

# Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Actress

Fiona Ritchie, McGill University

---

## Abstract

David Garrick is frequently credited with revolutionizing the acting profession and the presentation of Shakespeare through his appearance in Shakespearean roles in the eighteenth century. But the actresses who performed alongside him were also hugely influential in pioneering a new conception of Shakespeare on the stage. Performers such as Catherine Clive and Hannah Pritchard were celebrated for their acting talent in works such as Charles Churchill's *The Rosciad* (1761) and Thomas Davies's *Dramatic Miscellanies* (1784). This paper will trace the history of women's performance of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century and will focus on the accounts of Clive's and Pritchard's acting. I suggest that performing Shakespeare helped actresses to be taken seriously as artists for the first time, allowing them to be admired and respected for their skill in their profession rather than to be treated primarily as "ornaments to the stage," as they were in the Restoration.

---

## The Advent of the Actress

It is a testament to the importance of Shakespeare to the history of the theater that the first appearance by a woman on the public stage in England is believed to have been in one of his plays. On 8 December, 1660, a woman (probably Anne Marshall) played the part of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello* in a production by Killigrew's King's Company at the Vere Street Theatre. Thomas Jordan's prologue and epilogue, written for the occasion, justify the advent of the actress in various ways — for example, by claiming that replacing boy actors with women will both increase the realism of the performance and also bring about moral reform of the stage. But from the start, attention is drawn to the new phenomenon of the female body on the stage, with distinctly licentious undertones:

I come, unknown to any of the rest  
To tell you news; I saw the Lady drest;  
The Woman playes to day, mistake me not,  
No Man in Gown, or Page in Petty-Coat;  
A Woman to my knowledge, yet I can't

(If I should dye) make Affadavit on't. (Danchin 1981-85, 1:55-56, lines 1-6)

These lines insinuate that the actor speaking the prologue has seen the actress dressing; he is sure she is a woman because he has seen her body. The sexual connotation of the word "knowledge" also would not have been lost on the audience. Thus, from the first entrance of the first woman on the public stage in England, the actress is set up as a sexual object to be viewed, enjoyed, and appropriated by the spectator.

### The Impact Of The Actress's Body On The Stage Presentation Of Shakespeare

Scholarship on female performers of the Restoration and eighteenth century has stressed the public nature of the actress's sexuality, as was demonstrated by Jordan's prologue. New developments in the conception of sexual difference meant that the model of gender relations was evolving from one based on hierarchy, with man seen as a superior being to woman, to a model based on polarity, with woman seen as having different capabilities and functions than man. This change is examined in an article by Katharine Eisaman Maus, who outlines how the actress's sexuality came to be both celebrated and exploited because of the fundamental physical differences between her and her male counterparts.

As a new commodity, the actress was seen as something that could be used to advantage in the theater. The notoriously bawdy drama produced immediately after the Restoration made considerable use of the female body on stage to titillate the audience; these dramatic techniques were also employed in Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare. In her book *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700*, Elizabeth Howe describes how "couch scenes" — in which "female characters were directed to lie at a distance, asleep on a couch, bed or grassy bank where, attractively defenceless and probably enticingly deshabelle, their beauty unwittingly aroused burning passion in the hero or villain who stumbled upon it" — were commonly used in Restoration drama (Howe 1992, 39-41). The popularity of this device suggests that productions of Shakespeare's plays at the time may also have made use of this type of staging. The frontispiece engravings to *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* in Rowe's 1709 edition of Shakespeare (reproduced in Howe's book on pages 38, 40, and 112) all show the heroines lying vulnerably on a bed with their breasts exposed, as the male character advances menacingly towards them. The couch scene clearly has its origins in the drama of the pre-closure period (such as Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*), but is pushed to new extremes in the Restoration, with the staging of Shakespeare's plays being made more visually erotic.

Another way of both exposing the actress's body and also depicting a female character in a titillatingly vulnerable position was by the inclusion of rape scenes. The influence of this trend can be seen in Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (1680), in which Cordelia goes to the heath in order to help her father, but is seized by two ruffians sent by Edmund, who wants Cordelia captured so that he himself can rape her:

[. . .] like the vig'rous Jove I will enjoy  
 This Semele in a Storm, 'twill deaf her Cries  
 Like Drums in Battle, lest her Groans should pierce  
 My pittying Ear, and make the amorous Fight less fierce. (Tate 1997, 3.2.122-25)

The projected rape of Cordelia provides an erotic frisson for the character of Edmund and, by extension, for the (male) audience.

The sexuality of the actress could also be heightened by dressing her as a man. Breeches roles were "designed to show off the female body — there was no question of the actress truly impersonating a man [. . .] The breeches role titillated both by the mere fact of a woman's being boldly and indecorously dressed in male costume and, of course, by the costume suggestively outlining the actress's hips, buttocks and legs, usually concealed by a skirt" (Howe 1992, 56). Male characters could be played by actresses; in Dryden and Davenant's 1667 version of *The Tempest*, for instance, Jane Long played Hippolito, drawing attention to the eroticism of her transvestite costume in her prologue: "Or if your fancy will be farther led / To find her Woman, it must be abed" (Dryden and Davenant 1997, Prologue, lines 37-38). The breeches role could be used in a tragic as well as a comic context; John Crowne's *The Misery of Civil War* (1680), an adaptation of *Henry VI, Parts 2 and 3*, adds a superfluous mistress for Henry's son Edward, Lady Elianor Butler, who follows Edward to the battlefield dressed "in man's habit," fights with Edward, and is defeated. She reproaches Edward for his behavior towards her, utters a pathetic speech, and then dies (Crowne 1680, 63-64).<sup>1</sup>

### The 1740 Shakespeare Revival: Peg Woffington's Legs

The physical presence of actresses on the stage clearly influenced the presentation of Shakespeare in the Restoration theater, with many of the most significant adaptations of his works capitalizing on the female performer's body and sexuality. The continuing impact of the actress on Shakespearean theater in the eighteenth century can be seen in a series of Shakespeare revivals that took place in the 1740-41 theatrical season. Although David Garrick is most frequently credited with popularizing Shakespeare's plays on the eighteenth-century stage, female performers were

hugely influential in reviving those of his works that had been neglected after the Restoration and before Garrick arrived on the London theatrical scene.

As I have just outlined, the addition of breeches roles to Shakespeare plays exploited the presence of the actress's body on the stage; what happened in the 1740 season also stemmed from an interest in the actress's physique. At the beginning of this season, John Rich had engaged Margaret Woffington to act at Covent Garden. She was renowned for her beauty and her shapely legs, and so Rich — aided and abetted by the Prince of Wales, a pronounced admirer of Woffington — cast her in plays involving breeches parts in order to exploit her figure. On 6 November, 1740, Woffington appeared as Sylvia in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* (a part that involved her taking a male disguise), "By Command of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales." The production was a popular one, being acted four more times that month and then another five times during the remainder of the season. Woffington had even greater success, however, when Rich cast her as Sir Harry Wildair in Farquhar's *The Constant Couple*. Woffington first performed this part on 21 November, 1740; the run continued for ten nights in November and early December, with two royal command performances, and was acted another six times during the rest of the season. In his *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, Thomas Davies described Woffington's success in this role: "The managers soon found it to be their interest to announce her frequently for that favourite character; it proved a constant charm to fill their houses" (Davies 1780, 1:307).<sup>2</sup>

Fleetwood and Macklin, the Drury Lane managers, were not to be outdone by Rich and so began to cast around for plays in which their own actresses' bodies could be displayed. Drury Lane having always had a strong Shakespeare tradition, it was perhaps inevitable that they would turn to Shakespeare's transvestite comedies. *As You Like It*, advertised as "Not Acted these Forty Years" and "Written by Shakespear," was performed on 20 December, 1740. The play had been assigned to the King's Company in 1669, but there is no record of a performance between the closure of the theaters in 1642 and this revival.<sup>3</sup> Phoebe was played by Elizabeth Bennet, Audrey by Mrs. Egerton, Celia by Catherine Clive, and Rosalind by Hannah Pritchard. The play was an enormous success, being performed an incredible twenty-one times between its first night and 6 February, 1741, and then a further six times that season. This achievement is even more significant when we note that the play was initially performed without an afterpiece, although the double bill had now become standard practice.

The next Shakespearean revival was another play that involved women dressing as men. *Twelfth Night* — billed as "Never Acted there before" and "Written by Shakespear" — was staged at Drury Lane on 15 January, 1741, with Maria Macklin as Maria, Hannah Pritchard as Viola, and

Catherine Clive as Olivia. A run of six nights followed, and the play was acted twice more that season. *Twelfth Night* had been revived briefly immediately after the Restoration; Van Lennep's *The London Stage*, Part 1 notes that Pepys mentions seeing three performances of this play in 1661, 1663, and 1669. It had disappeared from the repertory, however, until the 1741 production, and so this was a significant revival.

When the impetus for the mid-eighteenth century Shakespeare revival is not attributed to Garrick, it is often credited to Charles Macklin, who revived *The Merchant of Venice* at Drury Lane on 14 February, 1741. The play, as "Written by Shakespear" — as opposed to Granville's *The Jew of Venice*, which had been popular since its first appearance in 1701 — had not been performed since the Restoration, but had an impressive total of twenty performances in the 1740-41 season. Macklin's decision to restore this play to the stage proved enormously popular, as the audience felt that he portrayed "the Jew that Shakespeare drew" (Baker 1782, 1:293)<sup>4</sup> Macklin was also praised for introducing a new, more naturalistic style of acting that influenced Garrick in his Shakespeare performances later in the century. But Macklin's revival would not have been possible without the actresses in his company (Clive played Portia and Pritchard Nerissa); the trend for reviving Shakespeare plays that involved female cross-dressing meant that *The Merchant of Venice* was bound to meet with success. This may seem curious to us, as the cross-dressing in this play occurs in the trial scene, which modern audiences tend to see as serious and non-erotic. However, *The Merchant of Venice* had until this time been played as a comedy, and although Macklin brought tragic resonance to the part of Shylock, traces of the play's comic performance history remained, particularly in Clive's portrayal of Portia: hence, the popularity of the use of the breeches part, usually associated with comedy.

The achievement of the 1740-41 Shakespeare revival is plain: As well as the restoration of several neglected Shakespeare plays to the stage with considerable success (particularly in the case of the *As You Like It*'s phenomenal popularity), the season saw an unprecedented number of performances of Shakespearean drama. Arthur Scouten notes that by the end of the season, Drury Lane had produced fourteen Shakespeare plays, for a total of eighty-five performances on 192 acting nights, and that from mid-December to the end of March there were only six acting nights without a production of Shakespeare at one of the three houses (Scouten 1956, 199). Although seen as Shakespeare's champion, Garrick never made Shakespeare's works such a strong focus of the theatrical repertory during the period in which he managed Drury Lane; in fact, the number of Shakespeare plays in the repertory of Drury Lane declined from twenty-two to thirteen under his management (Scouten 1956, 200). *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice*,

however, became stock plays after their revivals in this season and were still in the repertory at Drury Lane in 1776 (when Garrick ceased to be manager).<sup>5</sup>

That all this was due at first to the physical presence of actresses on the stage is significant and shows how, even if they were exploited by the exhibition of their bodies, female performers could have a valuable and lasting impact on the presentation of Shakespeare in the eighteenth-century theater. Although the initial impetus for the Shakespeare revival of the 1740-41 season was the celebration of actresses' sexuality when playing breeches parts, the plays would not have had such success if the female performers cast in the lead roles had not been so innovative in developing new styles of performance that moved beyond the mere exhibition of their bodies. *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Merchant of Venice* at Drury Lane all featured Catherine Clive and Hannah Pritchard, who were two of the most popular and talented actresses of their day. It is also crucial to note that the plays revived in this season became established in the repertory as a direct result of their success in the 1740-41 season, before Garrick appeared on the London stage or became manager of Drury Lane, and continued to be popular from this season onwards. The popularity of Shakespeare in the eighteenth-century theater is, in large part, due to the skill of the actresses who performed his works on the stage.

### Contemporary Criticism Of Shakespearean Actresses: The Female Performer As Professional

The theatrical records contained in *The London Stage*, Part 3 demonstrate the success of the Shakespeare revivals of the 1740-41 season and show the actresses' success in popularizing Shakespeare on the stage. Further evidence of the achievement of female performers can be found in the dramatic criticism of the period. From about the middle of the eighteenth century, theatrical criticism proliferated; this increased literary interest in the theater overlapped with a concerted attempt to regularize the status of the acting profession as far as society's view of it was concerned.<sup>6</sup> I would like to focus here on three sources: Thomas Davies's 1780 biography of David Garrick; his 1784 *Dramatic Miscellanies*; and Charles Churchill's poem *The Rosciad* (1761). I will concentrate on their accounts of the acting of Catherine Clive and Hannah Pritchard, using these contemporary critical accounts to evaluate their acting skill and to assess how actresses were coming to be judged by dramatic critics and by society.

Although there was a general increase in the volume of dramatic criticism in the mid-eighteenth century, the phenomenon especially affected female performers. Davies's work, in particular, offers an extended treatment of female roles in the theater and of the merits of the actresses who performed

them (as well as analyzing male roles and male performers). Previous theatrical commentators had recorded their opinions of actresses' performances, but their comments were brief and did not approach the extended analysis undertaken by Davies.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Davies's work, in contrast to earlier theatrical commentaries, pays a great deal of attention to Shakespeare in performance. Davies has a special interest in the power of Shakespeare's female characters and rejects the idea that they are not fully developed because the roles were written for boy actors:

Some critics have supposed, that the female characters of Shakespeare are not drawn with equal force and spirit, nor with that elegance and delicacy, as in other writers, on account of having such improper representatives. But I believe it will be difficult to find, in any author, such abundant and varied originality, in women's characters, as in Shakespeare. (Davies 1784, 2:363)

In a note, he adds that "Cleopatra, Juliet, Imogen, Ophelia, Lady Constance, Isabella, Volumnia, Lady Macbeth, Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind, Beatrice, are all distinct characters. To these many others might be added" (Davies 1784, 2:363-64).

This interest in Shakespearean heroines is central to *Dramatic Miscellanies*, which describes at length the principal characters of the drama that was staged in the eighteenth century and the performances of actresses who played them. Davies describes the advent of the first actresses in conventional terms, as ornaments to the stage: "Charles II. put an end to the ridiculous and absurd custom of men acting women's parts. A number of beautiful actresses soon gave a new lustre to the English theatre" (Davies 1784, 2:364). Although the physical appearance of the actress was still a criterion for judgment of her merit, as is evident from the Shakespeare revivals motivated by the fashion for breeches roles, actresses were, for the first time, coming to be taken seriously as performers and, indeed, as leading exponents of the art of acting.

In her exploration of the construction of actresses' femininity in the eighteenth century, Kristina Straub argues that the discourse of professionalism in the theater world intensified for the actress a contradiction between femininity as a public spectacle and emergent definitions of the middle-class woman as domestic and private (Straub 1992, 89). It is my contention that Shakespeare's female roles enabled actresses to achieve greater professional regard amongst dramatic commentators because performing these parts led critics to focus on the actress's construction of the role, rather than on her public display of sexuality. Shakespeare's female roles thus provided a way for the actresses of the period to demonstrate their considerable technical skill and to encourage public respect for their craft.

That comedy was considered by critics to be a genre inferior to tragedy can be seen from the large number of treatises on tragic acting that appeared in the eighteenth century, in comparison with the dearth of critical examination of the comic genre. Aaron Hill, for example, promised a work on comedy in his *Art of Acting* (published 1753), which dealt mainly with tragedy, but this work never materialized.<sup>8</sup> Actresses were still praised for their ability to perform comic parts, but comic acting did not attract as much critical attention as performance in tragedy. Catherine (Kitty) Clive, the most celebrated comic actress of the day, was praised by Charles Churchill's *Rosciad* in the following terms:

In spite of outward blemishes she shone  
 For Humour fam'd, and Humour all her own.  
 Easy, as if at home, the stage she trod,  
 Nor fought the Critic's praise, nor fear'd his rod.  
 Original in spirit and in ease,  
 She pleas'd by hiding all attempts to please.  
 No comic actress ever yet could raise,  
 On Humour's base, more merit or more praise. (Churchill 1761, lines 409-16)

Davies also paid tribute to Clive's comic abilities, calling her "the superior comic actress of the theatre" (Davies 1784, 2:408). Clive was widely celebrated, as in Churchill's evaluation, for her natural and easy manner of acting. Beyond general statements of her merit as a comic actress, however, there seems to be little or no surviving detailed critical comment on Clive's constructions of the roles she played. Although comic acting was analyzed and praised to some extent by critics, it seems it was not deemed worthy of the detailed scrutiny afforded to tragic performances. Furthermore, of the eleven Shakespeare plays analyzed by Davies in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, only one comedy is explored (*All's Well That Ends Well*).<sup>9</sup>

Clive contributed to the success of the 1740-41 revivals of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, in which she played Celia and Olivia, and of Macklin's revival of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which she played Portia. But Davies's description of her success in Congreve's *The Double Dealer* makes it clear that Clive was considered to be primarily of merit in contemporary comic productions and that parts were created specifically with her talents in mind: "Clive was, in Lady Froth, as in the rest of her comic characters, superior to all actresses. Happy was the author who could write a part equal to her abilities!" (Davies 1784, 3:324). Davies does record his opinion of Clive as Catherine in Garrick's adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but it seems that the success of the production

was to some extent a result of the audience's fascination with the real-life relationship between Clive and Henry Woodward:

Mrs. Clive, though a perfect mistress of Catherine's humour, seemed to be overborne by the extravagant and triumphant grotesque of Woodward; she appeared to be over-awed as much by his manner of acting, as Catherine is represented to be in the new fable. In one of his mad fits, when the new married couple were at supper, Woodward stuck a fork, it is said, in Mrs. Clive's finger; and in pushing her off the stage, he was so much in earnest, that he threw her down: as it was well known that they did not greatly respect one another, it was believed that something more than chance contributed to these excesses. (Davies 1780, 1:276)

Berta Joncus points out that in comic drama of the period, the performer's public persona, which would have been well-established, was central to the comic effect of the piece (Joncus 2003, 15). Thus, it seems that Clive's success in contemporary comedy influenced the audience's perception of her performance in this Shakespeare adaptation, which was designed by Garrick as a comic afterpiece.

Hannah Pritchard's first great theatrical success was playing Rosalind in the 1740 revival of *As You Like It*. Davies claims that this role "at once established her theatrical character: her delivery of dialogue, whether of humour, wit, or mere sprightliness, was never, I believe, surpassed, or, perhaps, equalled: her fame was now enlarging every day by the eagerness which the town expressed to see her in various attitudes" (Davies 1780, 2:177-78). Pritchard's success in this role led John Hill to describe her as "the best actress of the British stage" ([Hill] 1755, 195). Pritchard next created the role of Viola in *Twelfth Night*, when that play was revived in January 1741, and played the part of Nerissa in Macklin's revival of *The Merchant of Venice* in February of that year. All of these productions were, as has been noted above, extremely successful and without a doubt paved the way for Garrick's later movement to promote Shakespeare on the stage.

On 5 October, 1742, Hannah Pritchard performed for the first time with the young David Garrick: They played Chamont and Monimia in Thomas Otway's *The Orphan*. On 16 November, Pritchard played Gertrude to Garrick's *Hamlet*. They continued to perform together sporadically in the following years, as Garrick rapidly made a name for himself. Their partnership caused its first major sensation when, on 12 February, 1747, Garrick played Ranger and Pritchard Clarinda in Benjamin Hoadly's *The Suspicious Husband*. Contemporary critical commentary makes it clear that Pritchard's acting was equally as skillful as Garrick's. The two were praised for their performances

in *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which they first appeared together on 14 November, 1748. Anthony Vaughan, Pritchard's biographer, describes the critical reaction to this production:

The critics saw the play of wit between Beatrice and Benedick as a continual contest: "Mrs. Pritchard was Garrick's rival in every scene; which of them deserved the laurel most was never decided," says Murphy. Davies, in almost identical words, confirms this: "The excellent action of Mrs. Pritchard in Beatrice, was not inferior to that of Benedick. Every scene between them was a continual struggle for superiority; nor could the audience determine which was the victor." Walpole, however, had no doubt, "there was more spirit and originality in her Beatrice than in his Benedict," and yet again in another letter, "Mrs. Pritchard played with more spirit and was superior to Garrick's Benedict." (Vaughan 1979, 54)

The play was immediately successful; it had fourteen performances that season and remained popular in the following years.

As well as being an accomplished comic actress, Pritchard was also skilled in tragic roles. The ability to act in both comic and tragic drama was relatively unusual, although it was a talent also credited to Garrick. At this time, most performers stuck to one "walk," either comedy or tragedy. Davies writes, however, that Pritchard was "not confined to any one walk in acting, she ranged through them all; and, what is singular, she discovered a large degree of merit in every distinct class of it" (Davies 1780, 2:178). Pritchard's ability to act both comic and tragic parts is another way in which she rivalled Garrick, the most famous performer of the age.

The critics' inability to separate the performances of Garrick and Pritchard in *Much Ado About Nothing* was also true of their appearance together in *Macbeth*. Davies writes of the scenes surrounding the murder of Duncan: "The representation of this terrible part of the play, by Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard, can no more be described than I believe it can be equalled. I will not separate these performers, for the merits of both were transcendent. His distraction of mind and agonizing horrors were finely contrasted by her seeming apathy, tranquillity, and confidence" (Davies 1784, 2:148). Indeed, Garrick played the part of Macbeth on only one occasion after Pritchard's departure from the stage in 1768 (Stone and Kahl 1979, 558, 552). Hester Thrale, in fact, claimed that Pritchard's performance was better than that of Garrick and that he himself realized this: "I always thought Pritchard superior to Garrick; he felt her so in one Scene of *Hamlet*, one of *Macbeth*, & one of the *Jealous Wife*, when all the spontaneous Applause of the House ran to her" (Thrale 1942, 2:725, n. 4).

Although her collaboration with Garrick was clearly a crucial factor in the success of Pritchard's performance of Lady Macbeth, there is much contemporary critical comment on the considerable merits of her individual performance. In his *Life of David Garrick*, Davies, like many contemporary critics, focused on three key scenes: the murder, the banquet, and the sleepwalking scene. Of the murder he writes that:

Mrs. Pritchard's action, before and after the commission of the horrid deed, was strongly characteristical: it presented an image of a mind insensible to compunction, and inflexibly bent to cruelty. When she snatched the dagger from the remorseful and irresolute Macbeth, despising the agitations of a mind unaccustomed to guilt, and alarmed at the terrors of conscience, she presented to the audience a picture of the most consummate intrepidity, in mischief. When she seized the instruments of death, and said,

'GIVE ME THE DAGGERS!' —

her look and action cannot be described, and will not soon be forgotten by the surviving spectators. (Davies 1780, 2:182-83)

In his use of the term "characteristical," Davies praises Pritchard's understanding of the character and her ability to act in a manner that accords well with the depiction of Lady Macbeth that Shakespeare gives us.

In the banquet scene, Pritchard is once again commended for her interpretation and for her by-play as Lady Macbeth attempts to distract the attention of the company away from her husband:

At the banquet scene, in the third act of the play, she still discovered more characteristical skill, if possible, than in the preceding act. The guilty king, full of the horrors resulting from the murder of Banquo, by his alarming terrors of mind, betrays himself to his guests. Mrs. Pritchard's art in endeavouring to engage the attention of the company, and draw them from the observation of Macbeth's feelings, equalled any thing that was ever seen in the art of acting. (Davies 1780, 2:183)

Pritchard's genius is again noted in the sleepwalking scene: "In exhibiting the last scene of Lady Macbeth, in which the terrors of a guilty conscience keep the mind broad awake while the body sleeps, Mrs. Pritchard's acting resembled those sudden flashes of lightning, which more accurately discover the horrors of surrounding darkness" (Davies 1780, 2:183-84). Here, Pritchard is admired for her ability to add depth to the character of Lady Macbeth — she is not simply a cruel and terrible woman; rather, the sparks of conscience that Pritchard demonstrates make her both more human and more fearful. What is evident from all these accounts is the physicality of Pritchard's

performance; like Garrick, she was developing a new style of acting far removed from the static and declamatory manner of their theatrical predecessors.

Lady Macbeth became Pritchard's most famous part, and it is fitting that she appeared on the stage for the last time in this role for her benefit on 25 April, 1768. In *The Rosciad*, Churchill describes the effect that Pritchard's performance of Lady Macbeth had on him:

When she to murder whets the tim'rous Thane,  
I feel Ambition rush through ev'ry vein;  
Persuasion hangs upon her daring tongue,  
My heart grows flint, and ev'ry nerve's new strung. (Churchill 1761, lines 491-94)

This is a wonderful testament to the sheer power of Pritchard's performance; not only does she give a convincing portrayal of the character of Lady Macbeth, but she is moving the audience to become emotionally involved in the play; Churchill here seems also to imagine himself in the role of Macbeth, so that Pritchard, as Lady Macbeth, reaches out to and persuades every member of the audience to her murderous plan.

At times, and particularly when she grew stouter in later years, Garrick's slight build must have made him look incongruous next to the statuesque Pritchard; contemporary illustrations of their performances together — for instance, notably the famous painting of them in *Macbeth* by Johann Zoffany (1768) — suggest as much. The success of their partnership, however, implies that eighteenth-century audiences were more than willing to make allowances for the disparity between two actors' physical forms when faced with the power of their performances together. Churchill takes just such a view in *The Rosciad*:

Figure, I own, at first, may give offence,  
And harshly strike the eye's too curious sense:  
But when perfections of the mind break forth,  
Humour's chaste sallies, Judgment's solid worth;  
When the pure genuine flame, by Nature taught,  
Springs into Sense, and ev'ry action's Thought;  
Before such merit, all objections fly;  
Pritchard's genteel and Garrick six feet high. (Churchill 1761, lines 521-28)

Indeed, Churchill credits Pritchard with the skill in acting that makes her and Garrick seem well-suited on stage.

In its analysis of Pritchard, the poem attacks the small-minded critical opinion that judges performers on their physical appearance. In response to the accusation that "Pritchard's for comedy too fat and old" (line 496), Churchill gives an angry tirade against the habit of evaluating performers solely on the aesthetic appeal of their physical form:

Are foibles then, and graces of the mind,  
 In real life, to size or age confin'd?  
 Do spirits flow, and is good breeding plac'd  
 In any set circumference of waist?  
 [. . .]  
 All actors too upon the back should bear  
 Certificate of birth; — time, when; — place, where.  
 For how can critics rightly fix their worth,  
 Unless they know the minute of her birth?  
 An audience too, deceived, may find, too late,  
 That they have clapp'd an actor out of date. (Churchill 1761, lines 501-20)

Churchill's rant shows how far the London theater had come since the days of the first actresses, who had been introduced onto the stage largely for the purpose of titillation, however much this was cast in the guise of moral reform; for the first time now, female performers were being taken seriously as artists, and actresses like Pritchard were accorded the same respect by critics as their male contemporaries, even Garrick.

### Conclusion

Although the credit for Shakespeare's reestablishment and growing popularity in the eighteenth-century theater has been given to Garrick for his achievements as actor and manager, as I have demonstrated female performers played a much greater role in this development than has previously been acknowledged. The regularization of the status of the actor has also been largely attributed to Garrick, but clearly actresses had a significant part to play. The analysis of actresses' performances contained in Davies's criticism and Churchill's *Rosciad* shows that female performers were no longer considered exclusively in the same terms as their Restoration counterparts, as ornaments to the stage, but were coming to be respected and admired as professional performers. Although Restoration actresses were admired for their skill, extended evaluation of their constructions of the roles they played or analysis of their acting ability never appeared. There are, of course, several reasons for this omission, in particular a change in cultural

attitudes towards the social standing of the actor and the proliferation of theatrical criticism in the mid-eighteenth century. It is my contention, however, that Restoration versions of Shakespeare portrayed female characters as sexual commodities to such a degree on the stage that it became difficult for the actresses playing these roles to be considered as serious artists. Traces of these old attitudes remained in the eighteenth century, but the revival of Shakespeare's plays in versions closer to the originals, although at first motivated by the female performers' sexuality — as in the case of the breeches roles of the 1740-41 season — allowed actresses to play more developed parts and to create new styles of acting and expression that did not simply exploit their physical presence on the stage. Thus, Shakespeare provided a significant instrument through which actresses could assert their skill and theatrical worth, allowing them to contribute to a growing movement to make the acting profession more respectable in the eyes of society.

### Notes

1. The essays in this cluster are papers originally delivered in a panel session on eighteenth-century Shakespeare at the second British Shakespeare Association Conference at Newcastle University in 2005. For an examination of the impact of pathetic drama on the female characters in reworkings of Shakespeare in the Restoration, see Marsden 1991.
2. Woffington's success as a performer is clear from her relationship with Garrick. It seems that the young actor, who was in love with the celebrated actress, deliberately allied himself with her in a bid to achieve his own fame in the theatrical world (Stone and Kahrl 1979, 54).
3. For details of the performance history of Shakespeare's plays in the Restoration and eighteenth century, see *The London Stage* volumes (Van Lennep [n.d.], Avery 1960, and Scouten 1961). See also the section entitled "The Shakespearean Revival" in the introduction to *The London Stage*, Part 3 (Scouten 1961, 3:cxlix-clii) and "The Shakespearean Revival" in Lynch 1953, 89-115.
4. This comment is frequently credited to Pope; however, the only record I have found of it attributes the statement to "a gentleman among the audience" on the night of Macklin's first performance of the part (Baker 1782, 1:293).
5. See Scouten's Table B of repertory plays and revivals (Scouten 1956, 193-94).
6. On dramatic criticism in the London periodicals, see Gray 1931. On the status of the acting profession in eighteenth-century society, see Straub 1992, Chapter 1, "Ocular Affairs: The Gendering of Eighteenth-Century Spectacle," 3-23; and Chapter 5, "The Construction of Actresses' Femininity," 89-108.

7. John Downes, for example, lists the roles performed by actresses of the Restoration in *Roscius Anglicanus* (1987), but although he comments on the success achieved by some female performers, his remarks are limited to a sentence or two. Colley Cibber's comments on actresses in his *Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian* (1740) are more lengthy, but are often biographical and focus on the actress's strengths and weaknesses in general, rather than in specific roles, and the parts he does consider largely belong to contemporary drama.
8. Katherine West Scheil (2003) has recently shown that Shakespeare's comedies were evaluated in a very different way than his tragedies and histories and that the latter two genres had considerably more influence on the public perception of Shakespeare as the national poet and cultural hero in the eighteenth century.
9. Similarly, in Francis Gentleman's *The Dramatic Censor* (1770), only two of the fourteen Shakespeare plays examined are comedies (*As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*).

## References

- Avery, Emmett L., ed. 1960. *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces Together With Casts, Box-Receipts, and Contemporary Comment, Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers, and Theatrical Diaries of the Period. Part 2: 1700-1729.* 2 vols. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Baker, David Erskine. 1782. *Biographia Dramatica, or, a Companion to the Playhouse.* 2 vols. London.
- Churchill, Charles. 1761. *The Rosciad.* Dublin.
- Cibber, Colley. 1987. *A Critical Edition of the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian.* Ed. John Maurice Evans. 1740; New York: Garland.
- Congreve, William. 1694. *The Double Dealer.* London.
- Crowne, John. 1680. *The Misery of Civil War.*
- Danchin, Pierre, ed. 1981-85. *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration, 1660-1700.* 4 parts. Nancy: Publications de l'Université de Nancy.
- Davies, Thomas. 1780. *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq.* 2 vols. London.
- Davies, Thomas. 1784. *Dramatic Micellanies [sic]: Consisting of Critical Observations of the Several Plays of Shakespeare: With a Review of his Principal Characters, and Those of Various Eminent Writers, as Represented by Mr. Garrick, and Other Celebrated Comedians. With Anecdotes of Dramatic Poets, Actors, &c.* 3 vols. London.
- Downes, John. 1987. *Roscius Anglicanus.* Ed. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume. 1708; London: Society for Theatre Research.
- Dryden, John, and William Davenant. 1997. *The Tempest (1667).* In *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare.* Edited by Sandra Clark. London: Everyman. 79-185.
- Farquhar, George. 1706. *The Recruiting Officer.* London.
- Farquhar, George. 1700 [1699]. *The Constant Couple, or, A Trip to the Jubilee.* London.
- [Gentleman, Francis.] 1770. *The Dramatic Censor; or, Critical Companion.* 2 vols. London.
- Gray, Charles Harold. 1931. *Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795.* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Highfill, Philip H., Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, eds. 1973-93. *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800.* 16 vols. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Hill, Aaron. 1753. *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq; in Four Volumes. Consisting of Letters on Various Subjects, and of Original Poems, Moral and Facetious, with an Essay on the Art of Acting*. 4 vols. London.
- [Hill, John]. 1755. *The Actor: Or, a Treatise on the Art of Playing*. London.
- Hoadly, Dr. [Benjamin]. 1747. *The Suspicious Husband*. London.
- Howe, Elizabeth. 1992. *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Joncus, Berta. 2003. "A Star is Born: Kitty Clive and Female Representation in Eighteenth-Century English Musical Theatre." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Oxford University.
- Lynch, James. 1953. *Box, Pit, and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson's London*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marsden, Jean I. 1991. "Rewritten Women: Shakespearean Heroines in the Restoration." *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*. Edited by Jean I. Marsden. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf. 43-56.
- Maus, Katharine Eisaman. 1979. "'Playhouse Flesh and Blood:' Sexual Ideology and the Restoration Actress." *English Literary History* 46: 595-617.
- Otway, Thomas. 1680. *The Orphan: Or, The Unhappy-Marriage*. London.
- Scheil, Katherine West. 2003. *The Taste of the Town: Shakespearian Comedy and the Early Eighteenth-Century Theater*. Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses.
- Scouten, Arthur H. 1956. "The Increase in Popularity of Shakespeare's Plays in the Eighteenth Century: A Caveat for Interpreters of Stage History." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7: 189-202.
- Scouten, Arthur H., ed. 1961. *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts, and Contemporary Comment. Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers, and Theatrical Diaries of the Period*. Part 3: 1729-1747. 2 vols. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Stone, George Winchester, Jr., and George M. Kahrl. 1979. *David Garrick: A Critical Biography*. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press; London: Feffer and Simons.
- Straub, Kristina. 1992. *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tate, Nahum. 1997. *King Lear* (1680). In *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*. Edited by Sandra Clark. London: Everyman. 291-373.
- Thrale, Hester. 1942. *Thraliana*, 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon.

Van Lennep, William, ed. [n.d.] *The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces, Together With Casts, Box-Receipts, and Contemporary Comment, Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers, and Theatrical Diaries of the Period.* Part 1: 1660-1700. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press.

Vaughan, Anthony. 1979. *Born to Please: Hannah Pritchard, Actress, 1711-1768: A Critical Biography.* London: The Society for Theatre Research.