not only the role of the comic playwright and in doing so challenges the Bassa's mastery of the harem, but also of someone who sees gender and sexuality as something playful and amusing - quite a welcome, entertaining change from the serious discussions about the roles of the sexes by other Romantic writers such as Edmund Burke or Wollstonecraft.[105] Of course (as O'Quinn also points out) her influence is confined to the harem, just as Cowley's is confined to the theatre. But she uses this liminal space to make some incredibly astute observations about the world outside, and to experiment with different kinds of relationships.

[104] Daniel O'Quinn, 'Hannah Cowley's A Day In Turkey And The Political Efficacy Of Charles James Fox', in *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 14 (2003), pp. 17-30, p. 28.

[105] Compare Burke's very serious description of Marie Antoinette as a 'delightful vision' needing to be protected by 'chivalry', which casts her as a helpless, ethereal figure, rather than a real woman (Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Dodsley, 1790), pp. 112-113).

Zilia's plot 'management' has an impact on the other characters she interacts with. Paulina, having been denied her liberty and access to her relatives, is quickly taken under the wing of Alexina and Zilia, who decide to teach her how to win the love of the Bassa. Their method reflects (and mocks) the idea that women should be unattainable and cold, in order to make men pursue them. Zilia, who is aware of this convention, tells her:

> Come, my good girl, you shall go with me, and I will give you the prettiest lesson you ever learnt. In half an hour, you shall be able to play on a husband's mind, as though it were a musical instrument - every note shall be obedient to your wish.
>
> Alexina: Be attentive to her lessons, my dear Paulina; my Felicity depends on your Success. Preserve your own innocence, and be the guardian of mine. (III, 1)

Two things are interesting about this exchange. Firstly, it emphasises that this behaviour is taught; it does not come naturally to women. And secondly, it shows the three women working together in a partnership to achieve their goals. Zilia wants Ibrahim to fall in love to make him release the rest of his slaves, and Alexina wants his focus taken off her so she can remain faithful to her husband. It appears as if they are using Paulina for their own purposes at first, but she very quickly settles into her role as she finds she enjoys toying with Ibrahim and eventually falls in love with him. This kind of teamwork between women is not unusual in female-authored plays of this period. In Joanna Baillie's *The Tryal* (1798), for example, cousins Agnes and Mariane stage a series of tests to find the most suitable man for Agnes to marry. That Alexina puts Paulina in charge of preserving the innocence of both women is an example of instant trust between women in the same situation; both are aware of the consequences of not helping each other.

This mutual trust can be described as a favourite feature of many female writers' plays, and, as in *A Day in Turkey*, one female character is frequently charged with ensuring the safety and unblemished reputation of another. Cowley's play *More Ways Than One* for instance has one woman, Miss Archer, rescue another, Arabella, from an attempted kidnapping by playing a trick on the kidnapper and then taking Arabella into her house and under her protection. However, Cowley did not have the monopoly on this storyline by any means. Another play that features the same plot is Sophia Lee's *The Chapter of Accidents* (1780). In this play, performed at the Haymarket theatre, the heroine Cecilia is the mistress of

Woodville. She has been kept intentionally uneducated and 'natural' by her father, but after she has spent some time in town, she realises that her reputation is at stake and leaves Woodville. He offers to marry her, but she feels unable to do so until her reputation has been restored. There follow several scenes in which Woodville, other members of his family, and Cecilia's estranged father try to find her. Eventually, of course, the other characters conform to comic convention by realising Cecilia's worth, and she marries Woodville with their blessing. The relevant part of the story for this analysis, however, is that in order to escape from both the search parties and her notorious name, Cecilia takes shelter in the house of Sophia Mortimer, who is Woodville's father's ward. Sophia provides her with a safe space, and keeps her presence a secret, while at the same time facilitating situations in which Woodville's father can see Cecilia behaving in an exemplary fashion. Initially, Sophia is reluctant to participate in this plot, because she, like Cecilia, is highly aware of the importance of reputation; when her husband lists Cecilia's good qualities, she comments: 'Supposing her all you say, the world judges by actions, not thoughts, and will bury her merit in her situation' (II, 5).

However, it is precisely this recognition of Cecilia's situation that prompts Sophia to help her after all. She ends up (literally) supporting Cecilia when she faints (III, 2), and is involved in the final scene in which it is revealed that Woodville's mistress and the virtuous lady who has been staying at the house are the same person. Sophia has no emotional or family attachment to Cecilia: she is simply told that this woman needs shelter, and accepts this as a situation in which her help is needed. This protection is remarkably selfless, as Sophia has nothing to gain from this assistance, but, in the event of the secret coming out too soon, could potentially damage her own reputation. The play also makes an important distinction between the protection a man can offer Cecilia, to the one Sophia provides. As Cecilia moves out of the house Woodville has bought for her, she tells him, 'who is it has made me thus destitute?---I may retain your protection, indeed, but at what a price!' (II, 1). In contrast, in the final scene when Sophia's part in the plot becomes known, her guardian observes, 'Methinks all seem rewarded but my poor Sophia here? and her protection of Cecilia deserves the highest recompence' (V, 2). The men decide she should be rewarded with a husband, but as it is then revealed that she secretly already has one, this is judged to be reward enough. In these two contrasting scenes, Lee makes it clear that a woman can rely on another woman to help her without demanding anything in return. This is a remarkably

optimistic view of female community, in which women have a kind of instant kinship and understanding, and which is finally validated by their families and society in general.

In part, this understanding is based on the fact that nobody understands a woman's situation better than another woman. As mentioned above, Sophia instantly recognises Cecilia's danger and is very aware of the consequences of her loss of reputation. But hers is not only an awareness of the potential danger, it is the knowledge that she could easily find herself in the same situation; after all, Sophia also has a secret, and has to rely on others to keep that secret. This, I would argue, reflects the reality that eighteenth-century women did indeed have to trust their female acquaintances to defend their reputation, especially as a malicious rumour could do considerable damage. Betty Rizzo has shown that especially middle- and upper-class women needed other women for security and support. She writes that 'genteel women were to be found in braces or swarms',[106] because it was unacceptable for a lady to leave the house alone - a woman on her own was not only in potential physical danger, but she was also in danger of being suspected of immoral or illicit activities.

Working with other women was therefore almost a social and moral necessity, and female playwrights were very aware of this, incorporating female friendship into many of their works. The heroine's best friend is almost always female, and provides her with assistance and support, not just in relationships with male characters, but also in general social situations. She also frequently acts as a moral guide, encouraging the heroine to make decisions which will protect her virtue. Other examples of this dynamic apart from those already mentioned include Olivia and Victoria in Cowley's *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (1783), Lady Frankland and Emilia in Griffith's *The Platonic Wife*, Lady Mary and Miss Dorrillon in Inchbald's *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are*, and Louisa and Eliza in Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (1788). As is obvious from this (by no means exhaustive) list, the theme of friendship between women has been written about by most of the major female playwrights of the period, and several of them (especially Cowley) wrote about it more than once. The reason this is remarkable is that friendship between women was (and often still is) seen as something superficial and artificial, especially in a comedy setting. The two women who pretend to be best friends, but secretly undermine each other at every turn are a

[106] Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-century British Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 27.

familiar trope of comedy, and there are many indications that this trope was already in existence in the eighteenth century. Griffith's play *A Wife in the Right* (1772) makes a reference to it, and the 'sensible' man of the play already recognises it as a cliché:

> Lord Seaton: Female friendships, you know, Charles, are not among the perennials of life.
>
> Colonel Ramsay: That is a mere common-place reflection, my Lord, adapted only to the very triflers of the sex. (I, 1)

This is not to suggest that the superficial friendship or rivalry does not exist in plays of this time; as will be shown in the next section, they definitely do play a part. However, the fact that so many playwrights write against this stereotype and instead include positive instances of female friendship is telling. It suggests that they were very aware of the comedy trope, and (either consciously or unconsciously) tried to argue against it by demonstrating that it does not represent the reality of most female friendships.

By showing their female characters conversing together about many different subjects, not just the heroine's romantic interest, the authors also move away from the assumption that a male subject is necessary for women to relate to each other. While relationship problems are always a major part of these conversations (it is doubtful that many of these plays would pass the Bechdel test),[107] the women do have other shared interests: Lady Frankland and Emilia talk about books, for instance, and Lady Mary and Miss Dorrillon go gambling together. As other critics have pointed out, the 'assumption that women's sociability was properly expressed only in forming links with men recurs often in the period.'[108] By showing the possibilities and advantages of female friendship on stage, these playwrights actively prove this assumption to be wrong.

It is likely that the particular demands of these playwrights' work made it especially apparent to them that friendship and mutual assistance had personal and social benefits. I have already shown in Chapter One that writing for the eighteenth-century theatre involved

[107] This test asks whether a work of fiction features two women talking to each other about something other than a man; it offers an interesting perspective on gender in fiction, but is not an indication of literary quality.
[108] Carolyn D. Williams, Angela Escott and Louise Duckling, 'Introduction', in *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Carolyn D. Williams, Angela Escott and Louise Duckling (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), pp. 19-48, p. 22.

relationships with a great many co-workers in general; in this chapter, I would like to draw attention to the fact that some of these relationships were specifically between women. Firstly, the actresses in the cast would of course have to rehearse and perform together, and since all of these plays feature more than one female role, they would frequently play scenes with other women. As playwrights would sometimes attend rehearsals, authors and actresses worked together very closely in the production of a play, and this experience is likely to have influenced the author's writing. Inchbald for example was cast in a 1780 production of Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem,*[109] so that the two women had direct experience of combining their work to produce a play. It was also common for playwrights to write a part specifically for an actress they admired or wanted to support, and consequently a personal relationship between two women could result in artistic and financial success for both, if the play went well. Griffith for instance wrote the character of Mrs. Winifred in her play *A School for Rakes* (1769) specifically for Catherine Clive. Griffith writes in her 'Advertisement' for the play,

> I am particularly bound to Mrs. Clive, on this occasion, who undertook the study of a new part, at a time when she had determined to quit the stage, and whose kindness to the Author, and attention to the public, made her hazard her health, by performing it -- I need not say how well -- when her physicians would have confined her to her chamber. ('Advertisement')

Clive was, at this time, an experienced and applauded comic lead actress, and as Griffith mentions, on the point of retiring from the theatre. Her commitment to play Mrs Winifred was therefore definitely a favour to Griffith; equally, however, she must have had a high opinion of Griffith's skill as a playwright to be so determined to star in the play despite her illness. *The School for Rakes* was Griffith's most popular play, and 'earned Elizabeth enough money to kit out her son for entry into the East India Company',[110] so their mutual esteem and collaboration definitely paid off.

[109] Spencer, 'Inchbald [née Simpson], Elizabeth (1753–1821), writer and actress'.

[110] Elizabeth Eger, 'Griffith, Elizabeth (1727-1793), playwright and writer' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-11596> [accessed 20 March 2017].

Female friendship is an important theme in most plays of this period, and this obviously reflected the everyday reality of eighteenth-century women, and especially women playwrights. However, because these plays aim to portray realistic relationships, they necessarily also include the opposite dynamic between women - rivalry. In the next section, I will be examining how antagonistic relationships are represented, and how this relates to the playwrights' own experiences.

Paper War: Female Rivalry

As briefly mentioned above, superficial or straightforwardly negative interactions between female characters have long been a staple of stage comedy. Angela Escott et al. have observed that the view of women as 'naturally' antagonistic is widespread in fiction:

> texts from this period often express a profoundly misogynistic view of a world in which groups of women left to their own devices would soon break up in a welter of bad organization and vicious rivalry. If they kept together long enough to achieve anything but a brawl, they might occasionally manage to commit sins, crimes, or trivialities, but would find it extremely difficult to achieve anything worthwhile.[111]

Their analysis implies that the common view was not just that more than one woman in the same place would inevitably argue, but that this tendency was potentially socially and politically dangerous. It is also implied that women would influence each other to be immoral, as if they had no inherent conscience which would prevent them from committing crimes. Burke, for instance, refers to groups of French women during the Revolution as 'furies of Hell, in the abused shapes of the vilest of women'.[112] This image is in direct contrast to the view of female friendship mentioned above, in which women instead safeguard and encourage each others' moral decisions. While the political dimensions of this view of female morality will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, it is important to

[111] Williams, Escott and Duckling, 'Introduction', p. 19.

[112] Edmund Burke, *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke,* 8 vols (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1852), IV, p. 209.

keep in mind that even in the seemingly purely personal relationships between women this fear of female anarchy is frequently present, even if it remains in the background.

While rivalling relationships are represented in several plays of the period, I will be starting my analysis with a well-known real-life example. The disagreement between Hannah Cowley and Hannah More, frequently termed 'The Paper War', shows that professional rivalry was very much a part of the eighteenth-century theatre, and is remarkable as a well-documented instance of a very public argument. At the core of their rivalry lies an accusation of plagiarism. In 1779, Cowley stated in the newspapers that More's play *The Fatal Falsehood*, which had premiered that year, was copied from her own tragedy *Albina*. Cowley's play had first been performed a month after *The Fatal Falsehood*, but Cowley said she had written it three years before that. Both women were acquaintances and protégées of David Garrick, and Cowley argued that More had seen the play in Garrick's office, and copied from it.[113] The disagreement was public from the beginning, when Cowley allegedly stood up during a performance of *The Fatal Falsehood* and exclaimed, 'That's mine! That's mine!'[114] After that the two writers exchanged a series of letters directed at each other in the public newspapers. The letters consist of their respective defences, More saying that she was unaware of *Albina*, 'I never saw, heard, or read a single line of Mrs. Cowley's tragedy',[115] and Cowley refuting the accusation that she had sent More threatening messages. While the actual issue of who had copied who, or if any plagiarism had indeed taken place, remained unresolved, their letter exchange is mainly remarkable for the fact that both More and Cowley constantly insist on their reluctance to enter into this exchange in the first place. The reason they both cite for this discomfort is that they find it unseemly for a woman to publicly dispute something so personal. More's letter begins, 'It is with the deepest regret I find myself compelled to take a step so repugnant to my own feeling, and to the delicacy of my sex', to which Cowley sarcastically replies, 'I wish Miss M. had been still more sensible of the indelicacy of a newspaper altercation between women, and of the ideas of ridicule which the world are apt to attach to such unsexual hardiness.'[116] It is notable that both characterise their disagreement as fundamentally unfeminine, and that Cowley is clearly well aware that

[113] Ellen Donkin writes in detail about the background of The Paper War and the influence of Garrick's mentorship on the two women. See *Getting into the Act*, Chapter 3.
[114] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 57.
[115] *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, *Vol. 49*, 1779, p. 407.
[116] *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, *Vol. 49*, 1779, p. 407.

rivalry between two women is likely to be seen as something both immoral and comic. Since she was the writer with more experience in the theatre, it is possible that she had seen the audience laughing at women arguing on stage, and knew that the same reaction would be elicited in real life. She was not wrong; the very fact that the (relatively minor) incident was termed 'The Paper War' shows that contemporary commentators thought the two women were overreacting. Even years later, the *Monthly Mirror* reprinted a poem written about the occasion, which lamented their falling-out in sarcastically overblown sentimental language:

> Shall not the Muses sigh, and Friendship weep?
> Or say, shall Envy's glance the scene explore,
> Or guess the name — a COWLEY or a MORE?[117]

Of course, the issue was that for Cowley and More, this was a serious problem. An accusation of plagiarism is dangerous for a professional writer, and could potentially have put both their careers in jeopardy. But both their own and other commentators' responses do not focus on the professional aspect; they instead focus on the impropriety of a woman defending herself in public, and accuse the writers of petty motives like jealousy. The playwrights' own letters suggest that they were eager to prove that rivalry does not come naturally to women, and that being antagonistic was the last thing they wished to be. Although they must have been at least partially aware of the irony of declaring their aversion to a public defence in the very public medium of a newspaper, they write very seriously not just on behalf of themselves but also for other women. For their critics, the incident seemed to prove the common opinion that 'women left to their own devices would soon break up in a welter of bad organization and vicious rivalry'.[118] It is likely that More's and Cowley's letters were intended to defend against this accusation more than against that of copying a play, especially since they could not possibly have expected that their personal disagreement would be solved by an exchange of letters.

In fact, it was not uncommon for women of the time to have open disagreements with others, especially among women writers, who of course were frequently competing against fellow writers by virtue of their profession. More especially is famous for not getting along

[117] *The Monthly Mirror*, July 1806.
[118] Williams, Escott and Duckling, 'Introduction', p. 19.

with other women particularly well. Her deteriorating relationship with the poet Ann Yearsley has been well documented elsewhere,[119] and she also disapproved of the historian Catherine Macaulay, writing to Garrick, 'I am actually ashamed of her'.[120] Cowley was less outspoken about her relationship with other female writers, but Escott has demonstrated the possibility of Cowley's rivalry with Charlotte Smith, as well as with Hester Thrale Piozzi.[121] Piozzi's marriage to a much younger man was definitely the cause of a major disagreement between her and the Bluestocking circle, 'whose viciously uncharitable reactions have shocked many later commentators'.[122] Elizabeth Inchbald publicly snubbed Mary Wollstonecraft after it emerged that Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were romantically involved but not married.[123]

As is apparent, disagreement and professional rivalries between women writers were by no means unusual. However, the difficulty these women faced was that any antagonism between them, no matter how justified it might be, was perceived as an example of the 'vicious rivalry' between women in general. We can see from the More and Cowley example that even if the disagreement technically only involved the two women, it was likely that the public would take an interest, and would interpret it to mean that women, as a whole, were unable to co-exist peacefully, or disagree in a dignified manner. That More and Cowley address themselves to 'women' in general shows that they were well aware that their personal behaviour might influence opinions about everyone of their gender. Portraying rivalling women on stage was therefore a difficult decision for a female playwright. On the one hand, they were a staple of domestic comedy, and would guarantee laughs from the audience. On the other hand, a woman writer would probably want to avoid making her female characters fight too viciously, or too exaggeratedly, to avoid perpetuating the stereotype of the 'furies of Hell'. She might also want to instead show antagonism in a more realistic manner, to reflect the realities of female relationships.

[119] See Anne Stott, *Hannah More*: *The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 70; Kerri Andrews, *Ann Yearsley and Hannah More: Patronage and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 2015). More had become Yearsley's patron, and Yearsley's insistence on autonomy and her perceived ingratitude led to a disagreement over profits from Yearsley's poetry.
[120] Qtd. in Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 37.
[121] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 10.
[122] Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 67.
[123] William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Johnson, 1789), p. 108.

To examine how playwrights dealt with this decision, I will analyse two examples: Cowley's *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (1783), and Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* (1784). *Bold Stroke* was first performed at Covent Garden, and was inspired by Susannah Centlivre's comedy*, A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1717), with some scenes being obvious parallels of Centlivre's play. There are two interwoven plots in Cowley's play; one concerns Olivia, whose father wants to marry her off and therefore introduces her to a constant succession of suitors. She does not like any of them, and with each of them adopts a persona directly opposed to the suitor's preference, thereby scaring them off. This is the storyline that is most obviously inspired by Centlivre.[124] Her father also tries to scare her into marrying by threatening to make the extremely young Marcella her stepmother. The other plotline is about Victoria, whose husband has left her for a mistress, Laura, to whom he has promised Victoria's valuable property. In order to get both her husband and the contract for the property back, Victoria disguises herself as a man and courts Laura, who falls in love with her. Eventually, of course, Olivia finds the man she wants to marry and who she can be herself with, and Victoria's husband regrets his choice and returns to her.

Victoria and Laura are the female rivals in this text. While their relationship has many different interesting aspects (which I will come back to later), at the heart of their interaction is their competition for the same man, Victoria's husband. They also, for different reasons, have a legal claim on the same piece of land. Olivia initially assumes that Victoria wants to punish her husband by stealing his mistress, but Victoria explains that her (rather elaborate) plan of pretending to be Laura's suitor stems from her envy of the other woman:

> To rival him, was not my first motive. The Portuguese robb'd me of his heart. I concluded, she had facinations [*sic*] which nature had denied me: — It was impossible to visit her as a *woman*: — I therefore, assum'd the cavalier to study her, that I might, if possible, be to my Carlos, all he found in her.[125]

Her idea was therefore intended as a method of spying on Laura, to become more like her, and eventually beat her at her own game. The discovery that her husband has signed over

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[124] In *Bold Stroke for a Wife*, Colonel Feignwell wants to marry Anne Lovely, but she is monitored by four different guardians. In order to obtain consent for the wedding from all of them, Feignwell adopts four characters, each one designed to appeal to one of the guardians. Having tricked them all into agreeing, he reveals his true self and marries Anne. Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (London: J. Hodges, 1749).
[125] Hannah Cowley, *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (London: Davidson, 1783), I, 2 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

the estate to his mistress forces Victoria to keep putting on her disguise, as not only her marriage but also her own financial future depend on it. From the beginning, Cowley complicates the issue of rivalry. What starts as quite a superficial competition between two women over who can be more attractive to a man soon involves issues of property and inheritance, as well as a developing relationship between the women themselves. In addition, there is no black-and-white distinction of who is right and who is wrong. Initially, Victoria has the role of the wronged wife, who is justified in trying to take revenge on Laura. But during the course of the play, Laura is increasingly painted in a sympathetic light, as the audience watches her genuinely falling in love with Victoria's male persona. When the disguise is revealed, she is devastated, and asks, 'Is this real?— Can I be awake?' (V, 2) Most importantly, Victoria herself becomes increasingly sympathetic towards her rival. Initially she sees Laura only as the woman who has stolen her husband by virtue of her beauty, and is convinced that Laura is morally corrupted. In the fourth Act, she comments in an aside:

> 'Base woman! how can I pity thee, or regret steps which my duty obliges me to take? For myself, I would not swerve from the nicest line of rectitude, nor wear the shadow of deceit, but for my children. Is there a parental heart that will not pardon me?' (IV, 1)

Clearly, Victoria has no regard for Laura's character here; but she is already questioning whether the deception she herself has undertaken is going too far. In Act Five, her defiant refusal to pity Laura has turned into sympathy. After Victoria reveals her true identity, she tells her, 'Oh, may'st thou, indeed, awake to virtue! You have talents that might grace the highest of our sex; be no longer unjust to such precious gifts, by burying them in dishonour' (V, 2). While she is still commenting on Laura's lack of moral virtue, she recognises the other woman's potential and value. As well as delivering a moral lecture, she is acknowledging that Laura is not just someone she has beaten in a fight, but simply someone with her own gifts and failings. Through their close association, the two women have indeed become similar. Laura is similarly devastated at losing the estate, and Victoria recognises that Laura is now in the same position she herself was in at the start of the play. Victoria has regained her partner and her property, while Laura has lost both. Having seen how much this situation had affected Victoria previously, the audience is now encouraged to see Laura in a sympathetic light too: she may be morally misguided, but this does not make her an entirely

villainous character. It is significant that Cowley, who had after all experienced a rather vicious rivalry with another woman herself, decided to write this very nuanced and introspective representation of female competition only four years after the Paper War.

A different perspective on rivalry comes from Inchbald's farce *The Mogul Tale*. Her first attempt at writing for the stage, this short piece was first presented at the Haymarket in 1784, and was so popular that its success encouraged Inchbald to keep writing plays. Rivalry is not the main theme of the text however; at its centre are the cultural differences and expectations between British and Indian people. However, because it is set in a harem (much as in Cowley's *A Day in Turkey*), it necessarily features a group of women and their interactions. In comparison with Cowley's play, Inchbald's representation is much more severe. Chosing the farce as her medium, she was able to write some rather biting satire since the short form of the farce allows this much more than the romantic comedy, which was expected to be more gentle and sentimental. *The Mogul Tale* tells the story of three British characters: a doctor Johnny (a cobbler), and his wife Fanny. They travel in a hot air balloon (which was all the rage at the time due to the Montgolfier brothers' experiments with this form of transport in 1783 and 1784), and unforeseen weather conditions cause them to crash-land in an Indian harem. The Mogul in charge of the harem decides to play on their fears and portrays himself as the stereotypical eastern tyrant, helped by his eunuchs and three ladies of the harem. The doctor pretends to be an ambassador of the king, while Johnny says he is, in fact, the Pope, and his wife a nun. Finally, the Mogul stages a mock trial of the three, at the end of which he reveals himself to be a very reasonable and kind man, and sends them back home unharmed.

As is obvious from this plot summary, the play is not intended to be realistic.[126] Rather, it uses common stereotypes and exploits and subverts them for comic effect. In particular, much of the humour comes from the fact that the characters themselves are very aware of the clichés attached to their personas. The three women who inhabit the Mogul's harem are openly in competition with each other. Their goal is to be the favourite wife, because this will guarantee them the highest status. This is established right at the beginning of the play, when one lady says to the others:

[126] Both Inchbald and Cowley base their representations of harem life on European stereotypes of this environment. Their intention is not to provide a realistic view of life in either Turkey or India, but to use these stereotypes to comment on their own, British, society.

> 3rd Lady: So, here you are musing and plotting mischief against me, because the Sultan loves me; well, the woman who possesses his heart, is sure to have every woman in the Seraglio against her: but there was a time when you was kind to me.
>
> 1st Lady: Yes, my dear Sophie, when you was in distress: and I assure you that if ever that time should come again, we'll be as kind again, and love you as well as ever.[127]

Inchbald shows a very different harem politics to Cowley; instead of working together to achieve a goal, Inchbald's female characters compete against each other to gain power, and are only friendly with other women if they do not perceive them as a threat. However, the remarkable thing is that they are very aware of what they are doing and why. Having stated that they will only be friendly to a woman they see as having less power than them, they go on to say, 'our sex are seldom kind to the woman that is so prosperous; their pity is confined to those that are forsaken — to be forsaken and ugly, are the greatest distresses a woman can have' (I, 1). They entirely recognise the hypocrisy of this, and, in a heavily satiric speech, point out the two things women were commonly said to be most competitive about: popularity and beauty. The quote also shows that, because they are cut off from any other means of achieving influence, they very much rely on their beauty to gain them at least a small amount of power over the Mogul and over the other women. They provide an example of the 'fake female friendship' trope, in that they can be sympathetic and nice to another woman, but only when she is unhappy and therefore, non-threatening to their own happiness. When Fanny arrives, the ladies initially pity her and are quite curious about her balloon adventure, but as soon as she becomes part of the harem, they see her as competition. They worry that she, being a new addition, will become the new favourite: 'Here she comes, and looks very pretty, she will be the favourite very soon, but let us plague her, and that will make her look ugly' (II, 2). They are not primarily opposed to Fanny because she is a woman, but because she threatens to take away the small amount of power they have in the harem. By deciding to be her enemy and undermining her, they see the chance of taking that power back.

In this play, Inchbald portrays a problem with eighteenth-century society that other critics have recognised. Rizzo writes that 'The system, including its legal and moral components, all

[127] Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Mogul Tale*, *or, The Descent of the Balloon* (London: Powell, 1788), I, 1 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

but guaranteed the punishment of women who conspired with one another, the rewarding of women who betrayed one another to men.'[128] In this particular instance, being kind to Fanny simply has no social benefit for the ladies as the environment they live in sets them up to be in competition with each other. What is applicable on a minor scale in the enclosed space of the harem is equally relevant to society in general: women were (mostly subconsciously) rewarded for siding with men rather than with other women. This dynamic was certainly at work in the theatre world. For instance, Donkin has persuasively argued that More and Cowley's disagreement stemmed from their mutual association with Garrick, and there is some suggestion that he enjoyed his female playwrights competing for his attention.[129]

We can see both Inchbald and Cowley interacting with the problem of female rivalry in different ways. Inchbald, in a characteristically sarcastic fashion, simply portrays the effects of this ideology on women. She shows that women recognise this power dynamic, and participate in it because it is one of the few ways they can attain status and power. However, she leaves it at that; *The Mogul Tale* may have other moral lessons for its audience, but there is no obvious statement about female rivalry or community.[130] The play does not offer a solution, or a suggestion that things might change in the future. The characters, having had this shared experience in the harem, eventually go to their respective homes seemingly unchanged.

Cowley, on the other hand, is significantly more optimistic about female rivalry in *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*. Her female characters learn from their rivalries, and often become morally better people because of it. Victoria goes from simple and straightforward antagonism to understanding and sympathy. It is important to note that Cowley does not suggest women should have no disagreements at all: the reasons for their rivalries are justified. However, Cowley does champion a more empathetic, more rational way of disagreeing with each other. By doing this, she portrays women as capable of rational arguments, and shows that women's fights do not necessarily devolve into 'a welter of bad

[128] Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, p. 171.
[129] Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 57.
[130] It is interesting to note that Inchbald played one of the harem ladies in the first production of the play. While there is some disagreement among critics about whether this was a deliberate statement about life as an actress and a female playwright or simply a way of increasing her earnings, it is certainly intriguing that she would have spoken some of the lines about female rivalry herself.

organization and vicious rivalry'. Cowley legitimises women's rivalries; after all, Victoria and Laura's antagonism is over a very valid and important issue. Cowley knew from personal experience that such disagreements, no matter how justified, were liable to be seen as comic. In response to this she made the female rivals of *Bold Stroke* two clever, engaging women who were likely to engage the audience in an empathetic appreciation of their positive qualities rather than simply vilifying them for their intense rivalry.

'Tis only a woman': Same-sex attraction

Having analysed the possibilities of female friendship and rivalry, it is now important to mention another type of interaction between women: romantic relationships. In order to provide a complete picture of the lives of eighteenth-century women, both in reality and on the stage, this aspect also needs to be included. However, in comparison to the previous types of relationships, it is slightly more difficult both to define and to make definite statements about this. Lesbian relationships were of course never the main focus of a stage play, nor would they have been talked about openly. However, we know about several eighteenth-century women who were in same-sex relationships, and many more who were suspected of it. The Ladies of Llangollen, for instance, Eleanor Charlotte Butler (1739-1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755 -1831), were a very high-profile example. While they were clearly a couple, living together for over 50 years and using a joint signature, they were not openly referred to as such. Hannah More, someone who clearly would have disapproved of the idea of two women in a relationship, visited them and was 'delighted with them. [...] She did not speculate about the sexuality of the two ladies or see anything odd in a relationship that bore many resemblances to the earlier close friendship of Elizabeth Bouverie and Margaret Middleton'.[131] As we have already established, close friendship between women was regarded as useful and morally sound, and this presented both a problem and an opportunity for female couples. On the one hand, people like More would always see them only as friends; there was no possibility of ever being regarded as an actual couple. However,

[131] Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 293. Stott is here referencing another example of upper-class women who lived together, even after Middleton's marriage. More had visited them both and counted them as friends.

this also provided a convenient excuse, and a chance to put a socially acceptable label on the relationship. If most people simply refused to see the romantic elements of the relationship, this in some measure kept the women safe from being either ridiculed or ostracised. Of course, we also have to take into account that eighteenth-century views of sexuality and relationships were different from modern ones. It is therefore entirely possible that even the women involved in what we would term a same-sex relationship would never have defined themselves as homosexual, or even compared their relationship with a heterosexual one. Therefore, when I refer to female homosexuality or lesbian relationships in the text, this is only done to provide clarity, and to distinguish between friendly and romantic relations. It does not reflect the way women of the time would have spoken about themselves.

The stage in this case mirrors society's attitude accurately. Female playwrights display an awareness that relationships going beyond friendship did exist among women, but they do not write about them overtly. The examples I will be analysing in this section are mostly confined to a sub-plot within the plays, as these relationships do not take centre stage, or if they do, then not for long. Nevertheless, the amount of leeway female playwrights apparently had to at least hint at same-sex relationships is surprising. Firstly, I would like to return to Cowley's *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*. I have already referred to the interesting dynamic between Victoria, the wronged wife, and Laura, the mistress, above. While their rivalry over a man is the most important aspect in terms of the plot, Cowley also uses these characters to explore notions of gender and sexuality. Laura, believing Victoria to be the male Florio, falls in love with her and plans a future for both of them. Victoria accomplishes this by flirting heavily with Laura, to the extent that even her friend Olivia is impressed:

> Olivia: [...] as a cavaleiro, it seems, you are formidable. So suddenly to rob your husband of his charmer's heart! — You must have used some witchery.
>
> Victoria: Yes, powerful witchery —the knowledge of my sex. Not a woman breathing, from fifteen to fifty, but would rather have a compliment to the tip of her ear, or the turn of her ankle, than a volume in praise of her intellects. (II, 1)

While there is clearly some internalised misogyny at work here - Victoria suggests that women are frequently superficial - it is undeniable that she is more successful at winning over Laura than her husband was. Victoria's husband had to promise Laura his wife's estate,

and there is more than a suggestion that this is the main reason she became his mistress. She appears to see flirting with rich, older men as a way to earn money (see IV, 1, where she suggests doing the same thing to Don Sancho). However, with 'Florio', this is not a motive; she is ready to share her acquired wealth with him. Cowley is showing that Victoria's 'knowledge of [her] sex' enables her to form a much closer, and for Laura, much more serious relationship with her. I have already mentioned that, because of their situations, the two women become increasingly similar. This similarity not only helps them to sympathise with each other, it is also the foundation of their intimacy. Of course, Laura assumes that she is engaging in a heterosexual relationship; but Victoria's frequent conversations about Laura with other characters remind the audience very effectively that this is not the case. Instead, the play contains multiple scenes in which the audience would have seen two women flirting with each other on stage. The idea of one woman dressing as a man and then engaging in behaviour inappropriate for her own gender has, of course, a long tradition on the stage. From Shakespeare onward, pretending to be male has allowed female characters to say and do things they would otherwise be criticised for. The same principle applies here: the normally genteel and reserved Victoria would never address Laura in the same way she does as Florio. However, the audience can see that, though to society and to her husband, she is the virtuous, faithful wife, she is capable of being something else. Also importantly, Olivia knows this and does not judge her for it, though it surprises her. And indeed, Victoria herself is surprised by her growing fondness for Laura, and at the end of the play praises her 'precious gifts' (V, 2). It is small wonder that Angela Escott has diagnosed the play as having 'erotic lesbian undertones'.[132] Undertones are exactly what they are: the relationship between Laura and Victoria is hidden under several layers. Firstly, the fact that it is part of Victoria's plan to regain her estate; secondly, that Laura believes Victoria is male; and third, that cross-dressing is an established comic tradition. Nevertheless, the play is relatively bold in its display of same-sex desire, and in suggesting that women would make great romantic partners because they share an understanding of what it is like to be a woman. Cowley, as we have seen previously, was interested in experimenting with and exploring different kinds of relationships on stage, and this is certainly what she is doing here. The layers under which this relationship operates allow Cowley to safely bring her experiments to the public stage without risking moral censure. Indeed, theatre critic George Daniel (1789-1864) describes

[132] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 28.

the play in his introduction to an 1831 edition as 'a polite and pleasant production. The incidents are nicely balanced between nature and probability; the characters display a happy union of real and artificial life; and the language is terse, pointed, and elegant.'[133] This indicates that, for all Cowley's boldness and innovation in portraying Victoria and Laura's relationship, she knew very well where the limits of acceptability were, and how not to cross them.

While *Bold Stroke* probably has the most extended experimentation with the same-sex storyline of all Cowley's plays, there are other instances in which her focus on female community results in friendships which seem more than a little romantic. Friendships between women could often be extremely close, and, to modern eyes, they frequently verge into relationship territory. This was of course not always the case; most of the female pairs represented on the eighteenth-century stage are simply friends. However, there are some instances where the relationship between two women is remarkably more intimate and flirtatious than their interactions with the male characters. This, I believe, is worthy of investigating because it indicates that the author is questioning the primacy of the heterosexual marriage narrative. Cowley provides several such instances. For example, in her *More Ways Than One* (1783), after Miss Archer rescues Arabella from a kidnapping attempt, Arabella tells her:

> Arabella: I am so sorry that you must leave me! I love you better than any body, except - I mean I love you better than every body!
>
> Miss Archer: 'I comprehend you my Love - Adieu! (V, 3)

Their use of the word 'love' is not in itself remarkable, as it was common for female friends to assure each other of their love. What is interesting is Arabella's phrasing. She hesitates after telling Miss Archer she loves her more than anybody; when she says 'except' she is likely thinking of Bellair, the young man who eventually marries her. But then she reiterates that Miss Archer is the most important person to her. This is especially noteworthy because the two women have only known each other for a short while, so there is no long friendship between them to justify this. It is almost as if the figure of Bellair briefly intrudes in their conversation, but is then put aside by Arabella's regard for Miss Archer. In the end, of

[133] George Daniel, *Cumberland's British Theatre: With Remarks Biographical and Critical, Vol. 39* (London: Cumberland, 1831).

course, the traditional marriage happens, and Bellair cannot be put aside any longer. Miss Archer appears to acknowledge this state of things with her 'I comprehend you' in answer to Arabella's hesitation. By making Miss Archer rescue Arabella from being abducted, Cowley casts her in the 'romantic hero' role, at least for a little while.

Another example occurs in Cowley's *The Town Before You* (1794). Escott has noted that 'in her play "The Town" she portrays a female artistic community in which there is strong attraction between the women'.[134] The play's main character is Lady Horatia Horton, a sculptor whose work is generally admired, especially by Georgina who poses for one of her statues. Horatia, Georgina, and Lady Charlotte represent a small artistic community who gather frequently in Horatia's studio. Georgina is meant to be her model for a sculpture of Andromache, (cf. II, 2) and is particularly enchanted by Horatia's work, saying: 'O! Lady Horatia does look so charmingly whilst at her labours; her sweet white hands appear like the very marble she is at work upon. [...] O dear! I wish she would teach me her art: I could spend my life amidst fine statues' (I, 2). The important thing to note here is that Georgina explicitly says that she not only admires Horatia's talent, but also her person; she equates the sculptor's beauty with that of the statue. And Horatia clearly recognises Georgina's attractiveness in return when she selects her as her artist's model.

Some of the male characters are quite dubious about the moral appropriateness of Horatia's work. Their doubts stem not just from her profession, a relatively unusual one for a lady, but also from the fact that she only makes sculptures of women. In the following scene, Asgill, who is in love with Horatia, cites this fact as a sign of her virtue; but his friend Conway sees it as a potential problem:

> Asgill: The subjects she selects, Delicacy itself would paint out: with an enchanting modesty she seeks for models only in the graces of her own sex, the daughters of Britain, and the matrons of Greece.
>
> Conway: Very well: but you are a *Son* of Britain —does Lady Horatia —
>
> Asgill: (*eagerly*) Yes - no - I cannot tell. She treats me with rigour, yet l think her heart has passion. I sometimes fancy l see it shine like the sun in November — unwillingly, and by starts. (I, 2)

[134] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 28.

Asgill's argument for Horatia's affection for him sounds relatively flimsy; she clearly is quite distant towards him. Andrew Elfenbein, in his analysis of *The Town*, comments on this scene:

> Conway's unfinished question to Asgill could be completed in two possible ways: 'Does Lady Horatia care for you?' or 'Does Lady Horatia care for men?' The dashes in his speech and the uncertainties of Asgill's response again hint at the lesbian subject position that Cowley associates with Horton and her art.[135]

Elfenbein recognises very clearly that in Cowley's plays, same-sex attraction is not a fact, or a problem, it is a possibility. None of her female characters ever end up in a relationship with another woman, but the dialogue reveals that she occasionally speculated on what would happen if they did. Therefore, we can interpret this as another area in which a female playwright experimented with alternatives to traditional male-female relationships, without challenging the status quo directly. For Cowley, the possibility of women being attracted to women also seems to be connected with her interest in female-only communities. In both *A Day in Turkey* and *The Town Before You,* her female characters establish spaces in which men are not only not present, but also not needed. The harem ladies and the artistic women of *The Town* provide each other with companionship and mutual support, so that a male presence often feels more like an intrusion than an improvement (this is especially obvious in A La Greque's climbing over the harem wall in *A Day in Turkey*). Escott has also noted that Cowley's play *The World* (1781) contains a reference to a real-life example of women living together:

> Cowley refers obliquely to lesbianism in her unpublished play, 'The World', when the satirized female connoisseur, Mrs Sparwell, bids a wistful farewell to her fantasy of a 'Bath Weston'. The reference is to Bath-Easton, where Sarah Scott lived with Lady Barbara Montagu, following the breakdown of her marriage amidst rumours about her lesbianism.[136]

Again Cowley refrains from referring to same-sex relationships openly, but instead hints at possibilities. Sarah Scott (1723-1795) was, of course, also the author of *Millenium Hall* (1762), a book which concerns itself at length with female community. That Cowley chose

[135] Andrew Elfenbein, 'Lesbian Aestheticism on the Eighteenth-century Stage' in *Eighteenth-century Life*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2001), 1-16, 4.
[136] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 28.

precisely this reference for her play is therefore incredibly fitting, as she shared Scott's interest in the topic.

Cowley was not the only playwright writing about potential female relationships. Inchbald also wrote a play in this category, which could perhaps be called a 'Comedy of Possibilities'. Her play *The Widow's Vow* (1786) was inspired by a French drama entitled *L'heureuse Erreur* by Joseph Patrat (1732-1801).[137] In it, the Countess has sworn not to see any men for the rest of her life after being disappointed by her first husband. Her neighbour Isabella wants to introduce her to her brother, the Marquis; in order to circumvent the Countess' rule, she starts a rumour that the Marquis is really Isabella dressed as a man. The Countess believes this rumour, and admits the Marquis into her house, flirting quite heavily with the supposed 'Isabella' and eventually agreeing to marriage as a joke. At this point, of course, it is revealed that the Marquis is actually a man, and the two marry. There is also a subplot concerning the Countess' servant Flora and the Marquis' servant Carlos. Flora is aware of the rumour about the Marquis' gender, and therefore speculates if Carlos is also a woman in male disguise. Both of them engage in a similarly flirty relationship, during the course of which Flora keeps trying to find out Carlos' real gender.

The plot is fairly unlikely, and features so many jokes about disguises and mistaken identity that it is reminiscent of Shakespeare' *Comedy of Errors.* Because of its focus on physical comedy and also its brevity (there are only two Acts), it does not fall into quite the same category as Cowley's more serious comedies. However, even given its shortness, the play provides an interesting exploration of gender roles. Firstly, Inchbald (and her characters) make the observation that women are more likely to speak openly about their feelings to other women - this is what Isabella is counting on when she introduces her plan:

> Isabella: The Countess, from what you have told her, will suppose him a woman receive him and consequently suffer a thousand endearing familiarities; till, charmed by the graces of his mind and person, she shall love him without *knowing* it, and, when she detects the impostor, be unable to part with him.[138]

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[137] Ben P. Robertson, 'Inchbald, Elizabeth, Drama' in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature,* gen. ed Frederick Burwick, 3 vols (Chichester: Wiley and Sons, 2012), I, pp. 660-665, p. 662.

[138] Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Widow's Vow* (Dublin: Byrne Porter and Jones, 1786), I, 2 [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

Because the Countess thinks the Marquis is actually a woman, she will be more 'familiar' with him. This statement reveals a serious fault in the interaction between the genders: women are only supposed to be intimate friends with other women but are not permitted romantic feelings for them, while men, who are supposed to be their romantic partners, are not meant to be emotionally close to them. The Countess of course takes this separation to an extreme level by banning men completely, but this comedy has a serious point. The Marquis only becomes an ideal partner for the Countess when she treats him as a woman, overcoming the strange disconnection between romantic and emotional closeness. That he is open about his feelings to her, and that she feels free to engage in flirtation only becomes a joke because these behaviours disturb the usual boundaries of their interaction. Other characters in the play describe the Marquis as effeminate, emphasising the idea that he behaves more like a woman than a man.

Flora's ideas about Carlos also show the arbitrariness of gender roles; her opinions about whether he is male or female constantly change according to how he behaves. In this scene, they meet for the first time, and she uses some extreme stereotyping to guess his gender:

> Flora: O Lord, I hope this is not a woman too! but I dare say it is —Lord what a pity! but I'll talk to him, and I shall soon be able to find out — and if he does not fall in love with me, I'll conclude it can't be a man. *(aside.)*
>
> Carlos: A very pretty girl. *(aside.)* Your humble servant, my dear angel.
>
> Flora: Too conceited for a man. *(aside.)* (II, 1)

The play both confirms and subverts those stereotypes here. The fact that Carlos is immediately attracted to Flora appears to support her first idea about men. However, her second statement that women are more conceited than men would have struck the audience as ironic, since they know she is in fact talking to a man. Flora imitates the Countess in that she is willing to let Carlos be closer to her once she believes he is actually female. She arranges to meet him in the garden, and when another servant criticises her for being indiscreet, she replies:

> Flora: Lord bless you — it is only a woman.
>
> Ursula: A woman!

> Flora: Aye, in mens' clothes, like the master, and so there could be no harm you know.
>
> Ursula: I did not know the servant was a woman too!
>
> Flora: Why, I am not sure of it — but I thought so when I let him kiss me, and I thought so when I promised to meet him in the grove — and I will e'en go — for I dare say 'tis only a woman. (II, 1)

There are two possibilities here: either Flora is incredibly naive and really thinks that Carlos is a woman; in that case, she is also for some reason perfectly happy with another woman meeting her alone and kissing her. On the other hand, it is more likely that Flora knows Carlos is a man, and is merely using the gender confusion as an excuse to placate the interfering Ursula. In either case, however, we can see that some behaviour that would be interpreted as romantic and even inappropriate between a man and a woman is seen as less serious when it involves 'only a woman'. This raises the issue of erasure, the fact that often relationships between women were not taken seriously because they were seen as less valid than heterosexual relationships. Some of the scenes in both this play and in Cowley's do suggest that these women are 'experimenting' before eventually entering a 'proper' relationship with a man. This view makes them non-threatening, since the traditional marriage ending of the comedy is preserved.

It is difficult to decide whether Inchbald and Cowley participated in this view or not; since no playwrights ever openly shared their views on same-sex relationships, we can only guess their opinions. On the one hand, the instances of women flirting with women in the plays are clearly intended as comic scenes. The audience would not have assumed that the characters were being serious, and especially in *The Widow's Vow*, the play's framework of plotting and disguises encourages the idea that everything is only done as a joke. On the other hand, even if it was disguised as a joke or a 'phase' before entering a marital relationship, these plays do nevertheless feature women flirting with, and being romantically close to other women. It is entirely possible that this is the playwrights' way of including such relationships safely. We have established that female playwrights were extremely interested in representing all kinds of women and their relationships, and this method would allow them to do just that. Certainly, for any lesbian or bisexual women in the audience, these plays

would have offered a small amount of representation that was otherwise unavailable to them.

By analysing female playwrights' interpretations of these different types of relationships, I have tried to show the impressive diversity presented on the London stage. It is undeniable that marriage plots dominated the comedy genre, and it would be understandable to define marriage as the main interest of eighteenth-century theatre. Indeed, this is frequently how comedy of that time is perceived, and I believe this contributes quite significantly to the lack of modern performances of the plays. The financial and social importance eighteenth-century plays place on marriage are difficult for a modern audience to relate to. However, the true focus of these texts is actually a critical engagement with marriage and the social and moral questions associated with it. As we have seen, many female writers were especially concerned with the rules and laws surrounding marriage. They quite happily pointed out the problems arising from making marriage the sole focus of a woman's (or man's) life. And, as we have seen, there was a developing interest among women writers to explore other ways people could interact with each other, and to teach (especially younger) women in the audience about the choices they could make for their own lives. The very fact that there are so many instances of friendship, rivalry, romance, and community speaks to the theatre's ability to both suggest and represent alternatives to the traditional marriage plot. This interest in other forms of relationships was not the work of a single playwright or theatre. The examples in this chapter have been taken from the works of a group of writers, whose plays were performed on different stages. We can therefore conclude that this was a general trend, probably reflecting an increasingly critical engagement with society and tradition in the late eighteenth century. That the American and French revolutions led to questions about politics and individuality is well known from the works of political commentators such as Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Thomas Paine, but the theatre reflected this trend as well. In a much quieter and more subtle way, female playwrights encouraged their audiences to question and, perhaps, reinvent. This is all the more remarkable because they were working against two obstacles. Firstly, comedy was defined by the heterosexual marriage plot, and secondly, as women, they were not supposed to know about or participate in political debates. Susan Carlson has very perceptively written that ‘the women

of British comedy have exercised their wit and wisdom while checked by comedy's institutionalized limitations on their autonomy: sexual objectification, isolation, and marriage'.[139] This chapter has shown that within these limits, there was quite a lot of room for experimentation.

Having examined women's' interactions on a personal level, I will move on to look at their professional interactions in the next chapter. While personal relationships were confined to the home, domestic matters were by no means women's only concern. Running a household or business and making a living were equally important. Especially in the case of female playwrights, their work required them to go out in public and interact with others on a professional level, whether with actors, managers, printers, or other writers. Being well aware of the difficulties of bridging the gap between the private and the public sphere, many of those playwrights used the stage to speak about professional women.

[139] Carlson, *Women and Comedy*, p. 11.

Chapter Three: Women Writers and Women's Work

In this chapter, I will be discussing the representation of work and working women by female dramatists. While domestic concerns such as relationships and marriage were the main focus of stage comedy in the eighteenth century, these were not the only concerns. Many plays feature representations of working women, and issues such as education and finances associated with having a profession. The main focus of this chapter will be on women writing about their own profession, as many authors used their access to the stage to reflect on being a female artist. Plays written in the latter half of the century show an interesting division - women writers appear sometimes as comic figures, who should not aspire to being treated as professional, sometimes as enviable examples of female determination and intelligence. Women writers themselves were still attempting to define what being an author meant to them. Their inclusions of female artists in their works can be interpreted as being in some ways autobiographical, showing the developments of confidence and experience, as well as the need to balance a career with the romantic or domestic expectations of others. In order to represent a full picture of their self-reflection, this chapter also examines other types of writing apart from plays. Many female playwrights wrote in other genres, most notably novels and literary criticism. If we combine readings of those works with the representation of women's work on stage, we can see the figure of the female author developing throughout the century. Engaging with (and often distancing themselves from) predecessors such as Aphra Behn, eighteenth-century female writers became steadily more focused on presenting themselves as professional authors. They insisted on their work being valued for its merit, rather than because of, or in spite of, the gender of its author. They also insisted on being able to make a living from their work. To do this, they had to engage with earlier models of authorship and femininity, as well as exploring the morality of writing for profit. In addition, I will be discussing the representation of other kinds of work on stage, most importantly the appearance of farm workers and domestic servants. By combining this discussion with the introspective writing about what it meant to be a woman writer, I will demonstrate the increasing visibility of women's work, and their demand for it to be valued.

Writing about Writing: Women as professional Authors

Talking about professional writers and literary careers in the eighteenth century is a somewhat difficult task. The definition of an author was not as clear as it is today, and there were several terms writers could go by, with 'men (and women) of letters' and 'poets' being just two of them. Today, we would be comfortable describing almost anyone who writes in any genre as an author, but in the eighteenth century distinctions were made between genres, as well as between those who wrote to earn a living and those who wrote for amusement or education. These distinctions meant that some genres were seen as more prestigious, and therefore their writers as more accomplished. To write poetry, for instance, carried more prestige than writing pamphlets. Writing tragedy was considered to be more accomplished than writing comedy. These perceptions were changeable, however. For example, novelists became increasingly more admired throughout the century as the genre gained prestige.

Betty Schellenberg has written at length about the changing perceptions of writers in her book, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-century Britain* (2005). She details how female authors especially had to deal with two different perceptions of their work: their own, and that of their public. In some cases, either they or someone close to them decided to project a calculated public image of them as a woman writer. Schellenberg cites the example of Frances Sheridan (1724-1766), novelist and playwright. Her image has been largely influenced by the biography her granddaughter Alicia Lefanu wrote in 1824, which shows her as domestic and unambitious. This perception is likely to be inaccurate, since a truly unambitious writer would not have had her novels published and her plays produced at Drury Lane. Schellenberg therefore deduces that 'literary historians have, to some extent, projected [Frances] Sheridan's modesty and desire for obscurity onto her.'[140] Sheridan serves as just one example of women writers who have had an image constructed for them, either during their lifetime or posthumously. James Boaden, Inchbald's biographer,

[140] Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 26.

wanted to show her as a more gentle and feminine woman than her own works imply. Jane Austen, too, was portrayed in her biography as decorous and unworldly, in contrast to the sharp satire she used in her novels. Before we can examine how women writers saw and represented themselves, therefore, it is important to recognise that the image we have of them may be skewed by later depictions. Boaden's portrayal of Inchbald certainly influenced Samuel Littlewood's 1921 biography of her, in which she is described variously as ‘a charming woman’, ‘like the fairies’, and ‘a “very woman”, a bundle of enigmas and inconsistencies.’[141] Anyone who has read her plays and criticism cannot fail to notice that this description is entirely at odds with the sharply satirical and politically aware woman she comes across as in her work. Here we can see how literary criticism can be directly influenced by the images others have invented for these writers. Nineteenth-century biographers especially had a tendency to feminise and domesticate female authors of the eighteenth century, in order to make them more appealing to an audience with changing moral standards. Often, these women did not write their own biographies, or if they did, they were frequently left unpublished (or, as in Inchbald's case, destroyed). As a modern critic, it can therefore be difficult to separate out what is true, what is an image projected by the writer herself, and what is invented by others.

Part of the problem of representation for female playwrights was that they had to distance themselves from their predecessors. Because there had been few prominent women playwrights in earlier centuries, the stereotypical image of the female dramatist was defined by women like Aphra Behn (1640?-1689) and Delarivier Manley (1670-1724). These women, however, had been deliberately provocative, and especially in Manley's case, political. They, no less than their eighteenth-century counterparts, had been careful to project a certain image of themselves to the public. But because society's expectations of what a writer should be, and what the theatre should do, changed so profoundly during this time, the image that was helpful for Behn and Manley was extremely detrimental to women like Cowley and Inchbald. Catherine Gallagher, in her exploration of women writers' identities, states that 'Aphra Behn introduced to the world of English letters the professional woman playwright as a newfangled whore'. Gallagher stresses that this was a deliberate identity choice on Behn's part, whose fictional 'author-whore persona' gave her more authorial

[141] Samuel R. Littlewood, *Elizabeth Inchbald and her Circle* (London: O’Connor, 1921), p. 1.

freedom.[142] For her, and other women writers of her generation, it was possible to adopt such a persona because their audience expected, and even encouraged it, but also because Restoration theatre audiences may have been better at separating a fictional 'author-persona' from the real author. Gallagher also comments that 'In the Restoration it seems to have been quite common to advertise that plays in general and comedies in particular were not the expression of the author's "true" self, but were instead a means of "obliging" the audience'.[143] In other words, the audience accepted that Behn would project a certain image in her plays that did not necessarily reflect her actual personality. Playwriting was also a form of acting, in which the character of the 'author' was played by the writer just as the characters were played by actors.

In the late eighteenth century, this distinction appears to have been lost; it was now assumed that a writer's work showed her real character. Consequently, had an eighteenth-century woman playwright adopted Behn's persona, her audience would have concluded that she was an immoral, licentious person, and would quite probably have shunned her works. Nora Nachumi notes that the same failure to distinguish between acting and reality also impacted on actresses, so that '[t]hroughout the period, conduct-book writers frequently suggest that the same feminine frailties that lead to adultery make women accomplished performers'.[144] Therefore, if a woman was capable of portraying different people and emotions on stage, this also made her capable of deception in real life. The same was often assumed of female playwrights: if she could write about adultery or criminal behaviour, she must herself had taken part in it. This is why Backscheider and Cotton see women of this time as 'restricted to a limited number of themes, settings, plots, and even characters'.[145] Avoiding characters and themes that could be interpreted as risqué was one way of distancing themselves from Behn's author-persona. That this worked is proved by critics' comments, such as in the 1813 preface to Cowley's collected works, where the introduction laments that in many playwrights,

[142] Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1994), pp. 14-15.
[143] Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, p. 17.
[144] Nora Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-century Theater* (New York: AMS Press, 2008), p. 11.
[145] Paula Backscheider and Hope D. Cotton, 'Introduction' in Frances Brooke, *The Excursion*, ed. by Paula Backscheider and Hope D. Cotton (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), pp. ix-xxxviii, p. xi. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

> There seems to be an inclination but to paint from lower life. But Mrs. Cowley constantly keeps up the elegance of Style which Comedy, as distinct from Farce, should preserve. [...] Characters of coarse and peculiar outline she appears seldom to have attempted.[146]

A few pages later, the introduction also assures the reader that 'there was nothing in her Manners that indicated an Author' ('Preface', pp. xii-xiii). The critic shows that Cowley is a lady, by demonstrating that she is not at all like the stereotypical image of the female playwright. Cowley has clearly succeeded in overcoming the association with Behn's 'author-whore persona'. It is slightly unclear what exactly she did to achieve this: contrary to the opinion of the preface, she definitely wrote about 'peculiar' people, and never confined herself to only featuring genteel characters in her plays. However she does make an effort not to use 'coarse' language, and only comments on politics in an indirect way. Perhaps this, in combination with her apparently very harmonious married life, established her as a respectable woman. It is also likely that this is another example of a posthumous image change (Cowley died in 1809), as described earlier.

It is especially noteworthy that the writer of the preface claims that Cowley was 'given' the plot for her *School for Greybeards* by someone else: 'In one instance however a portion of one of the plots of a Comedy (The School For Greybeards) was taken from an old Play. It was extracted and prepared for her, she knew not whence it came, nor ever saw the original' (Preface, p. xii). As mentioned in the discussion of the play in the previous chapter, the plot is inspired by Behn's comedy *The Lucky Chance*. It is extremely unlikely that Cowley would not have known this, or that she would have just accepted an idea for a plot from an unspecified source in any case. Female playwrights in particular were very careful to avoid plagiarism, and Cowley would not have risked her professional standing by accepting a plot without knowing where it came from. In addition, as also mentioned earlier, she made very deliberate changes to Behn's plot to make it more suitable for a contemporary audience and to align it with her own vision of the play. The 1813 preface deliberately disassociates Cowley from knowledge of Behn's works, when in fact she had specifically chosen them as inspiration. Obviously in this case, Cowley had not sufficiently distanced herself from the

[146] Hannah Cowley, *The Works of Mrs. Cowley: Dramas and Poems,* 3 vols (London: Wilkie and Robinson, 1813), I, Preface, p. xi. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

unsavoury image of earlier women playwrights, so later commentators did it for her. Unfortunately this attempt to present her as a woman who was unaware of such 'improper' works as Behn's also makes Cowley appear as an amateurish writer.

With this in mind, I will examine how women writers portrayed themselves and their profession in their work. Curiously, it is rare to find explicit mention of female authors in female-authored plays of the time. As we have seen, many playwrights strove to represent a wide variety of female characters and relationships, but when we look at the occupations featuring on the stage, the spectrum is much narrower. There are plays by male writers that make female writing a large part of the plot: George Colman's *The Separate Maintenance* (1779) and Colman the Younger's *The Female Dramatist* (1782) both feature female playwrights as comic characters. In *The Separate Maintenance*, she appears as Mrs. Fustian, a dramatist who insists on boring her audience by reading from her play:

> Mrs. Fustian: ...I have brought a Tragedy - Your Ladyship wished to hear it, and knowing there would be a numerous and brilliant Audience I thought a fortunate opportunity - Reading plays in polite circles is all the mode at present.
>
> Lady Newbury: Oh! True - your Tragedy! Do you mean to read it all thro' Mrs. Fustian
>
> Mrs. Fustian: All thro'! - why yes, if your Ladyship pleases.
>
> Lady Newberry: Because a Tragedy must be rather long I suppose...[147]

Her name, in combination with Lady Newberry's reluctance to hear the play, shows the woman writer as, at best, tedious and socially embarrassing. The reference to plays being the 'mode' also implies that she is writing because it is the fashion, rather than because she has anything of substance to say. Colman the Younger is no more complimentary, as his Mrs. Melpomene Metaphor is equally ridiculously named and shown in an unflattering light. Betsy Bolton remarks that he 'treats the figure of the female dramatist with marked condescension'.[148]

[147] Qtd. in David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 20.
[148] Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

In contrast, when women writers mention the work of writing, it is usually in passing and not in a major plotline. It is entirely possible that this reflects a more general division in perception: male writers would have been much more confident in identifying themselves (and therefore others) as professional authors. The image of the 'man of letters' was well-established at this point thanks to literary figures like Samuel Johnson, whereas the 'woman of letters' was in a much more complicated position. Firstly, attaining that status required the writer to publish, critique, and converse about literature, all things that were easier for men to do. It also required being acknowledged by others as a 'person of letters', since this is a title it is impossible to give oneself. Women would have been at a disadvantage here, since there were few precedents or contemporaries with that status they could be compared to. Lastly, even if one was labelled a 'woman of letters', it carried with it an unfavourable association with the Bluestockings, and often that air of condescension that is present in *The Female Dramatist*. Identifying oneself as a literary woman was not something a female writer could easily do, and might in fact have actively wanted to avoid. Given this lack of representation and self-identification, it would be easy to conclude as Frank Donoghue does, that 'the literary career was an exclusively male form of social practice'.[149] However, when we look at the evidence of women's work, and their often very calculated publication and marketing strategies, it is clear that they did indeed have literary careers. By any criteria by which such things can be measured, whether it is financial reward, public acclaim, or the number of written works, female writers' literary careers equalled those of men. They simply talked (and wrote) about it less.

The marked difference in perceptions of male and female writers is exemplified in Cowley's play *More Ways Than One* (1783). I have already briefly discussed the relationship between the two main female characters in this play in the previous chapter. But in addition to featuring instances of female companionship, *More Ways Than One* is also concerned with different ways of writing and motivations for publishing. Arabella has been deliberately raised to be uneducated and naive, whereas her counterpart, Miss Archer, is considered a coquette, and is sophisticated and witty. Her popularity prompts Sir Marvel Mushroom, an upstart noble, to write and publish an unflattering satire of her in the newspapers. Miss Archer is initially unconcerned by this, until Carlton, a man she is interested in, claims the

[149] Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 161.

authorship of the satire. Her dismay at what she believes to be Carlton's low opinion of her prompts her to realise her feelings for him, which is exactly the outcome he had hoped for. The published satire and the uncertainty over its real author result in several conversations between Miss Archer, Sir Marvel, and Miss Juvenile, an aspiring author. Miss Juvenile is clearly meant to be slightly shallow (as her name suggests); she is mostly interested in the situation because she enjoys the dramatic tension the satire produces. But in the course of her interference, she raises some important points. On reading Sir Marvel's poem, she is envious that the newspapers published it:

> Miss Juvenile: I have wrote twenty pretty things of this sort myself; but some wise, grave editor or other, always cropt my laurels. The next morning the answers to correspondents never failed to inform them that, *"The lines of L.S. were inadmissible;"* or, "The Epigram signed Laura *wont do for our Paper;"* or "we must desire our fair correspondent Clarissa to *learn to spell,* before she pretends to write heroic verse." I wonder really at their impertinence;— that a young lady of fashion can't amuse herself in rhyming a little about her friends, but they must pretend to judge of the matter! (III, 1)

Cowley is obviously being humorous here: the juxtaposition of the chosen pseudonyms, names associated with sentimental and romantic writing, and the editors' blunt comments show that Miss Juvenile clearly thinks entirely too highly of her writing ability. However, the reader cannot help but feel that some of her comments are meant to be taken seriously nonetheless, and that they may reflect thoughts and experiences Cowley herself has had. The complaint that 'they must pretend to judge of the matter' is very revealing. Obviously the editors' judgement is not actually that refined, given that they published Sir Marvel's satire. Miss Juvenile implies that her writing, whether it is good or not, is judged on the basis of her sex. This is made even clearer later in the play, when Sir Marvel promises to get some of her work published (V, 5). He is extremely confident that the editors will not reject the poems if they come from him. Cowley presents a publishing bias that does not judge literary works by actual merit, but simply by who the author is. This idea is reflected in the main plot as well: Miss Archer also does not judge the satire on its truthfulness or comedic value, but is preoccupied by who wrote it. At first, when she does not know the author, she is remarkably

calm and unaffected by the satire. When Miss Juvenile tells her about it in the hope of seeing her reaction, Miss Archer only comments:

> Oh, yes, my Dear! I know it all; you are the fifteenth Lady that has been here this morning to inform me of it. Upon my word, a Newspaper Pasquinade is a mighty good thing - it makes one's friends remember one. [...] It is rather a Distinction; - to be abused in a Newspaper, you know, is to be ranked with half the great characters in existence. (III, 1)

She dismisses the poem as being of no great consequence and having no power to hurt either her reputation or her feelings. She even takes a slight pride in it. However, after Carlton reveals himself as the author, she clearly is affected after all. She insists on meeting him, and anxiously asks whether the satire reflects his real opinion of her: 'Why have you taken pains to represent me to the world in so odious a light?' (IV, 1). In a play whose plot is based on several mistaken and hidden identities, Cowley is very insistent that the identity of an author matters. It affects not only the chances of being published, but also the work's reception by its audience. This, in turn, affects the author: Miss Juvenile is denied the same access to the newspapers that Sir Marvel enjoys, and Miss Archer's dismay at 'Carlton's' satire leads to a series of misunderstandings between them. Cowley does not explicitly write about herself, and neither does she insert herself into the play in the form of a specific character. But she is clearly writing from personal experience here, and representing issues that were relevant not just to her, but to the literary community in general.

The third female character, Arabella, draws attention to another issue that affected women who were not part of the literary community. She would like to write, but her lack of education and experience means that she is unable to. When her guardian Barkwell finds her sitting at her desk, he accuses her of writing, to which she responds:

> Arabella: Oh, no; you know very well I cant write - I wish I could.
>
> Barkwell: Wish you could! why? to do mischief? Pity there's a Goose-quill in the kingdom, except those in the hands of the Faculty, the Clergy, and the Law; though as to the Law, I believe there would be no great harm if their's were taken away too. -- Pray, what use would you make of being able to write?

> Arabella: Oh, I'd write, I'd write down a song, that I have been making out of my own head; but I cant finish it, because I cant write. (II, 1)

It is very telling that his first thought is that her writing would do 'mischief'. She has not even told him what she would write about, but the very idea of a woman writing is dangerous to him. His list of acceptable institutions that may contain writers shows that he wishes writing was strictly regulated and confined to men, as these particular professions were not accessible to women. He also displays condescension towards women writers (as Colman Senior and Junior do in their plays), as he clearly doubts that Arabella can think of anything worthwhile to write. Her response indicates that her imagination is not, in fact, lacking; she has made up a song, but cannot physically write down her thoughts on paper. What she is actually doing in this scene is not writing, but drawing a picture of the man she loves; a much more acceptable occupation for a young woman, which is ironically mistaken by her guardian for an act of rebellion. In fact, she is only writing a 'song', a decidedly minor act of rebellion. Songs would not have rated very highly in the hierarchy of literary genres, so it is not as if Arabella is presuming to write in a traditionally male genre such as the epic poem. A song, being relatively short and perceived as something frivolous, especially since she would presumably write about romantic love, does not constitute a major challenge to Barkwell's authority. Nevertheless, the idea of her writing anything at all is deemed threatening. Arabella's inability to write is clearly also a comment on the lack of female education at his time. Part of her 'appeal' to men like Barkwell is that she has intentionally been raised without the ability to write. Her frustration also mirrors Miss Juvenile's situation as a creative individual without an audience for her work. Like her, Arabella can think of 'songs' but she cannot share them with others. Both women are hampered by male authority figures who impose their standards of what is morally proper on the women's writing.

The difference between male and female writers is made especially obvious in the last Act, when Miss Juvenile reveals that she has written a satire on Sir Marvel. He is outraged at the thought of her work being published: 'Why, Madam, you will not dare — you will not dare. Oh, the license given to these d—d newspapers! I'll get a seat in parliament, in order to vote against the freedom of the press' (V, 5). Of course, his sudden preference for press censorship exposes his hypocrisy, as he had prided himself on the newspapers publishing his own satires just a short while before. But more importantly, his threat to get into parliament

to control literary productions echoes Barkwell's earlier comment on public institutions. Cowley is drawing attention to the fact that men have the option of joining an institution like the law or government, in order to change things they are unhappy about. Women have no such option, and therefore no control over external factors that can influence their ability to write and publish. They would not even be able to vote for or against the freedom of the press, as Sir Marvel can.

More Ways Than One is heavily focused on the relationship between women and writing. Cowley shows a woman who writes, a woman who is written about, and a woman who cannot write. She presents women as active participants in the literary community, not simply as passive readers. The play is also unusually negative in tone for Cowley. Her sharp satire and overt references to political institutions are in contrast to the more gentle and playful tone of most of her other comedies. The play is dedicated to her husband, being prefaced with a poem that imagines her writing 'flying' to where he was stationed in India ('Dedication', p. 1). It is an unusually personal touch for Cowley, who normally maintains a more elusive 'author persona'. This, along with the change in tone, suggests that the topic of this play was particularly relevant to Cowley herself, prompting her to write a play that is more based in her personal life and experience than her other works.

The problem of creating and maintaining an 'author persona' was something many female writers besides Cowley faced. In a sense, all writers have a public image of themselves as an author, and a private one as themselves. In the eighteenth century, however, it was especially vital for women writers to manage their public image. In order to be published and read, a woman writer had to have a reputation of being morally sound and genteel, or in other words, a 'lady'. Prefaces and letters gave the author an opportunity to directly influence the public's perception of her; however, they also gave others the opportunity to cast doubt on her reputation. As we have seen in the discussion of Cowley and More's 'Paper War', one of the chief weapons of the literary community was to imply that the other person was being unladylike. Of course, male writers could equally be victims of slander or gossip. But while unsavoury rumours could damage the career of a single male author, a scandal involving a female writer reflected on the entire community of women writers . A woman writer therefore had to take care not only of her own personal reputation, but of the reputation of her profession. Nora Nachumi has commented that 'the eighteenth century

was a period in which discourse about actresses and female playwrights tapped into a profound anxiety over the sincerity of feminine conduct and even the composition of female nature itself'.[150] Because of this air of anxiety, a mistake made by one woman was often taken as a sign that her gender as a whole was morally flawed. It is telling for example that royal mistresses were frequently seen as immoral and licentious, whereas such relationships did not reflect badly on the men involved. Mary Robinson, George IV's first mistress, describes in her biography how conscious she was of the potential damage the affair could do to her reputation. Even while she was only corresponding with the prince through letters, she reminded him of 'the public abuse which calumny and envy would heap upon me; and the misery I should suffer if, after I had given him every proof of confidence, he should change in his sentiments towards me'.[151] This quote shows how much women like Robinson (who later became a published writer herself) had to rely on the public perception of themselves. Because she had neither inherited money or a title, her reputation was vital; the crown prince on the other hand would lose nothing by the affair.

For women writers, it was therefore necessary to be extremely careful about their public reputation. From reading their plays, it is clear that most women were to some extent concerned about their reputations, but female authors, unlike most other women, were in a uniquely difficult position. Their profession demanded publicity - it was vital that they drew attention to their work either in person or in writing. But precisely this act of seeking attention, if taken too far, would endanger their status as respectable ladies. The period of 1760 to 1800 was a particularly difficult time, because not only were things changing on a national and international scale; but on a smaller and less noticeable scale, the perception of women writers was changing. Critics have pointed out that the earlier decades of the eighteenth century were in some sense an easier time for female writers. For instance, Paula R. Backscheider and Hope D. Cotton write in their introduction to Frances Brooke's *The Excursion*,

> Encouraged and befriended by men like Samuel Richardson and Samuel Johnson, women writers of these decades [1740s/50s] lived in what might be called a window of unusual tolerance. Before them, women writers often had scandalous reputations

[150] Nachumi, *Acting like a Lady*, p. 2.
[151] Mary Robinson, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Mary Robinson, Written by Herself* (London: Phillips, 1803), p. 48.

> that discouraged other women from publishing; after them, women often felt restricted to a limited number of themes, settings, plots, and even characters. ('Introduction, p. xi)

Established as 'men of letters', writers like Richardson and Johnson (and in the theatre world, David Garrick) could encourage and mentor aspiring authors. Why they chose to support female writers, like Frances Brooke and Charlotte Lennox, is a matter for speculation. Was it because of the relative novelty of respectable women writers? A recognition of female talent? A wish for (as is likely in Garrick's case) 'literary daughters'? Whatever the motivation, this system worked in favour of both authors and mentors for a while. As the century went on, however, the mentor system was increasingly replaced by a literary marketplace that demanded book sales and entertainment rather than letters of recommendation. And, as we have seen in the case of Cowley, More, and Garrick, the mentor system was not without disadvantages. Particularly as the number of female writers increased, it became impossible for all of them to acquire patronage, resulting in competition and favouritism.

It may be helpful to note just how many more women writers there were in the last decades of the century as compared to the first. In terms of novel-writing, Schellenberg has calculated that 'women increased in proportion from being responsible for approximately 14 percent of all new novels for the three decades of 1750 to 1779 [...] to a slight majority of known authors at the end of the century'.[152] Far from being an exotic novelty, female novelists in the 1780s and 1790s were no longer a minority, and therefore had to look for other ways to stand out from the rest if they wanted to be published. With regard to female playwrights, Judith Phillips Stanton notes that only two new women playwrights were published in 1760-69; thirteen in 1770-79, another thirteen in the 1780s; and sixteen in the 1790s.[153] Of course, exact calculations are difficult because some women playwrights also published under pseudonyms or anonymously, but what we can conclude from these estimations is that women writers were an established and not insignificant part of the literary world by the late eighteenth century. Critical evaluations of eighteenth-century

[152] Schellenberg, *Professionalization of Women Writers,* p. 17.

[153] Judith Phillips Stanton, 'Statistical Profile of Women Writing in English from 1660 to 1800' in Frederick Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (eds.), *Eighteenth-century Women and the Arts* (New York : Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 247-253, p. 251.

female writing (including this one) can often give the impression that female authors of that time were an anomaly, a small group of extraordinarily talented women. This is because, sadly, it is impossible to write about all those women, and therefore any critic has to confine themselves to using a few select writers as examples. I feel it is important to draw attention to the fact that while I may be discussing the careers of more prominent writers like Cowley and Inchbald, there may well have been several other, now unknown, women who had the same experiences. The relatively sudden emergence of so many female writers probably contributed to the anxiety about female conduct that Nachumi describes, since their numbers meant that they could not easily be ignored or explained away as an anomaly. Like any minority that suddenly comes to prominence, they had to navigate society's fears and preconceptions about their presence.

Cowley herself only very rarely commented on her personal experience of being a writer. A notable exception is her preface to her last play, *The Town Before You*. Explaining her decision to stop writing for the theatre, she cites the changing taste of the public as her main reason:

> The patient developement of character, the repeated touches which colour it up to Nature, and swell it into identity and existence (and which gave celebrity to Congreve), we have now no relish for. The combinations of interest, the strokes which are meant to reach the heart, we are equally incapable of tasting. LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH! is the demand: Not a word must be uttered that looks like instruction, or a sentence which ought to be remembered. ('Preface', p. x)

She objects to the increasing demands for spectacle on stage, prompted by an audience who only wanted to be entertained, and by the steadily growing size of the theatres, which made small gestures and introspective dialogues difficult.[154] Her capitalisation and repetition of the word 'LAUGH' emphasises that she indentifies simple entertainment as the main goal of contemporary theatre. The laughter produced by jokes and farce literally supersedes everything else. It should be noted that Cowley is not objecting to comedy as such (that would be unusual for such a prolific comic writer), but to a comedy that is concerned with

[154] Drury Lane was extended in 1794, featuring a bigger stage and more seating, prompting actress Sarah Siddons to call it 'a wilderness'; the Haymarket and Covent Garden were also rebuilt in 1791 and 1808 respectively (see Walter Thornbury, 'Covent Garden Theatre', in *Old and New London: Volume 3* (London: Wentworth Press, 2016), pp. 227-237.

jokes exclusively, at the expense of character and plot. It is also interesting that she cites a Restoration playwright as an example of how to write good characters, proving that she was well aware of the works of her predecessors. She goes on to state what she thinks the theatre should be, and reflects on how the tastes of her audience have influenced her own writing:

> What mother can now lead her daughters to the great National School, THE THEATRE, in the confidence of their receiving either polish or improvement? Should the luckless Bard stumble on a reflection; or a sentiment, the audience yawn, and wait for the next tumble from a chair, or a tripping up of the heels, to put them into attention. Surely I shall be forgiven for satirising myself; I have *made* such things, and I blush to have made them. ('Preface', p. xi)

Her idea of the theatre as a 'School' echoes other female playwrights, such as Joanna Baillie in her *Introductory Discourse* (1798), who also saw it as their duty to educate audiences. Cowley's 'satirising' of herself shows that she particularly objects to an over-reliance on physical comedy. However, she is rather too harsh on herself: Cowley does indeed employ physical comedy and farce-like elements in her writing, but they never overshadow her attention to character development. However, in writing *The Town*, she looked back at her literary career and her experiences in the theatre, and concluded that writing plays was no longer a way for her to express herself. The play following the preface continues in the same vein. *The Town*'s protagonist Lady Horatia is not a writer, but she is a female artist. As a successful sculptor, she constantly has to contend with the other characters' views on what a female artist should be, and her own doubts about balancing her work with her desire for domesticity with Mr. Asgill. I have already discussed Cowley's exploration of the female artistic community, and shown that she experiments with portrayals of both same-sex friendship and attraction. In the same experimental vein, the play explores Horatia's personal struggles with her professional career. At the end of the play, when she is about to be married, Sir Simon encourages her to give up art in favour of being a wife: 'Come, come, Madam, throw away your chisel and your marble blocks, and set about making a good wife. That ART is the noblest pride of an Englishwoman' (V, 2). His comment not only makes Horatia's career sound like something she can give up easily and without consequence; it also implies that by working as an artist, she is neglecting her patriotic duty. Intriguingly,

Horatia does not answer his request; she does not speak any more for the rest of the play. Cowley leaves the fate of the female artist curiously open. Given that female silence has been identified as a passive form of protest in Chapter Two of this thesis, is very possible that Cowley is using a similar strategy here.

Alternatively, Cowley herself is not sure what the female artist should choose. As someone equally committed both to her writing and her family, she must have encountered similar dilemmas and criticisms. When we consider the play's preface in combination with the portrayal of a female artist's story, *The Town* reads like a public introspection of Cowley's own career choices as an author. Escott notes that Cowley simultaneously bids farewell to her own career as a playwright and aligns herself with other female artists:

> Drama, and particularly comedy, the genre with which she was most associated, she could no longer use with artistic integrity. Cowley made this known at the moment in which she represented herself on stage as an artist, following the examples of Aphra Behn and Angellica Kaufmann who had also represented themselves in their work as fully empowered creative artists.[155]

From evidence such as this, we can see that Cowley was by no means the naive, 'un-author-like' woman later critics tried to portray her as. While generally very careful about her public image, she was not afraid to comment if things were going wrong, especially on matters that concerned her personally, such as playwriting and authorship. In doing so, she showed a consummate awareness both of her predecessors, and the literary world of her day.

Another writer who exemplifies this awareness of what it meant to be a female author is Frances Brooke. Her 1777 novel *The Excursion*, while not a play or a comedy, is worth mentioning here because of its insightful and humorous portrayal of an aspiring woman writer. The book tells the story of Maria, who leaves her uncle's country house in order to come to London. Her goal is to marry an aristocrat, and she soon attracts the attention of Lord Melvile. However, while Maria is genuinely in love with him and assumes he wants to marry her, Melvile merely intends to keep her as his mistress. Maria's own good nature and her naivety about London high society lead her into dubious company, who encourage her to spend more money than she has, and who spread unsavoury rumours about her

[155]Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 211.

relationship. Finding that keeping up with their standards requires large amounts of money, Maria tries to supplement her income by having a play produced. One of the few things she has taken with her to London is a suitcase containing 'a novel, an epic poem, and a tragedy' (p. 16). She believes that the play will guarantee her income, and has it submitted to a theatre manager (obviously meant to represent David Garrick), who, however, does not even read it. This part of the story is remarkably similar to Brooke's own early career. Having also arrived in London in around 1748, she tried to have her play *Virginia, A Tragedy* (1756) produced. It was given to Garrick, then manager at Drury Lane, but never staged, because two other plays based on the same story were put on stage in the same season. Brooke claimed that her play was in fact written before the others, and that Garrick simply held it back in order to give preference to Samuel Crisp's *Virginia* (1754) ('Introduction, p. xii). Eventually, she simply published the play herself. While it would be too much to say that Maria is a stand-in for a younger Frances Brooke, there is no doubt that Brooke uses the character to comment on her own experience of being an aspiring writer. The scenes which deal with Maria's fascination with the theatre, her difficulty in getting her manuscript to reach the manager, and her devastation at being rejected, read quite differently from the rather standard romantic plotline of the rest of the novel. They have an intensity and attention to detail that can only come from personal experience. Specifically, they are about the problems of being an aspiring writer. Maria cannot approach the manager by herself, as this would be inappropriate for a genteel woman. Instead, she has to use her few social connections to find 'some respectable man of learning, for a man of learning she determined it should be, who could with propriety introduce her to the acting manager' (p. 57). This problem, of not actually having access to the manager, and therefore to the stage, herself, is a good example of the problem female playwrights faced when they were trying to publish their first works. Nachumi points out the vital difference between playwrights and those who wrote in other genres: in order to be successful, a playwright had to actively seek out public attention:

> While the playwright had to frequent public places and associate with persons of questionable repute, the novelist could work at home. She did not have to rehearse performers or curry the favor of theater managers. Instead, she could use her male

> friends or relatives as intermediaries between herself and her publisher without losing vital opportunities to make last-minute revisions to her work.[156]

This is an issue specifically for women writers, because these actions could potentially endanger their reputation, something that did not happen to men as easily and was therefore not such a concern to them. But Maria is conscious that trying to meet the manager backstage by herself would not be wise, especially since she is hoping to be seen as a future aristocrat. She can only send the play via Mr. Hammond, a poet who lives nearby. At first, she hopes that he will accompany her to the theatre, but he dissuades her, saying that it would be a 'disagreeable task' which 'the delicacy of your sex and character' do not permit (p. 60). When he returns, it is clear that the manager has not even looked at the manuscript, and had in fact probably forgotten about receiving it. Maria's first instinct is to regret sending Mr. Hammond; she believes he did her play no justice, and that he did not stress her own character and attractiveness. In short, she thinks he did not 'sell' her as an author (p. 85). If she had been able to go by herself, she could have represented her own work much better, and her looks and situation would have worked in her favour. It is likely that Brooke had similar thoughts when she submitted her play *Virginia* to Drury Lane; she believed that Garrick deliberately held the play back, and a personal conversation might have prevented this. Managers did, after all, receive many potential play texts, and it is likely that meeting the actual author would have made a particular text more memorable and therefore more likely to be produced. Since women were unable to do this, they were at a disadvantage. They had to find someone with a connection to a manager, who could recommend them. This removed a degree of personal agency from them, since, like Maria, they could only wait for the outcome and hope for the best.

The Excursion is interesting in that it presents Maria as both a classic romantic heroine and as a writer committed to her work. Most works imply that a woman can either be the romantic interest of the story or dedicated to her work, but not both; compare for example Horatia being made to choose between being a wife and being an artist in Cowley's *The Town*. Brooke on the other hand shows that this choice does not in fact need to be made. Maria's writing does not detract from her endeavours to marry, and her personal relationships do not prevent her from being an author. In fact, her two spheres of interest

[156]Nachumi, *Acting like a Lady*, p. 55.

often overlap, sometimes comically so. At one point, when she has heard rumours that Melvile is already engaged, she writes a letter to him asking him to state his intentions towards her. The letter is brought back with a message that Melvile has left town and would not return until after he is married. Maria is understandably devastated, as this is the final confirmation that he never intended to marry her, and that she has risked her money and reputation for nothing. Brooke writes:

> She wept the loss of the *most charming of mankind;* she grieved such a letter, for it was admirably written, should be thrown away. No ray of hope remained as to the first source of her grief; as to the second, she determined to insert this letter in her next novel. (pp. 135-136)

Maria is thinking about her writing career even as she is crying over the loss of her lover, and while her sudden switch from romantic heroine to author is very funny, it is also oddly realistic. Her way of dealing with her grief is to make creative use of it. It shows that she has concerns other than her love life, something that is rare in young beautiful women in eighteenth-century fiction. Brooke shows that Maria, no matter what else happens to her, is at heart a writer. She even addresses this directly in the lines that follow this scene, in which she has an imaginary conversation with a questioning reader:
'"Her next novel?" Is she not then cured of the disease of writing? Alas! my friend, it is plain you have never been an author' (p. 136).
The reader here displays the aforementioned attitude that writing (or any artistic profession) is unsuitable for women like Maria. Like Barkwell in *More Ways Than One*, he or she regards it as 'mischief' that will damage them (II, 1). Brooke's response not only emphasises her greater knowledge based on personal experience, but also tells the reader that writing is a vocation, not something that is taken up and discarded on a whim.

The Excursion therefore is not, as it might seem at first glance, simply the story of a young woman who learns how important real love and family are. Instead Brooke combines Maria's emotional development with her growth as a professional author. She shows Maria interacting with the London literary scene, gaining life experience that will be used in her future writing, and making the mistakes of an aspiring writer. For instance, she very much overestimates her writing's financial value at the beginning. She 'estimated her epic poem at

100*l*., her novel at 200*l.,* and her play, including the copy, at 500*l'* (p.55). In their introduction to *The Excursion*, Cotton and Backscheider point out how wildly optimistic it is to value her work at £800 in total, given that even very successful novels like Burney's *Evelina* had only sold for £20 ('Introduction', p. xxxiv). Perhaps Brooke is satirising herself at the beginning of her career to an extent; perhaps she is also hinting that writing is a real profession and should therefore be paid enough for the author to make a living.

Crucially, drawing on her own life experiences and determination to paint a realistic picture of the London literary community is what put Brooke's own writing career in jeopardy. The manager that Maria sends her play to is very obviously a caricature of Garrick, who also rejected Brooke's own first play. His failure to read the play or even remember that he has received it are presented in a rather comic way. But it is clear that what Brooke really objects to is his inability to tell the truth and say that he has no room for a new play because of the number of applicants. Instead he keeps the play text in his office, keeping the playwright waiting for an answer, and then makes vague promises of putting the play on in several years' time. He does not deal with authors (or their representatives) honestly and openly, as equal business partners. This, Mr. Hammond tells Maria, makes him a bad manager:

> I repeat, that, as an actor, the publick have scarce more to wish than to see him equaled; as an author, he is not devoid of merit; as a manager, he has, I am afraid, ever seen the dawn of excellence, both in those who aspired to write for, or to tread, the theatre, with a reluctant eye; and has made it too much his object, if common sense, aided by impartial observation, is not deceived, "To blast each rising literary blossom, and plant thorns round the pillow of genius". (pp. 84-85)

Garrick is a good actor, but his inability to see authors as co-workers and his fear of being outshone by them make him extremely frustrating to work with as a manager. This passage is particularly cutting because it does not criticise a style of management in general, but a personal fault of Garrick's in particular. In addition, Brooke confirms that this is her own opinion, not just that of Mr. Hammond. She adds a footnote to his speech in which she refers to Garrick's retirement, and comments:

> As the writer honours his talents, though she disapproves his illiberal maxims of government, she has unaffected pleasure in predicting, that the various excellencies of his performance will be remembered with delight, when the errors of his management, though fatal to literature, shall be consigned to oblivion. (p. 85)

She echoes Hammond's description of Garrick, and portrays him as a kind of despotic ruler whose personal insecurities prevented other talent from thriving. The phrase 'fatal to literature' is especially harsh (and probably slightly exaggerated), but Brooke contents herself with the thought that at least the damage he has done will not be permanent. It is unsurprising that Garrick strongly objected to these comments. In a letter to Frances Cadogan, he complained:

> I hope You have seen how much I am abus'd in y^{r} Friend Mrs Brook's new Novel? — she is pleas'd to insinuate that [I am] an Excellent Actor, a so so author, an Execrable Manager & a Worse Man — Thank you good Madam Brookes—If my heart was not better than my head, I would not give a farthing for the Carcass, but let it dangle, as it would deserve, with It's brethren at ye End of Oxford Road.[157]

Clearly Brooke's criticism had really hit home, and Garrick felt personally insulted by her. His letter implies that Brooke had decided to attack him without reason, and his image of a dangling carcass is rather graphic. In fact, there was a history of Garrick trying to subtly sabotage Brooke's literary endeavours. His rejection of her *Virginia* may conceivably have been an accident, but after Brooke mentioned this event in her periodical *The Old Maid* (1755-56), Garrick definitely developed a personal animosity towards her. One of Brooke's early successes had been her translation of Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby* (1759) into English. Both contemporary and modern critics describe her translation as exceptionally good, and it contributed greatly to Riccoboni's success as a writer ('Introduction', pp. xvii-xviii). However, when Brooke enquired if she could translate further novels, Riccoboni asked Garrick for advice first (they shared a publisher). He told her to refuse permission, writing,

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[157]'Letter to Frances Cadogan, July 17, 1777', in David Garrick, *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the most Celebrated Persons of his Time,* ed. by James Boaden, 2 vols (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831), No. 1109.

> I am not acquainted with Mrs. Brooke: she once wrote a play, which I did not like, & would not act, for which heinous offence she vented her female Spite upon Me, in a paper she publish'd call'd the *Old Maid*, but I forgive her as thoroughly as her Work is forgot. [...] You will be civil to her & no more, all this is Entre nous.[158]

His response is doubly ironic, since he claims he does not know Brooke but clearly knows what she writes in her periodical; and because he calls her work forgotten when she had just published a critically acclaimed translation. It is also noteworthy that he unnecessarily genders her criticism of him by calling it 'female Spite', making her sound unreasonable and motivated by vengeance. As an actor and author, Garrick had to expect frequent criticism, but it seems that Brooke's objection to his methods was particularly hurtful to him. In any case, his instruction to Riccoboni resulted in her looking for another translator, which meant Brooke had to find a different project. As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, she and her friend Mary Anne Yates took over co-management of the Haymarket Opera House in 1773. They applied for a license to perform plays, but it was denied. Several critics have suspected that Garrick used his - at the time considerable - influence to persuade the Lord Chamberlain to refuse the license (see 'Introduction', p. xxxi).[159] The year before, Brooke had also offered her comic opera *Rosina* to both Garrick and Colman, but had been rejected by both theatres. Donkin speculates that this could also have been Garrick's doing, and that he was actively trying to exclude Brooke from the London stage.[160] It may seem that this is crediting Garrick with too much power; but if we look at evidence such as his letter to Riccoboni, it does appear that he had an extraordinary amount of influence in the literary world. People, and especially aspiring female writers, trusted his advice without questioning. In this light, letters written to him by other women writers, such as Hannah More's lines written at his retirement, 'Who shall now hold the master-key of the human heart? Who direct the passions with more than magic power? Who purify the stage; and who, in short, shall direct and nurse my dramatic muse?'[161] and Elizabeth Griffith's 'I have reason to hope that with your assistance, without which I well know no piece succeeds, I may again retrieve my

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[158]Marie Jeanne Riccoboni, *Mme Riccoboni's letters to David Hume, David Garrick and Sir Robert Liston, 1764-1783,* ed. by James C. Nicholls (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation & Taylor Institution, 1976), pp. 45-46.
[159]See Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 278.
[160]Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, p. 51.
[161] More, *Life and Correspondence*, ed. by Boaden, p. 64.

dramatic fame'[162] are not just flattering letters to a theatre manager, but bids for continued support from a man who could very well make or break a writer's career.

In Brooke, we have an example of a woman who deliberately refused to involve herself in the patronage system which was still upheld by managers like Garrick. While other writers like Cowley and More eventually published their works on the grounds of their own reputations, and began to see the theatre in a much more critical light (though for different reasons), at the beginning of their careers they were very much Garrick's protégées. This system required them to write flattering letters to him and refrain from open criticism, but in turn it provided them with access to the stage and to the best actors to star in their plays. Both women also admired Garrick as an actor, and playing the 'literary daughter' in exchange for the access to the literary world he could provide may have looked like a good deal. Garrick cites their expressions of gratitude in his letter to Frances Cadogan, saying, 'have not y[e] Ladies - Mesdames, *Griffith, Cowley & Cilesia* spoke of me before their Plays with an Over-Enthusiastick Encomium? — what says the divine Hannah More?' He contrasts this to Brooke's supposed 'Malignity'.[163] This was the disadvantage of Garrick's patronage system - he expected gratitude, and always perceived writers as being in some way obliged to him, even though, as manager, it was his job to find and produce new plays. This, I believe, is what Brooke objected to when she described Garrick in *The Excursion* as not being honest and fair. She (and her character Maria) regarded writing and publishing as a purely professional vocation, in which both sides entered a contract and were therefore equal partners. No side should expect any personal obligations. That Brooke was interested in and adept at such partnerships is evidenced by her initiative in corresponding with Riccoboni, and her successful co-management of the Haymarket Opera House.

Brooke's career choices neatly showcase the eighteenth-century shift in the perception of writers. For a while writers had to be promoted and sponsored by men of letters or men of wealth, and as a result the writer was perceived to be working *for* someone. Gradually, as the publishing and theatre world became more commercialised and professionalised, writing increasingly turned into a business arrangement, and writers were now working *with* someone. This is not to say that the shift was either sudden or complete: many playwrights

[162] Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, ed. by Boaden, p. 56.
[163] 'Letter to Frances Cadogan, July 17, 1777', in Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, ed. by Boaden, No. 1109.

still declared themselves obliged to managers, actors, or their audience in their prefaces. But it is noticeable that the men of letters who had essentially dominated the literary scene, such as Garrick and Johnson, disappeared during the end of the century, and nobody replaced them. The next generation of famous literary men, like William Wordsworth or Lord Byron, never established the same kind of patronage system. For women writers, this change meant that they had to establish themselves as writers; they could not rely on the continued support of a single person, and therefore had to manage their own literary careers. Brooke is unusual in the number of different genres and vocations she experimented with, but we can see the same trend in other writers: Inchbald also wrote novels and criticism, Mariana Starke changed from playwriting to travel writing, and Sophia Lee opened a school. Being an author, and especially a female author, became less straightforward as an occupation, but those who succeeded in their literary career managed it entirely through their own talent and determination.

Criticising Shakespeare: Women Writers as Critics

One of the signs of female authors becoming more self-aware of their roles in the literary world is their venturing into literary criticism. In addition to becoming a major force in novel- and playwriting, women in the eighteenth century also increasingly worked as literary critics. Reflecting and commenting on the literary world itself as well as other writers' works became part of what it meant to be a professional author. While many female writers followed Cowley's method of mainly commenting in prefaces or through characters in their own fiction, some did publish works that exclusively consisted of literary criticism. Inchbald, for instance, was equally as interested in commenting on literature and the theatre as Cowley. Unlike Cowley, she made it a major part of her writing career and spent several years working as a professional theatre critic. Her introductions to plays in *The British Theatre* (1806-1809) gave her a direct opportunity to engage with the works of other playwrights, past and present. Her own experience as an actress and her (by this time) impressive publication history made her an ideal candidate for the job. Karen Bloom Gevirtz comments that:

> Acclaimed as a playwright as well as a novelist, Elizabeth Inchbald was both popularly respected and commercially powerful. Small wonder that when the publisher Longman was looking for someone to write prefaces to the plays in the soon-to-be published *The British Theatre*, he turned to Inchbald.[164]

Her appointment was a major step towards the acceptance of women writers as professionals. In this section, I will be examining how women wrote theatre criticism by looking at Inchbald's *British Theatre* and Griffith's *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775). Because both writers commented on Shakespeare, and therefore on the same plays, comparing them helps to chart a development in female criticism. While women had written literary criticism before, being asked to contribute to a project as extensive and reputable as *The British Theatre* gave Inchbald an opportunity to influence theatre criticism on an unprecedented scale. Bloom Gevirtz notes that Inchbald distinguished herself from other critics especially in her comments on Shakespeare:

> Her discussions of the female characters thus makes her different from the major Shakespeareans, who rarely if ever were interested in the representation of authentic female experience in Shakespeare's work. [...] These kinds of observations grant validity to female experience, and, taken with her emphasis on women's issues throughout the prefaces, set Inchbald apart from almost all the other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Shakespeare critics.[165]

The British Theatre provided Inchbald with an opportunity to specifically use her status as a *female* playwright to comment on other writers' works. She was not simply emulating what male critics were doing, but instead inventing her own brand of criticism. It is rare that being a female writer actually presented an advantage in the eighteenth century, but this is the case here. Presumably, it was exactly Inchbald's unique perspective that the publishers were looking for. I am focusing specifically on her commentary on Shakespeare's plays here, because this places her in a well-established but predominantly male-dominated, genre of criticism. Shakespeare was acknowledged as a genius by the eighteenth century. He can be described as the most established playwright of this time, with his plays regarded as model

[164] Karen Bloom Gevirtz, 'Peer Reviewed: Elizabeth Inchbald's Shakespeare Criticism' in Joseph M. Ortiz (ed.), *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), pp. 31-50, p. 31.
[165] Bloom Gevirtz, 'Peer reviewed', p. 44.

examples of what playwriting should do. Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee, held in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, is the most vivid example of Shakespeare being established as a national institution.[166] Many of the greatest actors of the time based their reputations on their performance of Shakespearean characters; for instance, Garrick's King Lear and Richard III, and Sarah Siddons' Lady Macbeth. Therefore, for an eighteenth-century playwright to comment on Shakespeare was to comment on the prime example of their profession. Shakespeare's plays were frequently commented on, continuously performed, and often rewritten.

Inchbald was actually not the first woman to write critical commentary on Shakespeare; Elizabeth Montagu had written her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* in 1769, and Griffith had published *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*. Montagu follows a fairly standard tactic of alternately comparing Shakespeare to the Greek and Roman classics, and proving that he is superior to French dramatists. She regards her criticism as a kind of patriotic duty. In her introduction she writes:

> I will own I was incited to this undertaking by great admiration of his genius, and still greater indignation at the treatment he had received from a French wit,[167] who seems to think he has made prodigious concessions to our prejudices in favour of the works of our country man in allowing them the credit of a few splendid passages.[168]

In consequence, most of her work is concerned with showing Shakespeare to be the better storyteller, better poet, and more talented writer of 'natural' characters than French dramatists. She objects to the love plots and sentimental speeches she considers a hallmark of French drama. Female characters are rarely mentioned, and the only speeches she quotes extensively are made by male characters. She never refers to female critics; in fact, she does not think of herself as a female writer. In her explanation of why she believes that the English are better qualified to recognise a good play than the French, she says: 'Learning here is not confined to scholastics, or a few lettered sages and academics; every English

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[166] James Boswell describes it in a letter as 'an elegant and truly classical celebration of the memory of Shakespeare, that illustrious poet, whom all ages will admire as the world has hitherto done. It was truly an antique idea, a Grecian thought, to institute a splendid festival in honour of a bard.' James Boswell, 'A Letter from James Boswell, Esq; on Shakespeare's Jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon', in *The London Magazine*, Vol. 38, September 1769, 451-54, 451.
[167]Montagu is referring to Voltaire here.
[168]Elizabeth Montagu, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (London: Dodsley, 1769), p. 16.

gentleman has an education, which gives him an early acquaintance with the writings of the ancients'.[169] Apart from her overestimation of the average Englishman's critical ability, this sentence either excludes women like her from this learning, or implies that she sees herself as part of this group of educated 'gentlemen'. Given that she refers to the classics throughout her essay, and confidently cites other famous critics like Pope and Johnson, the latter is more likely. Montagu therefore is not trying to write as a woman, and specifically female aspects of criticism do not concern her.

While Montagu's aim is to be similar to other male Shakespeare critics, Griffith explores a new form of 'female' criticism. Her theatre criticism is not as extensive as Inchbald's, but it equally qualifies as being 'different from the major Shakespeareans'.[170] She decides to focus not on the dramatic merits of the plays, but on their educational value. She analyses both the plots as a whole and selects quotes for their moral value, attempting to draw out a specific moral from each one. To do so, she presents some very sophisticated close reading, which points to her observational skills as a critic. She also, like Inchbald, is very interested in the female characters. In her chapter on *Richard III*, for example, she analyses Act I, Scene II, in which Richard courts Anne. She comments, 'Women are certainly most extremely ill used, in the unnatural representation of female frailty, here given'.[171] The scene gives the impression that Anne is both easily swayed and disloyal to her late husband, because she appears to forget her grief very quickly. Griffith returns to her concern over how women are portrayed several times in her book. In her discussion of *Much Ado about Nothing,* she even imagines how this portrayal might affect specifically female readers of Shakespeare. After quoting Beatrice's speech in which she asks Benedick to avenge Hero's slander, Griffith writes:

> There is a generous warmth of indignation in this speech, which must certainly impress a female reader with the same sentiments upon such an occasion. I am not so disingenuous to take advantage of this passage as an historical fact, but am willing to rest it upon the sole authority of the Poet's assumption, as this will sufficiently

[169] Montagu, *A Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear*, p. 3
[170] Bloom Gevirtz, 'Peer reviewed', p. 44.
[171] Elizabeth Griffith, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (London: Cadell, 1775), p. 312. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

> answer the design of my introducing it; which is, to vindicate my sex from the general, but unjust charge of being prone to slander. (p. 155)

It is interesting that it is her express purpose in this passage to write about the misrepresentation of women. She does not only mention it in passing, but actively uses her status as a critic to comment on what she perceives to be a fault in society. To more conservative critics, Beatrice may be an unsuitable role model for women; she is one of Shakespeare's most outspoken and independent heroines. Griffith, however, sees her as a character that particularly female readers can identify with, and should emulate. While her official goal in writing this book may have been to find the morals in Shakespeare plays, she does spend a lot of time thinking about his gender roles. This is not to say that she ever specifically calls for a change in gender roles, she is not writing a manifesto in the style of Mary Wollstonecraft after all. But Griffith does remind her readers that they should learn from Shakespeare's plays, and that includes realising how women should (or should not, as in Anne's case) be spoken of.

The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama is an intriguingly inconsistent work. Not only does Griffith deviate from her stated purpose, but her commentary also changes between being remarkably proto-feminist to being deliberately feminine and domestic. For instance, while the passages quoted above clearly favour female characters speaking their minds, she also praises Desdemona for being silent, saying 'In my opinion, she seems to be as perfect a model of a wife, as either this author, or any other writer, could possibly have framed. She speaks little; but whatever she says is sensible, pure, and chaste' (p. 523). For a critic to present both the silent Desdemona and the outspoken Beatrice as role models is slightly strange. We can however draw a parallel between Griffith's recognition of Desdemona's speechlessness and the deliberate silence some contemporary female writers use in their plays. As I have discussed previously, writers like Cowley and Inchbald sometimes make their female characters silent as a form of passive resistance. While Griffith does this less than other writers, she nevertheless recognises the significance of female silence in drama.

In contrast, when Johnson comments on Desdemona in his edition of Shakespeare's plays (1765) it is for entirely different reasons. He describes how:

> the soft simplicity of Desdemona, confident of merit, and conscious of innocence, her artless perseverance in her suit, and her slowness to suspect that she can be suspected, are such proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature, as, I suppose, it is vain to seek in any modern writer.[172]

He also speaks about her silence and chasteness, but he does not regard her as a model for women; instead he sees her character as proof of Shakespeare's observational skills. This is only one example of a frequent occurrence in his criticism, whereby he only notices female characters if they help him make a point about men. Johnson does not ignore female characters, but he is only interested in what they tell him about male characters, Shakespeare himself, or male critics. In other words, he does not consider whether they are good and useful portrayals of real women, or what kind of message a female audience might receive from them. This is most obvious in a passage from his notes on *King Lear*. Johnson writes (at some length) on the character of Cordelia, but his remarks are not really *about* Cordelia; they are about how men react to her:

> Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles. Yet this conduct is justified by the Spectator, who blames Tate for giving Cordelia success and happiness in his alteration, and declares, that, in his opinion, the tragedy has lost half its beauty. [...] I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.[173]

This paragraph considers, in order, the intentions and reactions of Shakespeare, Joseph Addison in the *Spectator*, Nahum Tate, and Johnson himself. We can clearly see the focus of his criticism here; he does not consider for example how women might react to Cordelia's example of the dutiful daughter. This is not necessarily a fault in his writing, since the stated goal of his criticism is to show how 'natural' a writer Shakespeare is. It does mean that what Griffith and Inchbald were doing was an unusual move, one that set them apart from other Shakespeare commentators. Since Johnson was a much admired and imitated critic, we can

[172] Samuel Johnson, 'Notes to *Othello*', in William Shakespeare, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. Samuel Johnson (London: Nichols et al., 1765), n.p.
[173] Johnson, 'Notes to *Lear',* in Shakespeare, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Johnson, n.p.

safely assume he was not alone in his views on female characters. In fact, we can see that Montagu, who is clearly trying to emulate Johnson, employs the same approach and is therefore equally unconcerned to offer a female perspective.

So while Griffith's criticism is not always proto-feminist, it is almost always female-focused, and therefore innovative. In some places, Griffith seems to have intended her work almost as a conduct book: a way for young readers (especially female ones) to learn how to behave virtuously and appropriately. She expressly considers her 'young Readers' (p. 497) in her analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*, and sees *As You Like It* as a treatise on the education of children (p. 69). Strangely she never explains specifically what her readers should learn from these plays: she simply states that they are educational, and leaves her readers to form their own conclusions. She frames her Shakespeare criticism in a very feminine genre of writing; conduct books were an accepted way of women writing and publishing. Even the title of her work, expressly focusing on morality, points towards this. Griffith clearly felt that a woman writing about Shakespeare would be more easily accepted by her readership if the criticism focused on the same topics that readers were used to from conduct books. She indicates that this was the way women should write criticism; after all, female literary criticism was relatively recent, and there was no established way it had to be done. Judging from her works, Griffith appears to have been in favour of separate gender roles, and may have felt that if a woman wrote about drama, she should write about what was in her sphere: education, sensibility, and morality. Consequently, her work on *Shakespeare's Drama* feels much more personal, because Griffith is drawing on her own experiences to comment on the plays. This impression is reinforced by her frequent use of 'in my opinion', as in the Desdemona quote above. She is sharing her personal opinions about the plays, more in the capacity of a woman rather than as a critic. To many of her readers, and perhaps to herself, being a woman and a critic were two different things. By separating the two, she is making herself less threatening: she is playing the role of a woman who is focused on domesticity and propriety, rather than that of a critic who judges the literary quality of Shakespeare's plays. However, there are certain points in which she speaks in a more professional manner. For instance, she writes of *Titus Andronicus*:

> Ben Johnson assures us that it was performed, in his time, *with great applause*; and we are also told that it was revived again, in the reign of Charles the Second, *with the*

> *same success*. The different humours and tastes of times! It would be not only hissed, but driven off the stage at present. (p. 404)

In this quote, Griffith demonstrates not only her knowledge of the play's performance history, but also her grasp of how the audience's expectations have changed. Her keen perception of what was, and what was not acceptable on the eighteenth-century stage is clearly based on her own playwriting career. In her preface and conclusion, she refers to and quotes from several other Shakespeare commentators in a way that implies she saw herself as part of that community. She specifically cites Montagu as an inspiration, referring to her as 'a Lady of distinguished merit' who she is trying to emulate, since 'I am ambitious of the honour of appearing to think, at least, though I despair of the success of writing, like her' (p. vii). In fact, the two women differ widely in their approach to criticism, and arguably Griffith's writing is much more accessible than Montagu's. Griffith thus was torn between a criticism that was deliberately feminine and personal, and one that was more akin to a dialogue with other professional critics.

Another approach to criticism was taken by Joanna Baillie. Although Baillie's plays are not a major part of this thesis because they were rarely performed, it is important to examine her theoretical writing on the theatre. Rather than criticising individual writers or plays like Montagu and Griffith, Bailie focuses on formulating a response to what contemporary drama is doing and what, in her view, it should be doing. Her main aim is to make the theatre a place of moral education; her plans for an educational drama are set out in her *Introductory Discourse*, prefacing the first volume of her *Plays on the Passions* (1798). In it she writes: 'The theatre is a school in which much good or evil may be learned'.[174] Her ideas about the theatre go far beyond simple entertainment; like Cowley in her preface to *The Town*, she is quite dismissive about the kinds of superficial dramas she believes are too commonplace on the London stage.

In the *Discourse*, Baillie reveals her deep understanding of the drama and her ability as a critic. She sets out a detailed theory of both tragedy and comedy, dividing the latter into different categories. She laments that most comedies of her time are without real substance, and that 'satirical, witty, sentimental, and, above all, busy or circumstantial comedy, have

[174]Baillie, *Complete Poetical Works,* p. 22.

usurped the exertions of the far greater proportion of Dramatic Writers'.[175] Instead of these kinds of plays, she proposes to write a new kind of comedy, which she calls Characteristic Comedy. Her focus is on representing human nature, rather than dazzling the audience with extravagant characters and dialogue. Baillie believes that comedy is uniquely suited to teaching us about ourselves: 'Comedy presents to us men, as we find them in the ordinary intercourse of the world, with all the weaknesses, follies, caprice, prejudices, and absurdities which a near and familiar view of them discovers'.[176] This is the aim of her *Plays on the Passions*: to provide a 'near and familiar view' of each emotion.

By claiming the drama as a method for teaching people about life, Baillie takes on a great responsibility; she also shows the foresight and confidence to identify a flaw in contemporary drama and devise a plan to rectify it. However, Baillie's plan to teach her audience about themselves in this way was hampered by the fact that most of her plays were not publicly performed. They became closet plays, therefore reaching a much smaller audience than a run at a London theatre would have had. Baillie was very unhappy about this; she recognized that not staging a play limits the number of people it will reach, and writes: 'I should, therefore, have been better pleased to have introduced them to the world from the stage than from the press. I possess, however, no likely channel to the former mode of public introduction'.[177] This statement again highlights the common problem of accessing the theatre for female playwrights. Baillie describes the problem almost in exactly the same terms as Brooke's Maria, with the focus on having to be 'introduced'. Luckily, other female playwrights who shared her vision of the stage as a school in which morality could be taught had easier access to the theatre, so that, even though her own plays did not succeed, her aim for the British theatre was in some measure realised. In addition, Baillie's career shows that even towards the end of the century, when female writers were not unusual, finding out that the author of a text was female sadly still instantly prejudiced many people against it. Baillie's *Introductory Discourse* was published anonymously at first, and assumed to have been written by a man. When her identity was revealed, she endured a lot of criticism. In a letter to Walter Scott she sympathizes with another woman writer who had just revealed her gender, and writes: 'I speak feelingly on this subject like a burnt child. John

[175]Baillie, *Complete Poetical Works,* p. 19.
[176]Baillie, *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 19.
[177]Baillie, *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 24.

any-body would have stood higher with the critics than Joanna Baillie. I too was unwisely thwarted on this point'.[178] The sense of disappointment at being disadvantaged on account of her sex is not unique to Baillie; but it has to be said that she was less successful at having her plays produced than the other female playwrights I have been analysing. Whether this was due to her personality, chance, or deliberate exclusion is difficult to say. It is clear however that Baillie herself attributed it to her critical and theoretical writing, and felt that admitting to being a female critic had held her back. Tellingly, she says that most of the opposition came from other critics, rather than the reading public. It is therefore possible that the people who were most concerned with female critics were male critics. It is easy to imagine that they would not have welcomed the competition, especially from established writers like Inchbald and Baillie. They may also have disagreed with the new style of criticism most of them employed, exemplified by Griffith's deliberately feminine way of looking at plays.

In between Griffith's and Inchbald's publications, Frances Burney provided a fictional commentary on women as literary critics. Her 1779 play *The Witlings* was never produced on stage, but it provides an interesting insight into how self-styled 'women of letters' could be perceived, and the kind of criticisms they might have faced. *The Witlings'* main plot is a rather standard one of virtuous love, involving the beautiful but quite helpless Cecilia. What makes it interesting for the purpose of this thesis, however, is the group of characters that gives it its title. The Witlings are several women and two men, whose main occupation is discussing works of literature. Their gatherings resemble literary salons, such as the ones held by the Bluestockings, with whom Burney was herself acquainted.[179] They meet to share and discuss literature, and place high value on being thought witty and astute. However, these salons only showcase their lack of literary knowledge. The female half of the Witlings provide a harshly satirical portrait of women who comment on literature without the proper education to do so. As is obvious from their names, Lady Smatter, Mrs. Sapient, and Mrs. Voluble are not truly intellectual; they only pretend to be, while in reality being more concerned with superficial appearances than with actual knowledge. It has been suggested

[178] Joanna Baillie, Letter to Walter Scott, 13 October 1826, National Library of Scotland, Ms. 3903, ff. 131-133.
[179]See Evelyn G. Bodek, 'Salonières and Bluestockings: Educated Obsolescence and Germinating Feminism' *Feminist Studies* , Vol. 3, No. 3/4 (1976), 185-199, 187.

that they are partly based on real-life Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu.[180] I refer to them as literary critics, because they do not write fiction themselves, they only comment on it. Of course, none of the characters publishes their criticisms, it is an amateur occupation. However, Lady Smatter especially takes her role as a critic extremely seriously. Unfortunately, she is also very bad at it, because she constantly mixes up which author has written which work, and frequently misquotes her sources (IV, 1, footnote to l.47). Her inability to think objectively means that she is unable to distinguish between good literature and the incredibly derivative and clichéd poetry of her friend, Mr. Dabler. Despite her lack of qualifications, she insists on her right to be a critic: 'it's rather a hard case that, after so many years of intense study, and most laborious reading, I am not allowed to criticise a silly line of Pope' (IV, 1, ll. 154-155) , she retorts when Mr. Codger, another of the Witlings, tries to explain a quote from Pope's *Moral Essays* to her. Even though her 'intense study' has obviously been extremely inefficient, she does have a point: Codger is after all no more qualified than she is to comment on the text. Burney's highly sarcastic tone and the fact that she seems to have intended almost every character in the play as a satire of some kind, makes it difficult to decide what precisely it is she is satirising. Accordingly, critics have interpreted *The Witlings* very differently. Julian Fung, for instance, describes Burney's satire as:

> neither punitive nor reformative, but rather cautionary. She is not trying to chastise the vicious; she tries to warn her readers against the many dangers to which they may be vulnerable, particularly those that threaten young women.[181]

Barbara Darby sees her as being much more radical and pessimistic, writing that 'The Witlings depicts the triumph of censorship and subjugation over independence'.[182] In Burney's own time, both her father, and her mentor Samuel Crisp, discouraged her from publishing the play, as they believed it to be improper.[183] If we concentrate solely on her portrayal of female literary criticism, *The Witlings* is an unusual play. On the one hand it blatantly makes fun of women who try to comment on literature, and is a very unkind satire

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[180] Barbara Darby, *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-century Stage* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), p. 24.
[181] Julian Fung, 'Frances Burney as Satirist', in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (2011), 937-953, 937.
[182] Darby, *Frances Burney, Dramatist*, p. 22.
[183] Peter Sabor and Tristanne J. Cooke, 'Introduction' in Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney,* ed. by Peter Sabor and Tristanne J. Cooke (London: Routledge, 2016), p. xviii.

of eighteenth-century literary women. On the other hand, Burney herself was of course a woman of letters, and was acquainted with several of the Bluestockings. Therefore this indicates that she does not outright see female criticism as ridiculous, but instead reveals a profound anxiety about it. Her play, and the character of Lady Smatter in particular, constantly question whether it is proper for a woman to criticise literature, and whether women can attain the necessary experience and education to do so. The female Witlings are, at times, very insecure about their own opinions; Lady Smatter covers her insecurity by constantly referring to the classics, while Mrs. Sapient confines herself to repeating platitudes that nobody could possibly argue with.[184] Of course Lady Smatter's comments on literature and her complete lack of taste are ridiculed, and her salon is exposed as a group of shallow individuals. But on the other hand, in the midst of this ridicule, she makes some good points about criticism: who decides who is qualified to be a critic? Is one opinion about literature necessarily more valuable than another? There is no specific message here, no statement that would allow us to deduce if Burney had strong opinions either way. Given that this was Burney's first play, it is likely that she was herself trying to find a way to be a literary woman in a society that could be vicious about both female pretension to, and lack of, knowledge. If we compare Burney's portrayal of female critics to Griffith's presentation of herself as a critic, we can understand why Griffith 'softens' her literary criticism with traditionally feminine concerns such as morality and children's education. Burney's Witlings do not concern themselves very much with appearing as feminine, nor are they interested in traditionally female subjects (such as Cecilia's moral struggles and her marriage). Part of their comedic value therefore stems from the fact that they are 'unnatural' women, who have turned their backs on propriety - and in some ways, they are similar to Behn's deliberately inappropriate author-persona. In order to avoid being satirised as a 'Lady Smatter', Griffith had to demonstrate both her knowledge of literature and her femininity, a feat she accomplished by fusing the established intellectual pursuit of Shakespeare criticism with the established female occupation of writing conduct books.

Inchbald, on the other hand, having the advantage of writing at a later date, and having accumulated a store of personal experience and confidence, presents herself solely as a

[184] For instance in this exchange:
'Lady Smatter: Next to Mr Dabler, my favourite poets are Pope and Swift.
Mrs. Sapient: Well, after all, I must confess I think there are as many pretty things in old Shakespeare as in any body.' (IV, 1, ll. 98-101).

professional critic. While she incorporates her personal opinions, she is not concerned with whether the plays are morally valuable or educational. She comments on characters, dialogue, and staging in the way a theatre reviewer in the newspapers would. Like Griffith, she quotes other critics, but Inchbald is much more aware of her own position and strength as a Shakespearean critic. There are no apologetic prefaces to her criticisms, and no insecurity about the relevance of her own opinions. She comments on the fact that there really is no right or wrong way to write criticism, but that people have always had differing responses to plays. For instance, in the following paragraph, she remarks on the difficulty of presenting one coherent critical view of Shakespeare, when so many different voices have already interpreted his works:

> It is curious and consolatory for a minor critic to observe, how the great commentators on Shakspeare differ in their opinions. Tate alters the play of King Lear, and instead of suffering the good Cordelia to die of grief, as Shakspeare had done, he rewards her with life, love, and a throne. Addison, in his Spectator, condemns him for this; Dr Johnson commends him for it; both showing excellent reasons. Then comes Steevens, who gives a better reason than all, why they are all wrong.[185]

This paragraph neatly exemplifies Inchbald's awareness of her male predecessors in Shakespeare criticism, but also makes an ironic acknowledgement of the fact that any critic will be disagreed with by somebody. She very modestly calls herself 'a minor critic', but in the next sentence shows that the 'great commentators' really are no more qualified to be regarded as the ultimate authority on Shakespeare. Since any critic, even established 'men of letters' like Addison and Johnson can be proved wrong, it follows that Inchbald herself cannot be faulted for adding her own, potentially differing, opinion. And she is indeed not afraid to contradict either established opinion, or criticise the so-called authorities. In her preface to *Romeo and Juliet*, she writes, 'Garrick altered the play to its present state, and himself performed Romeo, but with no impressive talents. Mrs. Cibber's Juliet was held superior. Love, in Garrick's description, never seemed more than a fabulous sensation' (I, p.6).

[185] Elizabeth Inchbald, *The British Theatre, or, A Collection of Plays which are Acted at the Theatres Royal,* 25 vols (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co.,1806-1809), IV, pp. 5-6. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

In this example we can see that Inchbald not only prioritises female characters, but also female performers. She is not only unimpressed with Garrick's performance, but draws attention to the actress she considers a better match for the play. Of course, criticising the theatre elite was likely to have earned her some criticism in return. When she reviewed Colman the Elder's *The Jealous Wife* (1761) for *The British Theatre*, her remarks prompted Colman the Younger to write her an angry letter. In it, he accuses her of being ungrateful:

> Oh, Madam! is this grateful? is it *graceful*, from an ingenious lady, who was originally encouraged, and brought forward, as an authoress, by that *very man*, on whose tomb she idly plants this poisonous weed of remark, to choke the laurels which justly grace his memory?[186]

Just as Inchbald specifically wrote as a female dramatist, Colman objects to her criticism specifically on gendered terms. He demands that she should be 'graceful' in her writing, a demand rarely made of male writers; but more importantly, he implies that she owes her career to his father's interest in her. His letter goes on to describe in detail what he believes is wrong with her criticism, not just of his fathers' plays, but also of his own. He perceives her (relatively slight) criticism as a personal insult, invoking the terms of the outdated concept of patronage, which should obligate a writer to their patron indefinitely. However, Inchbald in her answering letter draws attention to the entirely business-like relationship she had with Colman, stressing that their working together did not entitle him to special treatment:

> Of your respected father I have said nothing that he would not approve were he living. He had too high an opinion of his own talents, to have repined under criticisms such as mine; [...] But, in thus acknowledging my obligations to Mr. Colman the Elder, let it be understood that they amounted to no more than those usual attentions which every manager of a theatre is supposed to confer, when he first selects a novice in dramatic writing as worthy of being introduced on his stage to the public.[187]

While her tone is slightly self-deprecating here, Inchbald is deploying her talent for subtle sarcasm. She reminds Colman the Younger that his father had been perfectly aware that working as a writer included dealing with criticism, something that she herself knew from

[186] Elizabeth Inchbald, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald, Including her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of her Time,* ed. by James Boaden (London: Bentley, 1833), p. 106.
[187] Inchbald, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, ed. by Boaden, pp. 111-112.

experience. Her mention of his 'talents' which could not be damaged by a critic pointedly implies that Colman the Younger has either too much regard for his own talents, or is excessively insecure in his status as a writer. Despite these very entertaining possibilities, it is more likely that Colman's anger stems from a difference in perception of Inchbald's own identity as an author. He regards Inchbald as a private person; as someone who is both a friend of his family and obligated to them, and should therefore refrain from commenting negatively on his father's work. Inchbald however is writing as a professional critic. Her personal feelings regarding Colman do not and should not enter into her critical discussion of his plays. She helpfully reminds him of this in her next paragraph:

> I should thank you for reminding me of my duty to my employers, but that it has been the object of my care, even to the most anxious desire of minutely fulfilling the contract between us; in which as you were not a party consulted, you cannot tell but that I might stipulate to give no other information in those prefaces but such as was furnished me from their extensive repository of recorded facts.[188]

Her use of the words 'employers' and 'contract' are designed to draw attention to her professional status as a critic. She is not simply sharing her private opinions for her own amusement. Reviewing the Colmans' plays is what she is being paid to do, and it is therefore neither a lapse in her moral nor her professional judgement.

If we compare Inchbald's *The British Theatre* and Griffith's *Shakespeare's Drama*, we can see a growing confidence in female criticism. Some of the differences in Griffith's and Inchbald's work can be attributed to the different personalities of the writers, but the thirty years in between the publication of both books clearly show some changes in the acceptance of women as professional critics. With Griffith, we can see the criticism developing out of more established literary forms, resulting in her mixing theatre criticism with personal advice. Using Shakespeare as a conduct book may seem strange, but it fits very neatly into the expectation that women should, above all, focus on the moral education of others, even when commenting on literature. It is likely that Griffith needed the format of the conduct book as a way to reassure herself, her readers, and her publishers that it was perfectly legitimate for a woman to write about Shakespeare in this way. Burney puts her own anxieties and the strangely conflicted expectations of her society into a play that exposes the

[188] Inchbald, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, ed. by Boaden, p. 112.

difficulties particular to female critics, and the criticisms they were likely to face from others. By the time Inchbald was writing, she could be an entirely professional critic without having to take her gender into account. Other people still occasionally did; but she herself found no reason to define her criticism by her gender. She does not hide her gender, as is obvious from her interest in fellow actresses and female characters. But it has no bearing on either the format she writes in, or the aspects of the plays she comments on. The format of *The British Theatre*, the fact that Inchbald was specifically commissioned by the publisher, and London Chronicle in 1758 that,

criticism. Unlike Griffith, Inchbald is not writing because she feels she is morally obliged to, she writes because she has been contracted to do so. Her relationship with her publisher, with the texts she reviews, and with her readers, is much less personal and more pragmatic. That is not to say that it is better; it simply marks an interesting shift in how women saw themselves as critics.

'My time is precious': Representing other working women

Apart from considering their own profession as writers, female authors also represented other work done by women. While women's work is never the main topic of a play, it is nevertheless mentioned, providing important visibility on the theatre stage. Among other things, the work represented includes farm work, millinery and dressmaking, and of course domestic service. That these are never the main concern of a play raises interesting points about the social class of author, audience, and characters. It also raises questions of female education and training, and the way women's work was perceived in relation to male professions.

Brooke, herself a woman of several professions, wrote two comic operas which are relevant in this context. *Rosina* (1782) and *Marian* (1788) are similar in their setting and tone. Both are sentimental pastoral dramas, which involve a virtuous heroine and her eventual marriage. Both are set in an idyllic English countryside, and feature a cast of characters that spontaneously express themselves in 'rustic' song. As is frequently the case, it is not the actual plots themselves that are remarkable, but the small references Brooke inserts into

them. Both plays feature representations of women doing farm work. *Marian* includes the following stage directions: 'PATTY, FANNY, and KITTY appear, walking up to the Boatman's House, with Baskets of Fruit and Flowers on their arms, as for the Market' and 'Enter the Girls from milking, with pails on their heads, and Sir HENRY talking to them'.[189] *Rosina* has similar instructions, for instance 'Dorcas, seated on the bench, is spinning; Rosina and Phoebe, just within the door, are measuring a bushel of corn'.[190] Brooke insists that these women are shown at work, even while the rather generic romantic plot is unfolding. It is especially noteworthy that both plays begin straight away by showing women in their everyday working lives. This normalises their work, and stresses that it is a normal aspect of their existence; the romance plot is an interruption, rather than the norm. While the idyllic surroundings and the songs paint a rather unrealistic pastoral picture, Brooke's inclusion of real farm work provides the plays with a grounding in reality. Especially in *Rosina*, the main character consistently stresses that her work is vital not just for her own survival, but that of her family. When the village workers are harvesting, Rosina is following behind them gleaning the leftover corn. Captain Belville, who is attracted by her beauty, interrupts her:

> Rosina: Why do you stop me, Sir? My time is precious. When the gleaning season is over, will you make up my loss?
> Capt. Belville: Yes.
> Rosina: Will it be any advantage to you to make me lose my day's work?
> Capt. Belville: Yes.
> Rosina: Would it give you pleasure to see me pass all my days in idleness?
> Capt. Belville: Yes.
> Rosina: We differ greatly then, Sir. I only wish for so much leisure as makes me return to my work with fresh spirit. We labour all the week, 'tis true; but then how sweet is our rest on Sunday! (I, 1)

Their exchange shows not only two different attitudes to work, but also to their perceptions of women. Captain Belville, who is a man of means, sees Rosina's work as something superfluous: it can easily be substituted for money, and it would be preferable to him to see

[189] Frances Brooke, *Marian* (London: Longman and Rees, 1800), I , 1 and II, 1. [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
[190] Frances Brooke, *Rosina* (Dublin: Smith, 1783), I, 1. [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

her doing nothing. Rosina, on the other hand, immediately stresses both the time-sensitive nature and the financial value of her work, but also tells him she enjoys it. Belville essentially offers to buy her time, and presumably a position as his mistress. He assumes that Rosina, who has to do manual labour for a living, will agree by default. This exposes a presumption that firstly, women's work is not valuable, and secondly, that women do not really want to work; Rosina proves him wrong on both counts. While her language in the last few lines is fairly stilted and poetic, and therefore unrealistic, her 'time is money' attitude earlier on shows her to be a very practical person. This is emphasised in the next section of the play, where Belville outright offers her a purse of money for her time:

> Rosina: Let me call my mother, Sir. I am young, and can support myself by my labour; but she is old and helpless, and your charity will be well bestow'd. Please to transfer to her the bounty you intended for me.
>
> Capt. Belville: Why —as to that—
>
> Rosina: I understand you, Sir; your compassion does not extend to *old* women.
>
> Capt. Belville: Really—I believe not. (I, 1)

Rosina exposes Belville's hypocrisy by making him admit that his intention has never been to be charitable. He only offers her the money because of her beauty (and, although he does not say it, because he wants something in return). He regards Rosina's looks as a commodity that he can buy if he finds the right price. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, this perception of a woman's beauty being her only financial asset frequently comes up in the context of marriage. However, most plays with a marriage plot concern middle- or upper-class women. Brooke transfers the plot to a working-class community instead. This gives her a very visual opportunity to demonstrate that beauty is not Rosina's only way of supporting herself. She is a woman who works for her living, and makes her own money this way. It is significant that Rosina is literally in the middle of her work when Belville propositions her; she is holding the corn she has gleaned while he tells her she should not work. This physical evidence puts Rosina in a position of strength. She does not need charity, and she does not need to trade anything of hers for money. In a sense, this gives her an advantage over middle- and upper-class heroines, who usually do not have a profession to fall back on.

Indeed, for most of the play Rosina is more concerned with her work and supporting her mother than with anything else. It is only at the end, when she marries Mr. Belville (the Captain's brother), that she turns into the stereotypical romantic heroine who blushes when speaking to him (II, 2). Also in the last scene, it is revealed that Rosina's father was of the same social class as the Belvilles, and that Dorcas, her mother, adopted her. This makes her the social equal of her future husband. While this is a happy ending for the characters, and promises future equality between the married couple, in terms of Brooke's representation of working women it is problematic. It is almost as if Brooke could imagine working-class Rosina as the independent farm worker, but not as the married lady whose husband owns the land. It also undermines the elements of realism in the play. While the fairytale-like quality is partly there from the beginning (*Rosina* is after all a comic opera with many musical numbers), the scenes in which the characters talk about their life and work on the farms introduce a degree of reality. The ending, with its fairytale-like quality, contradicts this. While the trope of the poor, lower-class girl marrying a rich man was certainly not unusual nor unpopular (the same thing happens in Richardson's *Pamela*, for instance), it seems at odds with what Brooke is trying to do in the rest of the play. As I have established previously, female playwrights frequently had to adhere to the traditional happy ending of marriage and conflict resolution when writing comedies, even when the rest of their play contradicted it. It is likely that Brooke is doing the same here, although it has to be said that *Rosina* is not opposed to or sceptical of romance throughout, unlike, for instance, some of Inchbald's plays. But the slight mismatch between the focus of the play and the sudden revelation of its ending do point towards Brooke writing the marriage ending almost automatically - she has made her point in the rest of the play, and is therefore happy to keep the traditional resolution. Even in a genre like comic opera, where the audience would have expected only entertainment and songs, it was possible to include real-world issues as long as it was done in a relatively cautious way. That Brooke focused on the financial aspects of Rosina's life is not surprising, as Brooke herself was very conscious of the need to earn a living. Even though her husband was a clergyman and they therefore had an income, she insisted on taking on literary projects that would enable her to make money herself. In a letter to her bookseller, James Dodsley, she writes:

> In any future publication I will take care you shall not lose; I will share the profit or loss of the history; & if, in any other, you disapprove that mode, we will not fix the price till what I write has been six months publish'd. I have thots *[sic]* of writing for the theatre, after the hist. is finish'd; but it is difficult to get things done: if I succeed that way, I shall give up all others, as I like it best; in that case you know the price is always fix'd.[191]

Her keen awareness of the literary marketplace, and her preference for the theatre because it was more likely to profit financially shows Brooke as a thoroughly practical writer. She was not someone who could be accused of writing only as a genteel pastime. She presented herself as a professional writer, and expected to be appropriately paid for her work. That is probably also why Garrick's sabotage of her translation agreement with Riccoboni stung so much - it was a profitable project, and she had expected both financial and professional success from it.

Brooke's staging of farm work in the context of a comic opera is unusual; but while *Rosina* may be the most extensive representation of women at work during this time, it is not the only one. Other playwrights also include characters working or speaking about their work. The first act of Burney's *The Witlings* is entirely set in a milliner's shop. Most of the dialogue is concerned with the private lives of the main characters, but there are lines that refer to the women working there and the kind of products they make (I, 1). Cowley's *Who's the Dupe?* includes Mr Doily, who has made his money through trade, and his daughter Elizabeth's mantua maker, Mrs Taffety. Elizabeth's lover Granger occasionally dresses up as Mrs Taffety in order to have secret meetings with her (I, 2). The choice of disguise shows that dressmaking was exclusively a female profession, and also how common it was for a woman to visit another woman's house in order to make dresses for her. Elizabeth's father looks down on the supposed mantua maker, mostly for her social pretensions:

> Charlotte: Lord bless me, sir! I dare say she can't come again to-morrow. Such mantua-makers as Mrs. Taffety won't wait half-a-dozen times on people. Why, sir, he comes to her customers in a chair of her own; and her footman beats a tattoo at the door as if she was a countess.

[191] 'Letter from Frances Brooke to James Dodsley, 1769', qtd. in Schellenberg, *Professionalization of Women Writers,* p.1; Brooke is referring to her *History of Emily Montague* (1769).

> Doily: A mantua-maker with her footman and chair! O lud! O lud! I should as soon have expected a duchess in a wheel-barrow. (I, 2)

This exchange tells us that dressmakers had an uncertain social status; on the one hand, if they were popular, they could afford quite a lavish life style, and were probably seen as privileged because of their access to the houses of the nobility. On the other hand, they were still working women, and therefore classed in the same category as servants. Doily's comment shows that, even though he himself is not from a wealthy family, he regards himself as superior to dressmakers.

The question of domestic servants, and which professions exactly fell under that description, is a complicated one, and can therefore only be addressed very briefly in this thesis. It is however important to note that domestic servants were an integral part of eighteenth-century stage comedies. The servant characters are easy to overlook both because they are so ubiquitous, and because they are almost never the main characters. Once again, Brooke's *Rosina* and *Marian* are exceptional in this regard, as both their main characters are working-class. Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* has Paulina, a romantic heroine who is a domestic servant, although it is arguable that she shares the title of main female character with Alexina, who is a countess. Since every genteel heroine has at least one ladies' maid, the maids become a kind of necessary accessory. The maids have very little character development, and are therefore frequently interchangeable and indistinguishable. Mostly, they serve as a foil to the main romantic heroine. In order to accomplish this, they often have to be petty, mean-spirited, or licentious in order to emphasize the main character's generosity and virtue. This has led some critics to conclude that eighteenth-century drama is consistently bad at representing servants. Bridget Hill in her book *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (1996) for instance writes, 'There is nothing new in the way in which the drama of the period represents servants. They are invariably found as comic, ignorant, and dishonest characters - a butt for the wit of their superiors'.[192] This description puts them on a par with Shakespeare's clown characters, who are intended to provide comic relief. However, while Hill's assessment may be broadly true, there are characters that do not fit her description. And even the ones that do fit it at first glance can still give important insights into both gender and social rules. Shakespeare's clowns are, after all, often the most philosophical of

[192] Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domestics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 2.

his characters. Sophia Lee's *Chapter of Accidents*, which I have already discussed in the previous chapter, features servants quite prominently. Jacob, who is the main female character's manservant, falls firmly into the category of the stereotypical comic servant. He not only does not really understand important plot developments, but he speaks in an extremely exaggerated dialect which sometimes verges on being incomprehensible. For example, 'Thee'st good luck, faith! wish, no odds to thee, my fortin ware as good! but theed'st *always* a muortal good notion of wroiting and cyphers, while I don't knaw my own neame when I do zee it' (II, 2).

This quote also emphasises his illiteracy, which has no bearing on the rest of the play. It is only intended to show that he is decidedly not as clever as the other characters. However, in this scene he is speaking to Vane, who is Lord Glenmore's manservant. Vane normally speaks in the same register and with the same vocabulary as his employer; but in order to get information from Jacob, he adopts a similar accent: 'Yes, yes, I shall certainly make one among you, — either then or before; [Aside.] — but now I must goa and give this geame to zquire - zquire - what the dickens be his neame! I do always forget it' (II, 2). The clear change from his way of speaking in the aside to his demeanour when he talks directly to Jacob shows that he is playing the role of the rustic, forgetful servant because it serves his purpose. There is no doubt that Lee implies some servants really are like Jacob; but Vane's cunning assumption of the disguise hints that perhaps some of them are actually articulate and in charge of directing the plot in a certain direction. Vane is usually linguistically indistinguishable from the people he works for - unless, as in this example, he chooses to fabricate a difference.

The heroines' maids normally fall into the same category: Charlotte in *Who's the Dupe?,* Minette and Inis in *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*, and Flora in *The Widow's Vow* are all examples of maids who are indistinguishable from their mistresses by their language. The audience only knows that they are domestic servants because of the way they address other characters, and because they refer to their work.[193] Flora, for instance, begins the play by saying 'I can't go at present, Mr. Jerome, for I expect my Lady every moment to ring, and if I should be out of the way she will be angry; and as I am but new in her service —' (I, 1). In

[193] Presumably they would also have been distinguished by their costume, but since there are very few descriptions of specific costumes this is difficult to ascertain.

terms of the plot, this is only a set-up that allows Jerome to explain that the Countess is never angry with women, and why this is so. If we look at it from Flora's point of view however, this scene is about her anxiety over keeping her new job, and making a good impression. It also reminds us that, for the majority of the play, characters like Flora and Jerome are at work. While it is rare they are actually shown doing any work-related tasks, the events of the play take place during their working day. Flora is continually prepared to attend the Countess if she wants something, and unlike other female characters who may be friends or relatives, she does this because she has been hired to do so. This means that her relationship to the main female character has an extra dimension: while servants can be either the friends or the antagonists of the heroine, they are also her employees. Like Flora, they have to be concerned with not being dismissed, or at least getting a good reference if they are. For other characters, getting along with the main character primarily influences their romantic or social prospects. For servant characters, it is their livelihood that is potentially at stake. They do not just have a personal relationship with their employer, but also a professional one. Hill writes that the professional side of service was becoming increasingly more important, as 'During the eighteenth century - if not before - the old paternalistic relationships between masters and servants was giving way to a stricter contractual one.'[194] Flora and Rosina (who are not the only examples of domestic servants) are defined primarily by their occupations. They both draw attention to their duties, and to the fact that their work is essential if they want to support themselves. Rosina's insistence that she is a worker capable of making her own money is reminiscent of Inchbald's pointed reminder to Colman Jr. that she is a professional writer fulfilling a contract.

In this way, the master-servant relationship mirrors the patron-writer relationship discussed earlier; there was more emphasis on professionalism and the financial aspects of employment. It is possible that women writers were especially aware of this parallel. Firstly, they were engaged in a discussion about what it meant to be a working woman. Secondly, women and servants were often so closely associated that little distinction was made between them. Hill argues that 'Wives, children, and servants were all in the same category of those owing complete obedience to the head of the household. Some husbands denied their wives any control over servants, and made little distinction in their treatment of

[194] Hill, *Servants*, p. 5.

either'.[195] Domestic servants, like women, were considered to belong in the private sphere. Earlier in the century, Daniel Defoe in his novel *Roxana* (1724) had written that marriage was 'to be, at best but an upper servant'.[196] In other words, women might have been in charge of their domestic servants, but they, in turn, were considered to be 'in service' to their husbands. This was primarily a female issue because most domestic servants at the time were women. The 1851 census reported that 'there were 905,000 female domestic servants in Britain as compared with 134,000 males. [...] Of these females, 40 per cent were under nineteen years of age, and 66 per cent under twenty-four'.[197] There was no such census taken in the eighteenth century, but it is likely that the figures would have been similar. John Fielding wrote in the *London Chronicle* in 1758 that,

> the infinite variety of professions, trades, and manufactures joined to the army navy and services, leave few men idle, unless from choice; whilst women have but few trades, and fewer manufactures to employ them. Hence it is, that the general resource of young women is to go to service.[198]

The scarcity of available professions for women also explains why working women in plays of this time are usually either domestic servants or milliners, as there was not much else they could have done. Most of the women writers discussed here were middle-class and (at least at some point in their lives) wealthy enough to employ servants of their own. At the very least, they would have encountered servants at their friends' houses, and at the theatres. It is therefore unsurprising that their plays feature domestic servants; it is surprising that they rarely discuss the master-servant relationship in any detail. There are small reminders that servants exists and that they are, frequently, working women. But there is no play that makes this a major part of the plot. It is a female issue that is only superficially represented by female playwrights. While it is not true that all servant characters are 'invariably found as comic, ignorant, and dishonest characters',[199] they are decidedly underrepresented given how much of the population, and of the audience, actually worked in service. It may be that this is an unintentional oversight, that female playwrights considered servants as much as

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[195] Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-century England* (London and New York: Routledge,1989), p. 146.
[196] Daniel Defoe, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (London: Warner, 1724), p. 157.
[197] *Census of Great Britain*, *Population tables, Vol. I* (London: Clowes and Sons, 1851), p. cxli.
[198] John Fielding, *London Chronicle,* 1758, ctd. in Hill, *Women, Work & Sexual Politics,* p. 157.
[199] Hill, *Servants*, p. 2.

'part of the furniture' of a play as they were frequently considered in real life. They may also have thought that the audience would not be interested in seeing this kind of representation. Servants definitely attended the theatre,[200] but would they have wanted to see their daily working life shown on stage in detail? After all, female domestic servants in the audience were unlikely to have identified with the minor background characters of the play. They, like everyone else, were meant to identify with the romantic heroine. Making the heroine a working-class woman would have been a risk, as it could conceivably have alienated the genteel part of the audience, who had distinct class-based ideas about what was appropriate for the stage and what was not. This part of the audience were also the people who had money - they contributed to subscriptions, they bought expensive tickets; as mentioned in Chapter One, wealthy female theatre goers could be a major source of support for female playwrights. It is not unlikely then, that having a working-class heroine was simply too risky for most playwrights. Only Brooke decided to take that step, and she did it at a time in her career when she was already an established writer. Mostly, female playwrights only hinted at the lives of working women, just as they rarely featured their own profession as a major part of their plays. Nevertheless, it is clear that the characters of both servants and women writers often kept the plots of these plays running. Frequently, they did so in the background and unacknowledged; and that, perhaps, was the most realistic representation they could have been given.

In the eighteenth century, the perception of women writers underwent a change, even if that change was not always obvious on the theatre stage. Women had to define themselves as professionals, not just to others, but to themselves. This self-definition was most obvious in their personal and critical writing. For some, like Cowley and Baillie, it included setting out a new vision of what the British theatre's purpose was and should be. For some, like Griffith and Inchbald, it meant reinventing literary criticism, and finding a uniquely female way of writing in order to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. In order to do this, they had to critically engage with other writers such as Behn and Centlivre, and decide if they wanted to emulate or distance themselves from them. They made great progress in the field of theatre criticism, where women's contributions progressed from Montagu's cautious imitation of established critics to Inchbald's confident comments in *The British Theatre*. On

[200] As evidenced for example by the footmen's revolt of 1737, in which they protested being banned from the Drury Lane galleries.

the stage, women found ways of representing female authors, and providing a counter voice to the rather unflattering portrayals their profession had received in male-authored plays. In this context of reinvention, it is of course important to mention the Romantic writers of the time. Female authors were not the only ones to find a new style of writing. At the end of the century, what we now call the first generation of Romantic poets emerged. From a female-focused point of view, this complicates things. The success of those poets, and the amount of critical writing about them, has led to the last decades of the eighteenth century being defined by Romanticism. However, even though they were writing at roughly the same time as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake, female playwrights had little in common with them. Their focus was on entirely different things; they did not define themselves as the solitary genius which became the symbol of Romanticism. Playwrights, by the nature of their profession, had to be social, because writing a play cannot be done in isolation. But female playwrights particularly were particularly interested in human relationships, and the workings of society. They were attempting a redefinition of their own place in that society, both as professional playwrights and as women. In short, as Schellenberg notes, the '"Romantic" model of the author' as a solitary genius clashed with what women were trying to achieve.[201] The solitude of the Romantic poet is at odds with women's focus on social issues; and while male Romantic writers also wrote about morality, theirs was usually an introspective view of it. Works like Wordsworth's *The Prelude* are concerned with the writer's own personal development, not with the recognition of a whole section of society. Unfortunately for female playwrights, readers of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century favoured the idea of the author as the solitary Romantic genius. As a consequence, these women's work was devalued when the Romantic ideal became the more prominent one. Therefore, to label them as part of the Romantic movement, or even to compare them with Romantic women writers such as Mary Shelley, would be to misrepresent them. They were writing in an entirely separate strain of literature, and embodied a separate idea of what it was to be an author. Sadly, their way of writing was termed less valuable in the following century, and has only recently been rediscovered. Their insistence on writing about women's work, in however small a way, can be interpreted as their way of bestowing value on themselves. By putting different kinds of female professions on the stage, and defining themselves as female authors and critics, they insisted on their work being valued and

[201] Schellenberg, *Professionalization of Women Writers,* p. 14.

rewarded accordingly. They also insisted on the female virtue of working and contributing to society. While this representation was by no means perfect, it was a major step away from women writers being defined as 'lady authoresses' and instead being acknowledged as 'authors'.

Having examined women's increasing presence in the professional literary world, I will now look at their engagement with contemporary politics. Of course, their insistence on making a place for themselves on the stage can already be regarded as a political act. However, in order to show that while women were overwhelmingly writing domestic comedies, they were very much politically aware, it is necessary to see them interacting specifically with political events of their time.

Chapter Four: Women and Politics

Politically speaking, the late eighteenth-century was a challenging time full of upheavals. The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), the French Revolution in 1789, and the Irish Rebellion in 1798 all contributed to an atmosphere of change and shifting power dynamics. At the same time, George III's mental health frequently prompted questions about the state of the British royal family, and his succession. In London itself, attention was drawn to potential corruption in the government of the British colonies by the Warren Hastings trial, spanning seven years from 1788 onwards. The country was also forced to examine its relationship with its colonies by the growing public support for the abolition of transatlantic slavery; in particular, the legal case of James Somerset in 1772 and the publication of Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, or *Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789), brought the realities of slavery home to Britain.[202] Because literature has always reflected the political realities of its day, it should come as no surprise that plays written at this time were heavily influenced by these events. Julia Swindells has written about a 'startlingly direct relationship between theatre and the political life of the period', which she sees as resulting in a 'perhaps unsurpassed interconnectedness of theatrical and political activity'.[203] I have already demonstrated that female playwrights participated in contemporary debates, and given the close connection between political events and the public stage, it is unsurprising that women wanted to contribute to that 'interconnectedness'. This chapter, therefore, features a detailed analysis of the representation these political issues received on the stage, and how female playwrights overcame the common perception that women should be ignorant of politics.

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[202]See Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 98.

[203] Julia Swindells, *Glorious Causes: The Grand Theatre of Political Change, 1789-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 138.

The Sword of Peace: Mariana Starke's colonial politics

As already established in Chapter One, the Licensing Act of 1737 technically limited playwrights' choices of topics to represent on stage. The Act was introduced to prevent inflammatory political content in plays, and to give the Examiner of Plays an opportunity to alter or entirely ban plays that did not conform to those rules. This has contributed to the view of late eighteenth-century plays as apolitical. However, in reality playwrights constantly mention political issues, and especially contemporary concerns, in their writing. The stage legislation put them in a strange position: writers frequently represent political content, while simultaneously denying that it is political. A prominent example of this is the prologue to Mariana Starke's play *The Sword of Peace* (1788). This comedy is heavily concerned both with Britain's colonisation and rule of India, and the impact of slavery on individuals. Nevertheless, its prologue, written by George Colman, claims,

> To India, then, our Author wafts you now,
> But not a breath of politics, I vow!
> Grave politics wou'd here appear a crime,—
> You've had enough, Heaven knows! all winter time. ('Prologue', pp. 6-7)

This section directly contradicts the actual content of the play; it also refers directly to political events happening at the time. Given that the prologue specifies the winter of 1788 as a politically eventful time, the assumption is that the writer is referring to Warren Hastings' impeachment, which took place on February 13. Hastings had been governor of Bengal from 1773 to 1784. Bengal had been Britain's first major conquered province in India, and Hastings' career had highlighted the problems of governing such an expansive country and trying to impose Britain's values and government systems on it. After his return to England, Hastings was impeached and eventually tried over allegations of misconduct and taking bribes during his time as governor. It was a high-profile case, not least because of the involvement of Edmund Burke as the prosecutor. While Hastings was eventually acquitted, the prolonged trial was much on people's minds, and brought attention to British relations

with its territories abroad.[204] Thus, the prologue tells the audience this developing political issue is irrelevant to the play, while simultaneously reminding them of it. The line about *The Sword of Peace*'s Indian setting only serves to reinforce the connection. It is therefore safe to assume that the disclaimer of 'not a breath of politics' is only a formality; it ensures that the play technically observes the rules of the Licensing Act, but it is unlikely that anyone in the audience could have seen this play and not realised that it is deeply engaged with both political and moral issues.

The Sword of Peace, which was first presented at the Haymarket theatre under Colman's management, is the story of Eliza and Louisa Moreton. The cousins arrive on the coast of Coromandel in India (part of the British-governed territories of Bengal) together, though they have different motives for travelling there: Eliza's lover Edwards has been sent to India by his parents because they felt she was an unsuitable match for him, and she wants to reunite with him. Louisa has been asked by an English gentleman to find the sword which belonged to his son who died in India. While trying to accomplish these aims, they are drawn into the political and social issues of the province, which is under English government. The governor and his mistress, Mrs. Tartar, are selfish and dismissive of Indian culture, and pay very little attention to matters outside their home. Mr. Northcote, on the other hand, is constantly trying to improve relations between British and Indian residents, and is well-known for his charitable deeds. The Moreton's servant Jeffreys, meanwhile, strikes up a friendship with Caesar, a black slave, whom he eventually frees. It is worth noting here that Caesar is also the slave name given to Oroonoko in Aphra Behn's 1688 novel. This may be a coincidence, but given female playwrights' awareness of Behn as their predecessor, it may be a deliberate reference on Starke's part. While the overall plot conforms to the standards of a romantic stage comedy, this is not Starke's primary concern. Both the principal female characters get married at the end (Eliza is reunited with her fiancé; Lousia marries Lieutenant Dormer, who had been in possession of the sword she was searching for). But these marriages do not simply establish personal connections between the characters. In the process of bringing about the Moreton's romantic successes, Starke also suggests solutions

[204] See P.J. Marshall, 'Warren Hastings, British Colonial Administrator' in *Encyclopedia Britannia*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Warren-Hastings> [accessed 10 December 2017]; *The History of the Trial of Warren Hastings, Esq. Late Governor-General of Bengal* (London: Debrett, Vernor and Hood, 1796).

for a better understanding between different nationalities, and a fairer system of government. She therefore uses the traditional framework of romance and sensibility to comment on contemporary political issues and make specific suggestions for their improvement.

Of particular interest is Starke's focus on slavery. Caesar is given quite a prominent role, and his discussions with Jeffreys about the nature of freedom challenge both characters' conceptions about their respective positions. At the beginning of the play, Jeffreys has a very narrow view of slavery - he seems to regard it as easy work:

> Caesar: Ah, Massa! you tink ve poor blacks know noting, but me can feel - me slave! *(Shakes his head and sighs.)*
> Jeffrey: Why an't you fed, cloth'd, and kept to do nothing? what wou'd you have more?
> Caesar: Yes, Massa; der is my lady's fine bird I do de same by — but if I leave de cage door open — ah, vil he no fly avay? but no talk of dis — it make me sick here. *(Points to his heart.)* (II, 1)

Jeffreys only considers the physical aspects of Caesar's situation, but is quickly reminded that, while he may be in a comparatively better place than other slaves, he is still not free. Caesar's comparison of himself to a captive bird reminds us that he is kept as a sort of accessory, a status symbol. A later scene reinforces this impression, as Starke provides detailed stage directions for a party:

> *Mrs. Garnish, with her natural brown Complexion, her dark Hair dressed out with a Number of Jewels, and her whole Dress as fine, and overloaded with Finery as possible in the Indian Stile, lolling in her Chair, holding her Cards, and a black Slave standing by her playing them for her as she speaks them, or points to them; taking up her Tricks, shuffling and taking up the Cards, and dealing for her. Another Slave by the side of the other Lady does the same for her. [...] The other Lady the Colour of Yarico. [...] Some tables with no Blacks attending, to show it is the Distinction of Consequence*

> *and Grandeur; and the Blacks who thus attend must be dressed finer and with more Attention than the others.* (III, 2, stage directions)

This section clearly shows Starke pointing out the vanity of owning slaves just to impress others. For ladies like Mrs. Garnish, they are simply part of her 'Finery', a way to present herself as superior. Starke is thus taking away any possible arguments that slavery is practical because it provides a workforce: none of these slaves are there to do actual work. They are doing things their owners could very easily do themselves, but choose not to because of their own idleness and pressure from their peers. The play's presentation of slaves as a kind of ornament very closely parallels them with upper- and middle-class women. They face the same expectations: to be unobtrusive and submissive, and to serve as a marker of high status and wealth for their 'owners'. In the context of the card party, this is made particularly obvious. Louisa and Eliza Moreton are attending, but have deliberately dressed in a very simple and understated fashion; Mrs. Garnish openly dismisses Eliza's appearance: 'I pertest I never seed a more meaner figure in all my born days, not I — why she hasn't a jewel or a pearl about her whole dress' (III, 2). In an earlier scene Eliza expresses her distaste at being asked to dress up for parties, because this convention is solely designed to advertise her status as a eligible woman, in being 'oblig'd to be dress'd up in grand gala, stuck on a Sopha, at the upper end of a room, for three nights running, to be view'd at will – as who should say – *what d'ye please to buy, gentlemen?*' (I, 1) The Moretons' simple dress during the card party is therefore a deliberate protest against this expectation. Eliza and Louisa also emphatically do not sit on sofas playing cards like the other women, but are instead dancing and walking around engaging in conversations. They resist objectification by controlling their own appearance and being active participants in the party, rather than passive accessories. Of course it is important to note that they can make this choice because they come from a privileged background. Neither of them needs to attract a wealthy husband - Eliza already has a fortune, while Louisa will receive hers when she returns the sword to England. Interestingly, the other female characters in this scene are in some ways controlled by the same objectifying system, even if they at first appear to be its main proponents. It is not just their slaves who are dressed up in order to show their status. This similarity, and the way the ladies and their slaves seem to play their cards almost as one person, highlights that there is not as much difference between them as they would like to pretend. Jeanne Moskal has pointed out that 'Starke reinforces the connection between the

marriage market and slavery by placing Mrs. Tartar as the head of both systems'.[205] As the Resident's mistress, Mrs. Tartar sets the tone for the province's upper class, and her attitudes towards eligible women and slaves appear indeed to be very similar: she regards them both as potentially useful to further her own reputation. At the same time, she herself is not separate from the system. She has made an alliance of convenience (and greed) too, and the play shows that neither she, nor the Resident, are very happy with the bargain.

It is also noteworthy that Starke describes one lady as '*the Colour of Yarico'.* This is a reference to Colman the Younger's play *Inkle and Yarico* (1787); Yarico is a West Indian woman who falls in love with Inkle, an English trader. He considers selling her into slavery, so he can make a financially advantageous marriage, but eventually decides against it and stays with her. Starke's mention of the play is therefore especially interesting in this context, since it emphasises the fine line that separates the carefully dressed-up women from their equally dressed-up slaves. And even though Starke's portrayal of the ladies in this scene is relatively unsympathetic, their comparison with Yarico, a romantic heroine, elicits some degree of empathy and pity for them. Since there are any number of other ways Starke could have described the woman's skin colour, there is no doubt that this is deliberate on her part. It is designed to show that the card-playing ladies are in a similar situation as Yarico - they are in danger of being bought and sold as well. In Chapter Two, I have demonstrated that Inchbald's *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are* and Griffith's *The Platonic Wife* make a similar comparison between the marriage market and slavery. Starke is therefore not alone in pointing out this parallel between both systems.

It is clear from Starke's play that these women have to take part in the system because they live in it, and their continued wealth and status depends on it. The Moretons, on the other hand, have only just arrived in India, and plan to leave again when they have accomplished their errands. Therefore, they can therefore decide to oppose the marriage market system because they are not dependent on it. Slaves like Caesar do not have the same choice in opposing the slave trade. What Starke shows instead is that British people, such as Jeffreys, do have the opportunity to resist systems that are imposed on them and should make use of

[205]Jeanne Moskal, 'English National Identity in Mariana Starke's "The Sword of Peace": India, Abolition, and the Rights of Women' in Burroughs, Catherine (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 102-132, p. 124.

it. Her play is not primarily intended to give a realistic depiction of the slave trade, but it is meant to appeal to her audience's conscience. In this, she is in line with other abolitionists strategies and concerns. As Carol Bolton has written, 'The long-standing argument of abolitionists was that it was not only Africans who were abused by slavery, but that it was morally detrimental to their "masters", and by extension to those who supported them'.[206] Starke appears to agree with this assumption, because her play seeks to educate both her characters and her audience about the correct moral choices one should make when faced with evidence of the slave trade. Jeffreys, the Englishman who has just arrived in India for the first time, represents that portion of the British populace who have never encountered, or have not thought about, slavery before. At first he is bewildered by it, and unthinkingly participates in the system by accepting the slaves' labour. But as soon as he interacts with and questions the system (by conversing with Caesar), he begins to be more critical, finally rejecting the system entirely (by freeing Caesar). It is made clear in *The Sword of Peace* that this makes Jeffreys a morally better person, as evidenced both by Caesar's freely given gratitude and loyalty, and the part both characters play in bringing about the play's happy ending.

The scenes in which Jeffreys and Caesar interact can be difficult to interpret. At first, it appears as if Caesar is simply a caricature of a slave. He speaks in an exaggerated accent, and is almost relentlessly subservient. When Jeffreys frees him, for instance, he insists on still calling him 'Massa' (III, 1), and he seems to spend most of his time on stage kneeling. However, in his dialogue with Jeffreys it slowly emerges that the purpose of Caesar's character is not to provide a realistic representation of slavery. He functions more as a symbol for all the other slaves, who are mentioned in passing but not represented physically on stage. In this way, his kneeling position may not simply be an act of submission. It also recalls Wedgwood's famous anti-slavery medallion, depicting a kneeling man with the caption 'Am I not a man and a brother?'[207] This image was first produced in 1787, in other words, at the time Starke was writing her play. Due to its wide dissemination, it is not

[206] Carol Bolton, *Writing the Empire*: *Robert Southey and Romantic Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 50.
[207] Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005), Fig. 0.13.

unreasonable to assume that she saw it,[208] or at the very least she and Wedgwood had similar ideas about appealing to their audience's humanitarian instincts. While the image and the language used about slaves is still undeniably patronising, the effect of such images cannot be underestimated. Both Caesar and the Wedgwood figure function as powerful reminders that the victims of slavery are not indistinguishable, faceless objects, but individual humans. Jeffreys at first sees the slaves as a normal part of the household, and is simply annoyed at their inefficiency. But through his acquaintance with Caesar, he begins to see him in particular as a friend, and therefore an equal.

Starke also uses their conversations to reflect on the British perceived value of freedom. Both Caesar and Jeffreys equate being free with being English.[209] After being told of his freedom, Caesar asks, 'I free! I like you! — Am I Englishman?' (III, 1) Interestingly, Jeffrey confirms this, showing that he, at least, considers being English not a matter of nationality or birthplace, but of personal liberty. This definition necessarily throws up some questions. For example, it seems to exclude the women who have married not from choice, but because they were told to do so. Note that Starke specifically uses the word 'Englishmen', not 'English people'. The married women in the Indian province may have been born in England, but their situation means that they cannot be considered entirely free. Jeffreys' exaggerated patriotic feelings, and his strange ideas about what being an Englishman entails, show that his definition of freedom is not only a kind of unthinking patriotism, but is also factually untrue. He describes to Caesar what his rights as an Englishman are:

> An Englishman — ay, he lives as he likes — lives *where* he likes —*goes* where he likes — *stays* where he likes — *works* if he likes — lets it *alone*, if he likes — [starves, if he likes — abuses who he likes — boxes who he likes] — thinks what he likes — speaks what he *thinks* — for, damme, he fears nothing, and will face the devil. (III, 1)

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[208] According to Zoe Trodd, 'The image was hugely popular. In Britain and the USA, abolitionists used the design on broadsides, pamphlet frontispieces and medallions, and citizens purchased decorative objects that featured the pleading black figure, from chinaware to cufflinks', 'Am I Still Not a Man and a Brother? Protest Memory in Contemporary Antislavery Visual Culture', in *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies,* Vol. 34, 2013, Issue 2, 338-52, 340.

[209] 'England' probably being used here to stand for 'Britain' as a whole, but maybe also a comment on English views of Ireland and Scotland.

It is worth noting that the phrases in parentheses are only found in the printed version of the play, and were left out during its representation on stage. It is these phrases in particular that give this speech a much darker aspect, and show Starke indulging in some very black humour. In the stage version, this is only hinted at by a later line in which Caesar questions whether Englishmen have a habit of fighting with everyone (III, 1). Jeffreys' lengthy explanations of the rights of Englishmen have been interpreted by Moskal as 'Starke [taking] the nationalistic stance that only Britons know the proper way to use their liberty'.[210] However, while patriotism is certainly a theme of the play, it would be simplistic to describe Starke as unquestioningly nationalistic. As shown in the quote above, she does not present Jeffrey's life as an Englishman in an entirely positive way, and this is made even clearer later on. In Act 3, Eliza's lover, Edwards, encounters Jeffreys and is surprised to hear that he works for her:

> Edwards: Hey — what — Mrs. Tartar — who do you belong to there?
> Jeffreys: Dear Sir, why to the Miss Moretons. (III, 3)

This exchange reminds us that Jeffreys does not in fact do what he likes and go where he likes - he follows the Miss Moretons' orders. Edwards' question infers ownership, in asking who he 'belong[s] to', aligning Jeffreys less with the other British characters and more with Caesar, who also 'belongs' to someone. Jeffreys' speeches about the absolute freedom he enjoys are therefore more likely to be ironic rather than patriotic. He may believe that he has all the rights he lists, but reality does not live up to his expectations.

In any case, Jeffreys' speech is remarkably optimistic. It implies that he should lead a life entirely free from any consequences. And this attitude is prevalent among the less sympathetic English characters in the play. For instance, the Resident believes he can do what he wants because he is officially in charge; Supple, an ambitious young man who has just arrived in India, believes he can manipulate everyone to get what he wants. They both assume that their status, both as Englishmen and as members of the upper class, gives them the right to use others. In the context of the Warren Hastings trial, in which it was implied that Hastings abused his position of power, Starke raises a very relevant concern: are British

[210] Moskal, 'English National Identity in Mariana Starke's "The Sword of Peace"', p. 123.

people in India aware of the consequences of their actions? Hastings' impeachment, whether it was ultimately justified or not, sent a very clear message that misconduct in the colonies could lead to very public consequences indeed. And accordingly, Starke displays the same message in *The Sword of Peace.* While the Resident and Supple seem to be effectively in charge throughout most of the play, Eliza in particular consistently challenges them on their behaviour, mainly by outright refusing to give in to their demands. The play's happy ending, though it does of course include marriage, consists of delivering some well-earned consequences. By this time, the Resident and Supple have had Edwards arrested, spread a rumour that the Moretons have been poisoned, and tried to keep Louisa from obtaining the sword she has comes to retrieve. These actions have mostly been motivated by the men wanting the two ladies for themselves, both for their beauty and their money. When this is revealed, the Resident is officially replaced by the virtuous David Northcote. His first action as the new Resident is to banish Supple permanently. Earlier in the play, the Resident had disparaged Northcote precisely because of his awareness of the effects his actions have on other people:

> Oh, he'll just suit your ideas, I can tell you, for one can do no business but in he pops his nose to counteract every thing that don't tally with his ridiculous notions about honor, generosity, benevolence, and stuff: [as if that had any thing to do with trade.] (I, 1)[211]

Northcote is focused on the human side of governing India, whereas the Resident, as evidenced by his remarks on trade, is only concerned with the financial side. In her fictional representation of the government of an Indian province Starke appears to be voicing her opinion of the issues brought up by the Warren Hastings trial. Her position is very clear: Northcote's humanitarian approach is rewarded, and the Resident's mercenary exploitation is punished. In early 1788, there cannot have been much commonly known evidence against Hastings; Starke is still concerned to demonstrate the two possible ways a governor of India *could* behave, and what she believes should be the consequences in each case. That she is joining in current political debate is made even more obvious by her emphasis that Northcote is based on a real person. In her *Preface*, she writes:

[211] Again, the parentheses denote words that were left out in the stage version of the play.

> the character of David Northcote is a real one. ---To Indians this is needless: the sketch, however, is not too faint, I hope, for others: it was dictated by a heart glowing with gratitude and admiration of his noble and unbounded goodness! ('Preface', p. viii)

However clear this characterisation may have been to Starke's contemporaries, her sketch is not obvious enough to tell us today who exactly Northcote was meant to represent. A common opinion among critics is to associate him with Lord Cornwallis, who was appointed as governor-general of India in 1786. His strategy was to reform the Indian administration and make it more difficult for officials to profit personally from their employment. While his treatment of the Indian population was not egalitarian, being still marked by a paternalistic attitude, it was as least less exploitative than that of some of his predecessors.[212] If it is the case, as is likely, that Northcote does represent Cornwallis, then Starke is commenting openly on recent political developments in the British colonies. Far from Colman's opening statement that there would be no politics, *The Sword of Peace* really is about very little except politics. Possibly Colman was very well aware of this contradiction, and his Prologue serves as a kind of shield - it stresses that it is not Starke's intention to be political, and any political parallels or inferences drawn from the play are therefore in the audience's own minds. It is a useful strategy, because it would have protected both playwright and manager from accusations of partisanship, or of breaking the rules of the Licensing Act. As Betsy Bolton has pointed out, 'The careers of female dramatists depended on their political innocence or neutrality – yet their plays might well engage political issues within a pose of female domesticity'.[213] That this is the case here is also supported by the play's full title: *The Sword of Peace, or, A Voyage of Love*. The romantic elements of the play are relegated to a subtitle, almost as an afterthought. The main title, with both its military and diplomatic implications, is clearly what stands in the foreground for Starke.

It would be easy to assume that Starke is an anomaly in her presentation of politics on the stage. Having written and published three plays, she retired from working for the stage and turned to the less public and much less controversial occupation of travel writing. Did she

[212] See Daniel O'Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770 -1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 31.
[213] Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage*, p. 39.

face too much criticism for her openly political work to be able to continue her theatrical career? A comment she makes in her Preface to *The Sword of Peace* seems to imply as much:

> A woman, however possessed of genius, wit, vivacity, or knowledge of the world, unless she continues to veil them under the modest, delicate reserve, which should ever characterise her sex, destroys their effects, and renders herself a being pitied by men of sense, envied, yet ridiculed, by every woman of her acquaintance. ('Preface', p. vi)

Perhaps Starke's failure to 'veil' her knowledge of politics made it impossible for her to continue working as a playwright, because she could not present the 'modest', respectable public character that this profession demanded. Whatever her reasons, it is not the case that Starke was alone in her efforts to use plays to comment on politics. We have already seen that female playwrights grew increasingly bolder and more outspoken about gender and their own profession towards the end of the eighteenth century, and this trend is also noticeable in their willingness to discuss politics. Inchbald had taken up the same theme as Starke only a few years earlier, in her play *Such Things Are* (1787), as I will go on to demonstrate.

Such Things Are: Elizabeth Inchbald and Female Virtue

Inchbald also sets her play in a place where Britain had colonial interests, on the island of Sumatra.[214] Like Starke, she also features a philanthropic character, named Haswell. He is investigating the conditions of prisoners, and taking their cases to the Sultan to ask for their release. By doing this, he gradually convinces the Sultan to be more humane, and succeeds in reuniting him with his long-lost lover, Arabella, who had been a forgotten prisoner in the Sultan's own jail. Haswell is contrasted with the other British characters in the play: Sir and

[214] Sumatra had been of interest to the East India Company since the Company's foundation, primarily because of its strategic location and its significance for the pepper trade. The British settlement on Sumatra was not particularly commercially successful, and was primarily maintained to prevent a Dutch monopoly on the pepper trade. It is also likely that European civil servants stationed there used their position to gain financial profits for themselves. See Ellen Filor, 'The Intimate Trade of Alexander Hall: Salmon and Slaves in Scotland and Sumatra, c. 1745-1765', in Margot Finn and Kate Smith (eds.), *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857* (London: Unversity College London Press, 2018), pp. 318-332, p. 319.

Lady Tremor, who are only concerned with their own reputations and spend most of their time arguing with each other; and Twineall, who is essentially a con artist trying to gain their favour. While some elements of the plays are different, the similarities between *Such Things Are* and *The Sword of Peace* are striking. Inchbald's Haswell is also based on a real person, as she tells us in her remarks on the play:

> When this play was written, in 1786, Howard, the hero of the piece, under the name of Haswell, was on his philanthropic travels through Europe and parts of Asia, to mitigate the sufferings of the prisoner. His fame, the anxiety of his countrymen for the success of his labours, and their pride in his beneficent character, suggested to the author a subject for the following pages.[215]

Like Starke, Inchbald is actively and openly incorporating contemporary events and persons into her writing.[216] While writing thinly disguised satires of well-known personalities had of course been a feature of British theatre for a long time, Starke and Inchbald are not using the stage in that way. They are not simply pointing out the mistakes and personal failings of their characters, as is the norm in satire. Instead they are endorsing specific people, and therefore taking a side in specific political and social debates. I have already observed in the previous chapter that female playwrights increasingly used their personal experiences when writing about professional or literary women. These plays show them going even further: they are not just adding personal touches to general observations about society anymore, but declaring their personal support for a specific cause. While Starke chooses negative aspects of society, such as the slave trade and colonial greed as her focus, Inchbald endorses prison reform in *Such Things Are*. Haswell spends a great deal of time in the Sultan's prisons visiting the inmates and learning their personal histories. In doing so, he, and by extension Inchbald, draw attention to the corruption in the prison system. Haswell constantly inquires why the people he meets have been imprisoned, and the answers nearly always show that they have not been treated fairly. In touring the dungeon with the Keeper, it becomes obvious that money is the main factor in whether a prisoner is kept or released:

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[215] Inchbald, *The British Theatre*, p.4.

[216] John Howard (1726-1790) was an English philanthropist and prison reformer, who conducted extensive surveys of prisons both in Britain and abroad. He presented his studies to parliament in order to encourage prison reform, and published his findings in *The State of Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of some Foreign Prisons* (1777). See Tessa West, *The Curious Mr. Howard: Legendary Prison Reformer* (Hook: Waterside Press, 2011).

> Keeper: That man, yonder, suspected of treason, is sentenced to be here for life, unless his friends can lay down a large sum, by way of penalty; which he finds they cannot do, and so is turned melancholy.
>
> Haswell: *(After a Pause.)* Who is that? *(Pointing to another.)*
>
> Keeper: He has been tried for heading an insurrection, and acquitted.
>
> Haswell: What then keeps him here?
>
> Keeper: Fees due to the court — a debt contracted while he proved his innocence.
>
> Haswell: Lead on, my friend — let us go to some other part. *(Putting his Hand to his Eyes.)* [217]

As this passage demonstrates, these men should not really be in prison. One has actually been found innocent, the other is only suspected of being a traitor, a charge that has not been proven. Both of them could have been free a long time ago if they had enough money, or rich friends. Money is also the primary factor in the treatment they receive while in prison:

> Keeper: In the ward we are going to, are the prisoners who, by some small reserve of money, some little stock when they arrived, or by the bounty of some friends who visit them, or such like fortunate circumstance, are in a less dismal place. (II,2)

The respective wealth of the prisoners and their families creates a class divide in the Sultan's dungeon. Some prisoners can literally buy their freedom, while others have no hope of ever escaping because they had no money in the first place, and have no means of obtaining it. For the poorer prisoners, this system creates an impossible double bind in which the one thing that could free them is also the one thing they cannot get. It is not difficult to draw a parallel to British debtors' prisons, in which people would be imprisoned for failing to pay their debts or becoming bankrupt. As in Inchbald's play, prisoners also had to rely on wealthy friends or family to bring them money in order to be released. Inchbald would return to this subject more extensively in 1797 when she wrote *Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are*. This play actually shows a British debtors' prison, in which the two main

[217] Elizabeth Inchbald *Such Things Are* (London: Robinson, 1800), II, 2. [line numbers omitted from text]. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.

female characters are kept for a while. *Wives* also shows the potential for abuse this system contains, as male characters offer to pay for the women's release only in return for romantic and filial submission. Having made it the subject of two of her plays, it is obvious that the prison system was of great interest to Inchbald. It is unclear whether she had direct experience of it herself, but she was definitely familiar with the threat of imprisonment. At the beginning of her acting career, and a short time into her marriage, Inchbald and her husband had severe financial troubles. Having had to return from a stay in Paris due to lack of money, Inchbald 'records, without reserve, that at Brighton they several times went without either dinner or tea, and once went into the fields to eat turnips instead of dining, their funds were so very low'.[218] In light of this anecdote, Inchbald's constant focus on ensuring her own professional and financial success is easy to understand. In general, debtors' prison appears to have been a constant threat to those involved in the theatre, as many actors spent time there at some point in their lives. Sophia Lee famously started writing her play *The Chapter of Accidents* while visiting her father, actor John Lee (1725-1781), in prison. Whether or not Inchbald had any personal experience is therefore not particularly relevant, since the prison was a constant possibility for those without independent wealth. It is this issue that she points to in *Such Things Are,* deftly transferring the problems of British debtors' prisons to a Sumatran dungeon.

One must assume that this transfer occurred partly as a strategy to keep her audience's interest. If Inchbald had written a play about the necessity of British prison reform, it is likely that viewers would have objected, and that newspapers like the *True Briton* would have called her a 'democrat' again. By using the foreign setting of Sumatra, she avoided those issues, and presumably lured her audience to a play that promised exoticism. It would be easy to assume that, since the play is set in Sumatra, Inchbald is portraying the horrors of the corrupt government of an uncivilised, regressive country. Indeed, she has been accused of using exotic locations to portray different cultures as alien 'others'. Mita Choudhury, for instance, has written that 'Inchbald's Orientalism capitalizes upon the most visible Orientalist assumptions, for it is sustained by ridiculing the Other's power, authority, morality, and legitimacy. It is not an intellectual but a populist discourse'.[219] However, a close reading of

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[218] Inchbald, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, ed. by Boaden, p. 68.

[219] Mita Choudhury, 'Gazing at his Seraglio: Late Eighteenth-century Women Playwrights as Orientalists', in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Dec. 1995), 481-502, 492.

Inchbald's plays does not support this view. Instead of 'othering' her Eastern characters and settings, Inchbald actually focuses on the parallels between Sumatra and Britain. This is mainly because her interest does not lie in portraying Sumatran culture, or even, really, in telling an Orientalist story; she intends instead to comment on British culture. Most of her characters are British - most notably, both the hero (Haswell) and the villain (Twineall) of the play have come from England. It is possible that Inchbald is using these two characters specifically to make a point about colonial relations. Haswell represents the humane option, being interested in the welfare and personal freedom of the inhabitants. Twineall clearly sees Sumatra as an opportunity for personal gain, and is ready to exploit everyone to satisfy his greed for money and status.

In this context of colonial greed, it is impossible for Inchbald not to mention the slave trade. Although her treatment of the subject is not as comprehensive as Starke's, she does not ignore the issue. It is first brought up in an exchange between Lady Tremor and Haswell, concerning the Sultan's government:

> Lady Tremor: But, Mr. Haswell, I am told there are many persons suspected of disaffection to the present Sultan, who have been lately, arrested, and sold to slavery, by his orders, though there was no evidence produced of their guilt.
>
> Haswell: In a government such as this, the charge is quite sufficient. (I, 1)

Note how quickly Haswell, the moral conscience of the play, identifies government corruption as the source of the problem. The Sultan's use of the slave trade as a punishment for those who voice opposition to his rule makes it clear that slavery is not a justified or even justifiable endeavour. There is no way of arguing that slaves are needed to supply a workforce, or for economic reasons, when it is so openly declared that being sold into slavery is simply a punishment which benefits only those in power. *The Sword of Peace* has Caesar act as a spokesperson for those who have been sold, in an effort to provide a human perspective on the institution of slavery. *Such Things Are* employs a similar strategy. Zedan, one of the few non-European characters, represents the exploited native population in the same way Caesar does. Zedan is also in the Sultan's prison, where Haswell meets him. At first, Zedan is suspicious of Haswell's motives, and uses his presence in the prison to his own advantage by stealing his pocketbook. He intends to buy his freedom with the money.

However, having observed Haswell's genuine efforts on behalf of the prisoners, Zedan's conscience prompts him to return the pocketbook to Haswell. His behaviour therefore does not stem from any kind of inborn deviousness, but simply from the circumstances he has been put in. Like the other prisoners, Zedan needs money to free himself, but has no legal way of obtaining it. In this, he very much resembles those slaves in the colonies who were offered the theoretical option of buying their freedom, but who were of course not recompensed for their work, making it almost impossible for them to succeed. The system has put him in a position where he has no choice but to steal. However, Inchbald shows that he can overcome his greed once he is treated with kindness and humanity. Unlike villainous characters such as Twineall, Zedan is very capable of behaving virtuously if he is put in a position to do so. This emphasises that far from being 'naturally' immoral and greedy, people like him were forced into such 'bad' behaviour by those who imposed their rule on them.

Zedan reminds the audience that his current status as a penniless prisoner has also been imposed on him; it does not represent who he really is:

> Misery, such as I have known, dealt to men who spurn me - who treat me as if, in my own island, I had no friends who loved me - no servants who paid me honour - no children who revered me.— Taskmasters, forgetful that I am a husband - a father - nay, a man. (II, 2)

Like Starke, Inchbald is not making a direct statement, she is showing the effect of different political approaches. The point of her play is not exoticism. It is to show how British foreign policy affects other people. In a sense, therefore, it has nothing to do with Sumatra itself, and everything to do with her British audience. This is, of course, not unproblematic in itself, because if a play has a particular, explicitly named setting, we might expect the author to represent that setting fairly and realistically. However it is important to remember that, while characters were expected to be realistic, settings in eighteenth-century theatre did not need to be. When writers used a foreign setting, it could either be to add some exotic interest to their story, or, as in Inchbald's case, to provide a mirror for their own society. Billie Melman writes that:

> Women travellers, missionaries and writers did not perceive the oriental woman as the absolutely alien, the ultimate 'other'. Rather oriental women became the feminine West's recognisable image in the mirror.[220]

This is where female authors differ noticeably from male writers. The difference lies in their respective attitudes to their characters, and the goals they wanted to achieve through their writing.

Both male and female playwrights wrote about women (although plays by female writers consistently have more female roles), and both wrote about the British colonies. But if male writers used a colonial setting, it was usually done for one of two reasons. One was to engender patriotic feeling. Following the American and French Revolutions, playwrights could easily gain audience approval by showcasing British military superiority. We can see this particularly well in *Aboukir Bay* (1799) by Richard Sicklemore. While the play is set in Egypt, the entire role of the Egyptian characters is to provide a background for the conflict between the French, who are shown as cruel invaders, and the British armed forces who gallantly rescue the Egyptians from French oppression. The play is based on real events, in this case the Battle of the Nile which took place on the 1st and 2nd August 1798. However, realism, any kind of moral, or character development is decidedly not the author's concern. The only message he intends to convey is that of British military might and pride in Britain's victories abroad. While female playwrights also included patriotic messages in some of their plays (and this aspect is discussed in a later section of this chapter), their patriotism is never this unqualified. I have not been able to find a female-authored play whose sole aim is to provide patriotic sentiment. Of course any play with a colonial setting necessarily engages with ideas about national identity, but women writers were always more critical of accepting and endorsing a nationalistic agenda.

The other reason for male writers to use orientalist elements in a play was to add some exotic interest to the story. This is the case for instance in Colman the Younger's *Inkle and Yarico* and Matthew Lewis' *The East Indian* (1800). For a while, plays set in 'exotic' foreign places were in fashion at the London theatres. We can see an increase in plays with such settings during the 1770s and 1780s, starting with Samuel Foote's comedy *The Nabob*

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[220] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 2.

(1772), followed by such plays as Inchbald's *The Mogul Tale* (1784), Starke's *Sword of Peace* (1788), Thomas Morton's *Columbus* (1792), and Sicklemore's *Aboukir Bay* (1799). Colman the Younger alone wrote at least three plays with orientalist elements, going through Eastern, American, and African settings with *Turk and no Turk* (1785), *Inkle and Yarico* (1787), and *The Africans* (1808). In male-authored plays, this fashion mostly manifested itself in providing a fantasy of what the colonies could offer. This consisted most often of providing an exotic beauty for the main character to fall in love with, and also gave the writer an opportunity to insert magical elements into the story. It was easier to make the audience believe in these elements if the magic was not British in origin; as Inchbald observed about foreign play settings:

> Plays, where the scene is placed in a foreign country, [...] have a license to present certain improbabilities to the audience, without incurring the danger of having them called such.[221]

In Lewis' play *The East Indian*, the main character, Beauchamp, falls in love with the beautiful Zorayda while in India. Her father, Rivers, has made a fortune living there, and comes to England to test the morals of Beauchamp and his friends, to determine who is worthy of sharing his wealth. Eventually, of course, Beauchamp and Zorayda marry, and have a happy (and wealthy) ending. The dramatic trope of a treasure obtained by undisclosed means in a foreign country was common, and provided a fairytale-like aspect. At the end of the play, the hero gets both the girl and the Indian treasure. Female writers of course also write about money; but as I have established previously, they were much more concerned with the practical aspects of it. Who legally owns the money, and what conditions it comes with, are of greater concern to women because they have less legal authority in case of a dispute. They are therefore less likely to show the amassing of wealth in the colonies in a magical and unquestioning way. Indeed, both Starke and Inchbald emphasise that British men often make their money by exploiting others. This is the case for the Resident in *The Sword of Peace*, and it is Twineall's intention in *Such Things Are*. Female writers are also more critical of their women characters, although this may be a side effect of the greater characterisation women receive in female-authored plays, giving them more time to become nuanced characters with faults and flaws. In Starke's play, the 'exotic beauties', while described as

[221] Inchbald, *The British Theatre*, Remarks on Cowley's *Bold Stroke for a Husband.*

attractive and well-dressed, are shown as passive and unquestioning, relying on slavery to maintain their social status. Inchbald adheres slightly more to the stereotype in *Such Things Are*, but not without reservations. Arabella is cast in the role of a fairytale princess, locked up, not in a tower, but in the Sultan's prison. She is shown as patiently accepting her confinement, as she stresses in this conversation between her, the prison keeper, and Haswell:

> Haswell: How shall I mark you down in my petition? *[Takes out his Book.]* What name?
>
> Prisoner: 'Tis almost blotted from my memory. *[Weeping]*
>
> Keeper: It is of little note - a female prisoner, taken with the rebel party, and in these cells confined for fifteen years.
>
> Prisoner: During which time I have demeaned myself with all humility to my governors: neither have I distracted my fellow-prisoners with a complaint that might recall to their memory their own unhappy fate. I have been obedient, patient; and cherished hope to cheer me with vain dreams, while despair possessed my reason. (II, 3)

It is only later that Haswell can prevail upon her to tell him her name and history, at which point it is revealed that she is a European Christian who was sent to Sumatra by her parents in order to make a financially advantageous marriage. Instead, she fell in love with the current Sultan, and was separated from him during the rebellion (III, 2). Arabella is the very picture of Christian suffering and virtue, even asking for another prisoner to be released in her place when Haswell secures her pardon. While this seems like a very conservative characterisation, Inchbald does give us a sense that Arabella goes too far in her determination to sacrifice herself. When Arabella and the Sultan are reunited, the play shows very clearly that, if Arabella had simply stated who she was instead of being silent, she could have spared herself fifteen years of being imprisoned without cause. Equally, the Sultan (who is revealed to have converted to Christianity) has been so caught up in his grief at being separated from her that he has never made any enquiries after her. Instead, he has become a tyrant, determined that his subjects should share his suffering. While Inchbald herself was a devout Christian, she clearly disapproves of this kind of martyrdom. It is up to

Haswell, with his active and determined Christianity, to make them realise that withdrawing from the world to suffer silently is no help to anyone. Inchbald very much champions Haswell's method of engaging with people to find out how he can help them. The passive, suffering Christianity embraced by Arabella and the Sultan is shown to be quite self-centred, causing more harm than good. It is worth noting that in this play, Inchbald does not discuss Eastern religions such as Islam or Hinduism, even though a reader might expect it from the play's setting. This is further evidence that her focus is not on analysing Sumatra itself, but British attitudes to it. That most of her characters are Christian is very dubious if we look for a realistic depiction of the country and its people; but Inchbald was writing for her British audience, who were supposed to draw conclusions from the play for their own lives. It therefore made sense for her to show what she believed British Christians should do, and how they should interact with the world.

In her representation of Christian values, Inchbald's aim is surprisingly similar to Hannah More's. While More's highly moral and not at all sarcastic works otherwise have little in common with Inchbald's displays of dark humour, More also advocated this form of active, evangelical Christianity. The More sisters' efforts to set up schools and female clubs in the Mendips region are a testament to their interest in furthering female education. Although More eventually rejected the theatre as improper for genteel women, this did not mean that she retired from being involved in public life. Anne Stott notes:

> Writing at the end of a decade in which women had entered public life, writing or disseminating political literature, collecting subscriptions, presenting colours to regiments, More had no doubts about the potential political importance of genteel women.[222]

However, More obviously saw women in a secondary role. They were to be helpmeets, aiding men to achieve their goals. Most of the examples Stott lists above, with the exception of writing, are passive actions, casting women in a supporting role. At the other end of the spectrum, Mary Wollstonecraft was calling for women to be active participants, for men and women to have equal roles in public life. In her view, 'Inequality of rank must ever impede

[222] Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 215.

the growth of virtue, by vitiating the mind that submits or domineers'.[223] More and Wollstonecraft both saw women as having a role in improving their society, but More believed there was a natural order to things and that women, especially working-class women, should know and respect their place in it.[224] Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, was 'hostile to hierarchy and injustice of every kind'.[225]

The female playwrights in this thesis tend to occupy a place somewhere in the middle of the two positions held by More and Wollstonecraft. On the one hand, the image of women as the moral 'heart' of society is a definite feature of most plays. The virtue and moral steadfastness of a female character is what frequently brings about a happy ending. Lee's *Chapter of Accidents*, Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault*, and Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* are just some examples of plays that follow this pattern. Crucially, female morality in these stories does not just have a positive effect on the woman herself; it changes her entire community. In Lee's and Inchbald's plays, families are reunited, misanthropes are reformed, and stereotypes are overturned by the women's actions. In *A Day in Turkey*, an entire system of government is changed and slavery abolished because of several virtuous women working together. There can be no doubt therefore that these writers saw female morality both as an appropriate role for women and as a potentially powerful tool. In the absence of government roles or voting rights for women, providing examples of how a moral conscience could have positive effects on contemporary social and political issues was a way for women to have noticeable influence. This was, in a sense, not particularly revolutionary since virtue and morality had been defined as women's proper sphere of influence for some time. However, because of the unprecedented numbers of women writers engaging with this idea in the late eighteenth century, their potential sphere of influence was much larger than it had been before. They were using the public platforms available to them to argue for a more active view of female morality, and their popularity as playwrights meant that great numbers of people listened to their ideas. Because it accords with eighteenth-century gender roles, the importance of women as the conscience of the nation is an issue on which

[223] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 47.
[224] This is obvious in her treatment of working-class poet Ann Yearsley, who was expected to respect More's role as her patron.
[225] Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

both conservative writers like More, and subversive writers like Inchbald and even Wollstonecraft have a common goal.

More could interpret the idea of female virtue as part of a woman's passive, domestic duty, in which 'politics in its broadest sense could not be the preserve of men alone. Home and nation were not discrete entities, and, as keepers of the domestic hearth, women were also the moral guardians of the country'.[226] For Wollstonecraft and other writers, virtue was also necessary for the moral health of a nation. However, their interpretations of what exactly female virtue was, differed. In the eyes of conservative authors, virtue lay in preserving the way things were: different social classes and genders knowing and accepting their respective places, respecting traditions, and acknowledging established authorities. More's sense of virtue as something that should exist passively, behind the scenes, is expressed in her earliest play, *The Search after Happiness* (1762):

> So Woman born to dignify retreat,
>
> Unknown to flourish, and unseen be great,
>
> To give domestic life its sweetest charm,
>
> With softness polish, and with virtue warm,
>
> Fearful of Fame, unwilling to be known
>
> Should seek but Heav'n's applauses, and her own.[227]

But for proto-feminist writers, to be a virtuous woman meant to effect change; to see and point out flaws in the system, to constantly question established norms, and to strive to change the system entirely if necessary. The prologue to Cowley's *Bold Stroke for a Husband* neatly exemplifies this view:

> Could men but see what female sense can do,
>
> How apt their wit, their constancy how true,

[226] Stott, *Hannah More*, p. 225.
[227] Hannah More, *The Search after Happiness, A Pastoral Drama* (Bristol: Bonner and Middleton, 1775), pp. 55-56.

In vain would rakes the married state revile,

Nor with the wanton, precious time beguile.

Such is our aim, to rectify the age,

By bringing rising follies on the stage. ('Prologue', p. 8)

This ambition to 'rectify the age' through 'female sense' shows how progressive writers combined the established ideas about morality as a female trait with their hopes of changing society for the better. In order to do this, they had to be in the public sphere, because they had to convince people that change was needed. Talking about politics and gender in the theatre therefore, became not only a profession, but a duty; if it was the role of a virtuous woman to change things, and she had access to a public forum, then she had to use that opportunity to speak out. We have already seen that Cowley and Baillie saw the theatre as a place of education and learning; by pointing out inequalities and problems in the marriage market, the world of work, Britain, or its colonies, they were hoping to convince their audience that change was needed in all these areas. However, despite having such agency for change, Inchbald appears less optimistic about being able to make a real difference. Her rather cynical view of human nature makes her more inclined to expose human follies, which results in several not-very-happy endings. However, in plays like *Such Things Are*, we can see her whole-heartedly embracing the idea of virtue as a powerful weapon for change. She deviates from the norm slightly, however, by making a male character the moral heart of the story. But Haswell embodies all the characteristics that are usually ascribed to virtuous women: empathy, determination, and selflessness. Inchbald may be using this male character to advocate a more 'muscular' morality for women, because, as mentioned above, Arabella's virtue is of a more selfish nature, since it ultimately helps nobody. In fact the kind of virtue she embodies creates the play's 'problem', with a more active force for good having to resolve the issue in order to bring about the happy ending.

This focus on reforming an entire system or society, which is a frequent feature of eighteenth-century female-authored plays, distinguishes them from those by male writers. Men did not seem to share a comparable overarching theme or goal in their writing. They wrote plays, and specifically plays set in the British colonies, for a variety of reasons. But while some of their stories feature the moral improvement of a single character, or

endorsements of female virtue, there is no sense that male playwrights as a group were writing in an effort to improve the morality of their nation. Women writers certainly agreed with Joanna Baillie's premise that ‘The theatre is a school in which much good or evil may be learned’.[228] It was in the hope of teaching their audiences to, essentially be better people, that female playwrights focused so heavily on morality in their plays. This focus is often held against them, as it can come across as preaching or old-fashioned insistence that every story needs to have a moral. Even in their own time, women were in the difficult position of being expected to be virtuous guardians of morality, but were simultaneously criticised for writing about morality.

We can see an example of this dichotomy in the reaction to Sophia Lee's *Chapter of Accidents.* Lee's play is particularly interesting in this regard because it occupies a place in-between More's and Wollstonecraft's stances on virtue. One of Lee's heroines, Cecilia, conforms to More's expectations of being retiring, quiet, and modest, at least once she has realised her previous error in judgement. However, Sophia, the other prominent female character, is extremely rational and self-assured, making her own choices about marriage and insisting on forming her own opinions. Probably as a consequence of this refusal to adhere to a clearly delineated position on female morality, reactions to the *Chapter of Accidents* varied wildly. Some reviewers were complimentary: ‘The comedy, which has a great deal of good writing, and a number of sentiments that would do honour to the finest pen’.[229] Others objected firmly to Lee's representations of female morality, complaining that the work ‘carries the general marks of a *woman's play*; abounding in much love, much sentiment, great entanglement, but little character and observation’.[230] Both reviews mention 'sentiment' - one interpreting it as a useful and proper subject for a play, the other characterising it as a frivolous distraction which is only of interest to women. Lee herself later wrote about her disappointment at being 'so severely censured by the rigid moralists who directed the newspapers’ (p. vii), showing that many reviewers also thought she was not writing about morality enough. There was therefore no way Lee (or any other woman writer in her position) could win, since critical opinion on what virtue was, and how much display of it was required, was so divided. In contrast to this variety of opinions, female

[228] Baillie, *Complete Poetical* Works, p. 22.
[229] *London Courant and Westminster Chronicle*, August 1780.
[230] *London Evening Post*, August 5-8 1780, Issue 9100.

playwrights seem to have decided that writing about morality, and specifically the positive effects of female morality, was their purpose. How they represented morality, and what they defined it as, was as different as the women writers themselves; but it is an overarching theme that is clearly present in women's works of the time.

In terms of writing about politics, playwrights like Starke and Inchbald could therefore justify it as their moral duty to point out the problems of British colonialism, as well as using the colonial setting to draw attention to issues at home. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, as a reaction to the American, French, and Irish revolutions, this moral duty seems to have included a degree of patriotism. In general, the last few decades of the century show a marked increase in patriotic plays performed on the British stage. Listed in the *Biographia Dramatica* for the 1790s are a great number of plays concerned with Britain, and specifically British military forces. This is only a selection:

205. *Britain's Brave Tars; or, All for St Paul's* Occasional Ent. Acted at Drury Lane, 1797

206. *Britain's Defenders.* Ballet, 1797

207. *Britain's Glory; or, A Trip to Portsmouth* Mus. Ent. Acted at the Haymarket, 1794

220. *British Fortitude and Hibernian Friendship; or, An Escape from France*. Mus. Drama by J.C. Cross, Covent Garden, 1794

225. *The British Recruit, or, Who's Afraid?* Interlude, Covent Garden, 1795

226. *The British Sailor, or, The Fourth of June.* Mus. Int., Covent Garden, 1789

42. *Cape St. Vincent, or, British Valour Triumphant*. Mus. Ent., Drury Lane, 1797 [231]

It is obvious from these titles that, contrary to what the Licensing Act technically demanded from the theatre, it was very much used as a stage for politics and political propaganda. Featuring British soldiers or sailors in a play must have been a very effective way of bolstering public morale and support for the troops, as well as appealing to a great number

[231] David Erskine Baker, Stephen Jones and Isaac Reed (eds.), *Biographia Dramatica*, *or, A Companion to the Playhouse: Containing Historical and Critical Memoirs, and Original Anecdotes, of British and Irish Dramatic Writers, from the Commencement of Our Theatrical Exhibitions; Amongst Whom are Some of the Most Celebrated Actors,* 3 vols (London: Longman et al., 1812), II, p. 67.

of the audience, many of whom presumably had family, spouses, or friends who were associated with the army or navy. I have already mentioned male playwrights' use of patriotism in plays, and many of these titles do suggest a very straightforward appeal to national pride, either because of the writer's own beliefs or simply because it was what the audience wanted. However, female playwrights' relationship with this increasing demand for patriotic content was more difficult. Because women writers had a history of using their plays to criticise issues at home, it was clearly impossible for them to transition into unquestioning patriotism. It would have been contrary to their characters, and also would presumably have alienated some of their audience, who were expecting Inchbald's dark humour or Cowley's social satire. Therefore, the patriotic elements in womens' plays are much more subtle.

A good way for women writers to support the British military while also continuing in their own style of writing was to make the male love interest a soldier or sailor. This compromise ensured that military men were openly supported and presented as eligible matches, but they were also integrated into the structure of the female domestic comedy. When the virtuous heroine marries a soldier, she affirms that he is morally equal to her and therefore shows him to be a good person. But she also asserts her own moral goodness by doing her patriotic duty and choosing an (often less wealthy) military man over a more financially or socially advantageous husband. By doing so, these female characters again contribute to a change in what is considered morally good female behaviour. They are not only trying to make a good marriage, but also one that supports national politics. Marriages like this take place for example in Inchbald's *Every One Has His Fault*, Cowley's *Who's The Dupe?* and *The Town Before You*, and of course Starke's *The Sword of Peace*. This plot device very neatly combines women writers' interest in portraying personal relationships on the stage with their interest in commenting on current political events. In the same way that Austen would later marry Anne Elliot to Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* (1817) without mentioning the Napoleonic wars, marrying the main female character to a soldier was a way of acknowledging politics in a more circumspect manner. It was also a very 'appropriate' method, as it fits into the traditional comedy structure which demands a marriage ending, and the traditionally female sphere of domesticity. If a writer wanted to be cautious of her own professional reputation, therefore, it was an ideal combination.

However, I would argue that these are not the only reasons female playwrights presented their characters like this. As we have seen, some women were very happy to be openly political, and it would seem odd for someone like Inchbald or Starke to be suddenly cautious about mentioning military conflicts. Instead, I suggest, they were being cautiously critical of the wars in the last part of the eighteenth century. The reason they had to be cautious was not because they themselves felt they should not write about their political opinions, but because they were criticising their own country in a time of war. During international conflicts with other countries, it is always more difficult to point out things going wrong at home. As the increasing demand for patriotic plays shows, the public were clearly expecting patriotic support for British efforts against France and other 'rebellious' nations. Accordingly, women writers avoided making these wars a large part of their plays because their tendency to be more critical would have inevitably led to controversy. Given how much the conflict with France especially influenced other British literature of the time, one would expect to see it play a major part on the stage as well. In fact, it is notable how little war itself plays a role in their works. Although they feature quite a number of soldiers and sailors, these characters rarely seem to be in active service, and they are certainly not shown engaging in armed conflicts. The presence of members of the military suggests a war, but the war itself does not appear on stage. An unusual exception to this is Cowley's *A Day in Turkey*, but even there the conflict only takes up the first few scenes and does not reappear afterwards. This is in marked contrast to a play like Sicklemore's *Aboukir Bay*, where the entire plot basically consists of military manoeuvres. *The Sword of Peace* makes this difference most obvious, by using the symbol of male military might, the sword, and expressly transforming it from an instrument of war to one of peace. The sword is not used to fight, but instead brings together an honourable soldier and a virtuous woman. Involving their military characters in the marriage plot, instead of military action, gave female playwrights more room for ambiguity. The heroine's decision to marry a soldier initially establishes him as a positive character whose virtue is rewarded. However, as mentioned in Chapter Two, women writers often subverted the marriage plot in order to point out its restrictions. In some plays, most notably *The Town*, the marriage ending is only superficially a happy one. The woman (in this case Horatia) gets married to a soldier, but while all the other characters are very happy for her, she is silent and passive after having been active and witty throughout the play. The reader feels as if the main female character has been forced into her position as a wife and

the happy ending of the plot by convention and society, rather than choosing it herself. This kind of ending outwardly conforms to the comedy structure, but there is an undercurrent of resistance and questioning in its resolution. It may also indicate that the author similarly felt forced into making a patriotic statement in her writing by her audience and society, rather than by her own inclinations. Cowley's remarks in her preface to *The Town* that it is 'rather the Comedy which the Public have chosen it to be than the Comedy which I intended' ('Preface', p. ix) are quite telling in this context. And indeed this play's ending is very out of character for Cowley. It reads almost as if it was changed at someone's request, because it is incredibly at odds with the rest of the play. Horatia, who has been defined by her occupation as a sculptor, is made to give up her work in order to be a wife. And her future husband Asgill, who has been a relatively quiet and retiring character throughout the story, is suddenly changed into a patriotic caricature. He appears on stage in the final scene in a sailor's uniform, and is given the final speech, which he uses to make a very overblown appeal to the audience's national pride:

> In the glorious tars around me, valour, intrepidity, heroism, shone forth with all their fires; they flashed through my heart! And, I swear, that should my country need my assistance, I will again resume the trowsers, and sail before the mast, wherever she bids her cannon roar, or her proud pendants fly
>
> *(Advancing forward)*
>
> Ah! repose on *us!* And when you look on the gallant spirits, who do honour to this habit, let every fear subdue; for, whilst the sea flows, and English sailors are *themselves*, ENGLAND MUST BE THE MISTRESS OF THE GLOBE! (V, 2)

This speech fits neither with the play or the character itself, nor with Cowley's other writings. While Cowley was probably patriotic in her own way, she was not given to nationalistic statements like this. I would argue therefore that it is quite likely that the ending of the play was not her choice, but that she felt compelled to conclude it in this way. This would help to explain the doubtfulness which is present in this last scene, both about Horatia's future as an artist, and about her marital happiness. Her friend Lady Charlotte remarks to her, 'I declare I should not so easily have forgiven a man *(looking on Asgill)* who could fly from me to the boisterous ocean, and prove such insensibility to beauty and love' (V, 2). Horatia does not

answer, but this line emphasises that she is in danger of not just losing her identity as an artist, but also potentially her husband - in the very next sentence he confirms that he is quite ready to go to sea again, especially if Britain is at war. If he was to die during this military service, he would leave Horatia in a very precarious position without either her husband's support or the income from her profession which she is expected to give up. Therefore, while this may be a happy ending for everyone else, for Horatia herself it does not paint a particularly desirable future. Cowley's own husband was stationed in India for a while (though not as a soldier), so it is very possible that Cowley here expresses some of the anxieties that come with seeing a partner leave home to work in another country. She presents a uniquely female perspective on war by showing the effect it has on the women who are left behind. Asgill makes war sound like an exciting and honourable adventure in his speech, but this is undercut by his suddenly silenced and isolated fiancée standing behind him.

Cowley is not being entirely unpatriotic here, but she is certainly introducing an element of doubt into Asgill's declaration of British military supremacy. Her ability to do this at a time when the audience demanded patriotism shows how much her confidence in herself as an author and as a political commentator has developed. If we compare *The Town* to Cowley's earliest play, *The Runaway* (1776), it is obvious that she has gone from writing a very genteel, gentle comedy to writing a still genteel, but also uncompromisingly honest, portrait of a woman's life in the political and professional world of the late eighteenth century. Because Cowley only developed this directness in her later plays, it is sometimes easy to regard her as relatively apolitical. She is not as cynical as Inchbald, and not as direct as Starke. But Escott rightly comments that 'Cowley's particular brand of sardonic humour indicates sufficient confidence to judge the social and political world, a world from which women were generally excluded'.[232]

I believe that Cowley's personal development reflects a more general trend in the later eighteenth century, in which women writers as a group felt more comfortable with being openly political. While they had always engaged with issues in the real world, it was only in the last decades of the century that plays could use politics as their main feature. Works like *The Sword of Peace*, *Such Things Are*, and *The Town* are no longer really domestic comedies

[232] Escott, *The Celebrated Hannah Cowley*, p. 39.

with hidden political commentaries. They are political texts with a veneer of domestic comedy. All three of these plays still operate under the comedy label, but in all of them the marriage ending is almost an afterthought, the comedic elements are very restrained, and it is clear that the author's interest is not in domesticity but in world politics. Anderson writes that 'Cowley used the romance conventions of stage comedy and the spirit of English nationalism to ground an ideal individual liberty that included her female characters as rights-bearing individuals'.[233] Both the contemporary theatre conventions and the social and political developments of the late eighteenth century combined to produce this unique opportunity for women to engage with politics on a public stage.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of The Rights of Woman* is in a sense the pinnacle of this growth in female political commentary. It is an affirmation that women did have a place in politics, whether their contemporaries necessarily agreed with this or not, and that they were very capable of writing about it. Wollstonecraft's work may have been unprecedented, but it did not develop in isolation. Without more 'genteel' writers like Cowley contributing to the acceptance of female political commentary, I believe it is unlikely that *The Rights of Woman* would have been written and published. Barbara Taylor writes about the 1790s that 'over the course of the decade the "rights of women" progressed from an easily dismissed, almost risible stance - the ne plus ultra of radical extremism - into a widely acknowledged, if highly controversial, element in popular democratic thinking'.[234] It is certainly no coincidence that the last decades of the century were also the point at which playwrights like Inchbald and Cowley were most popular, writing their most successful plays. There was a general interest in a female perspective on the world, one that unfortunately did not last long after the beginning of the next century.

Women writers were certainly aware of this trend, and used it to their advantage. The great number of domestic comedies staged during this time is not a sign that women were particularly interested in domestic themes, but rather that they realised they could use a traditionally 'feminine' genre to speak about politics openly. The late eighteenth-century domestic comedy should therefore be seen as 'domestic' in the national sense - concerned with events happening in the writer's own country. For women especially, this particular use

[233] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy*, p. 144.
[234] Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, p. 177.

of the theatre was very important because they had no other way of participating in politics. Writing and speaking about it was the only thing they could do, and thanks to the audience's unspoken acceptance of political content on the stage, they could do it without much repercussion. During the time of the French Revolution in 1789, the opportunity to use playwriting as political commentary was especially vital. At this time, it must have been almost impossible for a writer in Britain not to engage with politics. Any examination of literature of this time shows that the French Revolution influenced novelists, poets, diarists, painters, and generally artists of any kind. To entirely ignore this influence would have required enormous effort and would probably have marked the writer as out of touch with reality, especially in the theatre, which was expected to reflect reality rather than conceal it. George Taylor writes that, 'throughout this period of cultural crisis, the popular theatre embodied and reflected in many forms not only the material concerns but also many of the wider, less tangible, anxieties of its audience'.[235] We have already seen that the stage reflected anxieties about gender politics and women's roles, as well as colonial issues. At first glance, however, female playwrights appeared reluctant to engage with the French Revolution in particular. Perhaps because it was such a politically and socially divisive event, they avoided commenting in detail or taking a side. None of the female-authored plays staged during that time deal with the Revolution as a main subject. It seems to be the exception to the rule that the theatre reflected current concerns. The events in France were probably the cause of most cultural anxieties in late eighteenth century Britain, and it is therefore strange that they received so little stage time.

'Liberty joined with peace and charity': Reflections of the Revolution

Nevertheless there are of course traces of the effects of the Revolution present in the plays. One of them is the appearance of French characters. While it had been common for a while to use characters of 'rival' nations as a form of comic relief, in the late eighteenth century this carried particular political undertones. Firstly the nationality of these characters

[235] George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789 -1805* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 14.

changed - previously, the Irish had been the most common choice for the stage. Thomas Sheridan's (1719-1788) *Captain O'Blunder* in the 1740s, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) both feature examples of the Irish stereotype on stage. But towards the end of the century it became more popular to make jokes about the French. The subject of popular jokes is always a good indicator of what preoccupies people the most, so it should come as no surprise that this was the case. Cowley, especially, features French characters to great effect. She strikes a delicate balance between using national stereotypes as a joke and referring to political issues at the same time. She does this first in her short play *Who's The Dupe?* (1779). While this play does not feature any actual French characters, one of the British characters dresses up as a French woman. Granger, who is the heroine's secret lover, disguises himself as her French mantua-maker, Mrs Taffety, so he can visit her without being discovered by her father. 'Mrs Taffety' is a slapstick character. The farcical element of a man being forced to dress as a woman, her overbearing personality, and the comedy French accent all ensure that the audience will laugh at her. Her name is also quite telling: it is clearly not really French, but in fact sounds more stereotypically Irish. I believe that this marks the transition from the Irish being the standard comic characters in the theatre of the early eighteenth century, to the French being the most common target in the 1780s and 90s. Mrs Taffety thus combines everything that theatregoers of the time were used to laughing at. However, there is a more complex side to the character. Firstly, she is played by Granger, who is an entirely honourable and decent character. He is the man Elizabeth marries at the end, choosing him over Gradus, her pretentious other suitor. Granger is also a soldier. At the very beginning of the play, it is made clear how principled he is. He has been offered a position in the East India Company which is guaranteed to make him rich; but he has turned it down because:

> I can fight *(mimicking);* but I can't grow rich upon the smell of gunpowder. [...] to-day mowing down ranks of soft Beings, just risen from their Embroidery; to-morrow, selling Pepper and Beetle-nut —this hour a Son of Mars, striding over heaps of slain; the next an Auctioneer — knocking down Chintz and Callico to the best bidder. (I, 1)

His vehement refusal to take part in the colonial greed of some of his countrymen sets him apart from the more selfish characters in the play, such as Gradus. Granger is thus always presented as an admirable character, and while this trait is somewhat overshadowed by his

comical portrayal of Mrs Taffety, it never completely disappears. As a consequence, the audience does not just see the ridiculous French mantua-maker, but also the honourable British soldier. Even when Granger is in disguise, he uses his persona to support the heroine, Elizabeth's, moral judgement. When Gradus tells her that women in ancient times were much more virtuous because they did not receive an education and spent their time in the house weaving and spinning, Granger (as Mrs Taffety) warns her: '*En vérité, Madame!* If you marry dis Gentilhomme, he will make you spin his shirts, dat he may become de Fader of young Emperors' (I, 2). He not only objects to Gradus' attempt to domesticate Elizabeth, but also points out his plan to set himself up as the sole ruler of the household. That the supposedly French Mrs Taffety is concerned about future 'Emperors' who might result from such an attitude is particularly fitting.

The most obvious instance, however, of Cowley's interesting use of French characters occurs in *A Day in Turkey*, where A La Greque is a prominent figure. He has left France during the Revolution to become valet to Count Orloff, and is consequently captured alongside him and brought to Turkey. There, he does his best to avoid work and spy on the women in the harem. A La Greque very much plays into the common stereotype of French men as effeminate, idle, and lecherous. His behaviour and comically-accented English are an easy (and frankly quite lazy) way of inserting slapstick comedy into a play that otherwise deals with some very serious issues. However, he also serves another function: he is a constant reminder of the French Revolution, which, in the context of the play, has just happened. Because he is such an overdrawn character, who frequently behaves and speaks inappropriately, he is very difficult for the audience and the other characters to ignore. The duality of his function becomes most clear in this exchange between Azim and Lauretta:

> Azim: The new French slave—Frenchmen, there is no being guarded against.—They make free every where.
>
> Lauretta: At least they have made themselves free at home! and who knows, but, at last, the spirit they have raised may reach even to a Turkish harem, and the rights of women be declared, as well as those of men. (V, 1)

Azim voices the common cliché, with the phrase 'make free' implying that A La Greque has little respect either for other peoples' property or women. Lauretta instantly chooses to

interpret the phrase in a different way, emphasising that the French Revolution was based on principles of freedom and equality, and has liberated people from the rule of the aristocracy. She also relates the events in France to her own situation, and says that the 'making free' has not gone far enough, since it has yet to benefit women and the social structures of other countries. It is unsurprising that both of them have different views of A La Greque. Azim, who is in charge of guarding the harem and therefore quite an authoritarian characters, sees him as a disruptive influence who inconveniences him. A La Greque's refusal to take anything seriously or respect his Turkish captors is a serious fault in Azim's eyes. To Lauretta, who is one of the harem women, he is a reminder that authority figures can be overthrown. At this point in the play, she is actively carrying out her scheme to free everyone from the harem, so the French Revolution is probably an encouraging example to her - if a plan to change the authority system has been successful in France on a national level, there is no reason her own plan should not work on a smaller scale. It is worth noting that this passage was removed in the later edition of the play, probably because it sounded too much like outright support for the Revolution. Nevertheless, it is interesting that these lines were written in the first place, especially as Lauretta/Zilia is the 'playwright/manager'[236] character in the play, and therefore the one who most resembles Cowley herself. It is always difficult to distinguish between a political opinion voiced by a character and the opinions of the author. For female playwrights, using fictional characters as a way of expressing political views was a common defence mechanism, and Cowley in particular was very reticent in expressing her own personal opinions. In this case, however, it is reasonable to assume that Lauretta's words align somewhat with the views of her author. It may be that audiences of the time also made this association, and that this prompted Cowley to remove the line in the later edition. Generally she strikes a balance that does not outright condemn or support the French Revolution. Her French characters are frequently ridiculous, but they also serve to make the audience reflect on important issues. However, they are not the main characters, nor are their stories very influential in terms of the main plot. It is a safe way of engaging with these political issues without alienating any of her audience or colleagues, who may have had strong opinions about them. Her view of the French (and by extension, the events in France) is never entirely negative, but she never writes a play that is entirely about them either.

[236] O'Quinn, 'Hannah Cowley's A Day In Turkey', p. 28.

The only play that is unequivocally about the French Revolution is Inchbald's *The Massacre* (1792). It was, however, never staged or even published during her lifetime. While the massacre of the title supposedly refers to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in France in 1572, it is very obvious to the reader that Inchbald is actually writing about the September massacres of 1792.[237] The timing and setting of the play, as well as the fact that the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre is hardly ever mentioned, heavily imply that the story is really about contemporary events in France. The September massacres, lasting from September 2 to September 6 1792, were a period of unprecedented violence during the French Revolution. France's struggle in the war against Austria and Prussia, combined with internal conflicts about the country's new government, led to increased anxiety and paranoia about treachery. Encouraged by rumours of a counter-revolutionary plot, mobs attacked prisons in Paris, and executed prisoners, often finding them guilty of treason in impromptu courts. By the end of the massacres, over a thousand people had become victims of this violence. It was one of the events that contributed majorly to the opposition against the Revolution in other countries, especially in Britain.[238]

In the play a family, the Tricastins, consisting of husband and wife, their young children, and the husband's father, are in danger of being executed by a revolutionary mob. Most of the play is spent discussing whether they should flee or stay and face the mob, and all of them at some point offer to sacrifice themselves for the others. Eventually, father and son are captured and put on trial. The judge, chosen by the citizens, reveals himself to be a moderate and sensible man who protects them after nobody can offer any evidence that they have committed crimes. The leader of the mob threatens them with his soldiers, but the soldiers also refuse to harm the Tricastins without cause. However, after this incident at the trial, father and son are released to find that Madame Tricastin and her children have been murdered by the mob as she was trying to hide in her house. The play is unlike anything else Inchbald has written, and is most clearly about a current event. I have already established that Inchbald always referred to current political and social issues in her writing, but usually she employs a mixture of these issues and purely plot-driven actions, and most of

[237] See Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 1808.

[238] Alexander Mikaberidze (ed.), *Atrocities, Massacres, and War Crimes: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013), I, p. 594; and Mary Ashburn Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 58-59.

her plays have more than one theme. *The Massacre*, in contrast, is very obviously only about one thing.

It appears that Inchbald never intended this play for the stage. Melynda Nuss calls it a closet drama,[239] although Annibel Jenkins suggests Inchbald did send the manuscript to a manager and was rejected.[240] Looking at the play text, it is likely that Inchbald did indeed intend it as a closet drama. It has only three acts, making it easier for people to read through at home, there is very little action and a great deal of dialogue, which would not make it ideal for a theatrical production. Also, very tellingly, there are only two female roles, and one of them is practically non-speaking. Given how many roles Inchbald usually wrote for actresses, suddenly depriving them of good parts in this play is out of character. But for a closet play this character division makes more sense - Inchbald would not be concerned about writing roles for her colleagues in a play that was never going to reach the stage, and female readers at home would find it easier to read through the play just with members of their own family or perhaps a friend. The non-public nature of *The Massacre* accounts for how much it differs from Inchbald's other works. It is also, of course, a tragedy, and therefore stands out from the comedies which were her more usual genre. While I have been mainly concentrating on womens' use of comedy, it is useful to compare them with a play in a different genre, especially when it is used to write explicitly about a political event.

The Massacre is a departure for Inchbald not only in its form, but also in its tone and characterisation. She very rarely writes about anything in an entirely serious tone, and even serious subjects in other plays are frequently treated with a dry, black humour. But in this instance the whole play is entirely serious. This indicates Inchbald's own feelings about the Revolution. Clearly she perceived it as so important that she could not soften or mitigate its impact in any way. The play is intended to have an emotional effect on its readers, and even to shock them. In her Advertisement for *The Massacre*, Inchbald quotes a statement by Horace Walpole about one of his own plays:

> The subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction, to an audience. Still I found it so truly tragic in the essential springs of *terror* and *pity,*

[239] cf. Melynda Nuss, *Distance, Theatre, and the Public Voice*, *1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 36.
[240] cf. Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, p. 318.

> that I could not resist the impulse of adapting it to the scene, though it never could be practicable to produce it there.[241]

Inchbald stresses how applicable this quote is to her own work, and states her belief that it will explain why *The Massacre* has not been performed. Walpole's quote also serves as a kind of warning - if the reader was expecting one of Inchbald's usual comedies, this was far from being one. And the play itself certainly deserves this warning. The scenes in which the mob threatens the Tricastins and the description of Madame Tricastin's death contain very graphic violence, and the main characters are essentially in mortal peril for the entire story. The play starts with Madame Tricastin fearing that her husband has been killed on a visit to Paris, and this fear accompanies her throughout the rest of the play, until, tragically, he actually survives and she dies instead. This constant threat of violence very effectively captures the atmosphere during the September massacres, in which events must have seemed unpredictable and deaths occurred frequently. No doubt it also reflected the mood in Britain, where the volatile situation in Europe caused concern and uncertainty. The threat of mob violence was an especially present one for someone as closely associated with the theatre as Inchbald, since theatre audiences had a history of becoming violent to express their displeasure. Both Drury Lane and Covent Garden had seen riots in 1744 and 1763 respectively, and there were to be more theatre riots at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Robert Shoemaker argues that those living in London were especially aware and cautious of mob violence, as the large population and diversity of the city facilitated this method of expressing anger or disagreement:

> 'Violence, insult and riot were frequently used in order to defend and enhance Londoners' reputations and advance their interests. Although most such disorder was limited by cultural norms, it generated real fears of mob rule among those with power and property'.[242]

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[241] Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Massacre*, in *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, ed, by Boaden, p. 357. All further references to this source will be given in parentheses after each quotation.
[242] Robert Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-century England* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 24-26.

Inchbald's representation reflects these anxieties, at a time when they were fuelled by the violence of the French Revolution, and by events such as the Priestley Riots (1791) which brought the fear of hostile crowds home to England.[243]

Despite the threatening atmosphere and sombre tone of the play, however, some of the themes of Inchbald's other plays are also present here. Most crucially, she again explores the idea of morality. The play frequently questions what it means to be a good citizen, and how to react when faced with violence. Since the story takes place in the context of the French Revolution, the idea of liberty is an important theme. Crucially, all the characters seem to believe in the concept of liberty, but they interpret it in different ways. To the leader of the mob, Dugas, it means the freedom to arrest and charge those he feels are against the principles of the Revolution. To others like Glandeve, the judge, it means treating everyone the same and avoiding violence. Their differing views are made clear in the following exchange, where Glandeve refuses to sentence the captured Tricastins without evidence:

> Dugas: I thought, Glandeve, you were the sworn friend of Liberty?
>
> Glandeve: And so I am — Liberty, I worship. But, my friends, 'tis liberty to do good, not ill — liberty joined with peace and charity. (III, 2)

The crucial point here is that, while Dugas may appear as the villain of the piece, he believes he is doing what is right - he is also on the side of liberty. None of the characters are simply black and white, morally good or bad. Inchbald shows them as occasionally acting wrongly because of their mistaken views or the influence of outside circumstances. Later in the same scene, Eusèbe Tricastin attacks Dugas with a knife, intending to kill him. Glandeve prevents him from doing so, and his virtuous act of standing between the two opponents makes such an impression on Tricastin that he immediately gives up his weapon. Dugas retaliates by calling in his soldiers, but they refuse to execute anyone. Their colonel remarks:

> Yes, Sir, my brave men have received your commands; and this is their brave reply: — They are all men of courage— all ready to enter the field of battle against an insulting

243 See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 47.

> foe, and boldly kill him; but, amongst the whole battalion, we have not one hangman. (III, 2)[244]

His constant repetition of the words 'brave' and 'courage' emphasises that refusing to use violence is not an act of cowardice or fear of consequences. Again we can see a female writer including soldiers in her play, but not showing them in combat. In fact, these soldiers actually do the opposite and instead decide to protect people from violence. While *The Massacre* may be quite different in some ways, this particular feature of women's' plays has carried over from comedy into tragedy. In both the cases of Eusèbe Tricastin and the soldiers, refraining from violence is actually the more difficult and more courageous choice. Tricastin spares the life of someone who is openly threatening his family, and the soldiers are refusing a direct command. It would be much easier for them to carry out their respective executions, and they have good reasons to do so. But instead they recognise that it would be the morally wrong decision. This, Inchbald is saying, is what actual liberty is: to have the ability to apply reason and sensibility to a situation, and make the most virtuous choice, even if it results in a disadvantage. She does not support any particular side of the conflict; she does not even seem to object entirely to the conflict itself. What is important to her is the manner in which such conflicts are fought. It is difficult to know what Inchbald's personal views on the French Revolution were, but it is very clear that she objected to the indiscriminate violence and lack of humanity that were to characterise the 'Reign of Terror'. Her comments on the Revolution are not focused on its politics per se, but on its morality.

It may appear from this analysis that *The Massacre* is a very male-centred play, and in comparison with Inchbald's other works it certainly is. Madame Tricastin is the only female character with any significant dialogue and stage time, and even her presence is quite limited when compared to women in other plays. However, she plays a very important role. She represents the humanity which Inchbald has identified as vital in preventing a descent into bloodshed and revenge. Madame Tricastin is a constant reminder of how one person's actions affect others. Throughout the play, she prevents violence and rash decisions. She does this first by telling Tricastin they should leave the country rather than try to fight; when he objects, she reminds him that he has a family who would be devastated if he died in the

[244] Inchbald includes a footnote stating that this is based on an actual reply sent by a military commander during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (p. 378, fn. 1).

fighting. She does it again in the second Act, preventing Tricastin from killing himself in despair at being surrounded (I, 1, and II, 1, respectively). In the last Act, Madame Tricastin is herself killed by the mob; the soldiers who witness this are so affected by her death that they do not engage in combat but instead guard her corpse from being mistreated. They carry her to the hall in which the judgement of the Tricastin men is taking place, where she becomes a powerful visual symbol of the consequences of violence. The shock of seeing her dead body prompts Glandeve to reaffirm the need for reason and humanity, and his final speech almost reads like her funeral service:

> the good (of all parties) will conspire to extirpate such monsters from the earth. It is not party principles which cause this devastation; 'tis want of sense — 'tis guilt — for the first precept in our Christian laws is charity — the next obligation — to extend that charity EVEN TO OUR ENEMIES. (III, 2)

We can again see Inchbald's concept of active Christianity appearing here, and in fact Glandeve bears more than a little resemblance to Haswell in *Such Things Are*. Both men are also prompted to deliver their speeches by observing the suffering of women (Madame Tricastin's death and Arabella's imprisonment). While women are perhaps less active in these plays, they are still important to the plot; they help both the male characters and the audience to determine what is morally right. There is no denying that this representation of women is far more conservative than the image of the witty young heroine outsmarting others to get what she wants. It casts women in a much more passive role, and especially in the case of Madame Tricastin it recalls the way Burke wrote about Marie Antoinette - as a virtuous, feminine mother figure who is the victim of the uncivilised mob.[245] It is hard to say what caused this change in Inchbald's writing. Perhaps she felt that the form of the tragedy called for such a female character. It is after all very difficult to imagine one of her usual witty heroines in Madame Tricastin's situation. Their sarcasm, wit, skilful manipulation of social settings, and knowledge of gender expectations would be of no use to them here. In the same way that Cowley's *The Town* shows the devastating effect of war on women, Inchbald also makes Madame Tricastin the one who suffers most because of male violence. It is very telling that she is the only character who dies in the play. There is also a suggestion that she has been made more helpless than she already is by her society's gender

[245] Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* p. 78.

expectations. When her husband Eusèbe decides that flight is impossible and that they should try and fight their attackers, his friend suggests that Madame Tricastin should have a weapon as well:

> Menancourt: Give her an instrument of death to defend herself — our female enemies use them to our cost.
>
> Eusebe: No, by Heaven! so sacred do I hold the delicacy of her sex, that could she with a breath lay all our enemies dead, I would not have her feminine virtues violated by the act. (II, 1)

His refusal to even consider that his wife should be able to defend herself means that once she is separated from him, she has no way to fight back. Clearly women are not unable to use weapons, as Menancourt specifically mentions other women who do just that. Her 'delicacy' and 'feminine virtues' are of no help at all to her, since they cannot protect her. Like Arabella, she is almost too virtuous, and her (and her family's) idea of virtue is one of passivity. Inchbald is again suggesting that trying to be too delicate and self-sacrificial, and caring too much about what other people define as virtuous, is harmful to women. However, Madame Tricastin really is in a position where there is no good way out for her. Complying with her husband's wish that she should be delicate and feminine means she is helpless. But if she had decided to ignore him and fight back, she would have lost her reputation and even, in a sense, her identity as a woman. Violence has been established throughout the play as the morally wrong choice. Faced with the decision between her life and her virtue, she prefers to die, and that gives us a powerful insight into the importance late eighteenth-century society placed on female virtue.

The Massacre is an interesting development in Inchbald's writing career. Not only was she writing in a genre she had not attempted before, but she also engages with contemporary politics in a new way. Whereas before she had voiced her criticism and opinions by making jokes about the issues she wanted to criticise, and putting perceptive, sarcastic women on the stage, in this case she does neither. This is not a consequence of either her changing personal opinions or a move towards becoming a writer of tragedies. After *The Massacre*, Inchbald returned to writing the comedies she was known for, producing *Every One Has His*

Fault and *Wives as they Were*, which feature some of her most cynical, cutting humour. If it is not therefore the case that she wanted to change her genre of choice or her portrayal of women, it must be that the subject matter simply called for a different approach.

It was impossible to write a comedy about the French Revolution. Its effects were so widespread and so serious that it was not to be joked about. Comedies did not usually shy away from serious subjects; as we have seen, issues like the slave trade and war were very much featured in plays. But it seems that the French Revolution was the one subject that was off-limits. Perhaps it seemed too immediate and too close to be represented on stage. This put women playwrights in a situation where writing about it was incredibly difficult. It had been established in the previous years that it was acceptable for women to openly write about politics as long as they did it within the form of the domestic comedy. When they came up against a subject that was unacceptable for comedy, this left them with no way out. The only alternative was to follow Wollstonecraft's example, abandon all pretence and comment on the Revolution without any filter. But for most women writers, this was not an option. They depended on their reputation, their character as respectable women, for their professional careers. Inchbald did write about it, but she did it from within the respectable, domestic genre of the closet drama. This ensured that nobody could accuse her of seeking publicity for it, or making light of the subject. Even though she was, at this time, an established writer with an impeccable reputation, Inchbald still decided to be cautious in this instance. To write a work like *A Vindication of The Rights of Men* or *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* was to risk isolating oneself socially and professionally. Wollstonecraft probably knew this, and risked it anyway; and indeed several people turned against her, and at the end of her life her reputation was practically destroyed. But Wollstonecraft had always had a tendency to isolate herself, to stand apart from everyone else. She did this by living in different countries, having a child out of wedlock, and living in a separate house while being in a relationship with William Godwin. For a playwright like Cowley or Griffith, who depended heavily on their social network, this must have been unthinkable. Because playwrights are inherently inclined to work with others, to suddenly abandon all these ties would have been akin to social (and financial) suicide. Most female playwrights could theoretically have written a work similar to Wollstonecraft's political discourses- they had the intellect and the political awareness to do so. But it is very likely they also recognised that their freedom as women writers had limits. While they wrote within the borders that

society and their audience had deemed acceptable for them, they could be fairly outspoken. There were some things, however, which were beyond that. A female playwright could write about almost anything, but she could not write about it in any way she wanted. There were rules that had to be observed in order to remain respectable.

It is not inherently remarkable that women wrote about politics in the late eighteenth century. It was only natural that as authors, they wanted to comment on major issues affecting their own and other societies. Nor was it unprecedented for female writers to do this, as women like Delarivier Manley had made a name for themselves by writing political satire decades earlier. In particular, the theatre had always been a place for political engagement. Because plays were relatively quick to write and to produce, playwrights could react to contemporary events much faster than novelists, for example. Playwright Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) wrote about the close association between theatre and politics in the period, claiming that the 'theatre engrossed the minds of men to such a degree...that there existed in England a *fourth estate*, Kings, Lords and Commons and *Drury Lane Playhouse.'*[246]

What is remarkable is the way in which late eighteenth-century women wrote about politics. As playwrights, they were restricted by the theatre legislation of the time; as women, they were restricted by society's expectations about female morality. Unlike Manley, they could not have written an openly satirical work about their politicians. Consequently, they had to find a way to approach the topics that interested them from within the parameters of what was respectable. Using the form of the domestic comedy to write about anything from the slave trade to prison reform was bold and cunning in equal measure. Starke's *Sword of Peace* is an incredible example of women's perspective on British colonialism, and manages to address an impressive number of issues in one play. Starke shows how interwoven colonial greed, slavery, the marriage market, and social class are. The fact that all of them combine to form the plot of a single play proves that they are not separate, but instead related to each other. That Starke somehow manages to combine them all in a comedy is remarkable, given the seriousness of these topics. It could be interpreted as the author making light of these issues, and reducing them to a joke. However, Starke never actually makes fun of the

[246] Qtd. in Linda Kelly, *The Kemble Era: John Philip Kemble, Sarah Siddons, and the London Stage* (London: Bodley Head, 1980), p. 31.

issues themselves, but rather of the people who perpetuate them. In addition, in this chapter we have seen that using the form of the domestic comedy was an essential defence mechanism for women writers. This becomes most obvious in the difference between Inchbald's comedy *Such Things Are* and her tragedy *The Massacre*. *Such Things Are* is only technically a comedy, because while it ends in marriage, the rest of the plot is not particularly comical. However, the label allows Inchbald to write quite extensively about both British government of the colonies and the need for prison reform in Britain itself. Despite these serious and potentially controversial subjects, the play was staged and performed successfully. Compared to this, *The Massacre* was never staged. The fact that Inchbald seems not even to have attempted to stage it shows how aware she was of the limits of what was acceptable. In her comedy, she could write about politics without too much backlash, but in her tragedy, it is unlikely that her public and critics would have accepted the same content. The heightened awareness of the arbitrary restrictions imposed upon the theatre in general and women in particular defines political writing at the end of the eighteenth century. While the prominence of female playwrights like Cowley and Inchbald gave them some measure of creative freedom, it also meant that they frequently encountered these limits of acceptability. This was especially true after the French Revolution. Not only was the Revolution itself a difficult topic to write about because of its enormous political impact and the sheer violence of the events in France. It also meant that in Britain, writers were now expected to be patriotic as well as respectable, in order to counteract the fear of revolutionary ideas spreading from the continent. This introduced an additional element that playwrights had to consider in their work. Tim Fulford writes that,

> Faced by the revolution's threat to the social order, Englishmen were more than ever determined that Englishwomen should stay in their familial places, lest they be tempted into a sexual and political 'excess' which they, as women, were thought to lack the self-restraint to resist.[247]

Women in the public eye therefore had to be especially careful not to be perceived as part of the threat to British respectability. Playwrights did this by emphasising the importance of morality, and above all female morality, in their writing. By making virtue the main

[247] Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 5.

characteristic of their female heroines, they could hope to demonstrate that the theatre, rather than being a place of controversy and mob violence, could be a place for moral education.

Women writing about politics still could not openly declare that they were doing so; however, there seems to have been a mutual understanding between playwright and audience about what the real topic of these plays was. It is likely that the audience enjoyed the female perspective on current events, which these authors provided. The majority of people coming to the theatre were not able to participate actively in politics, not having the legal rights, the education, or the social connections to do so. Female playwrights were writing from the same position, as none of them were ever going to vote, stand for election, or fight in a battle. They provided a view of political events from the sidelines, and could better express the powerlessness felt by themselves and other members of society who were similarly excluded, when important political issues occurred that they had no influence over. The way in which these women participated in political discussions nonetheless shows that neither they, nor eighteenth-century theatre-goers, were in any way separated from or ignorant of politics. Arthur Murphy's description of the close association between the stage and the political world very much applies to female playwrights - none of them were working in isolation.

Epilogue

The second half of the eighteenth century was defined by events like the American and French Revolutions, which caused great shifts in international politics and more subtle societal changes in Britain itself. Discussions about the abolition of slavery and colonial government, about marriage law and female virtue found their way into the literature of the time. This thesis has shown how women reacted to and contributed to those debates. The theatres of the time were unusual places; while they were in some ways quite traditional and tried to uphold conservative values and rules, they also presented an opportunity for women to share their opinions in a public space. At the beginning of my analysis, managers like Garrick still operated under the established patronage system, which could benefit those women who succeeded in catching a patron's eye. But this also restricted their creative freedom and independence. However, from the 1760s onwards the literary world began to transform into a more commercial literary marketplace. The increased focus on commercialism did not just affect the stage, but it was in the theatre that women writers interacted with it in significant ways. They could not rely on a patron's support, but had to find out for themselves which plays would sell and keep their audiences coming back. They had to try and negotiate fair prices for their work, and insist on being recognised as professional authors. In some cases, they could make impressive sums of money from their playwriting, but their success also meant that they had to manage being a woman in a very public profession.

Uniquely for women of this time, playwrights' careers required them to interact with an incredibly wide spectrum of people. This is not to suggest that other women only worked in private. A great number of shopkeepers, farmers, domestic servants, printers, and other female workers interacted with the public every day. But playwrights, above all others, did not just engage with others, they had the unique opportunity to influence public opinion as well. Very few other women had so many people from all walks of life gather in the same place to listen to what they had to say. Playwrights socialised with theatre managers, actors, printers, dressmakers, and in some cases even royalty, and as a consequence they had a unique experience of life in eighteenth-century Britain.

In Chapter One, I have explored the world of the London theatres as it was during the latter half of the century. By chronicling the changes in management styles, I have demonstrated how choosing a theatre and a manager could have a significant effect on a playwright's work and her career. Finding a competent and supportive manager gave writers an advantage, but some managers saw themselves as superior to the people they worked with. In reality, however, playwrights, managers, and actors were mutually dependent on each other. The theatre could not function without all of their contributions. This mutual dependence opened a way for women to gain some influence. Successful actresses like Catherine Clive and Mary Robinson were particularly influential because of their celebrity status. They not only made a lot of money from their performances, but also had a great deal of social advantage. Powerful people wanted to associate with them. Whether they were attending salons held by aristocratic ladies or married upper-class men, they had direct access to the people who held financial and political power. The negative side of this advantage was that actresses' power often lay in their sexualisation. People went to the theatre specifically to watch them on stage, and many influential men saw them as potential mistresses they could buy with gifts and promises of social status. For the female playwrights of this time, the actresses' way of achieving influence was not an option. For an actress, her appeal was defined by her (real or perceived) availability. For a female playwright, having this kind of public image would be fatal to her career; she had to be seen as respectable instead. Mary Poovey has summarised very effectively how this need for respectability, for a 'good character', puts women writers in a unique position:

> the very act of a woman writing during a period in which self-assertion was considered 'unladylike' exposes the contradictions inherent in propriety: just as the inhibitions visible in her writing constitute a record of her historical oppression, so the work itself proclaims her momentary, possibly unconscious, but effective, defiance.[248]

My analysis of women's' plays has shown both these 'inhibitions' and the ways they could be overcome. It has become clear that for most female playwrights, the aim of their writing was not actually outright 'defiance'. That is too strong a term to be applied to these women; they were not radicals who defied all rules, they were simply trying to effect some change from

[248] Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, p. xv.

within the existing system. The acts of pushing against the rules and conventions which I have identified in the play texts are signs that women were claiming a space for themselves. Whether they were discussing the theatre itself, the marriage market, female friendships, literary careers, or contemporary politics, female playwrights knew they had a right to participate in the discussion. The fact that the eighteenth-century theatre enabled women to write lines for actresses who could stand on the stage and address female audience members played a significant part in this. It was much easier to claim a right to be heard when people were demonstrably interested in listening.

Having gained this (albeit limited) influence, female playwrights had to decide what to do with it. In Chapter Two, I have shown how they used the stage to speak about topics specifically relevant to women. The first step to claiming a space for women was to represent everyday female experiences. Thus, female playwrights focused on writing about marriage, courtship, family, and friendship. They invented female heroines who spoke wittily about women's lives. This representation was not entirely new: there had been actresses and female playwrights before the 1760s. It was, however, a relatively recent occurrence compared to the male presence in the theatre, and the amount of representation women achieved on the London stage during this time was unprecedented. The great number of play texts I have analysed in this thesis clearly shows just how many plays were written by women about women. This representation was, of course, sometimes problematic. Because so many plays deal with similar topics such as marriage, and feature similar characters, it is easy for them to become interchangeable. The similarities between these plays sometimes make it difficult to distinguish precisely between one play and another, and this has become one of the main points of criticism against them. Some critics, then as now, dismissively categorise such texts as 'a *woman's play*; abounding in much love, much sentiment, great entanglement, but little character and observation'.[249] The subjects of these domestic comedies may have seemed frivolous to male critics, and they can appear frivolous and superficial to modern readers. However, if we consider the historical background and the legal standing of women in the eighteenth century, it is obvious that topics like marriage and divorce were of vital social and financial importance to women.

[249] *London Evening Post*, August 5-8 1780, Issue 9100.

In addition, some of the parallels between the plays stem from the very rigid structure of the stage comedy. A comedy was required to end in marriage, and female playwrights invariably obeyed this rule. Therefore, some of their works appear conservative in reinforcing the patriarchal status quo. However, close reading of the plays has revealed that these playwrights may have worked within the existing structure, but they often used it to express controversial ideas. The cover of writing a *'woman's play'*, a domestic comedy, enabled them to speak about such topics as divorce laws, abusive relationships, and even same-sex attraction. The concessions to tradition and gender expectations which female playwrights made in their careers were necessary for them to keep the influence they had gained by their access to the stage.

Treading this line between acknowledging the limits of their creative freedom and developing their writing careers has emerged as something female playwrights did with considerable skill. Chapter Three has shown how they thought critically about what it meant to be a writer, and how it was possible to combine the creativity of writing with the practicalities of managing a literary career. Frances Brooke stands out as a writer who was particularly willing to try out new ways of advancing her professional standing. Her often melancholy musing about this in *The Excursion* and her rivalry with Garrick testify that being a professional female writer was far from easy. Nevertheless, women made great strides in that regard, as is obvious from the development of female theatre criticism during this period. Playwrights also put women writers and artists on the stage as characters, in an effort to counter the often negative and dismissive representation they had received in many male-authored plays.

Representing aspects of women's lives on major London stages was already a great step towards equality. But female playwrights realised that they could not only represent social and gender issues, but effect change as well. As they gained more experience and professional standing, they discovered ways of advocating changes in their society. The specific improvements they intended to effect were as varied as the women themselves; it is very clear from their writing that most of them had causes that were important to them because of personal experience. Inchbald wrote about prison reform and poverty, Lee about education, Starke about slavery and colonial greed. It may sound like an overestimation of the theatre's influence to see it as a realistic venue for social improvement; but many critics

have agreed that the stage was an effective tool for changing society's views and opinions. George Taylor writes that:

> in our period probably more people were excited into reassessing their attitudes by the direct experience of actresses embodying 'new women' on stage, than by the didactic treatises of Wollstonecraft or Hays.[250]

The ability of the theatre to reach and influence its audience is something that is perhaps difficult to imagine today. But the amount of writing for and about the theatre at the time is testament to the role it played in many peoples' lives. The very fact that legislation such as the Licensing Act was deemed necessary shows that those in power were well aware that the stage had great persuasive powers. The Act was of course not the first attempt to regulate the theatre. From rules for players in Shakespeare's time to the Puritan ban on theatres, there has always been some effort to restrict the stage's influence in some way. However, I believe that the work of female playwrights in the eighteenth century represents the first conscious effort to use that influence on behalf of a group. Others had used plays to gain favour, to further their reputation, or, as in Delarivier Manley's case, to satirise specific people. But for women like Inchbald, Cowley, and Griffith, the theatre's importance lay not just in what it could do for their personal careers. They wanted to use it to improve their society as a whole, and specifically, to improve society's view of women. They had not decided on this as a group - there were no meetings between them to agree on a common goal. But nevertheless there are striking similarities not only in their plotlines, but also in the aims their writing intended to achieve. My analysis of the texts has shown repeatedly that the same themes can be found in almost all of their plays. They wanted to use the theatre for the moral improvement of their audience. Whether they were writing a story about sultans in India, masked balls in London, or romantic intrigues in Spain, at the heart of the story was always the same question: what is the morally good thing to do? The various topics I have examined in each of the different chapters are in reality not very separate at all. They are simply the various manifestations of women's efforts to answer this question.

As has become clear, the eighteenth century can be characterised as concerned with virtue in general. A large part of the criticism that women, and female playwrights in particular, faced was based on their supposedly immoral behaviour or opinions. Richard Polwhele's

[250] Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage*, p. 126.

poem 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798), with its vicious criticism of women writers like Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, and Yearsley, exemplifies the anxieties surrounding the morality of women being outspoken in public. In that sense, women writers simply participated in a discussion that was already in the air at the time. However, I cannot help but wonder if they partly contributed to this obsession with female virtue. They did not invent it; but they did focus attention on it, and communicated it to a wide spectrum of the population. The question about female virtue united even such disparate writers as Hannah More, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Mary Wollstonecraft. It is unlikely that they themselves would have seen it that way if asked. But as I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, morality is a feature of all their works, even if they have different interpretations of it. Virtue can therefore be seen as the overarching theme of women writers' work and careers in the eighteenth century. Far more than their writing about marriage or domesticity, it is their questioning of morality which characterises them best.

For female playwrights particularly, this meant taking something that was supposed to control women and turning it into an advantage. Concerns about morality had been used to try and keep women away from the theatre. But instead of turning away from life in the public eye, these women effectively made themselves the spokespersons for female morality. Their plays were intended to teach their audience, and especially young women in the audience, how to be virtuous. Actresses like Sarah Siddons were to become a symbol of female virtue. Unfortunately, the practice of morality being used against women did not disappear entirely (and some women like More contributed to this). In the aftermath of the French Revolution, and during the nineteenth century, perceptions of virtue would return to being a disadvantage to women by curtailing the arenas in which they could work and express themselves. Anne K. Mellor sees the late eighteenth century as a time of unusual freedom of expression for women:

> from a late twentieth-century feminist perspective, we might see Victorian literature as a *regression* from the more liberated stance of feminine Romanticism, a backlash in which female intelligence, activity and power was once again *restricted* to the arena of the domestic household.[251]

[251] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 212.

But for a brief moment, on the London stages, female playwrights created a space where virtue was defined not by silence and passivity, but by strength and knowledge, and by their encouragement of other women to inhabit this space. Coming back to Showalter's assertion that 'Almost no sense of communality and self-awareness is apparent among women writers before the 1840s',[252] I can therefore confidently assert that this does not apply at all to eighteenth-century female playwrights. On the contrary, women writers during this period were incredibly self-aware, and frequently used the stage to explore what it meant to be a woman, and what it meant to be a writer.

There are many aspects of being an eighteenth-century female playwright that this thesis has not had room to explore. For instance, I have only referred briefly to the financial aspects of a professional writing career, but a more in-depth study of how much women were paid compared to men, and which plays were the most financially successful would help to paint a fuller picture of what it was like to work for the theatre. For the sake of being concise, I have also had to limit my study to comedies, and to the London stages, but useful comparisons could be made with plays in other genres, and with theatres in smaller towns, or in other countries. Critical engagement with women's history in general has developed impressively over the last decades, but there is still a great deal to do. There are still many playwrights to be rediscovered, and there are many play texts which have been left unpublished. Many times during my research, it would have been useful to have access to more biographical information about these women. Some biographies, like Anne Stott's *Hannah More: The First Victorian,* or Annibel Jenkins' *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* already exist, and are a very helpful step in the right direction. But in some cases, like Sophia Lee and Mariana Starke, no such sources exist, and more knowledge of their lives and works would greatly enhance our understanding not just of these women in particular, but of eighteenth-century life in general.

Female playwrights in the eighteenth century are best summed up by their contradictions. They were united by common themes and concerns, but never formally joined together as a group. Anderson sees them as '[a] group of successful women writers [who] did not have a clear proto-feminist agenda, though they were committed to happy endings for their

[252] Showalter, *A Literature of their Own,* p. 15.

heroines', and their plays as 'hopeful visions of female agency'.[253] They had to be both professional writers, and mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. In many ways, they paved a way for the future women's' rights movements, but they cannot be called feminists. In their careers, they wrote both domestic comedies and commentary on world politics. They were defined by their public character, and left behind a wealth of fictional characters that embody their concerns and opinions.

In a move which entirely contradicts eighteenth-century stage convention, I will conclude this thesis with a Prologue. The following lines from Griffith's *A Wife in the Right* perfectly combine female playwrights' ability to look back at their predecessors, and ahead to the future they were trying to build:

Let females then compose, as well as play,

And strive to please you in the noblest way!

No sulky critic to the play-house drawn,

Whom modern comedy provokes to yawn,

But marks of authors past the valu'd file,

And owns Centlivre tempted him to smile.

Why may not Ladies too in future plays,

Strike a *Bold Stroke,* and, anxious for the bays,

New *Busy Bodies* form, new *Wonders* raise? ('Prologue', ll. 40-49)

[253] Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-century Comedy,* p. 3.

Appendix 1: Chronological List of Plays

Year	Name	Author	Theatre	Manager
1762	*The Search after Happiness*	More	Performed at her school	-
1765	*The Platonic Wife*	Griffith	Drury Lane	(Garrick, absent during the season) Colman/ Victor
1766	*The Double Mistake*	Griffith	Covent Garden	Beard
1769	*The School for Rakes*	Griffith	Drury Lane	Garrick
1772	*A Wife in the Right*	Griffith	Covent Garden	Colman
1775	*The Inflexible Captive*	More	Bath	Not known
1776	*The Runaway*	Cowley	Drury Lane	Garrick
1777	*Percy*	More	Covent Garden	Garrick (producer)
1779	*The Witlings*	Burney	Not performed	-
1779	*Who's the Dupe?*	Cowley	Drury Lane	Sheridan
1779	*Lady Fashion's Rout*	Cowley	Not known	Not known
1779	*Albina*	Cowley	Haymarket	Colman
1779	*The Fatal Falsehood*	More	Covent Garden	Harris
1780	*Belle's Stratagem*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1780	*School for Eloquence*	Cowley	Drury Lane	Sheridan
1780	*The Chapter of Accidents*	Lee	Haymarket	Colman
1781	*The World as it Goes*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1782	*Rosina*	Brooke	Covent Garden	Harris
1782	*Which is the Man?*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1783	*A Bold Stroke for a Husband*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1783	*More Ways Than One*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1784	*The Mogul Tale*	Inchbald	Haymarket	Colman

1785	*I'll Tell You What*	Inchbald	Haymarket	Colman
1785	*Appearance is Against Them*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1786	*A School for Greybeards*	Cowley	Drury Lane	Sheridan
1786	*The Widow's Vow*	Inchbald	Haymarket	Colman
1787	*Such Things Are*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1787	*The Midnight Hour*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1788	*Marian*	Brooke	Covent Garden	Harris
1788	*The Fate of Sparta*	Cowley	Drury Lane	Kemble
1788	*Child of Nature*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1788	*The Sword of Peace*	Starke	Haymarket	Colman
1789	*Animal Magnetism*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1791	*Next Door Neighbours*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1791	*The Widow of Malabar*	Starke	Covent Garden	Harris
1792	*A Day in Turkey*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1792	*The Massacre*	Inchbald	Not staged	-
1793	*Everyone Has His Fault*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1794	*The Town Before You*	Cowley	Covent Garden	Harris
1797	*Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1798	*Lover's Vows*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris
1805	*To Marry or Not to Marry*	Inchbald	Covent Garden	Harris

Appendix 2: Play summaries and Cast lists

This appendix contains plot summaries of key plays analysed in the main thesis text. Where possible, I have included information about the original cast in the Dramatis Personae.

Frances Brooke

Marian (1788)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Sir Henry Truman	Mr. Incledon	Marian	Mrs. Billington
Oliver, Marian's father	Mr. Thompson	Patty	Mrs. Martyr
Edward	Mr. Johnstone	Fanny	Mrs. Barnet
Robin	Mr. Blanchard	Kitty	Mrs. Arnold
Jamie	Mr. Powell	Peggy	Mrs. Mountain
Thomas	Mr. Darley		
William	Mr. Gray		
Servant	Mr. Abbot		

Marian, the daughter of a farmer, has inherited some money from her Godmother. As a consequence, her father thinks she should no longer see her lover Edward, as she is now too good for him. However, Edward and Marian reconcile, and assure each other that money plays no part in their relationship. The play also features relationships between Jamie, a Scottish pedlar, and Peggy, as well as between Robin and Patty.

Sir Edward, the landowner, has observed Edward's conduct, and wants to reward him by giving him a farm if he marries Marian. Jamie reveals that Edward's mother, a genteel lady, has finally inherited a house she was cheated out of by a relative. Edward and Marian decide to go and live with Edward's mother, and Sir Henry promises the farm to Oliver (Marian's father) instead.

Rosina (1782)

Men:		Women:	
Mr. Belville	Mr. Bannister	Rosina	Mrs. Bannister
Captain Belville	Mr. Brett	Dorcas	Mrs. Pitt
William	Mrs. Kennedy	Phoebe	Mrs. Martyr
Rustic	Mr. Davies		
First Irishman	Mr. Mahon		
Second Irishman	Mr. Egan		

Reaper	Mr. Helme		

Rosina has been adopted by Dorcas and her daughter Phoebe. She goes out to glean corn during the harvest, and Belville, the landowner, falls in love with her. Belville has also brought in some Irish farm workers to help with the harvest, although some of his other men object to this.

Captain Belville, his brother, also likes Rosina, but only wants her as his mistress. To persuade her, he offers her money, but she refuses. Belville speaks to Dorcas, and learns that Rosina is the daughter of a gentleman and lady who drowned at sea. However, he believes that his brother genuinely loves Rosina, and encourages him to marry her. Captain Belville has hired some men to kidnap Rosina, because she did not accept his offer of payment. She is rescued just in time by the Irish workers, who bring her back home. Captain Belville's plot is revealed, and Belville and Rosina confess their love for each other. Phoebe and William, who have had an on-and-off relationship throughout the play, also reconcile and plan their marriage.

Frances Burney

The Witlings (1779)

Dramatis Personae

Men:	Women:
Beaufort	Lady Smatter, Aunt to Beaufort
Censor	Cecilia
Dabler	Mrs. Sapient
Jack, half brother to Beaufort	Mrs. Voluble
Codger, Jack's father	Mrs. Wheedle, a Milliner
Bob, Son to Mrs. Voluble	Miss Jenny, her apprentice
	Betty, maid to Mrs. Voluble

Cecilia Stanley and Beaufort are engaged. However, when Jack brings news that she has lost her fortune, Lady Smatter considers the match unsuitable and tries to persuade Beaufort to break it off. Cecilia is upset and leaves Lady Smatter's house.

Meanwhile, Lady Smatter's literary salon, The Esprit Party, assembles. Lady Smatter considers herself an expert literary critic, and is especially fond of quoting Pope. Mrs. Sapient only speaks in truisms, which she and the others consider to be profound statements. Codger tells stories which go nowhere, and never manages to bring his point across. Dabler is an amateur poet who frequently copies from other authors, but wants to be seen as a literary genius.

To keep Cecilia away from Beaufort, Lady Smatter offers to give her money if she leaves the city. Unable to pay her debts and believing that her engagement was based only on her fortune, Cecilia reluctantly decides to accept a job as a governess. However, Beaufort finds her just in time and assures her he still wants to marry her. Lady Smatter objects, but Censor threatens to publish cruel satires about her unless she agrees to the marriage. He also blackmails Dabler by threatening to expose his plagiarism. Unwilling to risk her reputation, Lady Smatter agrees to let Cecilia and Beaufort marry.

Hannah Cowley

A Bold Stroke for a Husband (1783)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Don Julio	Mr. Lewis	Olivia	Mrs. Mattocks
Don Carlos	Mr. Wroughton	Victoria	Mrs. Robinson
Don Caesar	Mr. Quick	Laura	Mrs. Whitfield
Don Vincentio	Mr. Edwin	Marcella	Miss Morris
Don Garcia	Mr. Whitfield	Minette	Mrs. Wilson
Vasquez	Mr. Fearon	Inis	Miss Platt
Gasper	Mr. Wilson	Sancha	Mrs. Davenett
Pedro	Mr. Stevens		

Victoria has discovered her husband Carlos is having an affair with another woman, Laura. He has promised her their estate, which makes Victoria fear for their and their children's future. In order to win the estate and her husband back, she disguises herself as a man, Florio, and seduces Laura. Laura leaves Carlos, so she can share the estate with Florio.

Olivia's father, Caesar, wants her to marry, and constantly sends potential suitors to her, including Vincentio and Garcia. However, she is secretly in love with Julio, and therefore deliberately frightens off any other suitors by finding out what they expect from a wife and doing the exact opposite. Caesar is so frustrated by this that he threatens to marry the very young Marcella, so that Olivia would have a young, spoiled stepmother. Marcella, however, tells Olivia this is only a deception, making Caesar's threat ineffective.

Julio and Carlos meet Olivia and Victoria at the Prado - both women are veiled, and the men fall in love with their respective personalities. Eventually, Carlos discovers the woman he has fallen in love with is really his wife, and confesses his infidelities. Victoria agrees to take him back, and reveals how she has tricked Laura into giving up the estate. Julio goes to see Olivia after having been told of her terrible behaviour by Vincentio and Garcia. She reveals that it was only an act because she was waiting for him, and the two are engaged.

A Day in Turkey, or, The Russian Slaves (1792)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Ibrahim	Mr. Holman	Alexina	Mrs. Pope
Orloff	Mr. Farren	Paulina	Mrs. Esten
A La Greque	Mr. Fawcet	Lauretta/Zilia	Mrs. Mattocks
Mustapha	Mr. Munden	Fatima	Mrs. Martyr
Azim	Mr. Cubit	Female Slaves	Mrs. Fawcet, Mrs. Rock, etc.
Selim	Mr. Incledon		
Muley	Mr. McCready		
Ismael	Mr. Farley		
Old Man	Mr. Thompson		
Son	Mr. Cross		
2nd Turk	Mr.Evatt		

During the war between Russia and Turkey, Alexina and her husband Count Orloff, and her maid Paulina are captured by Turkish forces. Alexina and Paulina are brought to the Turkish Bassa Ibrahim's harem. Ibrahim is intrigued by the reputation of the beautiful Alexina, and wants to woo her. However, she is determined to return to her husband, and Lauretta/Zilia therefore makes Ibrahim think that Paulina is Alexina, instructing her in how best to capture his attention. Mustapha helps in this scheme, while Azim does everything in his power to hinder it. Meanwhile, Orloff and his French servant A La Greque both try to enter the harem, Orloff to reclaim his wife and A La Greque to look at the women. Finally, after a series of incidents including an attempt to kill Ibrahim, Alexina's imprisonment, and A La Greque hiding under Ibrahim's sofa, the confusion between Alexina and Paulina is cleared up. By that time Ibrahim has fallen in love with Paulina and she with him, which prompts him to henceforth live monogamously, give up the harem and reunite Alexina and Orloff.

A School for Greybeards, or The Mourning Bride (1786)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women	
Don Alexis	Mr. King	Donna Seraphina	Miss Farren
Don Gaspar	Mr. Parsons	Donna Antonia	Mrs. Crouch
Don Octavio	Mr. Palmer	Donna Viola	Mrs. Brereton
Don Henry	Mr. Kemble	Donna Clara	Mrs. Cuyler
Don Sebastian	Mr. Bannister Jr.	Rachel	Mrs. Wrighten
		Carlota	Mrs. Wilson

The play is set in Portugal. Antonia has agreed to marry the much older Gaspar (a marriage designed to raise her financial and social status), because she believes that her former lover Henry has been banished from the country.

Viola's father Alexis has picked Octavio as a future husband for his daughter based on his own opinions and preferences; however, her mother Seraphina is aware that Viola is already in love with another man, Sebastian. Both wedding plans, orchestrated in both cases by patriarchal figures, would put the women in a marriage of convenience, not love. Seraphina (herself much younger than her husband) pretends to be her daughter and distracts Octavio. She arranges to meet him in the garden at night, but this is merely a ruse so that Viola can elope with Sebastian at the same time without being noticed. Antonia is very unhappy about her upcoming wedding, but Henry secretly comes back in disguise to reveal that he has been pardoned. Because he and Antonia were already betrothed, he can legally prevent the arranged marriage to Gaspar. At the end of the play, both women marry the men they actually love.

More Ways Than One (1783)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Bellair	Mr. Lewis	Miss Archer	Miss Younge
Carlton	Mr. Wroughton	Arabella	Mrs. Kemble
Sir Marvel	Mr. Edwin	Miss Juvenile	Mrs. Wilson
Mushroom	Mr. Wilson	Lodging Mistress	Miss Platt
Evergreen	Mr. Quick		
Feelove/Barkwell	Mr. Wewitzer		
Le Gout	Mr. Fearon		
David	Mr. Stevens		
Doctor's Servant	Mr. Thompson		
Lawyer's Clerk	Mr. Jones		
Stranger			

Evergreen, an elderly man, has arranged to marry the young Arabella. Her uncle, Feelove (called Barkwell in a second version), has deliberately kept her uneducated, has told her Evergreen is an aristocrat, and that she has no choice but to marry him. However, Bellair, a young man, gains access to the house by pretending to be one of Feelove's patients, and he and Arabella fall in love. Carlton is in love with Evergreen's ward Miss Archer. She is a fashionable, witty woman who constantly makes fun of men, and Carlton fears being rejected. Sir Marvel, a newly rich and very pretentious man, has written a poem satirising Miss Archer. At first, she is amused by it, but when she is falsely told that it was written by Carlton, she realises how much she values his opinion of her.

Meanwhile, Bellair has persuaded Arabella to elope with him. He enlists Evergreen's help, not realising that Arabella is promised to him. She is brought to Evergreen's house, and he

plans to take her away with him and force her to marry him. Miss Archer, who learns of this, secretly persuades Sir Marvel to sit in Evergreen's carriage, disguised as a woman. Sir Marvel and Evergreen argue, giving Miss Archer the opportunity to take Arabella to a safe place.

Having learned that Miss Archer was genuinely affected by his supposed satire, Carlton reconciles with her, and they agree to marry. Feelove is irritated by Evergreen's attempt to marry Arabella without giving him the money he was promised for her, and out of spite gives Bellair permission to marry her instead.

The Runaway (1776)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Mr. Hargrave	Mr. Yates	Lady Dinah	Mrs. Hopkins
George Hargrave	Mr. Smith	Bella	Miss Younge
Mr. Drummond	Mr. Bensley	Emily	Mrs. Siddons
Sir Charles Seymour	Mr. Brereton	Harriet	Miss Hopkins
Mr. Morley	Mr. Aickin	Susan	Mrs. Wrighten
Justice	Mr. Parsons		
Jarvis	Mr. Palmer		
First Hunter	Mr. Bannister		

George Hargrave comes home from college, and visits his cousin Bella and sister Harriet. Sir Charles Seymour is planning to marry a woman George is in love with. George's father, meanwhile, wants him to marry the elderly Lady Dinah, who is a very self-absorbed, pretentious woman. Mr. Drummond arrives, and tells them that a young lady has asked him for help, as she is running away from a marriage she is being forced into. Bella and Harriet agree to help her. When George meets Emily, the runaway, he realises she is the woman he is in love with.

Harriet meanwhile loves Charles Seymour, but he believes he cannot court her because of his lack of money. George and Lady Dinah constantly misunderstand each other, as she believes he is courting her, and he thinks he is courting her on behalf of his father. When Lady Dinah sees George with Emily, she is jealous and devises a plan to ruin her reputation and have her thrown out of the house. Emily is taken away in a carriage to have her arranged marriage. However, Lady Dinah's plan is exposed, George rescues Emily, and the two are married. Charles Seymour and Harriet also realise they love each other. Bella receives a letter from her lover, but decides against getting married.

The Town Before You (1794)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Tippy	Mr.Lewis	Lady Horatia Horton	Mrs. Pope
Fancourt	Mr. Munden	Georgina	Miss Wallis
Conway	Mr. Holman	Mrs. Fancourt	Mrs. Mattocks
Asgill	Mr. Pope	Lady Charlotte	Miss Chapman
Sir Robert Floyer	Mr. Quick	Jenny	Mrs. Martyr
Sir Simon Asgill	Mr. Powell	Mrs.Bullrush	Miss Stuart
Humphrey	Mr. Fawcett	Lady Horatia's Servant	Miss Leferve
Perkins	Mr. Hull		
Slopseller	Mr. Thompson		
Buckram	Mr. Williamson		
Holdfast	Mr Cross		
Sir Robert's Servant	Mr. Simmons		

Mr. and Mrs. Fancourt are having marital difficulties - she married him for love, he married her for her money, but since he refuses to work they are now poor. Sir Robert Floyer is a newly rich man trying to make a name for himself in London. Mr. Fancourt and his friend Tippy, a con artist, hatch a plan to swindle Floyer out of his money. Floyer's daughter Georgina meanwhile is friends with Lady Horatia, a sculptor. Conway is in love with Georgina. Asgill is in love with Horatia, but after he receives news that his uncle, on whom he is dependent for money, has lost his fortune, he thinks he has nothing to offer her. Despairing, he joins the navy in order to distance himself from her. His uncle, Sir Simon, goes to see Horatia, but meets Georgina instead and mistakes her for Horatia. Georgina tells him she would never marry someone without a fortune, and Sir Simon therefore believes that Horatia is superficial.

Tippy plans to marry Georgina by kidnapping her, in order to have access to her money. Mrs. Fancourt, however, hears of the plan and goes to warn Georgina. As Tippy and Fancourt's deception is revealed, Fancourt also tells his wife their marriage was not legal. Mrs. Fancourt is relieved she no longer has to be loyal to him, and Georgina promises to support her out of gratitude for her honesty.

Horatia speaks with Sir Simon and reveals that he spoke to Georgina instead of her, and that she loves Asgill regardless of his fortune. Sir Simon's supposed bankruptcy was only a deception to test Horatia and Asgill's real characters, and Asgill is brought home to be married to Horatia. However, Sir Simon, who does not value art, demands that Horatia give up her profession.

Who's the Dupe? (1779)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Doily	Mr. Parsons	Elizabeth	Mrs. Brereton
Sandford	Mr. Aickin	Charlotte	Mrs. Wrighten
Granger	Mr. Palmer		
Gradus	Mr. King		

Granger, a soldier, is in love with Elizabeth Doily, helped by her promise of a large fortune. However, her father, deprived of a good education himself, wants her to marry a 'man of learning'. To this purpose, he invites Gradus, an Oxford graduate with plenty of knowledge but very little idea of how to talk to women. Together with her cousin Charlotte, and Granger disguised as a Frenchwoman, Elizabeth persuades Gradus that she will only marry him if he becomes a fashionable man of the town. When Gradus arrives at the Doilys' in his new guise, having discarded his education for the latest fashion, Granger is presented as a serious man of learning. Gradus and Granger have a duel of wits, which Granger wins by making up quotations and passing them off as Greek. He is rewarded with Elizabeth's hand in marriage, while Gradus marries Charlotte, who has taken a fancy to him.

Elizabeth Griffith

The Platonic Wife (1765)

Dramatis Personae

Men:	Women:
Lord Frankland	Lady Frankland
Sir William Belville	Lady Fanshaw
Sir Harry Wilmot	Emilia
Ambrose	Clarinda
Patrick	Fontange
Nicodemus	Lucy, maid to Emilia
Two Footmen	Betty, maid to Clarinda

Lady Frankland has decided to separate from her husband because she feels that their marriage is not romantic enough and this makes her feel neglected. While she lives apart from Lord Frankland, she socialises with a number of female acquaintances, Emilia, Lady Fanshaw, and Clarinda. Lady Fanshaw and Clarinda are, however, false friends who are secretly trying to ruin her reputation, in order to sabotage any future relationships or

reconciliation with her husband. Emilia is her real friend, but she is the target of Mr Frankland, Lord Frankland's nephew. He wants to prevent his uncle from reconciling with his wife so he will eventually inherit his fortune, and wants to marry Emilia for her money.

Lady Frankland also has two potential suitors, Sir Harry and Sir William, but their extravagant and demanding professions of love eventually become too much for her and she returns to her husband at the end of the play.

The Double Mistake (1766)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Lord Belmont	Mr. Ross	Lady Bridget Belmont	Mrs. Walker
Sir Charles Somerville	Mr. Smith	Lady Mary Belmont	Miss Macklin
Mr. Belmont	Mr. Shuter	Lady Louisa Belmont	Miss Wilford
Mr. Southerne	Mr. Dunstall	Emily Southerne	Mrs. Mattocks
Elder Freeman	Mr. Hull	Maid servant	
Younger Freeman	Mr. Dyer		
Thomas	Mr. Holtom		
Ralph	Mr. Cushing		
Two servants			

Emily Southerne is in love with Charles Somerville. However, her father does not approve of the match and pressures her to marry someone much older than her. Somerville discovers another man in Emily's rooms at Bath, and believes her to be unfaithful. Emily flees to London, and stays in the house of her acquaintance Lord Belmont. He is an eccentric collector of curiosities from around the world. His nieces Mary and Lousia Belmont have different ideas about romance; Lousia wants to have a secret love affair like the ones she has read about in novels. Mary is much more practical about the topic. Their aunt Bridget is extremely concerned with her own reputation - she wants to present herself as both ladylike and learned, but comes across as extremely tedious and self-absorbed.

Meanwhile the Freeman brothers also have different ideas: the Younger wants to gain riches and status so he can live a life of pleasure, while the Elder thinks they should be respectable businessmen. The younger Freeman has begun a secret affair with Louisa, but has not told her the truth about his family background. She invites him into the house, but he is discovered and everyone believes he is Emily's lover. Confronted by everyone, Louisa admits she brought him into the house, and he reveals that he had an affair with Emily's maid in Bath. Louisa acknowledges her mistake in judgment; Charles admits he has misjudged Emily, and they marry.

Elizabeth Inchbald

Every One Has His Fault (1793)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Lord Norland	Mr. Farren	Lady Eleanor Irwin	Mrs. Pope
Sir Robert Ramble	Mr. Lewis	Mrs. Placid	Mrs. Mattocks
Mr. Solus	Mr. Quick	Miss Spinster	Mrs. Webb
Mr. Harmony	Mr. Munden	Miss Wooburn	Mrs. Esten
Mr. Placid	Mr. Fawcett	Servants	
Mr. Irwin	Mr. Pope		
Hammond	Mr. Powell		
Porter	Mr. Thompson		
Edward	Miss Grist		

Every One Has His Fault is a play about different kinds of relationships. Mr Solus is trying to find a wife, as his current lifestyle of maintaining mistresses is not rewarding enough; he wants someone to take care of him, and have legitimate children. Mr and Mrs Placid are struggling for power in their marriage. Placid is afraid of his wife, but cannot divorce her because she has not been unfaithful to him. Eventually, after comparing his relationship to others, he decides to assert some authority over her. By contrast, the Irwins are an ideal couple who are in love, and very loyal to each other. However, they have financial problems: Irwin is a soldier, and has lost almost everything while fighting in America. Lady Irwin's father, Lord Norland, has disowned her and forced her to give up her son Edward because he disapproved of her marriage. Irwin unsuccessfully tries to obtain money - first by appealing to his supposed friends, and then by stealing a pocketbook from Lord Norland. However, his conscience does not permit him to actually use the money, and it is eventually returned.

Sir Ramble and Miss Wooburn are a recently divorced couple. He has pushed her into the divorce by cheating on her. The property she owned before the marriage has now reverted to her, and Ramble is essentially bankrupt. Miss Wooburn wants to return the money to him, but her guardian Lord Norland wants to marry her off to someone else as soon as possible.

Mr Harmony, true to his name, is trying to reconcile everyone. He does this by telling them lies about what the others think of them. In this way, he manipulates Mr Solus and Miss Spinster into marrying, even though they dislike each other at the beginning. Sir Ramble and Miss Wooburn are reunited, which solves his money troubles. Lord Norland is reconciled with his daughter, and Edward reunited with his mother.

Such Things Are (1787)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Sultan	Mr. Farren	Lady Tremor	Mrs. Mattocks
Lord Flint	Mr. Davies	Aurelia	Miss Wilkinson
Sir Luke Tremor	Mr. Quick	Female Prisoner/Arabella	Mrs. Pope
Mr. Twineall	Mr. Lewis		
Mr. Haswell	Mr. Pope		
Elvirus	Mr. Holman		
Mr. Meanright	Mr. Macready		
Zedan	Mr. Fearon		
First Keeper	Mr. Thompson		
Second Keeper	Mr. Cubitt		
First Prisoner	Mr. Helme		
Second Prisoner	Mr. Gardener		
Guard	Mr. Blurton		
Messenger	Mr. Ledger		

On the island of Sumatra, Haswell, a philanthropic Englishman, is investigating the Sultan's dungeons in an effort to help the prisoners. He encounters a female prisoner, and petitions the Sultan for her release. It emerges that she is Arabella, the Sultan's former lover; they were separated during a rebellion which put him on the throne, and made her a political prisoner. Haswell convinces them to speak to each other, reconciling them, and showing the Sultan how harmful his method of government and lack of care for his subjects has been. While visiting the prison, Haswell also meets Zedan, an Indian prisoner, who steals his pocketbook so he can buy his freedom with the money. However, after witnessing Haswell's efforts on behalf of others, Zedan decides to confess the theft and return the money. Also in the dungeon are Elvirus and his elderly father.

The other half of the story concerns the British characters. Sir and Lady Tremor try to gain influence from Lord Flint, and constantly argue with each other. With them is Aurelia, who has been sent to Sumatra to find a husband. Twineall arrives from England, and asks Meanright how he can flatter the Tremors and Flint into getting him a profitable position. However, Meanright intentionally tells him misleading information, and Twineall's deceptions are exposed. At the end of the play, Twineall is rescued from execution by Haswell, the prisoners are released, and Elvirus marries Aurelia.

The Massacre (1792)

Dramatis Personae

Men:	Women:
Tricastin	Madame Tricastin
Eusèbe Tricastin	Amédée
Glandeve	
Rochelle	
Conrad	
Menancourt	
Dugas	
Guret	
Thevenin	
Clevard	
Domestic	
First Follower	
Second Follower	

The Tricastins, consisting of husband and wife, their young children, and the husband's father, are in danger of being executed by a revolutionary mob. Eusèbe Triscastin has escaped from Paris, and comes to warn the rest of the family of the danger. Most of the play is spent discussing whether they should flee or stay and face the mob, and all of them at some point offer to sacrifice themselves for the others. Eventually, father and son are captured and put on trial. The judge, Glandeve, chosen by the citizens, reveals himself to be a moderate and sensible man who protects them after nobody can offer any evidence that they have committed crimes. The leader of the mob, Dugas, threatens them with his soldiers, but the soldiers also refuse to harm the Tricastins without cause. However, after this incident at the trial, father and son are released to find that Madame Tricastin and her children have been murdered by the mob as she was trying to hide in her house.

The Mogul Tale, or, The Descent of the Balloon (1784)

Dramatis Personae

Men:	Women:
The Mogul	First Lady
First Eunuch	Second Lady
Second Eunuch	Third Lady
Johnny (The Cobbler)	Fanny (The Cobbler's Wife)
Doctor	

The Mogul Tale tells the story of three British characters: a doctor, and a married couple, Johnny, and his wife Fanny. They travel in a hot air balloon, and unforeseen weather conditions cause them to crash-land in an Indian harem. The Mogul in charge of the harem decides to play on their fears and portrays himself as the stereotypical eastern tyrant, helped by his eunuchs and three ladies of the harem. Finally, the Mogul stages a mock trial of the three, at the end of which he reveals himself to be a very reasonable and kind man, and sends them back home unharmed.

The Widow's Vow (1786), adapted from Patrat's *L'Heureuse Erreur*

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Don Antonio	Mr. Parsons	Countess	Mrs. Bates
Marquis	Mr Bannister Jr.	Donna Isabella	Mrs. Riley
Carlos	Mr. Palmer	Inis	Miss Brangin
Servant	Mr. Lyon	Ursula	Mrs. Edwin
Jerome	Mr. Edwin	Flora	Mrs. Wells

The Countess, a widow, has made a vow never to see any men after having been disappointed by her first husband (there is an implication that she may have killed him). Her neighbour Isabella sends her brother the Marquis to her; the Countess believes the Marquis is Isabella disguised as a man. After having a very close and flirty relationship, the Countess agrees to marry the Marquis, still believing she is participating in Isabella's joke. The Marquis's identity is revealed, and he and the Countess marry. There is also a subplot involving the Countess's servant Flora, who has a flirtation with Jerome, Antonio, and Carlos. Most of her story consists of Flora trying to determine whether Carlos is also a woman in male disguise.

Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are (1797)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Lord Priory	Mr. Quick	Lady Priory	Miss Chapman
Sir William Dorrillon	Mr. Munden	Lady Mary Raffle	Mrs. Mattocks
Sir George Evelyn	Mr. Pope	Miss Dorrillon	Miss Wallis
Mr. Bronzely	Mr. Lewis		
Mr. Norberry	Mr. Waddy		
Oliver	Mr. Fawcett		

Nabson	Mr. Thompson		

Wives as they Were, and Maids as they Are centres around two interwoven plots. Firstly, Sir William Dorrillon returns from India to visit his daughter Maria, who has not seen him since she was a child. Maria Dorrillon is one of the 'Maids' of the title; she is 'modern', outgoing, witty, and has a group of suitors she flirts with but doesn't take seriously. Her friend Lady Mary is similar to her, and the two women often go out gambling together.

The second plot concerns Lord and Lady Priory. Lady Priory is under the strict control of her husband, who refuses to let her leave the house or talk to other women, and sometimes even locks her in her room. Lord Priory (and Dorrillon) see this treatment as the perfect way to educate a woman, and believe that this is how all marriages worked in the past. Bronzely, a renowned rake, makes a bet that he can seduce Lady Priory; he kidnaps her, believing that she will not resist him once she is separated from her husband. She, however, simply ignores him, which unnerves him so much he eventually takes her home.

Miss Dorrillon and Lady Mary both end up in debtor's prison after losing too much money at cards. Sir William visits his daughter in disguise, and offers to pay her debts if she completely changes her behaviour and moves to the country. She refuses, and asks him to give the money to her father instead (Sir William himself, who she does not recognise), because she believes he is in financial trouble in India. Her sincerity impresses him so much that he releases her without insisting on his conditions. Lady Mary tricks George Evelyn into paying her own debts, when he tries to rescue Miss Dorrillon. However, at the end of the play Maria marries George, and Lady Mary marries a reformed Bronzely.

Sophia Lee

The Chapter of Accidents (1780)

Dramatis Personae

Men:	Women:
Lord Glenmore	Cecilia
Governor Harcourt	Miss Mortimer
Woodville	Warner
Captain Harcourt	Bridget
Grey	
Vane	
Jacob	

Governor Harcourt returns to England after a long absence, in order to find his daughter Cecilia, whom he had left with a parson, Grey, and his wife in Wales on his departure. Cecilia, however, has already come to London and become mistress to Woodville. Lord Glenmore, Woodville's father, wants him to marry Sophia Mortimer, who is secretly already married to Captain Harcourt, the Governor's nephew. Harcourt, hearing about Cecilia, decides to test her virtue by revealing that Woodville is intended for Sophia and offering her money to become someone else's mistress. Cecilia, however, steadfastly refuses and decides not to stand in the way of Woodville's marriage. Impressed by this, Harcourt tells her that Woodville is really in love with her and offers her asylum with himself and Sophia, for the time being.

Soon afterwards, the Governor and Lord Glenmore arrive to confront Woodville's mistress, but find only her maid Bridget, who pretends to be Cecilia. They kidnap her and lock her up in Glenmore's house, in order to keep her from Woodville. She is coerced into marrying Vane, the valet, who expects to receive a large fortune along with her. Meanwhile the real Cecilia has been living in the house too, and has so impressed Lord Glenmore with her modesty and sincerity that he decides to marry her. Just in time, Cecilia's surrogate father, the Welsh parson, arrives, and clears up the misunderstanding; Cecilia is accepted as the Governor's daughter, and allowed to marry Woodville.

Mariana Starke

The Sword of Peace, or, A Voyage of Love (1788)

Dramatis Personae

Men:		Women:	
Resident	Mr. Baddeley	Miss Eliza Moreton	Miss Farren
Mr. David Northcote	Mr. Kemble	Miss Louisa Moreton	Mrs. Kemble
Mr. Edwards	Mr. Williamson	Mrs. Tartar	Mrs. Whitfield
Lieutenant Dormer	Mr. Palmer	Mrs. Garnish	Mrs. Pouffin
Supple	Mr. R. Palmer	Mrs. Gobble	Mrs. Edwin
Jeffreys	Mr. Bannister Jr.	Miss Bronze	Miss Brangin
Caesar	Mr. Burton	Ladies	Miss Francis, Miss Palmer, Mrs. Gaudry
Mazinghi Dowza	Mr. Chapman		
Gentlemen	Messrs. Johnson, Lyons, Abbot, Painter		

The Sword of Peace is the story of Eliza and Louisa Moreton. The cousins arrive on the coast of Coromandel in India together, though they have different motives for travelling there: Eliza's lover Edwards has been sent to India by his parents because they felt she was an unsuitable match for him, and she wants to reunite with him. Louisa has been asked by an English gentleman to find the sword that belonged to his son who died in India. While trying

to accomplish these aims, they are drawn into the political and social issues of the province, which is under English government. The Resident and his mistress, Mrs. Tartar, are selfish and dismissive of Indian culture, and pay very little attention to matters outside their home. Mr. Northcote, on the other hand, is constantly trying to improve relations between British and Indian residents, and is well-known for his charitable deeds. The Moreton's servant Jeffreys, meanwhile, strikes up a friendship with Caesar, a black slave, whom he eventually frees. After foiling the Resident's plots, Eliza is reunited with her fiancé and Lousia marries Lieutenant Dormer, who had been in possession of the sword she was searching for. Northcote is made governor in the Resident's stead.

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