

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Eighteenth-Century Actress: Gender and Agency

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

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September 2014

Abstract

Actresses epitomized the pluralism of the female gender, exposing the variable images of women in their performances, painted images and in literature narrating the histories of performing women. The classification of actresses as either virtuous or immoral was not unique to professional actors and was suffered by women of all classes. And yet, with the theatrical stage as a platform to either conform or challenge conventional gender constructions, actresses possessed exclusive access to the public where they could establish alternative images of femininity.

This thesis examines the methods used by actresses in exerting their influence, but also identifies the abuses actresses endured that were distinctive to their profession. Their ability to mimic the manners and fashions of the upper classes and the acceptance of actresses into elite company, demonstrated the changeable nature of what individuals viewed as class identity. The transience of successful actresses in elevating their social status, posed a threat to social hierarchy that was founded on patriarchal authority. However, in appearing to conform to prescribed gender roles that placed women as the subordinates of men, actresses manipulated their identities to complement the public's attitude.

The changeable nature of class identity juxtaposed the capriciousness of female representations, with descriptions of actresses varying from admirable women who were admitted into upper class society, to images of unworthy and immoral seductresses from the lower classes. Virtue once lost was not irreversible and the exploitation of this knowledge by actresses is discussed in relation to the increased visibility of businesswomen who utilised

their ambiguous sexuality for career progression. Actresses throughout the eighteenth century were influential public figures, but the agency of the more successful performers aided in the construction of femininity that related to a broader spectrum of women.

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Amanda Capern and Professor Robin Pearson, whose constructive criticism and support throughout my entire PhD experience has been invaluable and it has been an honour receiving their assistance. I would also like to extend my thanks to the History Department and Graduate School in Hull where I have always received valuable and friendly guidance.

I would like to thank the staff in the Victoria and Albert Library and University of Nottingham Library, who spent the time to help me search their catalogues and the Brynmor Jones Library staff for their patience with me and my queries. I am indebted to Gayle Richardson, Library Assistant at the Huntington Library, California, for her generosity in helping me select correspondence and providing the copies as I was unable to view them in person. Due to my enquiries, Gayle took it upon herself to catalogue the entire Dorothy Jordan collection for future research and it has been my privilege to have been the catalyst for this.

To my parents, Thomas and Eileen, I dedicate this research to you both and thank you, along with Susan, Niamh and Brenda, for being a constant source of support and reassurance. But mostly I would like to thank my partner, James, who has stuck by me throughout all the ups and downs of this doctorate. I can never repay him for the encouragement, calming support and many cups of tea he has provided these past few years, without which I could never have completed this work.

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Introduction

Many females have risen from the lowest walks of life to distinguished eminence; some, on account of their personal charms, other by fortuitous circumstances, and many by adding cunning to their attractions, but few, very few, by their intrinsic merit, their superior beauty, and their virtuous deportment united.¹

Historical texts represent the eighteenth-century as a period of finery, social revolution and discourses regarding the separation of gender specific duties. Women were portrayed as the subordinate sex in contemporary conduct literature and religious teachings that emphasised the importance of protecting female virtue by containing women within the domestic sphere. Actresses did not adhere to stereotypical feminine constraints as these women inhabited and participated in the construction of public culture. This dissertation will focus on the influence of the actress throughout the eighteenth-century, a period when the theatre itself was undergoing a transformation with increased government regulation on the content exhibited within the playhouse. The visibility of actresses in society played a significant role in the forms of labour available to women outside the home and the social mobility obtainable through the transience of their profession which threatened to diminish class divisions. Eighteenth-century actresses presented a unique version of femininity which participated in the construction of gender identities. By exhibiting themselves on the stage,

¹ 'The Countess of Derby,' *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, August 25, 1800; Issue 12314.

in portraits and in the print media, actresses represented females who had the means to voice the difficulties faced by members of their sex, particularly the sufferings of lower class women. The following study will examine the agency of actresses throughout this period and how the exertion of their influence affected conventional gender roles.

The progression of women's history

In the late nineteenth century economic and social history emerged as an influential and popular research area. In France, the *Annales* School developed at the same time as the New Social History in the USA, both concerned with the histories of the ordinary people.² Women's history owes many of its methodologies in quantification and concepts to social history.³ The recording of history was predominantly presented from the male perspective and this led to the separation of spheres theory. Men and women were socialised beings and existed in different spaces, men in the public and women confined to the private domestic sphere. This assumption was seen as a natural rather than a socially constructed phenomenon, women appearing as weak and men as their protectors. In a male dominated world, concepts of the division of genders were legitimised by the hierarchical structure and therefore women's values were minimised to a domestic and caring role. Simone de Beauvoir stated in 1949 that 'one is not born a woman...but rather becomes one...and in becoming is, at least to some extent, a matter of choice.'⁴ During the eighteenth century the evangelical revival emphasised the concept that men and women were different, one

² Alberti, *Gender and the Historian*, p. 13.

³ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 21.

⁴ De Beauvoir, 'The Second Sex, Book II,' *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [<http://www.iep.utm.edu/beauvoir>] Cited in Southgate, *History: What and Why?* p. 106.

was dominant and the other submissive. The evangelicals preached that women's rightful place was within the home where they could nurture and rear children as God had intended. However, Kathryn Shevelow claimed that this confinement also strengthened the importance and authority of women within society.⁵ Children were women's responsibility, and so the future leaders heavily depended on the domestic ability of mothers. To some feminist historians, such as Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, the separate spheres theory is too simplistic a model to be used to explain a period where the boundaries between 'public' and 'private', or 'social' and 'political', were blurred and 'permeable'⁶. Ann-Louise Shapiro has also pointed to the 'slippery nature' of the theory of 'public' and 'private' divisions, as the home or 'private' sphere was once the hub of family run industries.⁷ Women played a large part in the publication of conduct literature, novels and the recruitment of their gender from the upper-classes into societies that discussed such political topics as the problematic rising lower-classes and its social implications and challenges to their authority. Yet as Leonore Davidoff argued, this theory of separating men and women into asymmetrical worlds, has been described as one of the most dominant concepts that has developed within women's history since its emergence in the 1960s.⁸

Research on the history of women has gathered significant recognition and has grown into a worldwide intellectual movement. In England, feminist history emerged from the new social history and socialist historians offered courses outside traditional universities in the

⁵ Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 10.

⁶ Barker & Chalus, eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 3.

⁷ Shapiro, 'Feminists Revision History,' referred in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Barker et al., p. 6 & p. 21.

⁸ Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 227.

1960s and 1970s. These courses revolved around the lives and labour of the British working class, thus emphasising the importance of the ordinary lower classes by giving the people a history of their own, which included the histories of female workers.⁹ Women's historians now looked towards political inequalities and events that had previously been overlooked such as the struggle for the vote, women's access to higher education, female involvement in the industrial revolution, women's medical history and sexuality. Yet a problem that arose from examining women's history through politics was that present day terms and values were used in the understanding of women from the past. Therefore, as the Italian historian Gianna Pomata stated, this would prevent 'a true dialogue with women of the past'.¹⁰ With this in mind, women's historians need to be aware that eighteenth century women may not have considered themselves the subordinates of men. In 1987 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall published their book *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. In their examination of the middle class social organisation they emphasised the importance of gender relations. Catherine Hall's justification of the book was -

'We wanted not just to put the women back into a history from which they had been left out, but to rewrite that history so that proper recognition would be given to the ways in which gender, as a key axis of power in society, provides a crucial understanding of how any society is structured and organised...'.¹¹

⁹ Downs, *Writing Gender History*, p. 31.

¹⁰ Pomata, 'Prospettive e soggetti di storia delle donne' in *La Ricerca Della Donne: Studi Femministi in Italia*, ed. Marcuzzo & Rossi-Doria, pp. 199-200. <http://translate.google.com/> as cited in Downs, *Writing Gender History*, pp. 20-30.

¹¹ Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*, pp. 12-13.

An important element of the book was that unlike previous gender texts, *Family Fortunes* did not focus solely on femininity, but included the men of the middle classes and how masculinity was constructed. Gender does not only affect the lives and history of women and so this study opened the way for further study into gender. Without masculinity, femininity would not be possible and therefore gender history would be incomplete. From the late 1980s and 1990s, the evolution of gender research into other areas such as the social analysis of class divisions was evident. The histories produced from this referred to gender identities not as universal definitions but as constantly evolving elements within a social structure. For Joan Wallach Scott gender represented the general understanding that society was organised by sexual differences. The production of this knowledge lay in the society's cultures, structures and especially its history. As historical events occur and are recorded, patriarchal ideals and concepts are strengthened and established gender roles for the present.¹² Historians have argued that women had been excluded from the written past, but by writing a women's history, historians had forgotten the gender of their male subjects. According to Toby L. Ditz, masculinity had been 'overlooked precisely to the extent that the power and privilege signified was hegemonic.'¹³ Historians such as Natalie Davis and Michelle Perrot, asserted that the study of men was heavily needed for the study of women. Davis stated that we as historians should not examine one sex above the other, any more than 'a historian of class can focus entirely on peasants'.¹⁴ As for its effect on women's history, the study of masculinity would give substance to the concept of gender

¹² Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 2.

¹³ Ditz, 'The New Men's History and the Peculiar absence of Gendered Power', p. 1.

¹⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women's history' in transition: the European case', *Feminist Studies*, 3:3/4 (1976), p. 90.

construction. The term 'mutual construction' had remained a theoretical conception while within an exclusively feminine study.¹⁵ An examination of the male perspective would allow for a more complete history, looking at the range of 'sexual symbolism in different societies and periods...and how they functioned to maintain the social order'.¹⁶

The theatre was a culturally rooted institution, which formed a political platform for social discourses in the eighteenth-century. Because of this, theatrical research is an important historical tool exhibiting the period's tensions, public tastes and gender constructions. As new approaches of communication developed, such as acting, people's perceptions and ways of thinking about beauty and gender roles were moulded through attending theatrical performances and the consumption of conduct literature.¹⁷ Feminist theories crept into the disciplines of history and theatre studies in the 1980s after their emergence from the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s, analysing the visibility of women in society. The utilisation of sexuality and gender identification in the examination of the theatre can shed light on the social and cultural stresses of a period. Judith Butler argued that gender was not a stable concept, unlike a person's biological sex. Instead she insisted that gender was a combination of the body's external gestures and mannerisms that are performed in everyday tasks, similar to how actors perform on the stage. Butler identified that the body 'publicly performs repeated, planned, stylized actions that are understood by the society in which they occur'.¹⁸ Therefore, by taking these gestures and performing them on the stage,

¹⁵ Downs, *Writing Gender History*, p. 74.

¹⁶ Davis, 'Women's history in transition', p. 90.

¹⁷ Zarrilli, et al., ed., *Theatre Histories*, p. XXVIII.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138. Further reading see Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

a male actor could enact the role of a heroine and vice versa, blurring the boundaries of masculine and feminine qualities. Gender confusion on the stage is evident in the study of eighteenth-century actresses who performed male characters with the reversal of prescribed gender roles performed by women who adopted masculine traits and dominated the public stage. Peter Morgan believes that although these women were a threat to the social order, they may have offered 'a potential ideological challenge' with which the lower classes of women could identify.¹⁹ This examination of gender and its creation has led to scholars questioning how audiences responded to the image of 'woman' performed on stage, whether by a male actor or the character created by a male playwright, in a society that subordinated women. This approach has been expanded by cultural materialists who seek to understand how plays and performances were both a product of and a participant in the construction of subordinate roles and discourses in society. They argue that in a society where women acted and wrote plays, a solely female production would create an alternative or opposing version than one created and performed by men. Cultural materialism touches on the theory of 'Reader Response and Reception' that first developed in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. Their aim was to examine not the meanings assumed in texts and performances, but how the reader or audience interpreted the production. Thus the audience became an active agent in the process of understanding and performing a play. In recent years, quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to develop this theory, but as questionnaires and audience interviews are not available for the study of the eighteenth-century, we must look at the expectations and reactions of the

¹⁹ Morgan, 'A Subject to Redress', pp. 23-41.

period.²⁰ Examining letters, newspapers, diaries and theatrical histories, the historian may determine the attitudes and responses to a play or actress, which is how James Lynch executed his study of the stage. Particularly negative reactions are important to the understanding of the cultural atmosphere of the period, as riots often occurred due to changes in a mode of production or a challenge to the status quo.

The analysis of iconography is a relatively new method in examining the theatre. People such as Erwin Panofsky (1955) have used iconography to examine paintings, sculptures and other visual forms of a subject's representation. By examining these, the historian can better understand the cultural forces that helped in shaping these images.²¹ Similarly to how no written work can be unbiased from the culture surrounding its creation, so too are paintings and prints imprinted with cultural meanings. Christopher B. Balme stated that in order to analyse images, the historian must interpret and uncover 'the semantics of a painting's 'sign language' and its relation to the larger social formation'.²² In other words, each piece of work has hidden codes and symbols relating to a period, and although they are just constructions of a reality, these representations are embedded with visual choices.²³ In examining a painting, the historian must begin with the usual compositional techniques, these being the choice of positioning, the size, environment, clothing, gestures and relation to other figures. The painting can then be compared to other representational forms on that same subject in order to further contextualise the piece, which is a necessity

²⁰ Zarrilli, *Theatre Histories*, p. 129.

²¹ Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology,' cited in Balme, 'Interpreting the pictorial records', p. 193.

²² *Ibid.* See also Zarrilli, *Theatre Histories*, p. 232.

²³ Zarrilli, *Theatre Histories*, p. 232.

when analysing the public representation of eighteenth-century actresses. Gill Perry used the image of hair in portraits and other visual representations of the actress Mrs Jordan (1761-1816) in her examination of the complexity and importance of hair in characterising the female actress.²⁴ Mrs Jordan's dishevelled and loose curls carried important imagery and cultural meaning of the period with William Hazlitt implying in 1815, that pictures of Jordan's natural loose curls represented her excellent natural abilities as an actress.

*Mrs Jordan, the child of nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart,
because it came from it, rich, full, like the luscious juice of the rich
grape.*²⁵

Perry contests Hazlitt's early interpretation and argues that her flowing loose curls depicted in the majority of her paintings held a 'double mediation'. To some the curls may have represented a natural, innocent free spirit, while to others the curl embodied a more sinister character, seducing the men in the audience with her 'wantonness'. Hence, as Hogarth described in 1753, the 'wanton ringlets' could be traced back to Eve in *Paradise Lost* representing the sexual seductress.²⁶

Tensions surrounding the images of actresses

Female piety and chastity was the ultimate achievement of the female sex according to conduct scripts of the eighteenth-century, yet the actress did not seem to obey the same rules and regulations abided by the populace. These were a group of women working in the public domain who were essentially selling their bodies for the public's entertainment,

²⁴ Perry, 'Staging Gender 'Hairy Signs'', pp. 145-163.

²⁵ Perry, 'Staging Gender 'Hairy Signs'', p.146, Taken from original, Hazlitt *A view of the English Stage*, p. 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-163.

attracting audiences with their figures and portrayal of fictional characters. The ability of actresses to mimic the fashion and mannerisms of aristocratic ladies strengthened the fear behind the increasing influence of the women whose sexual ambiguity made them attractive companions for gentlemen. According to historians such as Kathleen Wilson, the expansion of religious movements, such as the evangelical revival, was in retaliation against the growing number of women performing outside the private sphere. Women such as actresses were painted with the same stigma as prostitutes by moralists who feared the de-feminizing of women and destruction of hierarchy.²⁷ There were two central images of the female body – the Virgin Mary, pure and innocent, and the dangerous woman who occupied the public sphere and employed her sexuality to exploit men.²⁸ However, as will be exhibited in the following chapters, actresses recoded their negative public image by identifying themselves under conventional feminine roles – as mothers, wives and daughters. Felicity Nussbaum argues that in selecting certain stage characters to perform, actresses were consciously creating public personas that displayed apparent ‘interiority’, which strengthened the audience’s imagined intimacy with female performers.²⁹ The implied exposure of actresses’ true private characters can also be observed in memoirs and biographies, whereby in revealing their private domesticity, actresses manipulated readers into empathising with these women who excused their indiscretions as consequences of naivety and the abusive exploitation of the wealthy.

²⁷ Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History*.

²⁸ Crouch, ‘The public life of actresses: Prostitutes or Ladies?’ in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Barker, p. 26.

²⁹ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, pp. 16-19.

The mistreatment of young actresses at the hands of gentleman was not a common excuse used by eighteenth-century female players as justification of their actions. Within the theatre the word 'sentimental' and the concept that all individuals were innately good and virtuous was employed to induce an emotional response from audiences observing the suffering of others. A sentimental play evoked sympathy, sorrow or joy for the characters and allowed the audience to differentiate between what was virtuous and what was immoral and unnatural. These emotions were directed towards the slaves, poor and suffering characters in plays. The theatre acted as an effective public 'school' in instructing the people's moral consciousness and emphasising all that is good in humankind. G.J. Barker-Benfield argued that women dominated the production of this sentimental/sensibility literature and performances. Sentimentalism was assigned as a female characteristic, with both positive and negative effects.³⁰ The prime example of sentimentalism in the theatre was the figure of the 'virtue in distress' which according to Séverine Lancia offered actresses the 'opportunity to portray true feminine virtues on stage', thus justifying their choice in career as a responsibility to the moral teachings of society.³¹ The virtue being that of a woman who is in danger of corruption by a man. However, the important concept within sentimental plays was the always optimistic approach that the 'evil' characters might reform and repent all their sins. Sentimentalism culture ceased shortly after the French Revolution (1789-1799), when moral and virtuous plays gave way to melodrama. The main difference between sentimentalism and melodrama was their understanding of 'evil'. Unlike sentimental plays, melodrama

³⁰ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. xvii – xviii.

³¹ Lancia, 'The Actress and Eighteenth-Century Ideals of Femininity,' in *The Invisible Woman; aspects of women's work in eighteenth-century Britain*, eds. Baudino, Carré & Révauger, pp. 134-135.

explored the idea that people are either good or evil, and those who are evil do not eventually reform. By using the French Revolution as example, melodrama fostered the belief that there has always been and always will be evil and this evil conspires against those who are innocent and good, these often being from the female gender.

The theatre was a dangerous profession for young women with 'lively temper and personal accomplishments'; with actresses requiring a pure heart and strength in character in order to sustain their virtue.³² For those who preserved innocence and avoided temptation, there was opportunity to rise above their lower social status and become distinguished women displaying beauty, virtuous merit and intelligence.³³ Prior to the Restoration period, women were not permitted on the stage with boys or effeminate actors enacting female characters. There were several reasons as to why the introduction of actresses rapidly became a prominent fixture of the theatrical institution. Elizabeth Howe argues that a shortage of boy actors was the primary cause for the introduction of female performers. Between the years 1642-1660, the theatre was essentially non-existent after Parliament issued a decree against actors. When Charles II ascended the throne he re-established the theatrical profession by issuing two patents. During those eighteen years of absence, no boys had been trained in the performance of feminine roles and so a theatrical void was presented which actresses quickly filled.³⁴ Howe's alternative explanation was that attitudes towards women and their social position were evolving, asserting women's dominance in the private sphere and as the vital opposites to men. By acknowledging their significance and authority,

³² *Caledonian Mercury*, (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, August 25, 1800; Issue 12314.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Howe, *The First English Actresses*, p. 20.

Howe believes that women were no longer viewed as the inferior sex and therefore were permitted to succeed in the theatrical profession. However, it is naive to interpret women's perceived superiority in the domestic sphere as acknowledgement of their equality to men during the period. Women remained the subordinates to men in many areas, including the theatre where they were not permitted to become shareholders. Felicity Nussbaum believes that the acceptance of the female body in public was a result of audience's erotic voyeurism and their desire for the appearance of a real female figure rather than a boy in drag.³⁵ The appearance of the actress on the stage was commercially lucrative in attracting new admirers to the playhouses. Yet, both Howe and Nussbaum agree that this sub group of women exhibiting themselves in public were unprotected from sexual exploitation; their representations being utilised to promote the stage by alluding to their palpable sexual behaviour.

Methodology

This is primarily text based research with visual observations and analysis of portraits and prints. Many texts, such as religious scripts and social commentary have been made more easily accessible by searchable digitized databases such as ECCO (*Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*), *17th and 18th Century Burney Collection* and MOMW (*The Making of the Modern World*). Memoirs and contemporary documents such as Addison's *Collection of interesting anecdotes, memoirs, allegories, essays and political fragments; tending to amuse the fancy and inculcate morality* (1793) and Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz's *A Picture of England* (1791) are employed as indicators of eighteenth-century life and of

³⁵ Nussbaum, 'Real, Beautiful Women', p. 138.

famous individuals, while newspapers have been used both to strengthen or refute the character portrayals and events recorded in biographical texts. Newspapers are significant documents for textual representation of gender construction, but bias can still be evident in each depending on the relationship of the author to the theatre. There were strong ties between the newspaper industry and the theatre with many periodical founders having experience as either playwrights or patrons of the stage. Daughters of both the printing trade and theatrical vocation were vulnerable against men looking to enter these professions through marriage into the family, reducing the value of such women to commodities of the industry.³⁶ But unlike the printing trade, which was primarily a family run industry, actresses were not confined only to the work available to them within the domestic sphere. By gauging the bias evident in newspaper articles and examining the text within, these sources aided in establishing the print media's attitude towards the theatre which influenced the opinions of readers and the general public.

To aid in quantitative research I produced a new database comprised of forty actresses based on information available in the ODNB (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*) and primary source material such as biographies and memoirs. The composition is a tool developed to aid in establishing demographical trends by examining the leading actresses in the comic and tragic genres whose combined careers spanned the century and established a following of admirers in the London and provincial theatres. The purpose of gathering such information as family background, marital status and wealth upon time of death, served to identify the quality of life that was achievable. Unlike biographical indices

³⁶ McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, p. 38.

such as John Roach's *Authentic Memoirs of the Green-Room* (1796) and Joseph Haslewood's *The Secret History of the Green Room* (1792), this database attempts to compile a complete list of lovers, illegitimate children, number of marriages and wages earned while at the height of their career. Focusing on a small sample of actresses, women who were most recognised in the profession, the database indicates patterns of marriage and child birth, while biographical texts help to explain these formations further by justifying the decisions of actresses made about their careers and family lives.

The struggle of professional women to compete within the public world and exercise some control over their lives, while yielding to the restricted ideals of prescribed femininity, is a key focus of this research. The first chapter examines prescribed gender roles of the eighteenth-century and looks at contemporary research surrounding the containment of women within the domestic sphere. By utilising conduct books and works of social critique, such as Jeremy Collier's *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage* (1693), the chapter maps the influence of religion and examines the concept of separate spheres. This chapter is intended to address the social position of actresses juxtaposed with the representations in literature of what was considered to be the ideal woman. Chapter two examines the personal relationships of actresses and will engage the memoirs and biographies of female players with correspondence and newspaper reports to authenticate the biographical material. From a selection of forty letters between the actress Mrs Jordan and her lover, the Duke of Clarence, the inner conflicts of the woman will be examined whereby her wish to remain at home and live a domesticated life were negated by the need to work and support her family. The objective of this chapter is to identify the influence of

actresses over the people around them – their family and co-workers. The theatre was a highly competitive environment with actress rivalries a common sight, making allegiances a necessity for actresses wishing to sustain their influence and establish themselves as what Nussbaum has termed, ‘performative properties’.³⁷ In exhibiting the choices they made and their representation in biographies, the agency of actresses becomes evident.

Chapter three focuses on newspaper reviews and disturbances within the playhouse. The inter-relationship between actresses and their patrons is analysed to determine how actresses could manipulate authority figures in their lives; the chapter also aims to explain why benefactors consented to the influence of actresses. Texts such as *A Guide to the Stage* (1751) provide instruction on how the audience were expected to act while at the theatre is compared to the actions of spectators during times of disturbance within the playhouses, criticised in *A Seasonable Rebuke to the Playhouse Rioters* (1740) and newspaper reports. Felicity Nussbaum’s *Rival Queens* will provide further debate regarding the ‘intimacy’ between audiences and actresses, and the ambiguous representations of actresses’ characters, which identified their struggle in merging conventional feminine virtue with their professional aspirations. Nussbaum examines the stage characters adopted by actresses to determine actresses’ constructed and self-promoted images, while this thesis concentrates more on evidence of the contemporary social context to identify the characters that actresses wished to portray to their public, and the audience’s reception of

³⁷ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 23. Nussbaum’s idiom refers to the idea that actresses recognised themselves as valuable commodities to both the theatrical management and to their patrons. Aware of their worth, actresses could transform their objectification into remuneration, by negotiating better contract terms and acquiring lucrative relationships, creating aggressive competitiveness among female players.

these representations. The majority of female performers in this study originated from the lower classes; they were young, lower class girls who sought to rise up the social ladder. However, by appearing to be one of the common people, actresses exposed themselves to sexual attacks from those above their station. The schemes utilised by eighteenth-century actresses to combat such assaults are identified and how they became national symbols of British culture exhibiting their influence as global ambassadors of British taste.

Chapter four contextualises the recorded histories of actresses and compares the representations of them as recounted by biographers to the images they portrayed of themselves in self-authored memoirs. In examining memoirs the images that actresses wished to convey to their public will be identified and assessed in relation to prescribed gender roles. Bias becomes more apparent within these texts as the century progressed in correlation with a growing number of texts being produced by the actresses themselves and so newspapers are utilised to verify authenticity. The histories of Mrs Ann Oldfield (published in 1730) and Mrs Woffington (published in 1760) were authored by anonymous writers who had no personal relationship with the actresses and therefore, much of the memoirs revealed scandalous affairs and negative images of actresses. Aimed at attracting readership, such memoirs reveal patterns in the consumerism of literature, whereby the depiction of actresses as sexual objects appealed to male audiences and affected the perception of idealised femininity. In 1785 the memoirs of George Anne Bellamy were published, and demonstrates the growing popularity of female authors who exhibited an alternative image of working women than what had been recorded in earlier memoirs by men. The text was advertised as being the woman's own words and allowed the public

insight into both the private and public life led by this particular actress. Bellamy's memoirs will serve as a key text, representing actresses as both desirable sexual women juxtaposed with female domesticity and identifying the duality of the female gender. The representation of actresses as being both good and bad continued, with the theatre admirer, James Boaden (1762-1839), seeking the public's sympathy and approbation of actresses, by acknowledging their victimisation due to their profession. In examining memoirs and biographies, larger social problems will be identified such as sexual and domestic violence, establishing the significance of actresses as vehicles for gender discussion. Lower class women did not have the influence or capability to voice these concerns in most contexts and so the documenting of female struggles and the victimisation of women due to their subordination related by actresses exposed a greater threat to social morality than purely the ambition of women seeking a career on the stage.

The final chapter explores the close associations between the art world and theatre by utilising the many paintings and prints that have survived from the eighteenth-century and are on display in the National Portrait Gallery and National galleries of Dublin and London. Much analysis has been done on the portraits of actresses, and I will refer to the work of individuals such as Shearer West, Gill Perry and Martin Postle. However my focus will be on determining the actress's influence rather than an analysis of the symbolism in each piece. The objective of this chapter will be to argue the existence of actresses' agency in the artistic process, whether this was evident in the decision of pose, clothing and props, or in the intended reaction from the completed piece – did an actress aim to allure spectators by her beauty in the portrait, or was she representing herself as a professional performer in a

celebrated role displaying superiority over other actresses? Prints and caricatures will also be analysed as images created autonomously without an actress's permission. Yet performing women were accountable for their public character that cultivated satirical work, which placed them at the centre. Although mainly degrading to the individual depicted, the mass production of many images aided in advertising the person to a greater audience covering all classes and educations. The purpose of this chapter will be the identification of the influence of actresses as an occupational group through analysing the reaction which an image received and how that impacted on the spectator's response to an actress and her career.

Actresses were usually intelligent women whose ambition to succeed and ruthless business sense was evident in the success of such women as Margaret Woffington (1720-1760), George Anne Bellamy (1727-1788), Dorothy Jordan (1761-1816) and Sarah Siddons (1755-1831). Although women were perceived as the subordinates of men, celebrated actresses exercised significant influence over their careers, bodies and the men around them, more so than any other working female. Those who preserved a chaste reputation deserved the greatest admiration for successfully restraining sexual solicitations from a voyeuristic public, which exhibited 'strength of principle and a purity of heart'.³⁸ Yet an actress who had fallen from grace could salvage her reputation through seeking forgiveness and in exhibiting herself under conventional gender ideals, thus removing the woman's accountability. Alternatively, the ambiguity of an actress's character was fiscally beneficial

³⁸ 'The Countess of Derby,' *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), Monday, August 25, 1800; Issue 12314.

for the woman by attracting male patrons and protectors. Therefore, the women that will be examined in this thesis were required constantly to manipulate their images to accommodate their targeted audience, thus exhibiting the agency held by women whose reputations lay at the fringes of eighteenth-century society.

Contextualising the Eighteenth Century Actress

*A stage life, subsisting in a public line, (however exalted) must ever be liable to mortification and insults; of which those who are happily blessed with a private fortune have not the least conception.*¹

The actress and the theatrical institution existed outside the social norms of the eighteenth-century, with the image of the actress often exploited as a caution of the corruption and victimisation of women who chose not to live by conventional gender roles. James Boaden's quotation above echoed the public scrutiny actresses faced and yet many turned their suffering into financial gain through the publication of their career histories and scandalous affairs. This chapter contextualises the eighteenth century actress, identifying the struggles and tensions universally experienced by women, and establishing the magnitude of hostility suffered by actresses who challenged conventional ideals of femininity. The social position of the female sex was a recurring discourse in the eighteenth-century, where the functionality of the domestic home was evolving into a highly feminised and contained sphere which the actress did not fit into. Actresses did not mirror idealised femininity which dictated that due to anatomical differences the sexes held distinct roles with women as docile, maternal and submissive to business orientated men. The belief in naturally assigned inherent gender-specific responsibilities was the foundation for the governing of institutions, laws and social attitudes which reinforced the superiority of men over women.²

¹ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 24.

² Porter, *The Penguin Social History of Britain*, p. 23.

In his 1931 survey on Georgian life, A.E. Richardson concluded that society was modelled on the upper classes and wealthy elites, who were predominantly male, which justified the containment of female influence.³

More recent research has similarly concluded the subordination of women, with historians such as Michèle Cohen, Laura Runge and Stephen Gregg arguing that although women played a significant role in the construction of 'polite' society, the female gender was regarded only in relation to its effect on developing gentlemanly manners.⁴ The reform of social behaviour will be examined further in subsequent chapters, but it is worth noting that the relationship between polite society and gentlemanliness fortified an elitist dogma.⁵ Those at the top of the hierarchy contributed to the establishment of separate spheres and demanded that individuals conform to the ideas of a private and public environment. Political tensions and civil unrest were catalysts for the perceived necessity for this separation, with revolutions occurring in America and France in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The violence observed on both continents aided the justification that women needed to be protected and the home became a safeguard for femininity. In spite of the attempted confinement of women, the outbreak of revolution facilitated the

³ Richardson, *Georgian England*, p. 14.

⁴ See Cohen, 'Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Masculinity and Chivalry, 1750-1830', p. 320. Runge, 'Beauty and Gallantry: A model of Polite Conversation Revisited', p.59. Gregg, 'A Truly Christian Hero', p. 21.

⁵ See Lawrence Klein's analysis of Shaftesbury's manuscripts on manners and politeness. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 3. For further reading on manners see Karen O'Brien's chapter 'Manners and Partial Civilisation in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft' in O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, pp. 173-201. O'Brien examines Wollstonecraft's attitude on the education of children into moral individuals, which differed from Shaftesbury's belief that private virtues lead to a polite society where people act for the greater good of the public. Wollstonecraft argued that this was not the case for women, who were not as invested in public morality as men, due to their lack of civil rights. Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman* (1792).

exhibition of women as influential political agents, with individuals such as Olympe de Gouge (1748-1793) utilising the French Revolution and her occupation as a playwright, to stipulate the need for a genderless society.⁶ The difficulty that de Gouges experienced, and will be demonstrated in the analysis of actress representation, was the misunderstanding and differing interpretations of people towards theatrical and political representations. Polarised interpretations of her work led to the prosecution in her trial focusing on her unfinished, unpublished historical drama that condemned the monarchy. The Tribunal interpreted the play as proof of her treason, while de Gouges claimed it confirmed her patriotism, therefore demonstrating the possibility of conflicting understandings arising from fictional dramas employed in political discourse.⁷ The theatre was a culturally significant arena throughout the century, as both the vehicle of discussion surrounding manners and as an institution that reflected social change and economic growth.

While the example of de Gouges exhibited female activity in the political sphere, women formed an essential dynamic to the economy. Within the theatres female consumerism was highly visible – from the stage costumes of the actresses to the elaborate attire of the audience, as well as the sale of tickets to female spectators and their mimicry of theatrical

⁶ Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) - as a playwright she challenged the theatre's patriarchal management and later ventured into political writing, demanding gender equality. It was the publication of political pamphlets and her outspoken views on the three types of government (monarchy, federalism and republicanism) that resulted in her execution during the Reign of Terror. De Gouges' most famous publication, *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791), openly criticised the National Constituent Assembly's *Declaration* (1789), believing that it was invalid due to the nonparticipation of French female citizens in its creation. Further analysis of this can be read in Vallois & Galvin, 'Gendering the Revolution', pp. 423-445. Brown, 'The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges', pp. 383-401.

⁷ See Vanpée, 'Performing Justice', pp. 47-65.

fashions.⁸ It has been argued that the association of consumerism as a female occupation was satirised during the eighteenth century similar to criticisms of women's attempts to engage in political affairs, and was rooted in gender bias.⁹ Female consumerism was associated with female frivolity, while also alluding to the immoral lust and pleasure experienced by women from obtaining luxury goods. This pleasure was further censured with links to sexual gratification and the degenerate lifestyles of the wealthy. The caricaturist, James Gillray, represented the ridiculous exhibition of wealth through the sporting of high and decorative wigs and fashionable dresses that displayed the woman's figure.¹⁰ However, his most revealing commentary on the corruption of female virtue from a life of indulgence, was Gillray's *The accommodating spouse; Tyr-nn-es delight; - coming York over her; or what you like* (1789).¹¹ The affair between Sarah, Countess of Tyrconnel and the royal prince, the Duke of York was represented, with the Earl of Tryconnel depicted leaving the room, suggesting that the countess, who was born into wealth and married a gentleman many years her senior, sought affairs out of boredom. Images and scandal such as this may explain social anxieties regarding women's ownership of wealth and spending – if a woman was in possession of wealth and had the freedom to splurge on frivolous goods,

⁸ The mimicry of female audience members was evident in portraits of the period representing gentlewomen posed and dressed similar to theatrical characters that will be examined further in subsequent chapter. A more obvious example of imitation was in the popularity of such objects as the 'Abington cap', worn by the actress Frances Abington on stage and adopted by fashionable ladies.

⁹ See Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, pp. 234-345. For further reading on the moral debate surrounding consumerism, see also Berg & Eger, eds., 'The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debate', pp. 7-28.

¹⁰ Gillray's *And catch the living manners as they rise* (1794) NPG D12488 exhibited a lady wearing a high and feathered wig, which was so heavy, the woman's head was bent downwards. Gillray was also critical of the evolution of women's dress, satirising the sight of puffed up sleeves and tight dresses worn by women of all shapes in his *Following the Fashion* (1794) NPG D12504, and of the use of light muslin in *Advantages of wearing muslin dresses* (1802) NPG D12780 that depicts a lady's dress catching on fire while she sat near the fireplace.

¹¹ NPG D12999. Sarah, Countess of Tryconnel, was born Sarah Hussey Delaval, a wealthy heiress who married George Carpenter, 2nd Earl of Tyrconnel in 1780.

then it was not unreasonable to assume that her desires would eventually transform into the acquisition of sexual conquests, and what greater conquest was obtainable than a prince. In Bernard Mandeville's poem, *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* (1705), the author argued that the redemption of society, where 'pride and luxury decrease' and women were no longer consumers, would result in the termination of trades and the neglect of the arts, yet a moral and humble society would emerge.¹² However, it is evident that the anxiety exhibited in publications against female influence in the political and economic spheres, failed to extinguish the activity of women, with the example of actresses continuing to perform political dramas and as active contributors to the British economy.

Gender Anxiety

The preservation of virtue, particularly female innocence, was a recurring theme of the eighteenth-century. The visibility of actresses on the stage, in fine art and attending exclusive social gatherings, boosted their celebrated social status and added further to the anxiety surrounding the influence of unrestrained sexuality. In an article published in *The Town and Country Magazine* the author argued that a man or woman who successfully safeguarded their chastity while residing in London, was to be praised more for their honourable conduct than either the secluded nun or hermit, who were not daily presented with temptation or corruption.¹³ The metropolis became a fusion of individuals in the

¹² Mandeville, *The fable of the bees*, p. 17. O'Brien examines Mandeville's writings further in her *Women and Enlightenment*, pp. 20-24, and argues that his libertine views suggested that if female sexuality was accepted rather than be ridiculed in society, then immoral acts such as infanticide and abortion would no longer take place. The root of this hypothesis was that if women no longer feared public contempt, then they would no longer need to hide the evidence (illegitimate babies) of their sexual lives.

¹³ 'Histories of the Tete-a-Tete annexed; or, Memoirs of The Royal Sailor and Poly Finch,' *The Town and Country Magazine*, 22 (January, 1790), p. 9

pursuit of pleasure, from tours of communal pleasure gardens and the theatres to the patronage of brothels and prostitutes. The corruption of innocence was the feared consequence of these public entertainments. The home was identified as the ideal location to protect the delicacy of women, by containing their social movements and subordinating their influences in the public sphere. In domesticity women exhibited their natural aptitudes for child-rearing and household management.¹⁴ This image of wholesome womanhood became a nationalistic claim to British supremacy over other cultures, in particular the French. There was outrage within Georgian society after the news emerged that French women were serving as soldiers during the Revolution at the end of the century.¹⁵ No longer were women to be viewed as 'play-things' or 'instruments of propagation and pleasure', with French women from all ranks demonstrating 'their zeal for liberty'.¹⁶ Tales of hordes of women tearing dead bodies apart in the blood-soaked streets was a far cry from the established femininity of the French woman.¹⁷ But as one journalist questioned, if such Amazonian performances were to be seen from French women, what capabilities did English women hold?¹⁸ The masculination of women in France and the exposure of actresses in Britain were threats to the social hierarchy and became catalysts for the establishment of institutions to promote the subdued side of women.

¹⁴ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1830*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 19.

¹⁶ *World (1787)* (London, England), Tuesday, August 21, 1792; Issue 1761.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *General Evening Post* (London, England), July 10, 1790 – July 13, 1790; Issue 8858. *Whitehall Evening Post (1770)* (London, England), October 15, 1789 – October 17, 1789; Issue 6619.

In the theatre, actresses performing male roles and displaying their figures in breeches became the vogue during the eighteenth-century. Mrs Jordan was praised for her realistic portrayals in male attire, but her success in breeches resulted in her failure to convince audiences in her representation of ladies from the nobility. Therefore, to counteract her unsuccessful impersonations of elegant ladies, Jordan utilised the allure of her sexuality to obtain the admiration of audiences and establish herself firmly in the comedic genre. One paper argued that due to the frequency of Jordan's masculine performances, she was in danger of forgetting the 'modesty of her sex' and the 'soft, persuasive, and retiring manner' which defined the female gender.¹⁹ Women displaying the opposite gender's characteristics was not a uniquely feminine predicament, with an increasing number of men exhibiting a taste for feminine delicacy and fashion. Men in women's attire was an accustomed sight on the stage prior to the entry of actresses into the profession in the 1660s, and even after the introduction of actresses there were some actors who occasionally performed female characters. Tate Wilkinson and the actress Frances Abington would entertain at parties in their alter egos, Mrs Jenkins and Mrs Fuz, and his appearance as a woman did not harm the Yorkshire manager's reputation.²⁰ But in exhibiting more sentimental and effeminate gestures, actors in female character were publically challenging the prescribed identity of men. Both Kristina Straub and George Haggerty have suggested that the boy-actors who performed female roles may have exhibited an eroticism which encouraged homosexuality.²¹ Straub's argument is that similar to the importance of the actress's body

¹⁹ *Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, (Hull, England), Tuesday, December 11, 1810; Issue 1248.

²⁰ Wilkinson, *Memoirs of his own life*, Vol. 3 of 4, p. 86-90.

²¹ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 27. Haggerty, 'The Queen was not *shav'd* yet', p. 316.

in attracting audiences in the eighteenth-century, the sexuality of actors was just as significant in appealing to audiences, thus making the actor an erotic spectacle.²² Boy-actors were targeted in anti-theatrical texts for breaching gender roles and became associated with sodomy, which partly explains the introduction of actresses to the theatre by the mid-seventeenth century. Puritans such as William Prynne (1600-1669) criticised the appearance of boys in female attire, but also argued against the introduction of women to the stage. In his pamphlet, *Histriomastix* (1633), Prynne's denouncement against actresses juxtaposed the popularity of noble women performing home theatricals, which included Queen Henrietta Marie.²³ The appearance of women on the stage indicated not only the authority of the royal family over public entertainment, but also European influences, as actresses were a common sight on the Continent.²⁴ The necessity to employ transvestite boy-actors decreased by the 1660s and their appearance became what has been described as a 'curiosity' on the stage.²⁵

Recent research into 'gender anxiety' and the role of periodicals, such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, suggests that the feminisation of men was as much a threat to conventional gender roles as the masculination of women.²⁶ There has been a considerable volume of research produced on the social effect of sexually ambiguous cross-dressing women, particularly the appearance of actresses portraying masculine qualities in male attire on the stage. William Stafford's study examines the representation of gentlemen who were the

²² Straub, pp. 25-28.

²³ Lamont, 'Prynne, William (1600-1669)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22854>]

²⁴ Howe, *The First English Actresses*, pp. 21-23. See also Wilson, *All the King's Ladies*, p. 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Stafford, 'Gentlemanly Masculinities', p. 51.

Gentleman's Magazine's targeted audience, and explores the utilisation of women within the text to construct masculinity. Two distinct categories of gentlemen are explored by Stafford; the man who reflected the magazine's image was sensible, polite and virtuous, as opposed to the youthful member of the gentry who partook in the depraved entertainments of drinking, gambling and brothels. Stafford identifies these boisterous men as useful icons employed to distinguish the masculinity of the magazine's readership from distasteful recreations.²⁷ The publication also reinforced male predominance and the ideology of both a masculine public sphere and a female private sphere. In Stafford's analysis of the *Gentleman's Magazine* April obituary pages (1795) the subordination of women within the text can be identified. A third of the 309 listed deaths were women and yet these ladies were recorded only in relation to the men they were connected with. Where more than the woman's name was documented, a characterisation of her was documented revolving around the achievements of men; whether this was a father, husband, son or brother.²⁸ When Mrs Priscilla Kemble, widow of the celebrated actor John Philip Kemble, died in 1845, her obituary noted that she was 'much respected and lamented'. But besides her death the most significant data was regarding the ownership of a Sir Thomas Lawrence portrait depicting her late husband. Mrs Kemble was recognised by the public only as the great actor's widow and her personal possessions represented important memorabilia of her husband.²⁹ It can be concluded from Stafford's research that women in the *Gentleman's Magazine* were not individuals but rather an extension of the

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁹ 'Fashionable Intelligence' in *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Friday, May 16, 1845; Issue N/A

representation of men. A woman's virtuous character reflected the superiority of judgment and sensibility of those men around her. However, superior actresses were an exception to this and both their professional achievements and domestic accomplishments were recorded. Upon the death of Mrs Siddons, it was recorded that 'professionally her merits were transcendent; privately she was all virtuous, amiable and good'.³⁰ A balance between her career and domestic duties was necessary to verify her feminine qualities and as confirmation to the public that the separating of the genders into public and private was not required.

The cultural concern surrounding public women derived from the feared loss of femininity and virtue that could only be maintained through conventional gender roles. But by demonstrating the accomplishments of actresses in maintaining a public professional identity, while also successfully running a home, the superiority of these sometimes marginalised women was established over other culturally-marginalised female groups and social classes. Theatrical players were often portrayed as a transgressive group who did not incorporate conventional ideologies of the genders. The image of the actress was significant in establishing sexual definitions. They embodied the 'other' woman and opposed prescribed feminised roles. The actress was a public figure in a society that defined women's social position as private. However, there was a necessity to contain this 'other' woman, whose public employment challenged idealised femininity and men's authority in the public sphere. The representation of the privatised woman contributed to the definition of masculine gender roles, as masculinity was defined as the opposite to femininity. The

³⁰ 'Death of Mrs Siddons' in *The Morning Post* (London, England), Thursday, Jun 09, 1831; Issue 18876.

actress, as well as other public women such as prostitutes and literary writers, existed outside the private sphere and encroached into men's domain.³¹ As a member of the 'other' group the actress was easily associated as sexually deviant and a danger to social morality, regardless of her virtuous domesticity.

Anxiety over the increasing visibility and influence of individuals who failed to conform to prescribed gender roles included the censure of foreigners, non-Christians and fashionable men who were deemed a threat to national identity. Colonial expansion throughout the eighteenth-century led to a fear of invading foreigners, demolishing British culture and hierarchical structures. By 'foreigners' I include not only those born outside of Britain, but also groups that existed on the fringes of society such as itinerants and gypsies whose existence posed a threat to regulated civilization. In 1753 a bill was presented to the House of Lords by the second earl of Halifax (1716-1771), seeking the 'naturalisation' of Jews born outside the country.³² The Bill was quickly quashed but the opposition against Jewish citizens demonstrated the public's concern about foreign influences. In Dana Rabin's analysis of the anti-Semitism surrounding the 'Jew Bill', she utilised newspaper prints to reveal the manipulation of the public and demonization of the 'other'. Images of Jewish men as sexually aggressive and profane individuals posed a threat to vulnerable femininity and civilised society.³³ These non-Christian people did not fit into prescribed Britishness and similar to the plight of actresses, they were objectified as sexual predators and unpatriotic.

³¹ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 89.

³² The definition of *Naturalisation* – 'A foreigner's being made a natural subject by act of parliament, or consent of the states.' Buchanan, *A new English dictionary*, image 267.

³³ Rabin, 'The Jew Bill of 1753', p. 160.

This perceived threat to the nation was juxtaposed with internal anxiety on the loss of masculinity in parallel to the alleged loss of actresses' femininity as a result of professional ambition.

As already discussed, the eighteenth-century experienced a cultural revolution of manners, particularly concerned with what was deemed gentlemanly behaviour. Conduct literature and periodicals such as *The Tatler* and *Spectator* identified the necessity for men to adopt gentler manners and a language of politeness while interacting with women. Yet there was a fine line between accepted prescribed masculinity and the feminisation of men. 'Foppery', 'extravagant' and 'effeminate' were often employed as descriptors of an increasingly growing group of men known as the Macaronis, identified in public by their comically high wigs. Not only did these men blur gender identities but class distinction was abandoned, as any man with means could become a Macaroni regardless of his social class. This appealed to the middling classes and merchants attempting to gain an authoritative footing within society and as this group of men were not born but self-made as opposed to the traditional hierarchy of the nobility.³⁴ The Macaronis wore delicate laces and jewellery and in keeping with ladies fashion, their hair was shaped into high peaks as symbolism of their wealth. However the effeminate nature of these men was criticised in caricatures which represented the Macaronis as genderless individuals, neither male nor female, causing uncertainty over their sexuality. While actresses were accused of exciting men's carnal lusts and creating gender confusion while appearing in male roles, the Macaronis were feared to be promoting homosexual behaviour and thus threatened the ideology of British

³⁴ Rauser, 'Hair, Authenticity, and the Self-Made Macaroni', p. 101.

gentlemanly masculinity, which practiced a more delicate balance of refined manners, virility and the ability to exhibit courage to fight for one's country. The struggles of eighteenth-century men to maintain manliness while also appearing gentler but not feminine can be identified by society's confusion of the separate paradigms of sexuality and gender that were often believed to be the same.³⁵ If a man dressed and acted in a feminine fashion then he was assumed to be homosexual and if an actress preferred to dress in male attire both on and off the stage, as in the case of Charlotte Charke (1713-1760), she was similarly rumoured to have changed her gender and therefore altered her sexual orientation. Periodicals such as the *Spectator* attempted to normalise heterosexual unions as the ideal in British culture, while associating same sex relationships as signs of 'madness'.³⁶ The *Spectator* emphasised the appropriateness of men's sexual desire for women, yet in keeping with the construction of gentlemanly behaviour, this desire was to be aimed at virtuous women who would make worthy wives and mothers.³⁷ Actresses did not fall under the conventional gender ideal of virtuous woman as recorded in literature, challenging feminine ideologies which caused anxiety among those who held authoritative positions in a patriarchal culture. As the Macaronis threatened to reduce the dominance of men over the female gender, the influence of actresses endangered the supremacy of men in the public sphere and encouraged women to abandon the confinements of their domesticity.

³⁵ Neff, 'Bitches, Mollies, and Tommies', p. 396.

³⁶ Kelleher, 'Reason, Madness, and Sexuality', p. 292.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

Religious Revivals

In response to the growing concerns over the disintegration of public morality and the increasing numbers of prostitutes to be seen on London streets, the Society for the Reformation of Manners was founded in 1691. The Society targeted the metropolitan brothels and theatres identifying these as hubs that reinforced immorality and condemned Covent Garden as a breeding ground for vice. It has been argued that the society's interest in eradicating the problem of prostitution or female immorality was only in relation to how it affected men and identified prostitution as more harmful to masculinity than to femininity - the disease, financial implications and effeminacy of men threatened to weaken male dominance.³⁸ Jeremy Collier, a theatre critic and bishop of the nonjuring Church of England, agreed with the society's concern about the moral anarchy which the theatre presented.³⁹ In his 1698 pamphlet, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, Collier stated that nothing had debauched the period more than the theatre where 'hell' and 'damnation' were entertaining images.⁴⁰ Originally the theatre was viewed as a tool to display both vice and virtue, by placing significance on the righteous.⁴¹ Yet the depravities and vulgarity became comical and entertaining attractions that strengthened the arguments of religious societies such as the Reformation of Manners. The society became a 'rhetorical move' which sought to remove the theatre from the protection of the royal family and nobility by associating them with the degenerate poor, and in doing so, the society was able to bring legal indictments against individual actors.⁴² Unlike Jeremy

³⁸ Gregg, 'A Truly Christian Hero,' p. 21.

³⁹ Salmon, 'Collier, Jeremy (1650-1726)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5917>]

⁴⁰ Collier, *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*, p. A4 & p.43.

⁴¹ *Athenian Gazette or Casuistical Mercury* (London, England), Tuesday, November 14, 1693; Issue 7.

⁴² Milling, 'Abominable, Impious, Profane, Lewd, Immoral', pp. 132-133.

Collier's attack against the theatre, those within the Society aimed their attack on the performer's profanities rather than a critique of the theatre in general.⁴³ It was also significant that the Society's first two prosecutions were against actors from the licensed theatre that first staged John Gay's bawdy ballad opera, the *Beggar's Opera* (1728) in Lincoln's Inn Fields, rather than the theatres that held a royal patent. The Society wished not to involve the Royal family or associate them with the vulgarity for which these performers were being accused. These prosecutions against actors appeared to have stopped by 1702, although libel attacks continued.⁴⁴

The eighteenth-century was a period that appeared to acknowledge a collective 'consciousness of sinfulness'.⁴⁵ It has been argued that the acceptance of the evangelical revival, which encouraged citizens to become active in social reform, came about due to accelerated migration of the population from rural towns into large expanding cities.⁴⁶ The revival in religion served as a substitute community to those who now found themselves inhabiting the commercialised metropolis with increased tensions within the familial and authoritative domains.⁴⁷ The appeal of the Methodist movement was also justified by its volunteerism and the ability for the individual to be salvaged from their sins by a paternal

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁵ Crawford, 'Origins of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Revival', p. 365.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* For further reading regarding demographic shifts during the eighteenth-century, see Wrigley & Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, pp. 162-170. Wrigley and Schofield's study of baptism and burial records generated from 404 parishes highlights the increase of individuals who relocated to London. It is worth noting that these figures were estimated on the records available and that deficiencies in the recording of baptisms and births were evident due to lack of regulation or unified record keeping, but the expansion of London during the period is irrefutable. Further reading on Eighteenth Century London see, Porter's *Social History of Britain*, George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Schwarz, *London in the age of industrialisation*.

⁴⁷ Crawford, 'Origins of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Revival', p. 375.

God who would remove all guilt and bestow his protection. Individuals were no longer under the impression that their repentance was futile and that upon their death they would be liable to be punished by God. This is evident in theatrical dramas such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), which narrated the tale of a young gentleman, seduced by a prostitute into robbery and murder, resulting in his imprisonment. The young man's character is saved after a visit from a clergyman, repenting his sins and regaining his sense of morality. In Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1702) the female protagonist Calista's infidelity is discovered by her husband which results in suicide. Prior to her death, she requests forgiveness from her father for the shame she had brought on the family, while her father's concern is that she will receive the same forgiveness in Heaven. Calista dies declaring 'Peace dawns upon my soul'; she did not fear the judgement of a merciless God after atoning for her indiscretions.⁴⁸ The transatlantic evangelical revival was led by the congregational minister, Jonathan Edwards, and a study of his teachings has led Mark Miller to equate the 'vocabulary of submission' used in eighteenth-century evangelical literature to the eroticism of obedience.⁴⁹ The personal sufferings of individuals seeking God's salvation was connected to masochism, according to Miller, whereby the penitent experienced gratification from personal abuse in the pursuit of redemption. However, the fundamental aspect of the movement was that it permitted individuals to take responsibility for their religious instruction. The concept of a forgiving God was appealing to women who did not conform to social standards of marital domesticity. For actresses who were career-orientated and cohabitated with gentlemen, bearing illegitimate children

⁴⁸ 'The Fair Penitent', *Wikisource, The Free Library*, (February 03, 2009) [http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The_Fair_Penitent&oldid=961092]

⁴⁹ Miller, 'Jonathan Edwards, Affective Conversion', p. 566.

and acting as dominant breadwinners rather than submissive women, a God who would forgive all transgressions in later life allowed them to excuse their behaviour until it was necessary to repent. This often occurred at a time of illness or when the actress found herself no longer able to attract audiences. Actress memoirs, which will be examined in a later chapter, will illustrate the apologetic nature of these women in later life, who utilised their repentance to gain public sympathy and admiration.

While historians such as Michael Crawford and Mark Miller examined the rising importance of religion in the first half of the eighteenth-century, Davidoff and Hall argue that the significant evangelical revival occurred in the latter half of the century. Simultaneously, actresses appeared to be represented as professionals in possession of acknowledged theatrical skills, with certain individuals gaining notoriety that was usually associated with the aristocracy. The increased visibility of actresses may have prompted the reinforcement of religious teachings, as growing concerns regarding gender and the need to 'protect' femininity through its confinement are evident in conduct literature. Davidoff and Hall argue that from the 1790s onwards, the ambiguous nature of gender boundaries was no longer acceptable and rigid restrictions were demanded for the separation of the sexes.⁵⁰ Their study suggests that before this date, the feminisation of men in the form of Macaronis, dandies and 'fops', along with the cross-dressing of women mimicking men, was a common sight. The church became the safeguard for social morality, with female attendance much greater in comparison to male church goers. There is indication that this was due to the female character being represented as more susceptible to religion, piety was naturalised

⁵⁰ Davidoff, *Family Fortunes*, p. xxi.

to femininity.⁵¹ The church was once part of the public arena as was the household which was represented by the husband or head of the family. Shifts within society resulted in the church becoming a more domesticated institution, with the establishment of Sunday schools, prayer societies and religious literature, aimed at a female congregation who accepted this in the hope for a more active role in the public sphere.⁵² There is little or no evidence that shows a decline in the male congregation, but there were more advantageous public arenas where men could execute their business interests and network, such as the theatre and coffee-houses.

The French Revolution was one of the prime catalysts of the evangelical revival, as society faced the moral corruption prompted from the recognition of individualism occurring in France. Women embodied what were deemed as the weaker qualities of the genders and placed the sex under the same category as other so called 'helpless' groups consisting of children, the elderly and the mentally handicapped.⁵³ It was then the responsibility of men to protect and support the innocence of femininity. One argument that justified the subordination of women by evangelicals was the association of womankind to the Fall of Eve. Eve had introduced sin to the world and therefore women were to be punished through the pain of childbirth, or their 'hour of sorrow'.⁵⁴ However, an alternative interpretation of this 'punishment' and the event of childbirth was that it represented the salvation of women with the image of Mary, mother of Jesus as the maternal mother with natural

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Also, Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman*, p. 109. Wollstonecraft states that 'woman is naturally weak'.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

femininity.⁵⁵ Therefore, according to the celebrated evangelical Hannah More (1745-1833), a woman's salvation lay in her ability to marry and bear children, along with concealing her sexuality that was associated with the corruption of Eve. Yet female sexuality was essential for the success of an actress, while feminine domesticity and humility was needed for public acceptance.

Women and the Domestic Sphere

Much scholarly attention has been given to the analysis of Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753), with the opinion that this legislation was detrimental to the social position of women and their agency in marriage negotiations. For the acting community the act highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the family background of its players and recorded an increase in illegitimate births. The Act was introduced under the pretext of protecting inheritance and regulating marital arrangements by forbidding the marriage of underage youths without parental consent and establishing a legal requirement of a marriage license. Eve Tavor Bannet argues that this Act was a crucial moment in the history of matrimony, while Rebecca Probert disagrees and states that it merely documented already apparent marital shifts away from clandestine marriages to church-performed ceremonies. Bannet bases her argument on the Act's undermining of historical ideas of marriage; when communities deemed a man's promise of marriage as binding. According to Bannet the Act removed a woman's entitlement to seek justice if the man she believed to have been her husband absconded. Without documented proof, the verbal promise between man and woman was

⁵⁵ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, p. 50.

deemed invalid.⁵⁶ David Lemmings similarly identified the Act as reducing the authority of women within the home, with mothers no longer permitted to consent to the marriage of their underage children. The decision responsibility was entrusted to the father, a male relation or male friend of the family, which also extended to exclude mothers who remarried from deciding marriage negotiations for children from their first marriage. According to Lemmings, this clearly revealed that 'material interest' rather than the 'natural ties of maternal affection' was the primary concern of the MPs who indorsed the Act.⁵⁷ Bannet concludes that the Government utilised the Act to harness and convert society's 'natural impulses' into wealth, through the promotion of legitimate children to increase the population and workforce for emergent industries.⁵⁸ It may be argued that Parliament's prime concern was the safeguarding of property and wealth, rather than female defence.⁵⁹ Among the lower classes bigamy was a prevailing problem for women claiming inheritance and pensions upon the death of their 'husbands'. Without documented proof, any woman could claim to have obtained a verbal contract and declare themselves the rightful beneficiary. George Ann Bellamy had believed she was legally married to the actor West Digges, but discovered that the player already had a wife. Among the landed gentry and nobility a concern existed regarding fortune hunters who seduced wealthy youths for their inheritance. Yet it has also been argued that the Marriage Act promoted the 'virtue of love', in that by establishing the legal requirements of a marriage and preventing the seduction of youth, the number of extended courtships increased and, in effect, resulted in further

⁵⁶ Tavor Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753', pp. 233-254. Probert, 'The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753', pp. 247-262.

⁵⁷ Lemmings, 'Marriage and the Law in Eighteenth-Century England', p. 349.

⁵⁸ Tavor Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753', pp. 233-54.

⁵⁹ Harth, 'The Virtue of Love', p. 127.

love matches.⁶⁰ The argument in favour of this was that a loveless marriage would inevitably result in the infidelity of both partners. Therefore, by promoting love as central to lawful marriage negotiations, the virtue and morality of society was upheld.⁶¹ To protect women from unscrupulous men who denied promising marriage prior to a sexual relationship with their partners, the Act established the necessity of documented licenses which made the couple's arrangement undeniable. Rebecca Probert concurs with this argument and claims the Act provided security for women rather than women being the 'passive victims' of men.⁶² The actress Dorothy Jordan was illegitimate due to the ambiguity of her parents' marriage. Her mother had undergone a ceremony and believed herself the wife of Francis Bland, heir to Derriquin Castle. The marriage was invalid due to both parties being under age and meant that Dorothy and her siblings were illegitimate children. Bland had been disinherited when the liaison was exposed, but as the marriage was void he had the freedom later to abandon Dorothy's mother for a legal and prosperous marriage.⁶³ By abiding by the statute and marrying under a license, women were more secure in their domestic position, preventing men from evading their responsibilities and reducing the successfulness of concealing bigamy.

The Act unintentionally emphasised another social concern - illegitimacy and the state's required maintenance of bastard children. Many of the actresses in this study who bore illegitimate children were cohabiting and performing the role of wife with the children's

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-154.

⁶² Probert, 'The Impact of the Marriage Act of 1753', pp. 247-262.

⁶³ Ranger, 'Jordan, Dorothy (1761-1816),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15119>]

fathers. George Ann Bellamy, Dorothy Jordan, Maria Gibbs and Sarah Harlowe were but a few who led happy domestic lives, although for some it was short lived. Dorothy Jordan was wife in all but title to the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) for twenty years and was aware that he would never be permitted to legitimise their union. Therefore, all ten children were given the name FitzClarence and although not the duke's legitimate heirs, each were appointed to and married into prestigious positions in society, which suggests that the mistresses of wealthy gentlemen did not require legal protection or governmental aid for their children. Jona Schellekens linked the increase in illegitimate children to the Marriage Act, stating that the new restrictions imposed on marriage caused many courtships to continue without nuptials for years. This in turn resulted in couples having premarital sex and choosing to bear children out of wedlock, causing illegitimacy rates to double in England during the years 1750 and 1800.⁶⁴ In 1728 the Duke of Bolton initiated an affair with the actress Lavinia Fenton. He was in an unhappy marriage that had been forced upon him by his father. While awaiting the death of his wife, Fenton bore three sons prior to the legitimisation of their relationship. In society these children were recorded as illegitimate, regardless of the Duke's acknowledgement and acceptance of their births. Belinda Meteyard believed that the increase in illegitimacy rates during the eighteenth-century may be further explained in examining the individuals who recorded births, arguing that the legitimacy of a marriage or birth was left to the discretion of the recording clergyman. The identified legal marriages in Hardwicke's Act, removed the authority of matrimonial practices that did not require the purchase of a license, particularly *de praesenti* marriages where only a verbal agreement was made to be man and wife and thus created a difficulty

⁶⁴ Schellekens, 'Courtship, the Clandestine Marriage Act, and Illegitimate Fertility in England', p. 433.

in the registration of children. The ratification of the Act essentially identified all children born to parents without marriage banns as bastards.⁶⁵ However, Meteyard's research has come under scrutiny after Peter Laslett and Karla Oosterveen produced an in-depth study of parish registers, which according to Laurence Stone, contradicted Meteyard's interpretation of birth records. Stone disagreed that illegitimacy figures after 1743 displayed the drastic increase that Meteyard suggests and yet he agreed with the argument that the accuracy of registry records is questionable.⁶⁶ Regardless if the Hardwicke's Marriage Act dramatically transformed the legal status of many children, it undeniably highlighted the difficulty in identifying a lawful marriage and the social standing of unwed mothers and their children. Children born to actresses out of wedlock, not only were tainted as illegitimate, but also faced harassment for being the offspring of a group of women often associated with immorality and prostitution. This may further explain why the children of Dorothy Jordan and the Duke of Clarence were given the title of FitzClarence – removing all links to the actress and theatre, thus allowing the illegitimate children of the future King William IV to prosper sociably. In Jordan's case, Hardwicke's Marriage Act had little impact on the social acceptance of her children, and this is evident with the majority of actresses in this study. Although they were not married to the fathers of their children, the illegitimates of Anne Oldfield (1683-1730), Susannah Maria Cibber (1714-1766), George Anne Bellamy (1731-1788), and Anne Catley (1745-1789) were all acknowledged by their fathers and granted their paternal names, which makes the influence of the Act on the lives of actresses questionable.

⁶⁵ Meteyard, 'Illegitimacy and Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England', pp. 479-489.

⁶⁶ Stone, 'Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England', pp. 507-509. Laslett & Oosterveen, 'Long-Term Trends in Bastardy in England', pp. 255-86.

Hardwicke's Marriage Act was promoted as a method of protecting the interests of women, but education was the key to repelling female victimisation. Institutions that prevented women's full potential through restrictions on a girl's education reinforced prescribed gender roles and subordination of women. The theatre became a type of educational institution that challenged the quality of schooling provided to females from the upper classes and nobility which conformed to conventional gender ideologies by limiting the subjects taught to what was deemed necessary for a domesticated life, with such accomplishments as music, poetry and dance for attracting a husband. James Boaden, biographer and theatre critic, declared the theatre an excellent example of accomplished female education. Successful actresses required a learned understanding of drama, self-composure and 'an army of good words', which established actresses as a threat to prescribed gender roles in that their profession required a degree of education that was not available to the majority of lower class females.⁶⁷ In limiting women's intellectual abilities, the void between the sexes was increased, with men claiming superiority of reason over women who were reduced to sentimentality. In examining sentimental fiction of the period, two opposing conclusions can be arrived at. On the one hand, women were portrayed as sentimental and fragile, with women's weakness being recognised as natural to female physical stature. Actresses played on this perception by emphasising their victimisation to the public and therefore gained sympathy and protection. Examples of this will be further examined in the analysis of actress memoirs, where their manipulation over audiences is most evident. Hence, an alternate understanding would suggest that women utilised their

⁶⁷ Boaden, *The Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 6.

sentimentality as a personal defence against vulgarity and the protection of their virtue.⁶⁸

In literature, such as in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), the heroine's fainting fit provides her an escape from the unwanted sexual advances of a gentleman.⁶⁹ An educated woman could embrace perceived female vulnerability and employ it for her own benefit – actresses sought public sympathy and unaccountability for their indiscretions, while female theatre goers similarly exhibited their emotional intellect through fainting fits and crying during theatrical performances, thus portraying their frailty to the opposite sex and distracting male attention away from the alluring actresses upon the stage. The power struggle between actresses and their female audiences exhibited within the theatre will be examined further in a subsequent chapter, but the vulnerability displayed by actresses identifies their intelligence and understanding of manipulative techniques available for the exploitation of male spectators.

While women attempted to exert their authority, often through the manipulation of men, in the public sphere, female influence was most evident in the home. Recent research into separate spheres has challenged the belief in the privatisation of the home. In examining the lives of privileged gentlewomen and their roles within the home, Amanda Vickery questions the use of the term 'separate sphere' and disagrees with the image of the home as a private unit which isolated women in a protective sphere. Gentlewomen were skilled in the arts of politeness and hospitality which they exhibited in their domesticity. The home acted as a meeting place for elites, an office where domestics and tenants were managed

⁶⁸ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 32.

and as a cultural environment where women read and exchanged texts.⁷⁰ Home theatricals also emerged as a popular form of entertainment, but were criticised as ‘injurious to the morals of young women’, corrupting innocence and persuading them of a life of romantic adventures rather than submitting to domesticity.⁷¹ The lives of wealthy fashionable women were not as lethargic as Roy Porter and other historians have concluded. Research suggests that literature which highlighted distinctions between the public/private spheres, did not reflect the reality of the period, but rather attempted to reconstruct an idealised feminised private home. Vickery indicates that it was these women who aided in the ‘English urban renaissance’ which featured an escalation in the establishment of cultural institutions such as theatres, assembly rooms and pleasure gardens.⁷² It is arguable that without the involvement of these genteel women in the pursuit of socially-acceptable entertainments, the success of eighteenth-century actresses would not have been possible. A symbiotic relationship existed between actresses and genteel women, with the patronage of the latter allowing lower-class women the opportunity to train and be educated within the theatre while also maintaining a home and family, similar to the multi-dimensional pursuits of wealthy ladies. The establishment of theatres and the patronage from ladies of fashion provided lower-class women with a legitimate profession in the public sphere.

⁷⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 9.

⁷¹ *The Times* (London, England), Monday, January 04 1790; Issue 1568.

⁷² For further reading on the influence of gentlewomen on the establishment of British culture see Eger, ‘Luxury, Industry and Charity: Bluestocking Culture Displayed’. Berg & Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 190-206. Eger examines the influence of Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800), a patron of the arts and social critic, who exemplified Eger's argument that women played an active role in the creation of a national culture and were manipulators of ‘regulated pleasure and opulence’, p. 191. Also see, Borsay, *The English urban renaissance*.

Popular Literature

The increase in population during the century generated a demand for print culture, with periodicals and prints producing a satirical commentary on the politics, social order and celebrated figures of the period. This surge in consumerism has identified the growing middle-class of London as catalysts due to their surplus of wealth, which led to the birth of the novel in the eighteenth-century, a media that was considered primarily a feminine entertainment. With female readership on the increase throughout the century, so too was the number of circulating libraries that advertised anonymously female-authored literature, which in reality was often the work of male writers. These libraries aided in the construction of femininity that reinforced women's domestic responsibilities.⁷³ Under the guise of being the voice of women expressing their experiences and attitudes to femininity, these male-scripted documents fashioned a subculture of 'female' authored fiction and participated in fortifying patriarchal hierarchy. Novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), illustrated the popular theme of the danger men posed to a woman's virtue and the rewards to those who remained chaste. It has been argued that the popularity of the novel genre and its sexual content undermined the authority of the community by exposing youth to liberated sexuality.⁷⁴ This is evident in the reading of Daniel Defoe's (1660-1731) *The fortunes and misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders...*, (1722) and his 1724 novel, *Roxana, the fortunate mistress*. Defoe's heroines were not innocent young girls, but were women who utilised their sexuality for social progression. However, as will be observed in the examination of actress memoirs, the female subjects

⁷³ Jacobs, 'Eighteenth-Century British Circulating Libraries and Cultural Book History', p. 9.

⁷⁴ Harvey, 'The Century of Sex?' p. 910.

retained the readers' compassion and their immoral behaviour was forgiven, identifying society's mentality on female redemption. In *Moll Flanders*, all scripted 'natural' femininity is absent, with the heroine abandoning her children in the pursuit of her next wealthy husband. Devoid of maternal affection and with little regard for the gentlemen she cons into marriage, it is surprising that Defoe concludes the novel with Moll finding love, reconciling with one of her sons and living comfortably in penitence for her past. Individual's free-will appears as a recurrent theme in eighteenth-century novels, with Defoe's heroines choosing a life of immorality for self-gain and deciding to repent in later life. Freedom of choice challenged the conventional images of women as either innately virtuous or inherently depraved, which impacted on the public's view of actresses who were often portrayed as immoral sexual women, but could also evoke public empathy by presenting themselves as victims.

In Richardson's *Pamela* the story of a teenage maidservant who fights off the sexual advances of her master, identified female victimisation as a result from the girl's decision to remain chaste. After several failed attempted rapes, the gentleman falls in love with the girl and her unsullied virtue is rewarded in marriage and entry into the upper class. Richardson continued with the theme of female virtue and male desire in his 1748 novel *Clarissa, or, History of a Young Lady*. Unlike the protagonist Pamela, his female leading character Clarissa failed to protect herself against her captor Lovelace, whose drugging and rape of the woman caused her eventual mental deterioration and death. Clarissa's determination to remain virtuous was celebrated after her death and served as a lesson to the woman's family who had pressured her marriage to a disagreeable but prosperous

gentleman, which was the cause for her departure with Lovelace. The femininity exhibited in these novels, constructed by male authors, presented the importance of women's decisions to preserve female virtue, but also stressed that once lost, virtue could be regained through repentance.⁷⁵ According to historians like Patricia Meyer Spacks, eighteenth-century novels emphasised women's 'social helplessness and introduces the possibility that suffering might be a woman's only recourse'.⁷⁶ The appearance of innocence was useful to women, whereby fictional women were presented as victims of sexual events. This was apparent in the published memoirs of actresses who also presented themselves as victims of the abuse and immorality of the male spectator.

A less obvious theme explored by Richardson was female property and the economic restraints on women. Actresses earned a salary and yet were unable to purchase patents or theatrical shares independent from a male representative, as evidenced with Susannah Maria Cibber's inability to purchase a stake in the Drury Lane Theatre due to potential interference from her estranged husband.⁷⁷ Husbands held authority over their wives material possessions, while single women existed under the hegemony of male family members, although this control was enforced primarily among the wealthy. The actresses in this study were not heiresses and so unlike Clarissa in Richardson's novel, there is no evidence that any of the actresses were coerced into marriage. However, the trial brought

⁷⁵ For further research into the concept of free-will during the eighteenth century, see O'Brien's *Women and Enlightenment*, where she argues that fractions such as the Dissenters and Latitudinarian Anglicanism preached that salvation was attainable not only through a person's faith, but from a philanthropic and good life.

⁷⁶ Sparks, 'Ev'ry Woman is at Heart a Rake', p. 32. Also see Culley, 'The Sentimental Satire of Sophia Baddeley', pp. 677-692.

⁷⁷ Soule, 'Cibber, Susannah Maria (1714-1766)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/articles/5417>]

against a gentleman who removed Miss Ann Catley from the home of her music teacher and the potential future earnings that were lost by this, indicates the fiscal aspirations of parents for their acting daughters. Conduct books emphasised the necessity for girls to be affectionate and dutiful daughters and it was therefore Clarissa's duty to marry a gentleman whose connections would elevate the family. It was the responsibility of the woman to submit for the benefit of her family. Richardson challenged this assumption at the end of *Clarissa* when the young woman's death is lamented and her family see the error of their cruelty. Richardson's sympathies towards women's financial limitations may have stemmed from his youth, when he was confidant to several young ladies and aided them in the writing of love letters. However, the inspirations for both his heroines may have been derived from real letters that were submitted by women to periodicals such as the *Daily Gazetteer*, which Richardson contributed to.⁷⁸

Employing Richardson's novels as evidence, it is arguable that eighteenth-century novels and conduct literature emphasised women's virtue in terms of the management of their household economy.⁷⁹ In examining Richardson's two female heroines, both exhibit good household management, which indicated to readers that these women received respectable educations and conformed to stereotypical constructions of femininity.⁸⁰ Frances Burney's *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) similarly dealt with women's ownership, in the form of property and financial inheritance,

⁷⁸ Dussinger, 'Richardson, Samuel (bap. 1689, d. 1761),' *odnb*
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23582>]

⁷⁹ Roxburgh, 'Rethinking gender and virtue through Richardson's domestic accounting', p. 411.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

which was connected with parental affection and marriage negotiations.⁸¹ Analyses of eighteenth-century novels suggest that this literary form reinforced the constructed gender roles of conduct literature by displaying women's greatest strengths and virtue within the home as dutiful daughters and loyal wives. In observing scripted femininity, women earned the right to property and inheritance. Respectful daughters warranted affectionate parents who insured the future provision of daughters by allowing them to become responsible for earning the right to receive property. It was uncommon for wives or brotherless daughters of wealth to inherit the family home upon the death of the head of the family, as during marriage negotiations a male relative was assigned heir of the estate. This was out of the woman's control, but the ambivalence of female ownership could be negated by nurturing paternal love and daughters seeking personal economic possession merited from submissive femininity.

Eighteenth-century images of feminine characteristics were socially constructed ideologies identified and instructed through the consumption of conduct literature. The symbolism of private and public spheres was invaluable to the prescribed construction of matrimony. The private could not exist without the public, whereby, the need to protect marriage inside the home was increased by the threat that the public sphere presented to the institution, which included the threat of the actress.⁸² To historians such as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, the increase in readership of conduct literature and sermons during the eighteenth century serves as proof that women were still locked into the domestic sphere in a very

⁸¹ For further analysis see Cope, 'Evelina's peculiar circumstances and tender relations', p. 66.

⁸² Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Advice Literature', p. 38.

patriarchal Britain. A poem recited in 1792 identified female rights and yet all were in relation to men's actions towards women. Robert Burns' *The Rights of Woman*, stated that all women had the right to protection, decorum and admiration – to be protected by men due to inherent female 'helplessness', the preservation of male decorum so as not to offend the delicacy of women from men's swearing, drunkenness and rudeness, and the admiration of women through men's flattery.⁸³ The 'rights' of women were acknowledged solely on how they affected masculinity and aided in the construction of genteel images of man. Contrary to the supposed importance bestowed onto women by Burns' poem and in novels whose heroines were the crux of the narratives, these male-authored works sustained prescribed notions of subordination and the imperfections of femininity. The same year as Burns' poem was revealed, Mary Wollstonecraft published her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that argued against the perceived subordination of women. Wollstonecraft did not claim that an equality existed between the sexes, but rather that both held strengths, with men appearing superior due to women's lack of education, or rather, deficiencies in educational opportunities. Whether or not Wollstonecraft and Burns were aware of the other's 'Rights of Woman', the polarised arguments of what should be the constitutional rights of women demonstrated the transformation of gender constructions throughout the eighteenth century. The representations presented by male authors identified the physical weakness of women as justification of their subordinate role, while Wollstonecraft argued that authors such as Rousseau 'rendered women as objects of pity' by measuring women's worth by their agreeableness to men.⁸⁴ Female education was

⁸³ *The Rights of Woman* (1792) was published in Burns, *The works of Robert Burns; with an account of his life*, Vol. 2 of 4, pp. 418-419.

⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, *A vindication of the rights of woman*, p. 170.

the key to creating a society founded on rationality and by the end of the century a significant number of female authored scripts that challenged conventional images of femininity were circulated.⁸⁵

However, another conclusion may be made after examining the vast volume of conduct literature produced during the century, as Amanda Vickery has done.⁸⁶ Her interpretation on the abundance of prescribing material of the period serves as proof that women were not confined to domesticity, and that, at least some women such as actresses, were incorporated into a complex struggle to define femininity in the public sphere. The increased consumption of conduct literature was a direct response to the already visible independence of a number of women in the public sphere. The publication of prescriptive texts was a pre-emptive measure to contain female influence to within the home, in the hope of preventing an invasion of independent women in British society. Vickery's theory is convincing, and regardless of whether or not the majority of eighteenth-century women ventured into paid employment outside the home, professionals such as actresses and novelists inspired discussions surrounding the influence of femininity in the public sphere, while also challenging conventional feminine domestic ideals.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For further information on Wollstonecraft and the *Vindication of the rights of woman*, see Gordon, *Mary Wollstonecraft*. Tauchert, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the accent of the feminine*. And O'Brien's *Women and Enlightenment*.

⁸⁶ Literature aimed at the youth and advertised as guidance from parents are significant examples of the early development of gender roles in children. See, Anne Thérèse de Marguenat de Courelles, marquise de, *A New-Year's Gift, being, advice from a mother to her son and daughter...* (1731). And, *A father's advice to his daughters* (1776). See also, *Characterism, or, the modern age display'd: being an attempt to expose the pretended virtues of both sexes...* (1750?), and Parker, *A view of society and manners in high and low life...* (1781).

⁸⁷ For further analysis on the amusement that was derived from discussions surrounding women entering the public sphere see McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, p. 5.

Theatre and Gender

The sexually provocative image of the actress was not uniquely British with the virtue of actresses questioned throughout the Continent. The objectification of actresses as sexual commodities served as a marker for gentlemen's wealth and authority, in that a gentleman who possessed a celebrated actress as his mistress was deemed superior in the social hierarchy and the envy of other men. In an extract from *New Letters from an English Traveller. By the Rev. Martin Sherlock*, a dialogue between Sherlock and a young Russian man, narrated the youth's experiences of French women and the theatre. The young man had arrived in Paris and was immediately seduced by a pretty woman who flattered his ego. Upon leaving his mistress, the Russian was informed by his friends that not only had he been a dupe, but he had dishonoured himself 'by an attachment to a woman who did not belong to any of the theatres'. His next conquest was a young French dancer whose only want was 'money, money, money'. The gentleman's second theatrical mistress was a singer who had been born into the profession and 'possessed perfectly the genius of her trade' in the art of deception. Miss Sophy charmed and remained agreeable while she exhausted the Russian's fortune until his father stopped all finances. When the deplorable situation was revealed to the performer the 'mask fell off' and 'the prostitute remained'.⁸⁸ The young man was foolish and squandered his money, yet the theatrical women were caught in a reputation trap and identified as the cause of the Russian's misfortunes through their immorality. Alternatively it can be argued that actresses regained authority over their bodies and utilised their objectification by exploiting the passions of men. Some actresses

⁸⁸ *London Chronicle* (London, England), April 5, 1781 – April 7, 1781; Issue 3799.

confirmed this wanton image and the immorality of the profession by publicising the indiscretions of rival actresses in an attempt to distance their own characters from corruption. In Mrs Woffington's memoirs, written by an admirer, the actress was allegedly unhappy with the profession, believing that many of her sister actresses lived as 'Common Daughters of Prostitution'.⁸⁹ Woffington's author attempted to distance the actress from her fellow performers, emphasising Woffington's superior sense of morality compared to those who represented seductresses of the stage. Ambiguity surrounding the virtue of actresses rested on their social class.⁹⁰ Those actresses from the lower classes were believed to be highly sexually active due to their low breeding compared to the virtuous upper class ladies. Yet this does not account for the privileged ladies who bore illegitimate children and engaged in illicit affairs. The Duchess of Devonshire was a notorious flirt and gave birth to the illegitimate daughter of the Whig politician Charles Grey (1764-1845) after a brief affair.⁹¹ George Anne Bellamy defended the virtue of her fellow actresses and declared that those in the acting profession who preserved an unblemished reputation were the most deserved of the public's praise, more so than those women who were 'secured by rank or fortune from the temptations'.⁹²

James Boaden recorded that a stage career was a difficult and sometimes humiliating life and yet the data I have accumulated from forty of the most notorious actresses suggests that it was both a lucrative profession and an asylum for women. To measure how difficult

⁸⁹ *Memoirs of the celebrated Mrs Woffington*, p. 60.

⁹⁰ Straub, *Sexual Suspects*, p. 90.

⁹¹ Foreman, 'Cavendish, Georgiana, duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4934>]

⁹² Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 148.

actress's lives were or were not, life expectancy may help to shed light, for if it is assumed that actresses were victims who endured long hours of rehearsals and public criticism with little reward, then the life expectancy would be low compared to those who never accomplished stardom. From the database I have compiled the estimated average age of a successful eighteenth-century actress to be 62 years.⁹³ In a study employed by Aaron Antonovsky on the life expectancy of the legitimate children of British kings and nobility, the average life span reached the age of 45 for males and 48 for females.⁹⁴ However, the data from parish records compiled by E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield indicates that in the year 1701 the 'expectation of life at birth' for English women was 37.1, which decreased to 35.9 by 1801.⁹⁵ Stephen Kunitz determined a similar figure for the life expectancy of the lower classes to be 33-35 in the year 1701, which rose to the age of 45 by 1821.⁹⁶ These figures are similar to the findings of the National Bureau of Economic Research that placed the average age of individuals in England during the period at 37 years.⁹⁷ Therefore, if we assume that life expectancy in the eighteenth-century for the lower classes was 37 and compares the figure to the forty actresses recorded in my database, it can be observed that the majority of actresses surpassed the average age of life expectancy. It is important to note that the forty chosen actresses represent a fraction of the number of female performers employed during the century. A collection of theatrical professionals and people associated with the industry in London was composed between the years 1973 and 1993,

⁹³ From the information gathered in my database, the age of thirty-six out of the forty actresses is available. Where there is uncertainty surrounding an actress's exact age, I have taken the medium age for my calculations.

⁹⁴ Antonovsky, 'Social Class, Life Expectancy and Overall Mortality', p. 32. This age is representative of the years 1730-1779.

⁹⁵ Wrigley & Schofield, *The Population History of England*, p. 230.

⁹⁶ Kunitz, 'Making A Long Story Short', p. 274.

⁹⁷ National Bureau of Economic Research [<http://www.nber.org/aginghealth/spring06/w11963.html>]

detailing the lives of over 8,500 individuals and indicating the number of actresses in the eighteenth century to be in the thousands.⁹⁸ Each of the actresses in my database were engaged at some stage of their careers in London and appeared in either Drury-Lane theatre or at Covent-Garden theatre. In examining Highfill's collection and searching the playbills published in contemporary newspapers, it can be estimated that twenty-two actresses were employed in Covent-Garden in 1750 compared to twenty-three in Drury-Lane. These figures increase to the mid-thirties by the 1780s, while in the provincial theatres there were a minimum of 291 actresses employed between the years 1660-1765, although some of these actresses may overlap with the London data due to the mobility of performers.⁹⁹ What can be concluded from my database is that of the century's most successful/notorious actresses, with factual information regarding their birth and year of death, six are known to have lived into their eighties with Elizabeth Bannister departing life at the age of 92. This indicates that either the small sample of actresses earned a relatively good living from their profession that secured them a comfortable retirement, or these working women married successfully. There were few actresses who married into the nobility, such as Lavinia Fenton (1708-1760), Elizabeth Farren (1759?-1829) and Harriot Mellon (1777?-1837), and so it is more probable that the profession aided in longer life expectancy for successful actresses.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Highfill, Burnim & Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, and Musicians*. According to the *London Stage, 1600-1800*, edited by Hogan, there were at least sixteen theatres/buildings where dramas were performed in London. However, the two theatres with royal patents are the focus of this dissertation.

⁹⁹ For information regarding provincial theatres see Rosenfeld's *Strolling Player and Drama in the Provinces 1660-1765*. In this study, Rosenfeld based his calculations on data accumulated from eight theatres that represented the major theatrical circuits of the period – Norwich, Ipswich, York, Bath, Bristol, Kentish circuit, Penkethman's Greenwich Theatre and Richmond Hill Theatres.

¹⁰⁰ John Fyvie compiled a list of the most celebrated actresses in comedy during the eighteenth century and these three women were the only to marry into nobility – Lavinia Fenton became the Duchess of Bolton,

Married actresses seldom received their own salary, which was the property of their husbands, but in old age the theatrical family continued to support its players. Charities and annuities were sometimes provided for those actors and actresses who were struggling and destitute. Mary Stephens Wells received an annuity of £55 from the Covent Garden Theatrical Fund until her death, while Margaret Cuyler claimed the Drury Lane Actor's Fund.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the theatre formed a significant place where women could find legitimate employment and maintenance in their old age, which was arguably more fortunate than occupations such as washerwomen and the physical strains of servitude. A theatrical life enabled actresses to utilise the stereotypical representation of acting women as sexually active women. In a society where sexuality and the social position of women were prominent discourses, the actress struggled to conform to gender roles while retaining a public career. By accepting the significance of domesticity and publicising their duties as mothers and wives, actresses gained the approval of moral society and were permitted to pursue their careers, while employing their sexuality as self-promotion.

Conclusion

Actresses were professional women who contributed to the economy, as well as to attitudes on the status of women while influencing cultural tastes and entertainments. Actresses were a significant subgroup whose agency will be discussed in the subsequent

Elizabeth became the Countess of Derby and Harriot Mellon was the Duchess of St. Albans. Fyvie, *Comedy Queens of the Georgian Era*, 2nd Impression.

¹⁰¹ Crouch, 'Wells, Mary Stephens (1762-1829)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29016>]
Thomson, 'Cuyler, Margaret (1758-1814)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64329>]

chapters. Joseph Haslewood argued that 'merit' was the 'best recommendation' to the stage and many respectable players were to be found in the playhouse.¹⁰² Most significantly, Haslewood believed that many of the celebrated actresses of the eighteenth century would never have been permitted to socialise with 'virtuous society' in their 'previous situations in Life'.¹⁰³ The actress was perceived to be beautiful, intelligent, courageous and charming and was an obvious target for those who feared their authority and ability to social climb. The role of the actress in the eighteenth century was sociologically important and their histories proved that gender constraints were not as binding as conduct literature would lead us to believe. Significantly, if the age of the actresses I have studied indicates that they lived, on average, longer than women from lower socio-economic rungs of society, then this may confirm the ambivalence of their social status. The life span of actresses also challenges conventional gender constructions prescribed in conduct literature and in the texts that emerged from the reformation of manners, which portrayed the theatre as a haven of corruption and disease. The income that was attainable through an acting career and its impact on the quality of life of successful actresses, disputed associations of the entire profession with prostitution and the spread of disease. As will be seen in the following chapters, by discerning constructions of femininity and exploiting their sexuality, actresses blurred class boundaries and exhibited authority which rivalled that held by fashionable women of the aristocracy and upper classes throughout the eighteenth century.

¹⁰² Haslewood, *The Secret History*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 190.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

The Actress, Kin and Theatrical Family

Perceived gender roles in eighteenth-century British society, identified men as the protectors of women, while the fairer sex were expected to be submissive and dutiful daughters, wives and mothers. Lord Henry Home Kames argued that men were 'bold and vigorous' which qualified them to be the protectors of women who were portrayed as 'delicate and timid', and being conscious of their 'inferiority' should be obedient daughters and wives.¹ Although an actress could transcend class divisions and was an influential employee in the public sphere, she was nevertheless a female and was expected to conform to stereotypical gender constraints. Her professional identity required her to be publically accepted as a female before she could excel as a performer. The following chapter will examine how successful leading London actresses were in conforming to conventional female roles, but also how this group of women exercised their authority within the limitations of scripted female duties. In representing themselves as loving daughters, virtuous wives and caring mothers, actresses were complying with evangelical and moral conduct book teachings that attempted to suppress women's appearance as sexually provocative.² However, as both scholars have discovered, there were contradictory dynamics surrounding the sought after feminine ideal of a sexless and virtuous woman, as in upholding conventional roles women were ultimately sexualised in order to become wives and mothers.³ Female sexuality was the primary complaint against the celebration of performing women who were depicted as seductresses and morally corrupt, yet to attract

¹ Kames, *Six sketches on the history of man*, p. 195.

² Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 114.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

and secure a husband, all women required an element of feminine allure which makes the discourse surrounding actresses a universally female debate. For the actresses examined in the following chapter, it was imperative that the public acknowledged these women as both professional performers and as virtuous females who did not threaten social decency in their career aspirations. Theatrical relationships contributed to the agency, or lack of it, that an actress possessed, with theatrical companies resembling the family unit. Mimicking conventional identities, the manager served as protective father while the rivalry among actors and actresses resembled competing siblings. In analysing these relationships I will demonstrate how actresses interacted within the theatrical hierarchy and often founded their marital decisions on how advantageous a union could be professionally, establishing the institution of marriage as an economic enterprise rather than the primary motivation being love.⁴ Actresses were not passive characters who limited themselves to prescribed gender norms, but rather utilised the traditional images of wholesome woman to increase public admiration and celebration of working theatrical mothers and wives.

The Actress in her Role as Daughter

To uphold the virtue and morality of a girl, 'every man of honour' was expected to protect female integrity.⁵ A father was the natural protector of a young girl from her infancy and his

⁴ In his highly challenged book, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1990), Lawrence Stone argued that love played a significant role in marriage negotiations in the eighteenth-century compared to previous centuries. Although his theory has been disputed, Stone's emphasis on romantic love in matrimony is still relevant. Fletcher's *Gender, Sex & Subordination in England 1500-1800*, is a valuable examination into the construction of gender, which he states is both 'relational and organisational' and that women's assertiveness by becoming more active in the public sphere, created male anxiety as patriarchy within the household was threatened. This can also be applied to marriage negotiations, whereby women assumed a level of control over the decision to marry and with the increase of female professionals there was less of a necessity for women to marry for financial security.

⁵ Enfield, *Biographical sermons*, p. 32.

permission was necessary before a girl could choose the acting profession. The daughter's role was to be obedient and dutiful, believed as the bidding of God and if His decree was obeyed the woman would be rewarded in Heaven.⁶ In conforming to this a girl was playing her role as a moral and honourable member of society, however many actresses exhibited defiance by removing themselves from their fathers' protection in exchange for a theatrical life. Although this disobedience defied prescribed female duties, it demonstrated the determination of young actresses who initially were subjected to public ridicule but through their unrelenting study of the profession could win the audience's admiration and patronage. The quantitative data that I have compiled in my database of forty actresses will provide valuable information on patterns in marriage and child rearing. From this database it can be observed that no fewer than nine actresses originated from an acting family background. Either one or both parents had been employed in the profession, however not all theatre fathers encouraged an acting life for their offspring, having similar reservations as families outside the profession. Young women who utilised their agency in breaking free from parental control, chose to disobey for different reasons – some wished for adventure and wealth, while others disobeyed in pursuit of love.

The actress Ann Catley (1745-1789) publicly disowned her parents under the pretext of their ill treatment towards her, gaining her the sympathy and permission to pursue a life ungoverned by an authoritative figure. Articles detailing the events of the court proceedings portrayed the young woman as a possession, her body exploited by her parents for profit

⁶ Wynne, *Riley's Emblems, natural, historical, fabulous, moral and divine, for the improvement and pastime of youth*, p.3.

and innocent puppet of men's desire. At the age of fifteen, Catley, daughter of a coachman, was the apprentice of the music master William Bates, when she decided to defy her father and chose to remove herself from his protection. Under Bates' supervision the unruly Ann fled to her lover's house, Sir Francis Blake Delaval, a man eighteen years her senior and renowned for his debauchery. Acting out of either paternal duty to his daughter, or the most likely reason, to avoid a fine of two hundred pounds against him for her removal from the music master, Mr Catley sought the return of his daughter. According to newspaper reports, Miss Catley was worth the sum of four hundred pounds - Delaval agreed to pay the sum of two hundred pounds to the music master, with an extra two hundred to account for the loss of Miss Catley's future earnings, removing Mr Catley's liability.⁷ However, Mr Catley later instigated a criminal prosecution against Delaval and Bates in May 1763, perhaps realising the potential of his daughter's future earnings after observing the attention she received because of her beauty.⁸ The alleged crimes were a 'conspiracy to debauch the daughter of the prosecutor' and another for a 'Habeas Corpus, directed at Sir Francis Delaval, to bring in the body of Ann Catley.'⁹ During the hearing the chief of justice instructed Miss Catley to choose where she wished to live, as her father had 'assigned over his parental Authority' to the music teacher and was no longer legally her guardian.¹⁰ The court had 'no hopes of reclaiming' the girl from her immoral path and accepted Ann's decision to live with Delaval.¹¹ Her father's original charge against Bates and Delaval was then directed at himself, with the court concluding that it was in fact Mr Catley and his wife

⁷ *London Chronicle* (London, England) May 14, 1763 – May 17, 1763; Issue 997.

⁸ Ambross, *The life and memoirs of the late Miss Ann Catley*, pp. 26-28.

⁹ Blackstone, *Reports of cases determined*, p. 411. Also see Ambross, *The late Miss Ann Catley*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Blackstone, *Reports of cases determined*, p. 411.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

who had initially deceived and conspired against the girl. The argument was fuelled by Mrs Catley openly living in the accommodation supplied to Miss Catley by her lover.¹² The Catleys were reprimanded for the contracted apprenticeship that the court viewed as being 'calculated for the purpose of prostitution only', while Sir Francis's financial exchange with Bates was 'premium prostitutionis.'¹³ Bates and Delaval were found guilty and heavily fined, leaving Ann at liberty to do as she pleased, no longer legally under her father's protection or 'prostitution'.

There appears to have been ambiguity between the 'protection' of fathers in exchange for obedience and the maltreatment of daughters. Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821) had failed as an actress, but progressed naturally as a playwright, utilised the stage as her platform for the criticism of 'protection' offered by fathers and husbands.¹⁴ Inchbald feared that the subordination of women led to a despotic home which resulted in sexual violence, as in a homosocial society the female body became a commodity.¹⁵ While Ann Catley obeyed her father and lived under his 'protection', she was forced into a singing career where her beauty would be exploited and then prostituted to Delaval for financial gain. The court proceedings acknowledged that the woman's body was property sold to the highest bidder, and it was only after judgement that Miss Catley took full possession of her person and full agency. However, it is possible that Miss Catley instigated the entire incident in order to gain her freedom, as the affair with Delaval dissolved soon afterwards. Contemporary

¹² Ambross, *The late Miss Ann Catley*, p. 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁴ O'Quinn, 'Scissors and Needles', pp. 109-110.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

accounts also depicted a conflicting image of the woman, as the biographer James Boaden recorded Catley as 'bold, volatile, audacious' and 'mistress of herself', indicating a woman who was not a victim but rather a confident and autonomous individual who manipulated the judge and public into sympathising with her circumstances and excusing her affair and loss of virtue.¹⁶ Miss Catley challenged the conventional roles of a daughter – she disobeyed her parents, relinquished her chastity to a gentleman, fled the authority of her music teacher and publically revealed her corrupted character with no evidence of remorse. But in later life she appeared to embrace prescribed gender roles as mother and dutiful wife – her final and lasting representation being of a moral and charitable character winning public admiration and recognition in theatrical history. In a eulogium the actress's many indiscretions were reduced to simple 'misfortunes', 'the common result of a bad education.'¹⁷ Although Catley had initially risen to fame due to her disobedience towards her father and highly publicised court case, the young woman prevailed with her acting and established herself as a 'good mother, the chaste wife, and accomplished woman', redeeming her character from disobedient daughter to the conventional ideal of dutiful mother and demonstrated the capacity of women to transform their public representations.¹⁸

The life of an actress was appealing to those who tired of female domestic restrictions and an elopement with an actor was an opportunistic method of gaining access to a stage career and freedom from parents. Women who disobeyed their father's or family's wishes faced

¹⁶ Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Siddons*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 115.

¹⁷ Oulton, *The History of the theatres of London*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 67.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

the dilemma of being disinherited and left destitute of family and friends. Despite a woman's plea that the departure from her family home was a result of love she was still exposed to the stigma of being a dishonourable daughter and thus an immoral character. Many contemporaries believed that the disobedience of a daughter was evidence of the girl's degenerative character and would steer her into a life of dissipation. Tate Wilkinson, Theatre Manager of the Yorkshire Circuit, narrated the history of a young lady of fortune, Miss Dolly Steward, whose demise was not unexpected after her defiance at a young age. In 1766 this young woman eloped with the actor Mr Thomas Powell, resulting in her expulsion from the family. The lady had no other choice but to join the theatre, which Wilkinson believed to have been her secret motive for the elopement. Mrs Powell had some success in comedy, but her indulgence in 'sleep and vapours' affected her psychologically and she 'was obliged to be under some little confinement at Bramham'.¹⁹ Her death in Hull, November 1773, would have served as effective proof of the disastrous implications of a daughter slighting her family's wishes and choosing the life of an actress. Wilkinson suggested her elopement was a catalyst for entry into the theatre, using her 'love' for the actor to evoke public empathy and excuse her behaviour.

Objections to a daughter marrying a player were not uncommon among the upper classes, due to the perceived immorality of the profession that was frequently published in religious and conduct literature. But the concern over the corruption of youth by association with the theatre was not exclusive to the rich and was evident even within theatrical families. The previous examples revealed the temptations of the theatre for girls seeking to escape

¹⁹ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 33-34.

paternal control, yet another route into a stage life was love and marriage into the profession, which negated a daughter's disobedience if the match proved to be virtuous. Mrs Kemble (1735-1807) and Mrs Siddons (mother and daughter) both chose to defy their fathers in pursuit of love. Unlike Mrs Powell and Catley, a career within the theatre was not their ultimate goal, as both women occasionally participated on the stage prior to their elopements. However, as love was the sole reason for their disobedience, their folly was forgivable in society and both were reunited with their families. The life of a performer was not the future that Mr Ward, manager of an itinerant theatrical company, wished for his daughter. Mr Ward's 'contempt' for the profession led to Miss Ward's elopement with Mr Roger Kemble, an actor within her father's troop, and resulted in the estrangement between father and daughter for many years.²⁰ Although Mrs Kemble disobeyed her father's commands, the public were less inclined to judge her negatively for her actions. Her father was the manager of a strolling acting troop, the lower form of performers, and perhaps Mrs Kemble was thought to have been attempting to better her circumstances. This became a reality when the Kembles nurtured the careers of two of England's greatest performers, Mrs Siddons and John Phillip Kemble. Similarly to her mother, Sarah Siddons had chosen to marry an actor in her father's company, William Siddons (1744-1808), against the wishes of her parents. The objection to the match was the doubt over Siddons's future earnings and talent, along with being ten years her senior. Mr and Mrs Kemble had chosen another for a husband, Mr Evans, whom the young Miss Kemble rejected and she was subsequently sent to Warwick for two years as companion to Lady Mary Greatheed. The

²⁰ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 2-3.

romance between the young woman and actor did not dissipate during their separation and the union was eventually acknowledged by the Kembles.²¹

The identity of a girl as a dutiful daughter was not an irreparable image, and once lost by disobedience, could be re-established through remorse and the daughter's future obedience. Therefore, a woman's abandonment of stereotypical ideals of femininity did not designate her to the peripherals of society forever; as already discussed, free-will allowed individuals the opportunity to atone and resume constructed gender roles, once again appearing as acceptable conventional men and women. Sarah Siddons's insubordination towards her father was excused by her representation as an affectionate and loyal wife and mother, but the acceptance of her husband by the Kemble family indicated a shift in the perceived paternal authority in the domestic sphere. Frances Chiu and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace both touch on this in their respective works examining eighteenth-century fiction and the representation of male dominance. Kowaleski-Wallace analyses domestic economics portrayed in Maria Edgeworth's novels and concludes that patriarchy shifted from a tyrannical and forceful authority to a rational understanding between the sexes where guilt and obligation were emphasised.²² Chiu argues that the image of a despotic father figure in Gothic and Jacobin fiction was a satirical response to the changing position of fathers within the home. From the 1780s, fictional fathers appeared as a 'political response to challenge conventional notions' and attacked the overbearing fathers described in conduct literature by exaggerating their characteristics to the absurd.²³ But as

²¹ Shaughnessy, 'Siddons, Sarah (1755-1831)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25516>]

²² Kowaleski-Wallace, 'Home economics: Domestic ideology in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', p. 242.

²³ Chiu, 'From Nobodaddies to Noble Daddies', pp. 1-2.

Chris Roulston has argued, the image represented in conduct literature was not necessarily how fathers acted within the home. In portraying the father as governor of the household, Roulston claimed that literature destabilised prescribed paternal authority inside the home by highlighting society's growing concern that the opposite was in fact more true to reality.²⁴ This theory that fathers may not have acted as the dogmatic heads of the household, suggests that the documentation showing the dominance of fathers was an attempt by authors to compensate for the loss of authority men possessed over their wives and children. Therefore, the autocratic father who demanded obedience from his daughter did not reflect the actions of Mrs Siddons's parent, but rather illustrated a concern over his daughter's choice in husband at a young age and her inexperience of the world. An article in 1897 insisted that Mrs Siddons had obeyed her father in marrying William Siddons, quoting that her father had warned the girl not to marry an actor which she had not, as 'Siddons never was and never will be an actor'.²⁵ Perhaps Mrs Siddons's decision to disobey her father was not as rebellious as initially thought, but nevertheless the actress chose her romance over the wishes of a parent that also guaranteed her a life in the theatre. This demonstrates that the disobedience of a daughter and the abandonment of her gendered role as subordinate to a father were not irrevocable. The disobedient child could regain her paternal affection through atonement, demonstrating the lifecycle of gender construction.

A daughter exercising her independence and defiance was not necessarily viewed negatively in society, especially when the welfare of one parent was at jeopardy. While in

²⁴ Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage', p. 39.

²⁵ *The Era*, (London, England), Saturday, June 5, 1897; Issue 3063

the pursuit of maternal love, George Anne Bellamy (1727-1788) abandoned the protection of her father's home and suffered the loss of her inheritance, forcing her to engage in an acting career. Bellamy had little option but to defy her father, or she would have been regarded as a cruel daughter to have forsaken her distressed mother. Bellamy's disobedience lost her a father's love and made her the pariah of the family, but this was juxtaposed with her image as a virtuous daughter who did not overlook her obligations. Bellamy was the illegitimate daughter of a Miss Seal and James O'Hara, second Baron Tyrawley. Her mother was a well-educated woman, who was seduced by a gentleman and abandoned, which resulted in her hasty marriage and entrance to the stage as a means of supporting herself. The subsequent child she bore was then seized from her by the very man who was the cause for her suffering. George Anne Bellamy's mother encouraged her daughter to disobey her father's wishes and rekindle a relationship when Bellamy was at an age to exert her autonomy. Religious teachings emphasised the need for children to respect and obey their parents, but if one parent's wishes were deemed 'unreasonable as to require a Child to affront or slight the other, the Child would be safe in a respectful Disobedience and Refusal; because no Parent has a Right to take away another's Right' to that child.²⁶ However, the father's position was superior to the mother by 'God's appointment' and daughters were expected to obey their father's desires ahead of the mother's.²⁷ Yet, as stated in the text, *The Family New Year's Gift*, a child's responsibility to a parent also involved the 'support and sustenance' of a mother or father, thus justifying Bellamy's actions. By suffering the loss of her father's protection, Bellamy was exposed to theatrical

²⁶ *The Family New Year's Gift: or, a Present for a Son or a Daughter*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

life, urged by her mother whose own financial hopes were dependent on the daughter she was now reunited with. Without the support of her father, Bellamy, well educated, young and beautiful, was attracted to the glamorous life of a celebrated actress, and sought a similar career to financially support her newly independent life. It is possible that her hidden agenda was to be free to partake in London's entertainments, considering the sheltered life she had led before the exposure to her mother's colourful lifestyle. Bellamy's memoirs portrayed herself as an affectionate daughter who resigned her wealth for a life of poverty with a parent in need, publicly recommending herself as a virtuous member of society and excusing her decision to become an actress. The theatrical life, as opposed to her intended life as a sheltered gentlewoman, was deemed acceptable, as in accordance with conventional feminine ideals, Bellamy acted as a dutiful daughter who provided for her mother in a profession that was easily attainable and lucrative for a woman in her situation.

Bellamy's decision to provide for her mother was not unique, with many of the actresses in this study acting as either the sole earner of the family or assumed the role of employer, whereby the actress's mother accompanied the woman throughout her career as child-minder and housekeeper. A possible justification for procreation was that children would be the companions of their parents. This may have contributed to the rearing of children among the upper classes, but I believe this was not a consideration among theatrical families where children assisted in the domestic economy.²⁸ Obligation and Christian duty, to honour thy father and mother, may have spurred children to obey their parents' wishes, but the girl's own resolve must be acknowledged once she reached an eligible age to gain

²⁸ Plumb, 'The New World of Children in Eighteenth-Century England', p. 85.

some level of independence of thought. Elizabeth Farren, George Anne Bellamy and Dorothy Jordan all remained the chief benefactors and protectors of their mothers until their deaths and formed symbiotic relationships. Each of these mothers were dependent on their daughters as financial commodities and in return the mothers acted as contractors, protectors of virtue and groomed their daughters for public attention. Although profiting from the success of their daughters' careers, these mothers developed a strong family value that was as important a characteristic to the public persona of the actress as her acting abilities, by exhibiting these women as affectionate and loyal daughters.

Mothers could be influential promoters for actresses and aided in creating a public image that challenged the domesticated position of women. The employment of mothers by actresses such as Mrs Jordan, served to counter balance the professional ambitiousness of actresses by becoming household managers and child minders while their daughters performed on stage, exhibiting an alternative lifestyle that retained the virtues of domestic life. Mrs Bland, the mother of Mrs Jordan, had gained a reputation as a stage-mother who Tate Wilkinson mocked; 'the mamma, like other mamma's and in particular, ACTRESSES MAMMA'S, talked' so boldly about her daughter's great talents, 'that I was almost disgusted, and very near giving a flat denial to any negotiation' of contract in the company.²⁹ George Anne Bellamy's relationship with her mother similarly saw the promotion of the actress's talents, but it is arguable that her mother's intentions were on gaining access to the annual hundred pounds Lord Tyrawley had initially given his daughter. The juxtaposition between the coldness of her parents (her mother's dismissal and later her father's virtual

²⁹ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 134.

disownment) and Bellamy's representation of herself as a dutiful daughter, excused her many public indiscretions. Her six volume memoirs expressed her personal conflict and difficulty in remaining an obedient daughter –

*Honour thy father and thy mother – how strong the injunction! – and how pleasing the reward – that thy days may be long, &c. Next to the reverence due from us to the universal Parent of mankind, stands the duty we owe our earthly parents; one is equally as obligatory as the other.*³⁰

In upholding the appearance of a devoted daughter, actresses salvaged some of the morality that their characters were charged with lacking, establishing them as women worthy of the public's patronage. In William Chetwood's *A General History of the Stage* (1749), the author praised Bellamy for her 'liberal open heart' and called her a woman whose beauty was amplified by her virtuous mind, making her an acceptable female role model.³¹ Although it would appear the mothers of actresses abused parental responsibilities by exploiting their daughters' careers, actresses demonstrated a reciprocal relationship in utilising family duties to manipulate and promote their representations positively.

Actress as Wife

Women's 'supreme goal' was to find an advantageous husband,³² demonstrated by the Duchess of Marlborough in 1737/8 who stated that 'women signify nothing unless they are

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 5, p.171.

³¹ Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage*, p. 113.

³² Davidoff, *Family Fortunes*, p. 322.

the mistress of a prince or a first minister'.³³ Jane Austen reiterated this sentiment in her novels, depicting a comical Mrs Bennett attempting to marry off her daughters to wealthy gentlemen in *Pride and Prejudice* and the young Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, at the age of twenty-one 'beginning to think matrimony a duty' and 'a marriage with Mr Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr Rushworth.'³⁴ The necessity for eighteenth-century women to marry, transforming them into active members of society has been argued by scholars such as Leonore Davidoff, Catherine Hall and Eve Tavor Bannet, with the latter arguing that it was only by becoming mothers that women could become 'useful Commonwealthsmen' through the educating of children for the country's future prosperity.³⁵ Affection that resulted in a marriage was desirable, but evidence suggests that actresses' decisions regarding matrimony were more calculated than romantic, exhibiting their ambition to succeed.

Marriage represented a means for career advancement and protection, while also symbolizing institutional constraints on a woman who earned an independent salary. Under the title of wife, an actress held some semblance of respectability above the single females upon the stage; she was less of a seductress and was instead admired as an active participant in the family's domestic finances. The negative repercussions of marriage for an

³³ *Memoirs of Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough*, ed. William King (London, 1930), p. 331, as cited in Sparks, 'Ev'ry Woman is at Heart a Rake', p. 43.

³⁴ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 37.

³⁵ Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753', p. 236.

actress were universally felt by females of all classes; ownership was surrendered to her husband, which included property and salaries earned, thus negating the actress's struggles to attain a theatrical career. The actress George Anne Bellamy received valuable advice from the elderly actor Quin to 'not let the love of finery, or any inducement, prevail upon' her resulting in her committing an imprudent decision. For Bellamy was 'young and engaging' and had to be 'doubly cautious' of male admirers and in her choice of partner.³⁶ My interpretation of marriage is of a legal union recognised by the state, but as will be identified in the following analysis, actresses often performed the role and were recognised as spouses without the execution of a wedding contract. Actresses such as Dorothy Jordan, George Anne Bellamy and Ann Catley were striking, intelligent and determined women who attracted wealthy gentlemen and lived as their mistresses, performing the dual functions of a private and public female. Their acceptance and justification in remaining as mistresses will be examined and compared to their fellow actresses who succeeded in attaining the honourable position of wife. This will be approached by studying individual cases in order to deduce whether or not it was more beneficial to be without a husband.

Mrs Jordan was a reluctant mistress but accepted her role as financially more lucrative than the life of a working single mother. Her public representation as a married woman, would have commanded more respect than a single actress, in that she was able to maintain her wifely duties while also adding financially to the family by maintaining a career. This may explain why in the confessional *Apology*, George Anne Bellamy claimed that she was deceived twice by men who had promised marriage. The first was Sir George Methan and

³⁶ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 59.

the second, Mr John Calcraft; the latter was exposed as already having a wife.³⁷ Jordan's desperation to appear respectable was evident in her decision to adopt a stage name and refusal to squash rumours surrounding her marital position. Jordan's first suspected husband was a Mr Ford, (police magistrate and son of the principal shareholder of Drury Lane Theatre), a gentleman whom she expected would fulfil his promise and legalise their union. When Ford failed to do so and the more gratifying prospect of becoming mistress to a prince was presented to the actress, she declared that 'if she must choose between offers of protection, she would certainly choose those that promised the fairest, but that, if he could think her worthy of being his wife, no temptation would be strong enough to detach her from him and her duties'.³⁸ Aware of the potential rewards to be gained by an association with the Duke of Clarence (later King William IV) and conscious that as a royal, Clarence would be unable to offer her the security of marriage, Jordan determined that the role of mistress was tolerable for the sake of her children and career. Marriage had been Jordan's goal, evident by her use of the prefix 'Mrs' throughout her career, as a form of protection from public scrutiny and abusive male admirers. The use of the prefix was commonly used by performers with such aliases as Mrs Jordan, Mrs Spencer and Mrs Farmer billed for unmarried actresses. The use of pseudonyms was generally adopted at the insistence of relations who did not wish to be associated with the theatre. Dorothy Jordan (née Bland) chose her stage name so as not to 'injure her in the opinion of her father's relations', as did Mrs Ann Pope and Mrs Powell who were billed as Mrs Spencer and Mrs Farmer prior to both these women's marriages.³⁹ By adopting a stage name, the

³⁷*Ibid.*, Vol. 3 of 5, pp. 133-134.

³⁸ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 2 of 2, pp. 246-247.

³⁹*Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 29.

actress's professional identity took on its own persona, with the woman embodying a public and private character, two separate personalities in one form. As Mrs Spencer, the young Marie Ann Campion; who later became Mrs Pope, could separate her professional career from her personal identity to the public, thus protecting her femininity from the associated immorality of the stage. For Jordan, the prefix and change in name symbolised a new beginning for the actress and her family. It served as both a concealment of the events surrounding her escape from Ireland and was an attempt to recommend her character to the public as a struggling single mother.

Jordan's decision to submit to the Duke's proposition was not based on love and the actress was not in need of financial security, thus her acceptance in the role of royal mistress derived from personal vanity and the potential for a boost to her professional reputation. Jordan justified her choice to the public claiming that as a concerned mother the fiscal security of her children spurred the family's departure from Ford, whom many assumed was legally married to the actress. Jordan's failure to explain her habitual arrangement with the father or her children justified society's misunderstanding and anger about the affair. In a published letter the actress argued that her personal situation was not of interest to the public and that she would not 'obtrude upon the public an allusion to anything that does not relate to [her] profession', outlining the boundary which the public's intrusion had crossed. She continued, that if her critics were unsatisfied with this and chose to drive her from the profession, they would be removing her only income, or 'means to possess, the whole earnings of which, upon the past, and on-half for the future' she had settled upon

her children.⁴⁰ As mistress to the Duke, Jordan led a double life of a celebrated professional actress and as domestic 'duchess' of Bushy House, the couple's home, revealing not only the ability for actresses to elevate their social status, but also a distinct image of a working woman who lived like the 'virtuously superior' nobility. Admitted into social circles, which her fellow actresses could never expect to achieve, Jordan was professionally and personally elevated by her relationship with the Duke and undeniably aided in the actress's ticket sales with audiences attending in the hope of viewing society's elite.

It is arguable that a marriage with either Ford or the Duke would have led to professional suicide for Jordan. A marriage to Ford may have limited the actress to performances at Drury Lane Theatre only, due to his connections with that playhouse. The wife of a nobleman and particularly spouse of a prince, could not remain on the stage, as was seen when the actress Elizabeth Farren retired from the theatre prior to her marriage to Lord Derby. As mistress to the Duke of Clarence, Jordan supplemented the family's finances with her theatrical wages, but in marriage the actress would have had little choice but to yield the entire salary to her husband.⁴¹ When the actress Sophia Baddeley requested her salary to be paid directly to her rather than to the actress's estranged husband, a quarrel commenced between the husband and theatre treasurer, George Garrick, resulting in Mrs Baddeley agreeing to pay her husband's debts in exchange for a separation.⁴² Research into

⁴⁰ *London Chronicle* (London, England) November 29, 1791 – December 01, 1791; Issue 5503

⁴¹ One of the first people to examine Dorothy Jordan's correspondence with the Duke of Clarence was Arthur Aspinall. In his published biography on the actress he stated that within one of the envelopes was a £2 note with a letter revealing that while performing around the country Jordan frequently sent her salary to the Duke for the provision of the family. See – Aspinall, *Mrs Jordan and Her Family*, p. ix.

⁴² Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 1 of 6, pp. 11-12.

the agency of acting women during marriage negotiations reveals that the actress was both the 'trader' and 'product' of her performances, giving her the duality as 'both agent and object of exchange', whose choice in marriage could result in her becoming her husband's 'professional asset'.⁴³ When another actress, Susannah Cibber (1714-1766) married Theophilus Cibber (1703-1758), an actor and manager, her husband possessed the actress's finances, career and the product of her labour. According to Sir William Blackstone's *An Analysis of the Laws of England* (1771), 'By Marriage the Chattels real and personal of the Wife are vested in the Husband, in the same Degree of Property, and with the same Powers'.⁴⁴ There was ambiguity over what was considered as the personal property of a woman and more significantly to this study, whether or not the actress's own body came under the title of personal asset. Was it only her acting skills that represented a financial commodity which her husband had a right to ownership of or perhaps her body may have been viewed as a component of her professional identity? Who 'owned' an actress's body, the woman herself, her husband (if married) or the theatre manager who employed her? The actress utilized her body in the personification of a character, without it an actress would be unsuccessful, and thus the female body was a product of her labour, attracting spectators and employed on the public stage. If an actress's body was accepted as a chattel then it is reasonable to believe that a married actress lost all autonomy. She was open to public scrutiny through her profession, lack of privacy from the media and a loss of ownership over her own body and professional identity through marriage.

⁴³ Brooks, 'Negotiating Marriage,' p.50.

⁴⁴ Blackstone, *An Analysis of the laws of England*, sixth edition, p. 75.

The marriage of Susannah Cibber clearly emphasised the dangers in marrying for professional gain and served as a stark warning for young actresses regarding the importance of viewing marriage as a business-like exchange. Such marriage arrangements have been characterised as actresses marrying 'into and up' the theatrical hierarchy, whereby an inferior actress married an experienced actor whose networks would provide potential engagements and patrons for the actress.⁴⁵ Sophia Snow eloped to marry the actor Robert Baddeley in 1763 in the hopes of establishing a career on the London stage. This being accomplished and her marriage dissolving, Sophia instigated affairs with wealthy gentleman of Fashion, yet in subsequent years her egotistical attitude resulted in her removal from engagements and her selection of lovers emerging from the lower ranks. Prior to her marriage to one of David Garrick's close friends, Mary Ann Graham (1728-1787) was not considered a worthy asset to Garrick's theatre. Yet once married to the actor Richard Yates in 1756, her career advanced significantly, as did Priscilla Hopkins' (1756-1845) when she married William Brereton and then the actor/manager, John Philip Kemble. However, once secure in a marriage to the successful Kemble, the actress retired her professional identity and was content with her social advances as a manager's wife. The exploitation of marriage as a means to professional advancement presented the female public with innovative ideas on female agency, with actresses utilising their sexuality in acquiring the respectable role of wife, while continuing to gain recognition in the public sphere as celebrated individuals.

⁴⁵ Brooks, 'Negotiating Marriage,' p. 45.

Once bound in wedlock a woman rarely could free herself from a husband's presence and although the figure of a husband was effective in concealing a woman's ulterior motives, a wife's autonomy remained limited. Sophia Baddeley agreed to pay her estranged husband's debts in exchange for a legal separation and independence, while Mary Robinson utilised the appearance of her estranged husband. *The Memoirs of Perdita* indicated that the marriage between the actress and a clerk, Thomas Robinson, was a marriage of convenience – Robinson was obtaining a beautiful young bride with a salary, while the actress gained a husband who was useful for 'giving a legal sanction to the conquests she hoped to make'.⁴⁶ Mary Robinson manipulated the image of her husband as concealment of her extra-marital affairs and attempted to maintain the public image of a loyal wife. The actress performed the conventional duties of a wife as scripted in conduct literature, whereby a wife needed to support and augment her husband's responsibilities as 'the more he fails in his duty, the more earnest should be' the wife's activities to discharge her own.⁴⁷ Similarly, Susannah Cibber's husband was employed as a facade to the actress's personal objectives – firstly in the actress's aspirations of a stage career and secondly in leaving her husband for the lover that her husband had supposedly prostituted his wife to. To the general public, Susannah Cibber was portrayed as the subordinate wife obeying her husband's commands to accept a lover who would in turn alleviate the couple's debts. However, what occurred after the events were publically revealed makes the perceived obedience of Susannah to her husband's depraved plans questionable and suggests a willingness by the woman to escape a constraining and loveless marriage. When Theophilus realised that more financial gain

⁴⁶ *The memoirs of Perdita*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ *A father's advice to his daughters*, p. 30.

was to be made from his wife than merely the salary of an acting career the husband exercised his ownership over the actress's body and utilised her charm and beauty. Heavily in debt, Cibber introduced his wife to a Mr Sloper who took lodgings in the same house as the husband and wife and paid for the accommodation of all three. However, Susannah eventually left her husband for Sloper, and a public lawsuit was brought against Sloper for 'criminal conversation, and assaulting and ravishing' Cibber's wife.⁴⁸

The affair exposed and Sloper fined the total sum of five hundred and ten pounds, Susannah was once again at liberty to free herself from Cibber and reclaim her professional and personal identity. Publically the actress was redeemed from her transgressions by being represented as an innocent victim in Cibber's scheme, while Theophilus was portrayed as a cuckold sharing his wife with other men. Susannah Cibber cohabitated with Sloper until her death and bore a son and daughter, yet the actress could not fully escape her estranged husband's hold over her livelihood. Once married, a woman no longer possessed a legal identity, which included her right to ownership of property and to sign legal contracts (such as the Drury-Lane patent) in her own name.⁴⁹ While technically still married to Cibber, Susannah was unable to join David Garrick in a joint patent of Drury Lane Theatre. In a letter from Garrick to a Mr Draper in Dublin (1745), the actor questioned how Mrs Cibber could be a joint patentee as 'her husband will interfere, or somebody must act for her, which would be equally disagreeable' as a male was required to stand for her.⁵⁰ Marriage was an

⁴⁸ *The Annual Register...for the year 1766*, p. 74.

⁴⁹ Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism,' p. 6.

⁵⁰ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London) Saturday, September 09, 1786; issue 18018. Letter written to Mr Draper, Dublin; December 01, 1745.

important consideration for women, but critical for actresses. It could facilitate a woman's entrance into the theatre or boost her career, but the adverse effect of matrimony was the woman's surrender of ownership to her husband, which would be detrimental in a loveless marriage.

Actress as Mother

The representation of an actress as doting mother who chose a career upon the stage for the provision and improvement of circumstances for her family was commonly observed in memoirs and biographical sketches of the eighteenth-century. In exaggerating the struggles faced by acting mothers (in rearing children virtuously within an institution critiqued for its immorality and the difficulties of performing both the duties of mother and professional actress), actresses such as Sarah Siddons, George Anne Bellamy and Mrs Jordan exhibited conventional femininity that allowed them to become celebrated women. The theatre was transformed from a house of entertainment occupied by society's sexually ambiguous characters, to an industry where mothers could obtain an honest salary and the means to provide for their children. Mrs Jordan and George Anne Bellamy were celebrated actresses who also represented one of society's growing problems – single mothers and their illegitimate children – Jordan was the greatest offender with thirteen illegitimate children who survived to adulthood. It has been argued that Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753) was the main catalyst in the rise of illegitimate births, because of its redefinition of the concept on what made a marriage legal which affected the lower classes the most negatively.⁵¹ The Act asserted that a church wedding and parental consent was required, which segregated

⁵¹ Meteyard, 'Illegitimacy and Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England', pp. 479-489.

the poor who could not afford the expense of a church celebration. If Hardwicke's Marriage Act had not existed, Jordan's cohabitations with Ford and the Duke of Clarence would have constituted as marriages in the traditional sense as consensual intercourse and the birth of children came as a result of cohabitation. Louise Tilly, Joan Scott and Miriam Cohen have argued that the circumstances which the actresses, Jordan and Bellamy, experienced were not uncommon due to the Marriage Act's depletion of community authority to enforce men's responsibility for their offspring. The consenting of women to sexual intercourse out of wedlock but under the assurance that a marriage would one day take place has been referred to as *marriages manqués*, whereby the matrimonial promise was never fulfilled.⁵² Children born to couples who cohabitated but never married were labelled as illegitimates after the implementation of the Act, which negated the authority of the community which policed clandestine marriages to ensure fathers took responsibility. George Anne Bellamy had been promised marriage by Sir George Montgomery Metham and later by John Calcraft, while Richard Ford had assured Mrs Jordan of his devotion by offering marriage once he was in a financial position to do so. However, although a legal union was not possible between Jordan and the Duke of Clarence, in the press their long standing relationship was accepted by many as a form of marriage. An article published after Jordan's death stated that their union was similar to what the Germans termed a 'left-handed marriage', with similar expectations to the archaic common law marriages prior to the Marriage Act.⁵³ Under the illusion of domestic morality, the bastard children of Jordan and the Duke were not tainted as illegitimates and acquired key social positions and affluent marriages.

⁵² Tilly, Scott & Cohen, 'Women's Work and European Fertility Patterns', pp. 447-476.

⁵³ "His Present Majesty, William The Fourth," *The Belfast News-Letter*, (Belfast, Ireland), Tuesday, July 6, 1830; Issue 9710

At the age of 48 and still touring the theatre companies, Mrs Jordan wrote of her unhappiness with being taken away from her family, but knew it her duty to continue for the sake of her children. The actress chose her profession over maternal instinct, not out of vanity but due to her responsibility as primary earner and provider for her children. The theatre enabled women to form professional careers and contribute to the family income, however, as the playhouse performances were seasonal, often actresses were required to travel theatrical circuits, leaving their children in the care of relations. June 12th 1809, while performing in Dublin Jordan wrote to the Duke '...however fond you may think I am of acting this has been a severe tax on my feelings nor can any money or applause that may attend me in public compensate for what I suffer in mirth, but it is a duty I owe my family'.⁵⁴ In another letter, September 25th 1809, she wrote 'I wish to God I was at home, we do not see or exchange a word with a soul from morning to night'.⁵⁵ A struggle existed between her professional identity and her wish for conformity, to perform the duties of mother at the family's home. However, Jordan's primary 'duty' to her family was not in the role of mother but as the financial provider, a burden which she acknowledged in her letters. The Duke acted as her confidant and advisor, counselling her on theatrical engagements and informing her on the children's' progress. When her eldest child, George was violently ill, Jordan's maternal worry resulted in the actress's speedy return to Bushy House as she could

⁵⁴ DJ 244, *Dorothy Jordan to William IV, King of Great Britain*, June 12, 1809. Quoted by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. Letter written by Jordan while performing in Dublin, to the Duke of Clarence at Bushy House, Middlesex.

⁵⁵ DJ 286, September 25, 1809. Letter written by Jordan while performing in Liverpool, to the Duke of Clarence at Bushy House, Middlesex.

not 'sacrifice [her] feeling any longer for two or three Hundred pounds' salary.⁵⁶ Concern for her children's health, education and past times were frequent themes in her correspondence, along with the daily occurrences in the Duke's life. The two eldest boys, George and Henry Fitzclarence were in active service which caused Jordan increasing distress while touring, affecting her performances due to fatigue and this alerted the actress to the discontent of her touring existence in which she was 'living for everybody[s] pleasure but [her] own, and nothing but the motive could justify or reconcile a person...to make so great a sacrifice...'.⁵⁷ The motive was the provision for her family – she had in addition to the ten children with the Duke, two daughters by Ford and another daughter fathered by Richard Daly. The image of Jordan portrayed in her private letters contradicts contemporary caricatures such as *La Promenade en Famille* (1797) which depicted Jordan busily studying a play while the Duke attended to three of their children in a carriage. In her letters Jordan is a loving mother whose wish was to stay with her children rather than career progression. In October 1810, she wrote of her hope that the Drury Lane Theatre would be rebuilt after the fire in February 1809, believing that once open she could return to London and no longer be obligated to travel.⁵⁸ When Jordan returned to the family's residence at Bushy between engagements, the actress adopted the positions of mother and 'duchess' of the house. To the astonishment of the Duke's friends and family, Mrs Jordan was given the privileges of writing on behalf of the Duke his apologies and acceptances to invitations, undertaking the 'honours of the table, supported by taste and elegance' during a ball and supper hosted by

⁵⁶ DJ 292, October 01, 1809. Letter written by Jordan while performing in Liverpool, to the Duke of Clarence at Bushy House, Middlesex.

⁵⁷ DJ 331, January 22, 1810. Letter written by Jordan while staying in the *Star & Garter Inn*, Kirkstall, to the Duke of Clarence at Bushy House, Middlesex.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the Duke and 'presided at the ceremonials of disposing of the prizes' for a boat-race in honour of the his birthday.⁵⁹ The daily management of a stately home also fell upon the actress's responsibilities, who supervised the household expenditure and decoration; including disagreements with the Paper Hanger who had produced a paper for her that would 'have disgraced a common Bedroom'.⁶⁰ Although the actress was not legally the Duke's wife, she was praised as being a 'happy mother, an honoured wife in everything but the legal title', with her contemporaries acknowledging the 'establishment at Bushy as one of the most enviable that had ever presented itself to their scrutiny'.⁶¹ Jordan's successful multi-tasking, as working mother and administrator of a stately home, demonstrated that women could operate in both the public and private spheres without jeopardising feminine virtue.

Perhaps the most celebrated mother on the stage was Mrs Siddons who embodied dignity and morality notorious in the tragedian genre. The professionalism and honourable character of Mrs Siddons ensured the security of her children, not only from the actress's own salary, but her wealthy patrons who also aided in the Siddons children's future. According to an article in 1783, her Majesty was 'so highly pleased with Mrs Siddons in the *Grecian Daughter*, and so well satisfied respecting the excellency of her private character', that she sent a message to the actress to say that 'something would be done for her

⁵⁹ *Evening Mail*, (London) June 22nd 1792 to June 25th 1792; Issue 520; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, (London) Friday November 25th 1796; Issue 19 488; *The Morning Post and Fashionable World*, (London) Thursday August 25 1797; Issue 7630

⁶⁰ DJ 311, October 28, 1809. Letter written by Jordan from Bushy House, Middlesex, to the Duke of Clarence at Weymouth.

⁶¹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 247.

children'.⁶² The maternal affection of the actress was juxtaposed with the criticism she often received representing her as an 'extremely avaricious and uncharitable' woman, whose primary concern was her salary rather than the protection of her family.⁶³ Yet according to her biographer, James Boaden, 'women are devoted as much by nature as custom to the domestic duties' and Siddons's financial greed was arguably the result of the actress's attempt to secure her family's financial future. Through motherhood an actress could exhibit her influence and authority which was accepted in society as the natural right of a woman, the domestic sphere being the space where a woman's agency should be exercised. Siddons's justification for her professional ambition paralleled with conventional expectations of women's obligation to the management of finances within the home. When the actress George Anne Bellamy gave birth to her first child she wrote in her memoirs that she was unaccustomed to the management of a household, but from the study of 'oeconomy' she was able to manage their weekly expenses sufficiently.⁶⁴ Only one of her surviving children, the eldest boy Henry, followed her in a theatrical career and became an accomplished actor and playwright. For the Siddons family, life in the theatre was a lifestyle passed down the generations, but to her biographers Siddons was 'blessed with great domestic happiness'.⁶⁵

⁶² *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (London), Monday, January 6, 1783; Issue 683

⁶³ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 70.

⁶⁵ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 24.

Actresses and Theatre Managers

The relationship between theatre managers and performers was integral to either the success or failure of an actress's career and was often negotiated around stereotypical gender roles – assertive male in conjunction with the submissive female. The theatre managers analysed in this study represented three distinct masculine figures (as father, lover and sexual predator), which actresses had to manage in order to exhibit a degree of control. Theatre managers such as Tate Wilkinson, of the Yorkshire Theatre Circuit, and Joseph Younger, manager of the Liverpool Theatre Royal, represented father figures to their actresses with both men endeavouring to protect the virtue of their female employees, acting as surrogate families for those actresses who entered the profession unaccompanied by family. The actress's autonomy was weakened by her reliance on the humanity and compassion of her manager and until the woman had gained public recognition as a celebrated performer, her only resort for clinging onto minimal agency was to attempt the seduction or manipulation of the theatre's management. An actress could accomplish this by utilising stereotypical representations of women - presenting herself as a naive young woman who needed the guidance of her theatre manager, thus enabling her to influence the fatherly manager into acquiring certain stage characters for his protégé. Mr Younger became a surrogate father after the death of Elizabeth Farren's father, who 'took Miss Farren under his own immediate protection' and assisted in launching her onto the London stage.⁶⁶ George Anne Bellamy viewed the manager, Mr Rich, as a father figure who 'often professed that he loved' Bellamy as one of 'his own children'.⁶⁷ According to Tate Wilkinson

⁶⁶ Caledonian Mercury (Edinburgh, Scotland) Monday, August 25, 1800; Issue 1234

⁶⁷ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 107.

a manager's role was to reign over his players and be the 'distributor of justice', similar to the duty of a governing father.⁶⁸ Wilkinson referred to himself as the performers' 'sovereign'; it was he who chose which plays would be enacted and which actresses would fit the parts, maintaining the hierarchy within.⁶⁹ Under the illusion of his masculine dominance, Wilkinson only acknowledged an actress's agency in choosing her roles if she had achieved a reputable career in London, thus yielding to the woman's occupational superiority. However, evidence portrays the gentlemanly manager as a lenient employer who was easily persuaded by the fairer sex within the company. When Mrs Jordan sought an engagement in Wilkinson's company, it was recorded that 'his heart determined him'.⁷⁰ Rather than explain that his company was at full capacity, the manager took pity on the family and added the young actress to his troop.

The actor and theatre manager David Garrick was notorious for his arguments with employees, particularly with his leading actresses. The manager's despotic rule reflected conventional images of the protective father who governed his home, Garrick as head of the theatre surrounded by his submissive performers. His role as protector was apparent when female members of the company faced persecution or danger, but in coming to their aid the manager was also cleverly imposing on these actresses an obligation to remain loyal. A power struggle between Garrick and the actress, Sophia Baddeley led to a falling out with both parties immovable; Garrick was the 'tyrant behind the scenes', while Baddeley was

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 24.

difficult.⁷¹ Her refusal to return to the theatre impaired the manager's ticket sales as the actress was a favourite on the stage and demonstrated the influence which a woman could hold if publically celebrated. During this period Baddeley and her companion Elizabeth Steele were heavily in debt and Garrick, aware of their circumstances came to the aid of Steele who was being pursued by bailiffs. The manager informed Mrs Steele of the awaiting men and suggested she dress in male clothing. Garrick loaned the woman the female breeches costume worn in the *Irish Widow* upon the stage with the condition that she would assist him in engaging Baddeley in his company once again. Steele evaded her creditors and when Baddeley discovered Garrick's aid she agreed to return to the stage. Garrick's desire to acquire the actress made Baddeley aware of her own self-worth which allowed the actress to exercise her power of negotiating for better terms of contract. The actress sought an engagement with Garrick's rival, Mr Harris in Covent Garden Theatre believing that a bidding war would commence between the two theatres and Baddeley would emerge the more triumphant. The actress exhibited shrewdness and intelligence in manipulating Garrick once he confirmed a desire to employ Baddeley and yet by protecting her friend, Garrick was successful in coaxing Baddeley back under his regime. It is arguable that the actress held greater advantage in this relationship aware that her engagement meant profitable performances for Garrick. Baddeley utilised her celebrated beauty in contractual negotiations and in this instance, the woman prevailed over male management, demonstrating her capacity as both a 'sexual and material' being.⁷²

⁷¹ Steele, *The memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 5 of 6, p. 111.

⁷² Sechelski, 'Garrick's Body and the Labor of Art', p. 370. Sechelski examined the effects of acting to the physical body of the performer and the body as a commodity. See also Straub's *Sexual Suspects* for further discussion of the actress's body.

Tate Wilkinson was conscious of the astuteness of actresses during contract negotiations and stated that while 'making a bargain' Mrs Jordan was 'the cunningest devil of us all'.⁷³ An actress who was favored by the public could utilize the audience's desire to see her performances to negotiate salary and stage roles and often an actress surfaced as victorious in establishing authority over her managers. Exhibiting Machiavellian business sense and unfeminine characteristics, actress rivalries often forced managers to act as keepers of the peace, moderating feuds and indulging the egos of 'rival queens'. In doing so, theatrical managers appeared less as the dominant father figure of the theatre and more as submissive enablers of dysfunctional family units consisting of performers competing for attention. It was recorded that the actress Kitty Clive was a demanding and obstinate woman who frequently quarrelled with her manager and refused his wishes. During an argument over the part of *Polly* in John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), the manager, Mr Fleetwood came under criticism over his handling of the affair between the two rival actresses, Mrs Clive and Mrs Cibber. It was claimed that Fleetwood was fearful of offending Clive by giving the role to the inexperienced young actress.⁷⁴ To appease Mrs Clive and Cibber's admirers, the manager suggested that the actresses play the part on alternate nights, but Clive refused and would not be reasoned with. In her later years Clive's unwillingness to surrender her celebrated characters continued. Garrick, fearful of an altercation with the actress when obliged to confiscate the role of the sixteen year old *Miss Prue* in William Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) due to her aging appearance, attempted to

⁷³ Wilkinson, *Memoirs of his own life*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 192.

⁷⁴ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* (London) Saturday November 13, 1736; Issue 636

bribe the actress. The manager presented another leading character to Mrs Clive, 'a part almost as improper for Mrs Clive as the other', but less absurd than the sight of a mature woman portraying a teenage girl.⁷⁵ The weakness of a manager benefited young actresses struggling to claim leading roles. I have previously stated that the average longevity of an actress's life was longer than other lower class women which was estimated to be 37 years, yet the average stage career, as calculated from my database, was thirty years.⁷⁶ With a long career and an abundance of young women wishing to break into the industry, competition for roles was aggressive. Actresses retained their most celebrated characters into old age as was the case with Mrs Clive who was fearful of new actresses surpassing her talents and the loss of public admiration. Without the intervention of a manager to rule who was best suited to a role, young, ambitious, and beautiful young thespians could charm and attract influential patronage employed to dissuade the public from mature actresses, ultimately forcing them to surrender their prized roles. Mr Rich refused to attend the summons of Mrs Woffington during her argument with the younger George Anne Bellamy in the Green-room of Covent Garden. This dispute was regarding the younger actress's attire which surpassed the image of the experienced Woffington.⁷⁷ By not assisting the senior actress in establishing the inferior ranking of Bellamy, the manager's inactivity allowed the young actress further to torment Woffington and eventually surpass her rival

⁷⁵ Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 142.

⁷⁶ This figure was estimated from the data recorded of the years in which the forty chosen actresses were active in the theatre. However, there is only data on 21 of the forty actresses, which indicates that the average length of an actress's career in the eighteenth-century was thirty years.

⁷⁷ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 208.

resulting in Mr Rich reallocating leading characters from Woffington's possession to her younger adversary.⁷⁸

Paradoxically, it was not always beneficial for an actress to be employed by a manager who deemed himself as protector of his company. The above examples identified managers who exhibited lenient management, shielding their performers against public harm, yet cowering from domestic/in-house disputes. As the individual responsible for the governance of a company, the agency of an actress could be lost to the dominance of a manager who was free to be abusive towards young and naive actresses. The female body became a commodity while the manager transformed into sexual predator. If an actress refused to obey her manager's commands, the woman's reputation and future career on the boards would be in jeopardy. Mrs Jordan succeeded in escaping from her first manager with little damage done to her career, but her reputation had been injured among her contemporaries. While under the management of Richard Daly, the 'general *lover*' in his Irish company, the actress had been seduced and fell pregnant resulting in her fleeing to Yorkshire, seeking protection from the manager Wilkinson.⁷⁹ The predicament for an actress was that by allowing herself to be seduced she fell prey to the censure of gentry and nobility as 'who would have believed in the virtuous resistance of an actress?'⁸⁰ Yet if an actress was to resist the attentions of a manager, she was in danger of offending a man who

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 of 5, pp. 29-30.

⁷⁹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 360.

held 'the power to appoint them parts, either striking or otherwise; and who must not be irritated'.⁸¹

Miss Simpson (1753-1821); later Mrs Inchbald, defended herself against the unwanted advances of the Bristol manager James Dodd (c.1740-1796) by throwing a basin of hot water over his face after he had 'terrified and vexed [her] beyond measure [by] his behaviour'.⁸² The engagement which had been promised to Miss Simpson was offered to ensnare the actress and was quickly broken and their connection terminated when the manager's seduction failed.⁸³ Miss De Camp (1777-1838) utilised the sexual advances of her manager in promoting her chaste reputation and the gentleman's humiliation secured the actress an engagement in the company. In January 1795, John Philip Kemble, the acting manager of Drury Lane, apologised to the actress for the 'very improper and unjustifiable behaviour' he had shown towards her, and assured the audience that the woman had proved her conduct and character were 'irreproachable'.⁸⁴ The intoxicated manager attempted to rape the actress during a private interview between the two which was only prevented by Miss De Camp's screams, which also alerted the audience to the event and made it impossible for the manager to deny his assault. Kemble's drunkenness was accepted as habitual behaviour for theatre managers and was excused as a minor weakness in the characters of men. Tate Wilkinson claimed that he was not liable for his own intoxication, as he lived more liberally than his 'stomach and health would permit' and his wine was 'often rebellious'.⁸⁵ Miss De

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 12.

⁸² Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 29.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 30.

⁸⁴ *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, January 28, 1795; Issue 18 915

⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 102-103.

Camp was exonerated from any wrongdoings, her public reputation unscathed and her relationship with the manager was later repaired by the actress's marriage to Kemble's brother Charles. The actress had proved to have been physically too weak to defend herself from Kemble's attack, and yet her feminine frailty, in the form of her screams, saved both her body and character from harm. Women's physical limitations could be transformed into positive methods of protection, as De Camp's cries for help safeguarded her from allegations of immoral conduct, while also securing her the audience's support.

An actress's feminine charm was a beneficial tool during negotiations between herself and a manager, particularly if her employer transformed into lover. As discussed earlier regarding the considerations of women prior to marriage, the repercussion for an actress who accepted a relationship with her manager was the scandal and sexual ambiguity which her character suffered if the union was not legalised by marriage. If the affair was publicly known, the actress's admittance into upper class gatherings and patronage was uncertain, while on the other hand a relationship could ensure the progression of her career within that company. Thomas Harris (*d.* 1820), one of the four Covent Garden Theatre patentees, exploited his position of power within the theatre when he promoted the career of his mistress, the actress Jane Lessingham (1738/9-1783). The manager's favouritism was universally known and caused disorder between Harris and his fellow managers for Lessingham was not considered a great actress by the public and was described as a 'tasteless milksop' by the critic Francis Gentleman.⁸⁶ John Roach recorded the incident in his *Authentic Memoirs of the Green Room*, when Mr Colman engaged Mr and Mrs Yates

⁸⁶ Gentleman, *The theatres. A poetical dissection*, p. 77.

without the consent of Harris and his fellow patentee, Rutherford. The gentlemen disagreed with Colman's decision, removed a leading role from Mrs Yates and assigned the part to their 'favourite' Mrs Lessingham. Colman publicly discredited the alteration, stating that Harris and Rutherford were doing a 'great injustice to Mrs Yates and an affront to the public'.⁸⁷ Lessingham's talents were not highly rated by other managers either and it is doubtful that her stage career would have survived for such a long period if she had left Harris's company.⁸⁸

David Garrick also exercised his theatrical authority by promoting the career of his close friend, Mrs Susannah Cibber, as leading lady to his title roles. His partiality was not sexual, but simulated a brotherly love and respect, yet their similar appearance and expressions on the stage did have audiences questioning if the players were brother and sister in reality.⁸⁹ However, his relationship with fellow actresses was not always professional. His wife, Eva Maria Veigel (1724-1822), was a dancer and prior to the marriage there had been rumours of his affairs with the actresses Peg Woffington (1720?-1760) and Jane Hipsley (1719-1791), with whom, it was believed, he had fathered a child and assumed the guardianship of the boy in 1755.⁹⁰ An account of Miss Hipsley's theatrical career states that the actress's

⁸⁷ Roach, *Roach's authentic memoirs of the green room*, p. 109.

⁸⁸ Mrs Lessingham acted in Covent Garden Theatre for nearly twenty years. She first arrived in 1763 and her final performance was in 1782. See Crouch, 'Lessingham, Jane (1738/9-1783)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/39771>]

⁸⁹ Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 65.

⁹⁰ Samuel Catherley (c1747-1805) was believed to have been Garrick's child. There was speculation over who the mother was - Peg Woffington or Jane Hipsley, most likely Hipsley. Catherley came under Garrick's guardianship in 1755 and attempted a stage career but was not successful. Upon his marriage a newspaper printed their congratulations along with the statement that it was insinuated in the papers that 'in consequence thereof that gentleman will quit the stage; a circumstance which will probably afford as much pleasure to the Town as to himself'. *General Evening Post*, (London) June 11 1771 – June 13 1771; Issue 5876.

talents were first acknowledged when Garrick became manager of Drury Lane, who 'took in the cultivation of her talents'.⁹¹ The actress 'captivated the heart of her theatrical sovereign' and a 'chopping boy' was the evidence of their affair, the only child that Garrick was to father.⁹² However, the *Theatrical Biography* 1772 testified that the child died and deprived the public from 'one day seeing the father blazoned in the son', whereas rumours emerged that the love child was a Samuel Cautherley who became Garrick's ward in 1755.⁹³ Once the affair was over, Miss Hippisley was billed as Mrs Green, perhaps an effort to conceal her out of wedlock pregnancy, as it is questionable whether her husband was a Mr Henry Green, Esq., a purser of a gun-ship who had died after fathering two sons, with little evidence to confirm this report.⁹⁴ While her career began successfully under Garrick, perhaps indicating the manager's influence in promoting his mistress above her fellow actresses, her career progression seemed to dwindle afterwards. She excelled in the lower characters such as chambermaids and toured the Dublin and London stages, but failed to reach the top of her profession in terms of publicity. According to the *Theatrical Biography* she was 'the second edition of Mrs Clive', the celebrated actress Kitty Clive (1711-1785), for Mrs Green possessed 'lively spirit, pertness, and an affection of voice'.⁹⁵ She was a favourite of the public and 'one of the first comic actresses of her time'.⁹⁶ Mrs Green continued to perform until 1780 with numerous newspaper articles referring to her performances, yet unlike other comic actresses, such as George Anne Bellamy and Dorothy Jordan, Green

⁹¹ *Theatrical Biography: or, Memoirs of the principal performers of the three Theatres Royal Drury Lane*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 20.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *London Chronicle* (London), August 20, 1790 – August 23, 1791; Issue 5460 & *Public Advertiser* (London) Thursday, August 25, 1791; Issue 17827.

⁹⁵ Hitchcock, *An historical view of the Irish Stage*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 224.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

failed to gain admittance into the upper circles and Royal patronage. The admiration she enjoyed from the public and the hostility she received from the aristocracy indicated the ambiguity of Green's reputation and the stigma that still maintained years after the affair was over.

On hearing that the night chosen by the Royals to attend the Covent Garden Theatre was already fixed for Mrs Green's benefit, the Majesties 'postponed their intentions', much to the 'disadvantage and the disappointment of her (Mrs Green's) friends'.⁹⁷ The actress led a private and modest life subsequent to the Garrick affair and perhaps this explains her unexceptionable professional identity. More significantly, while Mrs Green's reputation was sullied from her relationship with the manager, Garrick's career flourished and his reputation unblemished, demonstrating the public's acceptance of philandering men in positions of power abusing the authority they held over their employees. Mrs Green was not involved in any further scandals, connected to any gentlemen or Royals and was merely judged publically on her acting capabilities. Her early success can therefore be explained by her relationship to the great actor/manager Garrick and the scandal surrounding the suspected love child. By disassociating herself from a relationship with her manager Mrs Green inevitably stifled her career, but the quandary remained that if actresses such as Mrs Green and Mrs Lessingham had not instigated affairs with powerful managers, their stage careers would not have flourished. These women utilised their sexuality for career progression and favouritism over their competing actresses. Theatre managers could be fatherly figures who protected actresses from unwanted admirers, easily manipulated by

⁹⁷ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, April 11, 1780; Issue 2338.

an actress acting as an innocent and submissive young woman who required guidance. Alternatively, an actress could utilise her sexual appeal to exploit a manager's affection or desire. However, as the above examples have shown, the theatrical audience's acceptance of sexually active unwed actresses differed for each woman. While some indiscretions were ignored due to the entertaining talents displayed on the stage, others such as Mrs Green, could not salvage their tainted reputation. The price of losing their virtue to a manager in exchange for a position in the theatre company, was the condemnation of the upper classes because of the association of the acting profession to prostitution. Yet sexual indiscretions of an actress could also be forgiven, subject to the woman's beauty, professional skills and commercial appeal, suggesting, again, that the problematic gender construction could be erased if other conditions could be met.

Actress and her Peers

A theatrical career was highly competitive with actresses squabbling over roles, costumes and status within the playhouse. To the public the theatre company was portrayed as a family unit with the manager as father figure and performers as children, but the evidence reveals an industry of betrayal and ruthless behaviour towards fellow thespians. To become successful in their field an actress had to act aggressively to stake her claim within the company. The exhibition of ambition often earned these women reputations as unfeminine public figures that embodied none of the conventional female gender roles. Female camaraderie was rarely seen among the actresses in this study, which somewhat reflects the proliferation of young women attempting a stage career throughout the eighteenth-century. Whether this was due to the increased popularity of the theatre as entertainment,

or the idea that a theatrical life presented a fanciful image of freedom paralleled with the upsurge in young people migrating into the cities with the theatre offering labour opportunities, competitive performers were both profitable and amusing for theatre management and the public. It has been argued that many plays experienced success due to the public's interest in the relationships between performers off stage rather than the performances on stage.⁹⁸ This is evident in satirical plays such as Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens, or the Death of Alexander the Great* (1677), which exposed the rivalry of the female characters and reflected the real tensions among actresses within the company. With a large pool of actresses to choose from, management could negotiate stricter engagements while the audience observed the drama both on and off the stage, indifferent to the physical harm suffered by these women. James Lynch argued that many young actresses travelled to rural theatres in the hope of learning their trade and obtaining principal characters without audiences comparing them to London's established actresses. George Anne Bellamy travelled to the Dublin stage to develop her professional identity when she found that there were no roles within her genre unattached to a leading performer.⁹⁹ When the actress Mrs Smith found that she could no longer perform her acting duties after she had given birth, the juvenile Mrs Jordan was readily available to take over her roles. Fearful of the audience preferring Jordan over herself, Mrs Smith endangered her health by returning to the theatre earlier than anticipated. The consequence of her anxiety and premature return was a 'fixed lameness in her hip', but she 'would not suffer Mrs Jordan to appear in

⁹⁸ See, Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, pp. 67-68. Nussbaum argues that the mimicry of real life rivalry on the stage aided in the creation of an actress's public identity, whereby the distortion between the true emotions of the actress and the personas she portrayed on the stage, caused audiences to believe they knew the private character of the actress.

⁹⁹ Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 158.

[the character] Fanny'.¹⁰⁰ The desperation of Mrs Smith to retain her agency and social position within the theatre reveals the capriciousness of the profession and explains why actresses needed to put their own interests above the aid of other women attempting to enter the profession.

Tensions between young actresses and their mature counterparts reveals a discourse surrounding theatrical life span and at what age an actress was considered too old for certain parts, coming under pressure to relinquish her most favourable characters. A woman's physical age was not the sole measurement of her career life, as the number of years she had performed on the stage was also taken into consideration. A newer actress presented a novel image on the stage to audiences who sought variety compared to the appearance of an actress frequently engaged on the boards whose merit was already known to the public. Established actresses needed to defend their status, while young naive girls struggled to acquire leading roles to attract public attention and patronage. Either the young actress was lucky to receive the roles with the departure of a senior actress or by employing ruthless tactics the young woman would turn the public against the older rival. Judith Fisher has argued that regardless of an actress's talent, a young performer was more agreeable to an audience than an older actress, therefore encouraging the need to impair their rival's career.¹⁰¹ Fisher based this on the assumption that the public preferred the exhibition of youth and beauty rather than the appearance of experienced aging actresses. However, if Fisher's theory is correct then how can scholars explain the actions of actresses

¹⁰⁰ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 2 of 4, pp. 171-172.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, 'Creating Another Identity', p. 60.

such as George Anne Bellamy who were young and pretty, yet still attempted to humiliate established performers whom they perceived as competition? The manager Tate Wilkinson discussed the comparison between an aging Mrs Jordan of forty-five and the eighteen year old Miss Richards, stating that youth was more pleasing than an 'old married' actress.¹⁰² Yet his judgement was issued only to differentiate between the two, as he acknowledged that the young actress performed Jordan's celebrated roles to the same degree of talent as the older original, placing greater significance on acting skill over appearance. When Miss Farren entered the London arena she was fortunate to be engaged at the time when Mrs Abington, 'the favourite of Thalia and of the Town', left Drury Lane Theatre for Covent Garden, leaving a vacuum in comedic roles to be filled.¹⁰³ Miss Farren adopted all of Mrs Abington's characters, a risk for a new actress with unavoidable comparisons made between the old and new performers. To establish a professional identity on the stage an actress required the audience's approval in memorable performances and characters. It was essential that an actress adopt and secure leading characters which the public acknowledged to be her own. By accumulating roles for her theatrical repertoire, the actress was preventing other rivals or budding new actresses from attempting to represent the same parts, as comparisons would be drawn over the attributes of both performances. Not all actresses were as privileged as Miss Farren and bitter rivalries developed between Mrs Cibber (1714-1766) and Mrs Clive (1711-1785), Mrs Clive and Peg Woffington (1720?-1760), Woffington and George Anne Bellamy (1731?-1788), and between Bellamy and Mrs Furnival (*fl.* 1731-1752). These actresses utilised the print media, their patrons or theatre

¹⁰² Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 3 of 4, p. 127.

¹⁰³ *Caledonian Mercury*, (Edinburgh, Scotland) Monday, August 25, 1800; issue 1234

management to undermine the character of their adversary, with the youthful challenger repeatedly emerging as triumphant. Ageism was not confined to the theatre, with acknowledgment to the power of youthful beauty over men evident in literature. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1714), represented the beauty of the heroine, Belinda, who despite her faults, was forgiven by men with one 'look of her face', satirising the weakness and irrationality of male passions while identifying the influence of female sexuality that often deteriorated with age.¹⁰⁴

Mrs Clive was criticised for her unwillingness to assist Mrs Cibber by allowing the less experienced woman to perform one of Clive's most celebrated characters, *Polly Peachum*. Clive was three years younger than Cibber, but to the public Mrs Cibber was the bright newcomer to the stage as Clive was already established as a celebrated actress. Clive cunningly utilised newspapers for her defence and implored the public's sympathy while insisting that she did not harbour any jealousy toward Mrs Cibber but rather feared that by giving up her most significant roles she would become a less desirable article to the theatre.¹⁰⁵ This was a genuine concern for the veteran actress competing against a fresh and beautiful rival. The first letter published in the *Case of the Contending Pollies*¹⁰⁶ signed from a *Spectator*, claimed that Theophilus Cibber (husband of Mrs Cibber) had offered the Drury Lane Theatre Manager, Fleetwood, £1000 for Mrs Cibber to take on the role of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*.¹⁰⁷ The bribe was socially acceptable as evidence of the partiality to

¹⁰⁴ *Miscellaneous poems and translations*, p. 357. Further analysis of Pope's critique on the employment of beauty and cosmetics by women can be read in Chico, 'The Arts of Beauty', pp. 1-23.

¹⁰⁵ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, (London) Friday November 19, 1736; Issue 641.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Journal* (London) Monday December 06, 1736; Issue 5861.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Gazetteer* (London) Thursday November 04 1736; Issue 424.

be expected from a husband attempting to advance his wife's career, but what the *Spectator* could not forgive was Mrs Cibber's want of humility for assuming she could surpass Clive in the role. Accordingly the author defined what was meant by the 'Rivalship of Actors', as the 'Self-Conceit and Vanity, that inward Consciousness of their own Ability, which makes them contest Parts in Plays with each other'.¹⁰⁸ The *Spectator* viewed the Cibbers as doing an injustice to Mrs Clive who was an 'established' and 'approved Actress' who the audiences accepted as Polly. In reaction to this letter, another author identified as A.Z. published his defence of Mrs Cibber and laid the blame on the manager, who intended to produce the play to the best advantage. The author claimed that Mrs Cibber had no prior knowledge of this and no longer wished to take the role.¹⁰⁹ Mrs Clive's retort to the accusation that she was acting obstinately by affronting the Town for refusing to alternate the role with Mrs Cibber, was to inform the public that she could not refuse to play an inferior role due to her contract with Mr Fleetwood but admitted that she was unwilling to give up Polly. Rather than Mrs Cibber replying to Clive's letter, it was her husband who responded in a letter defending his 'innocent' and 'inoffensive' wife who did not desire to offend Clive.¹¹⁰ Theophilus Cibber insisted that;

*...this neither is, nor ever was, a contest between Mrs Clive and Mrs Cibber,
but indeed, rather a dispute between Mrs Clive's Will, and the Manager's
Right.*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *London Daily Post and General Advertiser* (London) Saturday November 13, 1736; Issue 636.

¹¹⁰ *Grub Street Journal* (London) Thursday December 09, 1736; Issue 363.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Mr Cibber's public defence of his wife indicates the perceived authority of masculinity over the quarrelling women, by giving weight to Mrs Cibber's claims that she did not resent Mrs Clive. Cibber also altered the focus of the dispute away from the vulgarity of female rivalry to a pragmatic fiscal argument regarding breach in contract – the women became irrelevant as Cibber criticised the management. The dispute existed in the public sphere and it is arguable that in removing the focus from women and directing the argument under the more masculine language of contractual negotiations and fiscal repercussions, Cibber was giving authenticity to the debate, in conjunction with, and strengthening, gendering prejudices existent within society.

Another commentator argued that if Mrs Clive was as talented as her admirers claimed, then she should not fear the acquisition of any of her roles by an inexperienced actress. The significance of this article was that while Cibber had clearly attempted to differentiate between the women's personal argument and the masculine concerns of money, this author used an example of a celebrated actor to demonstrate his point – comparing Clive to Mr Quin without gender bias. Mr Quin was admired in his role as *Cato*, and it was naively assumed by the author, that if the manager gave Mr Quin's part to another, the actor would not be affronted. For if Quin was the greatest *Cato* of the period, 'what grounds can he have to be displeased at another person's acting the part?' as his 'salary would not be the less, and his credit in the performance of the Character would be so far from being impaired, that on the contrary it would be more strongly confirmed.'¹¹² However, what the *Reader of Speculations*, as the writer called himself, had not considered was the implication for a

¹¹² *Grub Street Journal* (London) Thursday November 25, 1736; Issue 361.

performer whose celebrated characters were successfully performed by another. If Mrs Cibber was victorious in the role of *Polly*, then inevitably further roles would be confiscated from Clive to flourish further the young actress's talents. It was significant that throughout this dispute Mrs Cibber remained silent. According to her husband, she was unaware of the manager's decision and unwilling to accept it as she recognized Clive's superiority. Research into the Cibber's marriage has identified Theophilus Cibber as the controlling force of his wife's career and it has been argued that Mrs Cibber's detachment from the publicised argument was indication of her subordination to her husband.¹¹³ Alternatively, her silence may be proof of the actress's own agency in designing a tactical ploy to represent herself as the injured and innocent young actress, bullied by an experienced performer. In appearing the dutiful and submissive employee who unwittingly slighted a more established actress, Mrs Cibber's circumstances seemed the more pitiable and defensible. I would argue that Mrs Cibber made a conscious decision to appear naive to gain public sympathy as during this period she clearly planned to separate from her husband by attempting to put in place a pre-nuptial agreement that allowed her full ownership of her salary.¹¹⁴ Although Mrs Cibber was unsuccessful in attaining full possession over her income and the relationship with her lover, Sloper, was initially instigated by the actress's husband, nevertheless the woman's public representation as a timid and naive actress contradicted Mrs Cibber's private actions. The scheme to seize Clive's characters was unsuccessful with Fleetwood casting Mrs Clive in the role of *Polly* and Mrs Pritchard in the secondary role of *Lucy*,

¹¹³ Brooks, 'Negotiating Marriage,' p. 53.

¹¹⁴ Soule, 'Cibber, Susannah Maria (1714-1766)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5417>]

revealing the influential force of print media, the public's defence of a favourite performer and the revulsion in society at the display of a young woman's ambitious arrogance.

Clive may have won the *Polly Wars* but when she later came up against the younger Peg Woffington the two 'clashed on various occasions, which brought forth squabbles'.¹¹⁵ One was calm and mistress of her emotions while the other, Mrs Clive, was impulsive and blunt, but 'no two women of high rank ever hated one another more unreservedly than these dames of the theatre'.¹¹⁶ Woffington's sexuality played a significant part in her career progression and allowed her admittance to exclusive clubs such as the *Beef Steak Club* while engaged in Dublin 1751. Unlike Clive and other actresses, Woffington openly declared her preference for the company of men and avoided circles of fashionable women who talked of nothing but 'silks and scandal'.¹¹⁷ This alienated her from the patronage of influential ladies, but secured her the admiration of gentlemen – men who were influential benefactors and were exploited by her to sway audiences against the actress's competition. The authority of theatrical patrons and their relationships with actresses is analysed in the chapter *Actresses and their Audiences*, but it is significant to note here how actresses employed their socially superior supporters to destabilise the agency of other performers. Woffington's neglect of the female upper classes proved detrimental in later years when the actress was no longer a great attraction on the stage and her beauty fading.

¹¹⁵ Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 259.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 260.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Woffington's successor was the actress George Anne Bellamy, a girl roughly ten years Woffington's junior whose youth and beauty promptly established her as a rival. Bellamy utilised the influence of her patrons, particularly the attention she received from the ladies of fashion who bestowed onto her jewels and gowns – an investment pool that Woffington had neglected. In 1756 Samuel Foote represented the feud between these two actresses, which erupted into what Foote titled *The Green-Room Squabble; or, a Battle Royal between the Queen of Babylon and the Daughter of Darius*.¹¹⁸ The animosity which Woffington bore for her young rival escalated during their engagement in Mr Rich's Covent Garden Theatre production of the *Rival Queens*. Bellamy appeared on stage alongside the mature Woffington, wearing an elegant dress that caused a fit of rage with Woffington demanding that she would not wear such clothes for their performance again.¹¹⁹ Bellamy's elegant attire portrayed a clear distinction between the older Woffington and the new generation of actress; Woffington's representation as the 'beautiful, elegant, accomplished, captivating Woffington' whose role was 'to please and charm contending kingdoms' was replaced by the 'enchanted Bellamy'.¹²⁰ By losing her theatrical presence and charm to a young actress, Woffington was in danger of no longer receiving leading characters and a decline in her audience attendance and salary, essentially reducing her to the inferior roles of chamber maids and old wives. Bellamy was unsympathetic towards Woffington's predicament and enjoyed tormenting her rival, stating that although she despised revenge she did not 'dislike retaliation'.¹²¹ Her vengeance was to outshine Woffington once again with another elegant

¹¹⁸ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 209.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 5, pp. 205-207.

¹²⁰ Hitchcock, *An historical view of the Irish stage*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 49. See also Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 4 of 5, p. 48.

¹²¹ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 208.

dress rekindling Woffington's rage that 'nearly bordered on madness'.¹²² Bellamy was triumphant over her rival whose age and figure had altered over time and Bellamy replaced her as Rich's leading lady.¹²³ Fashion played an important role in performance, with clothing symbolising the professionalism of an actress. The costume worn by an actress determined her ranking within the theatre company and revealed a shift in the public's association of actresses to prostitutes, with female performers adopting similar fashion to ladies of the nobility.¹²⁴

The attire Bellamy received from her female patrons was often employed to undermine the status of an established stage favourite in outshining the opponent's dress and on one occasion the young actress employed her benefactress to alter the public's opinion over the morality of a rival. While advancing her career in Dublin, Bellamy gained the patronage of the genteel Mrs Butler, who played a significant role in the actress's schemes to surpass her competition. Mrs Furnival was the target of public humiliation when Mrs Butler declared that the actress had stolen from her. The dress that Mrs Furnival was wearing in her role as *Octavia*, a Roman matron, had been lent to Bellamy by her patroness and taken by Mrs Furnival without consent. Tension between the two actresses had escalated when Bellamy was cast as the Queen of Egypt with Furnival in an inferior role. Bellamy was forced to wear a plain silk gown while Furnival appeared inappropriately in elegant attire causing confusion among the audience, as reports of the 'richness' and 'elegance' of Bellamy's dress 'had been

¹²² *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 207.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 of 5, p. 30.

¹²⁴ Ribeiro, 'Costuming the Part', in *Notorious Muse*, ed. Asleson, 104-128.

universally the subject of conversation for some time before the night of performance'.¹²⁵ The response occasioned by the sight of Furnival by the patroness was 'Good Heaven, the woman has got on my diamonds!' Furnival was heckled off the stage for her improper conduct and Bellamy concluded that 'every attempt to obtain a desirable end, if the means are not consistent with honour and rectitude, mar instead of promoting it'.¹²⁶ However, the authenticity of this event is questionable, as an account of the 'borrowed' dress records the theatre manager, Thomas Sheridan's reaction to reading the circumstances in Bellamy's *Apology* as simply a 'fabrication of George Anne's brain'.¹²⁷ According to Bellamy's description of events, Mrs Furnival's professional reputation was damaged, while Mrs Bellamy succeeded in gaining the public's sympathy and praise for her decorous conduct during the episode asserting her superiority over Furnival. The use of the collective voice of spectators against rival performers will be discussed further in chapter three, analysing the relationship between actresses and audiences, with the manipulation of the public by actresses seeking empathy through the portrayal of themselves under conventional femininity while emphasising their competitors' immoral characteristics.

Other techniques applied by actresses to challenge the authority of their rivals were to distract audiences and disrupt performances. Bellamy was experienced in sabotaging a rival's recital and in seeking the public's sympathy. When another actress was cast in a role she claimed as her own, Bellamy had on this occasion distributed pamphlets to the audience prior to the performance stating that the part had been unfairly taken from her. The

¹²⁵ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 133.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 135-136.

¹²⁷ Highfill, *A biographical dictionary of actors, actresses, musicians, and dancers*, Vol. 2, p. 6.

audience, believing an injustice had taken, place chose to give a cool reception to the innocent Miss Wilford and subsequently the manager reinstated Bellamy in the role. The influence of the audience on the careers of actresses is discussed further in the chapter *The Actress and her Audience*, but Bellamy's manipulation of the public illustrates the persuasive powers of an actress against potential competitors.¹²⁸ To appease a hostile audience the manager submitted to their desire for the return of Bellamy in the part, revealing the influence that audiences held over theatrical management who were dependent on the public as patrons of the arts. Therefore, it can be argued that actresses could often exhibit the greatest agency in the playhouse, in manipulating audiences to sway managers' decisions in their favour. In Bellamy's case, the actress exaggerated the conventional gender role of women requiring protection from the victimisation they suffered at the hands of men, for Bellamy this was through the manager's decisions. In 1755, Bellamy interrupted a play by fainting and conveniently removing the public's attention away from Woffington's performance. The young actress had allegedly seen a ghost which resulted in the conclusion of the night's amusement and the public's concern over her health.¹²⁹ Jordan had similarly attempted to persuade audiences against a Mrs Robinson who was engaged in Tate Wilkinson's Yorkshire Circuit. In 1785 Jordan returned to her old manager after establishing a successful London career, to find Mrs Robinson performing Jordan's celebrated breeches parts. Threatened that audiences would judge Robinson superior to herself, Jordan and her mother vocally criticised the actress to convince her fellow spectators against the performance. According to Wilkinson, Robinson's figure was 'neat to a degree of perfection'

¹²⁸ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 4 of 5, pp. 145-147.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 of 5, p. 30.

and was clearly a threat to Jordan if the young actress attempted the London stages.¹³⁰ Jordan's endeavours to discourage the audience failed and so the actress resorted to distracting both the public and Mrs Robinson to disrupt the performance and intimidate the actress. On Robinson's final night with the Yorkshire Company, Jordan entered the upper-box tier, attracting the audience's attention. Once she was satisfied that she had accomplished her effort in emphasising that she was a 'Mrs Somebody' compared to the figure on stage, the celebrated actress retreated to behind the scenes to meet the performers. However, Jordan slowly advanced further onto the side-stage, to a position where the audience could clearly see her on the same stage as her rival. No words were spoken during the confrontation but a pantomime of facial gestures and sneers alerted the spectators to the disgust felt by both these actresses for the other. Jordan maintained her superiority over Robinson, with no repercussions from her insolent behaviour towards her fellow actress. Wilkinson justified himself for not putting an end to the 'improper situation' believing that as Jordan was by now a celebrated London actress, she deemed herself superior to all country theatricals and would have ignored Wilkinson's reproaches as impertinent, identifying the prejudice between London players and rural performers. But her behaviour that was 'cruel to a degree' also amused the manager who enjoyed the mischief which the actress created and the attention it gained for the theatre, making actress rivalry profitable.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 189.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 4, pp. 262-263.

The representation of actresses as a group of women who lived outside the norms of society, caused the profession's virtue to be continuously questioned and it is understandable that on rare occasions actresses grouped together in the defence of their careers and formed friendships. The friendships which emerged among actresses within the theatrical family unit benefited aspiring actresses who were mentored by established performers, but was also a tactical liaison. These friendships were strategic relationships which benefited the women involved. Mrs Pritchard (1709-1768) was the 'constant companion and friend' to Clive, 'united in the bonds of friendship for almost forty years'.¹³² According to David Garrick's memoirs, Pritchard was a positive influence over Clive, whereby Pritchard laboured to benefit and advance her family's happiness and Clive 'occasionally exerted her interest in the service' of her fellow actresses.¹³³ When she resigned the part of *Polly*, some years after her dispute with Mrs Cibber over the same role, Clive 'instructed and encouraged' Miss Edwards (later Mrs Mozeen) who undertook the character. This aspect of Clive was contrary to previously reported accounts of the actress and perhaps confirmed the encouraging effect of Pritchard's friendship. An intimacy also existed between Mrs Bellamy and Mrs Cibber, which benefited Garrick when he engaged both to compete against Barry's female performers at the rival theatre.¹³⁴ Bellamy also assisted a young actress in permitting Miss Nossiter to adopt the role of *Juliet* for her debut performance.¹³⁵ In publishing this to the public, Bellamy was portraying herself as a gracious and caring older performer something that aided in the public's acceptance of her as a

¹³² Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, Vol. 2 of 2, pp. 137 & 143.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 143.

¹³⁴ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 2 of 5, p. 189.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3 of 5, p. 11.

celebrated female. More significantly, it was the actress herself who revealed this friendship to the public that highlights the limited material available on actress camaraderie. An explanation for this may be that competitive squabbles among actresses dominated the sensationalist press, as proof of the public's voyeuristic hunger for drama. Yet the most striking bonds were evident when the compassion of all within the theatre united for the aid of suffering performers.

To combat the increasing number of unwed mothers and abandoned children, charities such as the Foundling Hospital were established, revealing the philanthropic trend of the eighteenth-century. However, by the mid-century, women who lived in the public sphere and were reduced to begging were increasingly viewed as a threat to public morality.¹³⁶ This perhaps explains why the theatrical family would come to the aid of dejected performers. In looking after their own and removing the visibility of poor players, the theatre profession was preventing further negative discourse surrounding the industry, while also boosting its image by exhibiting the theatre's civil virtue. Collections and benefit nights were performed for fellow thespians who had succumbed to excessive indulgence. An actress's charitable work added another facet to how the public identified her, establishing a maternal and caring perspective, distancing her from the image of the unfeminine career-driven woman and conforming to scripted female sentimentalism. Tate Wilkinson iterated this by publishing that 'indeed players in general, when truly poor, will part their little to relieve a brother or sister actress when in distress'.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Fulford, 'Fallen Ladies and Cruel Mothers', pp. 309-329.

¹³⁷ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 153.

While peace and harmony within a theatre company may seem to have been the preferred atmosphere, Tate Wilkinson revealed the opposite to be the truth. The manager believed that the benefits of female competition 'prevented indisposition, and made them do their best'.¹³⁸ Thus the quality of acting was amplified and enticed greater audience numbers who wished to observe the foolishness of the onstage rivalry. An actress's attempts to outshine her opposition and conquer as leading lady within the theatre company were profitable to both the management and the triumphant woman who could negotiate a higher salary. Wilkinson had encouraged competition between the actresses Mrs Hudson and Mrs Montague, a rivalry he compared to the opposing Whig and Tory parties. From a managerial point of view, the segregation of audiences resulted in increased theatre attendance and profit with both camps vociferously campaigning for their favourite.¹³⁹ Mrs Hudson's benefit was arranged to take place while the company performed in Hull 1776, with the actress to play Rosamond. Mrs Montague was chosen to play the Queen in *Henry II*, a role which did not appeal to her and she refused to study the part. Upon the night of the benefit Mrs Montague complained of an illness that had prevented her from learning the lines and begged the audience to accept her reading the part. This caused great offence to Mrs Hudson whose friends felt this insult and demanded that the actress be removed from the stage.¹⁴⁰ Mrs Montague, the 'Thalestris of the stage', had overestimated her own merit and the public's admiration. Rather than humiliating Mrs Hudson, by poorly performing on her benefit and slighting her, Mrs Montague's actions had the opposite

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 151.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 215.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 244-245.

effect.¹⁴¹ It was appropriate that her professional identity was *Thalestris*, which possibly referred to her notions of grandeur rather than her supreme acting skills. The actress's pride alienated her from the public's admiration and she was reduced to begging for the public's forgiveness.¹⁴² In an attempt to maintain her territorial claim within the company Mrs Montague failed on this occasion, yet as suggested by the preceding examples, such tactics were necessary for a woman wishing to become a celebrated actress. Cunning, ruthlessness and adaptability to transform from the confident leading lady to innocent victim to invoke public sympathy were key characteristics and as John Harold Wilson eloquently wrote, in order for an actress to survive the profession the 'woman needed a rugged constitution and a fighting heart'.¹⁴³

Conclusion

Female agency played a significant role in the actress's career, from the relationship she held with her family, to her decision on whether or not to marry, to the private interactions within her theatre company. If an actress succeeded in becoming a celebrated public figure, the relationship between herself and her parents often determined the public's opinion of the woman's sense of morality. If she was the financial provider or proved to be a dutiful daughter, then her character and subsequent indiscretions were generally excused as circumstances out of her control. Actresses such as Anne Catley, who exhibited unfeminine disobedience needed to redeem their characters upon the stage and in the publication of memoirs. Such actresses won the public's admiration after pleading for forgiveness and

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 309.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 310-311.

¹⁴³ Wilson, *All the King's Ladies*, p. 22.

recoding their image under conventional gender roles, a method similarly adopted by those who chose to cohabit with gentlemen as unwed mothers.

To a professional woman sensibility was essential and marriage formed a type of contract similar to theatrical engagements. The actress needed to protect her livelihood and reputation before consenting to matrimony; therefore, passion was often a hindrance as evidenced by the many couples who eloped or rushed into unions. For those who chose marriage with the intention of profiting professionally, the majority of cases left the actress with little independence over her salary or ownership of property. In analysing the cases in this study, the representation of an actress as a married woman aided in the concealment of sexual indiscretions. Once a husband's use had depleted, however, rarely was the wife able to remove his authority/influence from her life, particularly if the woman's career was prospering. Those who established themselves as professional performers, needed to employ astute business intellect and as the majority of young actresses entered theatres where the primary characters were already under the tenure of other performers, a degree of vindictiveness was necessary.

Female comradeship was scarce during a period when the theatre was heavily regulated, which reduced the number of legal playhouses, making competition among women for principal roles necessary.¹⁴⁴ The lucrative and amusing sight of rivalry among actresses was

¹⁴⁴ King Charles II initially established patents for theatres in 1660, which licensed the selected playhouses to exhibit performances – differentiating between public entertainments which were legal and illegal. In 1737 the Licensing Act was passed which regulated the plays permissible to be staged in British theatres, further restricting the genres and choice of character roles for women.

juxtaposed with the public distaste for feminine ambition which was rooted in the argument against women appearing in the public sphere and threatening public morality. A celebrated actress was a threat to social order as she embodied a multidimensional type of woman; one who exhibited both the feminine roles of mother and wife, while also contributing to the economy and gaining admiration from the lower and upper classes. A poem published in 1788 commended the versatility of actresses and defended the profession for the improvement of society.

*Why should a woman, if she is a good wife, daughter, or mother, be less
respected because she has genius to contribute to our amusement, by
bringing before our eyes heroines we have so often read of and exhibiting
characters we so greatly admire?*¹⁴⁵

The actresses in this study portrayed themselves as conventional females, emphasising the desirable archetype of female duties that sanctioned their transcendence from scripted gender roles and established them firmly as legitimate professional women.

¹⁴⁵ Rowson, 'The Actress', in *The inquisitor*, Vol. 1 of 3, pp. 150-151.

The Actress and her Public

A cold, respectful, hard audience chills and deadens an actress, and throws her back upon herself; whereas the warmth of approbation confirms her in character, and she kindles with the enthusiasm she feels around her.¹

A skilful actress was a valuable commodity to a theatre and yet without the public's favour a performance would suffer disruptions and the possibility of an early closure. For the actress this could result in the end of her career. The following chapter will analyse the interaction between the actress and her audience, looking at the public's understanding of the theatrical genre and the methods used to display approbation and disapproval towards a player or a performance. The 'public' in this context refers not only to the theatrical audience, but also the greater populace that acted as both consumers of and patrons to the arts. Class distinctions among the audience itself will be examined and how the differing tastes and theatrical etiquettes displayed affected the actress upon the stage. In analysing this interaction, the agency held by actresses over the public will be revealed. Although the audience dictated the success or failure of a performer, actresses employed a myriad of techniques to manipulate the public in their favour and thus were active participants in the shaping of public artistic tastes. The synergy between the players and spectators was as important as the genius of the playwrights and theatre managers, the audience displaying authority to create either disorder or encourage a performance, while the actress manipulated this disruptiveness against a rival performer. Newspapers accounts indicate

¹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 189.

that often the audience itself transposed the role of players, engaging in the evening's entertainment through their fashion and audible opinions. However, while the assumption is that the public possessed absolute power either to raise or destroy an actress's budding career, there is evidence that the actress herself exercised some influence. The strength of female agency in the theatre may explain public animosity towards actresses in religious and moralistic texts that feared their social influence and transience. The social mobility of those who gained success in the profession and their command over the public demonstrated to the lower classes (the classes from which the majority of actresses originated from) the possibility to better one's social standing.

The Public's Perception of the Theatre

The eighteenth century opened with a period of continued anti-theatrical discourse that questioned the role and influence of the stage and its players in British society, particularly the status of actresses. Initially a form of entertainment for the lower classes, the theatre became a celebrated cultural institution after the patronage of Charles II and yet the moral integrity of the profession dwindled due to public popularity for debased drama. Both actors and actresses were censured for exhibiting vice and degrading public taste. Research into the creation of a national identity highlights the influence of the theatre and other artistic genres as areas of discourse on what was constituted as tasteful.² The term 'taste' became a 'marker of social distinction between groups', and was characteristic of the 'material realm', much like Lawrence Klein's argument that 'politeness' was associated with the interaction among individuals and how they distinguished their class identity through

² Berry, 'Promoting Taste in the Provincial Press', p. 2.

the 'art of pleasing in company'.³ Female spectators were viewed as the most vulnerable group to be exposed to debauchery evident in popular entertainment, women being the weaker sex and more susceptible to romantic ideas and seduction. Individuals such as Jeremy Collier attempted to dissuade the public against female players, identifying them as a source of corruption of the nation's youth. The principle of battling the corruption engrained in recreational pursuits had begun in the previous century when in 1691 a society was formed to 'suppress the immorality in the Nation' and to combat the profanities that were engulfing the country.⁴ The association between the marketplace and the loss of female virtue was manifest in all occupations that involved female activity outside the home. Research into the millinery trade in London and its businesswomen, for example, reveals the sexual connotations linked to female apprentices sent to the capital to learn their trade, where they were exposed to the seductions of 'young Beaus and Rakes'.⁵ It has been argued that a possible reason for the perceived sexual promiscuity of female milliners was the likelihood of women who participated in prostitution or in the running of brothels, masquerading as milliners to avoid prosecution.⁶ It is possible that the theatre similarly suffered from the feigning of prostitutes who identified themselves as actresses to mask their profession, which explains contemporary criticisms on the immorality of performing women. Another explanation as to why women's involvement in commercial exchanges was criticised may have arose from the supposed threat that financially astute women

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 3.

⁴ Defoe, *A collection of writings of the author*, p. 110.

⁵ Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners', pp. 148 & 163. Erickson uses the critique of R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, London (1741), to identify the hostility towards the millinery industry.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164. Erickson discusses the Old Bailey records and the number of women who all claimed to be in the millinery profession who were accused of prostitution.

posed to patriarchal authority, thus the emphasis on protecting female virtue by confining women to the private sphere.⁷ The Society for the Reformation of Manners had the patronage of both the Crown and the Church and set about prosecuting those who were caught partaking in lewd acts. This included playwrights and performers who failed to uphold the morality of society. In 1693 a letter was published in London's *Athenian Gazette* that posed the question – 'Whether it be lawful to see Plays?' The journalist's response outlined the initial reasons why people attended the theatre, a place where both vice and virtue were displayed, vice depicted as 'black and deformed' while virtue in a pleasing and enticing form to the audience.⁸ The theatre formed an institution that could be an 'innocent and useful Diversion' within society rather than the 'Scandal and Reproach' to the country.⁹ Yet what the Society discovered was that their attempts to expose and deter the audience from vice on the stage, merely increased the popularity for such themes. One critic stated:

*I do not remember that our English Poets ever suffer'd a Criminal Amour
to succeed upon the Stage, 'till the Reign of King Charles the Second. Ever
since that Time, the Alderman is made a Cuckold, the deluded Virgin is
debauched, and Adultery and Fornication are supposed to be committed
behind the Scenes, as Part of the Action.*¹⁰

Plays and operas such as *The Country Wife* (1675) and *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), illustrating elopements, robbery, bigamy, prostitution and illegitimate children, were

⁷ For further reading regarding businesswomen during the eighteenth century, see Freeman, Pearson & Taylor, 'Between Madam Bubble and Kitty Lorimer', pp. 95-114. This study examines female investors in British and Irish trading companies and how women entered shareholdings.

⁸ *Athenian Gazette* or *Casuistical Mercury* (London) Tuesday, November 14, 1693; Issue 7.

⁹ Swift, *A Project for the Advancement of Religion and the Reformation of Manners*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

successful on the London stages, despite the efforts of the Society and authors such as Collier. In 1698 Collier's critique, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, attacked the playwrights and performers of Restoration Comedies declaring them as profane amusements that were harming public morality. Actresses were not viewed as a suffering group of women forced to perform characters of low morals, but as dangerous women who threatened conventional domesticity.

In Collier's text the influence and visibility of these women were to be feared and discouraged. Collier began by stating that he was 'convinc'd that nothing has gone farther in Debauching the Age than the Stage Poets and Play-house', ending his preface with 'For to compliment Vice, is *but* one Remove from worshipping *the* Devil.'¹¹ The censorship of performances was not exclusively aimed at the public arena, with home theatricals similarly criticised and condemned. Sixty years later, the same concerns for the dangers to public morality exhibited in the imitation stage performances in private theatricals were evident; the argument founded on the 'injurious to the morals of young women, as they tend to corrupt them, and give them a levity and romantic turn, ill-suited to the comforts of domestic life'.¹² Within their private homes, youths were performing popular London plays, where quite often the innocent virgin fell prey to the seductions of an unworthy man and was left wretched and tainted. Young women imitating actresses on the stage would be exposed to profane language, love scenes and the interchange of gender roles, whereby the woman dressed in men's attire revealed her legs among their party. The revealing of flesh

¹¹ Collier, *A short view of the profaneness and immorality of the English stage*, Fifth edition corrected.

¹² *The Times* (London, England) Monday January 04, 1790; Issue 1568.

in public was a dangerous path to ruin for a lady of fashion and so the actresses' influence on the morality of the youth was to be feared. The necessity for individuals such as Collier to publish critical commentaries as warnings against the admiration and mimicking of actresses, indicates the powerful stimulant of performing women and the challenge actresses presented against conventional femininity. Actresses were seen to be feeding the imaginations of young women who viewed a theatrical life as an alternative future to domesticity; becoming wife and mother. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the prospect of a semi-independent life appealed to young educated women. According to the Yorkshire Circuit Theatre Manager Tate Wilkinson, the elopement of a daughter with a player was often the method used by a lady in order to accomplish her private motive - to enter the stage.¹³

Despite attempts to remove the playhouses from British culture, audience numbers appeared to thrive and the popularity of actresses ensured their survival while also altering the focus of reformers from destroying the theatre to purging it. Several methods were employed to detach the immorality and vice from performers and to re-establish the playhouse as a school that demonstrated the virtues and accomplishments of a cultured British society. First, the regulation of the theatre took place in 1737 in the *Theatrical Licensing Act*, which suppressed any plays with political undertones unflattering to the present Parliament; or, most importantly, to Robert Walpole (First Lord of the Treasury). By removing satirical plays from theatre bills, theatres faced an empty vacuum that was filled with a revival of classical and Shakespearean plays – by the 1740s one in four plays that

¹³ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 33-34.

were staged in London were Shakespearean.¹⁴ Returning to respected and celebrated British dramas, the association of the actress as seductress began to fade particularly for those in the tragic genre, with a shift in public taste for sentimental performances. The second endeavour focused on the increasingly educated audience that attended the playhouses and exploited the consumerism surrounding the theatre in the form of instruction scripts, which aimed to educate on decorum within the playhouses and the appropriate display of emotion. The success of this may be measured by the expansion of the London theatres, with both the Covent Garden and Drury-Lane Theatres undergoing refurbishments and rebuilds in the latter half of the eighteenth-century. In September 1782 Covent Garden Theatre opened with a new interior – a raised roof, better view of the stage from the second gallery and an increase in the number of boxes that bordered the stage.¹⁵ Drury-Lane followed the example of its rival theatre and rebuilt the old establishment, opening in March 1794 with a significant increase in the building's capacity – a pit with eight boxes on either side, two rows of boxes above them with another two rows of boxes on either side of the two galleries, forming a semi-circular plan that surrounded the stage and permitted greater attendances to the playhouse.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 57.

¹⁵ *London Chronicle*, (London) Sept 21, 1782 – Sept 24, 1782; Issue 4028.

¹⁶ *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post* (London) March 12, 1794 – March 14, 1794; Issue 3835.

Patronage and Gendered Nationalism

Theatres took on a patriotic role during the eighteenth century. They were patronised by nobility, and were an arena where civilized tastes, manners and fashion could be observed and where foreign visitors could celebrate the genius of British playwrights such as Shakespeare, Colley Cibber and Richard Sheridan. In creating an increasingly British entertainment, the role of the actress in exhibiting ideal qualities and manners, accentuated their influential social position and aided in female professional agency. While on stage actresses were expected to mimic the proper etiquette of the nobility, celebrating British refinement, which was hoped to educate further the lower levels of society that attended the theatres. Throughout the century the dramatic arts held an association with the monarchy and nobility, through the allocation of royal permissions to set up playhouses and in the attendance of monarchs to these establishments. Theatres which possessed a royal patent were recognized as legitimate houses for social entertainment, but also created an arena for a culturally British identity. The appearance of the royal family at theatres attracted audiences from all social classes who wished to consort with society's elite. The voyeuristic admiration of the public led to what we now understand as celebrity infatuation, whereby a personal acquaintance with the profession's leading players was sought after. Actors and actresses were admired on the stage by illustrious persons and were, therefore, desirable to those aiming to climb up the hierarchy, giving precedence to the theatre as a national arena for social networking. The nobility acted as both patrons and protectors of performers and augmented the image of the theatre as a national pastime.

The regular attendance of the nobility to the theatre was the most obvious method used to support the profession. In 1788, a gentleman named Mr Smith held a benefit performance in Drury Lane which, according to the journalist's account, 'may be ranked among the greatest ever known in this country.'¹⁷ An estimated 1150 box tickets were sold before the doors opened, with the pit needing to be laid into boxes rather than for the general public. The Prince brought with him a party of sixteen and 'bore with the rest of the audience the strongest testimonies of regard towards this Gentleman.'¹⁸ Another newspaper article described the honour bestowed upon the Haymarket Theatre when it was attended by a large group of royals, resembling a gathering of the royal court. The Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York, the Duke of Clarence, the Princess Royal and the Princesses Elizabeth, Augusta, Mary, Sophia and Amelia, all attended an evening of entertainment, where they were surrounded by 'thousands of their loyal citizens' who displayed their attachment to the monarchy 'by the most unbounded bursts of rapturous applause'.¹⁹ This account of the illustrious attendance may be argued as exhibiting bias, as the editor of *Diary or Woodfall's Register* was once an actor in his youth and his daughter grew up to become a novelist and actress. William Woodfall (1745-1803) gave up his aspirations of a theatrical life upon the death of his father, when he decided to join the family's print business. Throughout his career, Woodfall exhibited his admiration for drama by becoming a theatre critic and a regular theatrical section was featured in his periodical.²⁰ Regardless of the accuracy of the reception witnessed inside the theatre, the fact that many of the royal

¹⁷ *The Times* (London, England) Tuesday March 11, 1788; Issue 889011.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Diary or Woodfall's Register* (London) Thursday, Jan 05, 1792; Issue 870.

²⁰ Barker, 'Woodfall, William (bap. 1745, d. 1803),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29914>]

princes and princesses visited the theatre identifies the significance of the playhouse as a form of entertainment which appealed to individuals from the lowest rung of the social ladder to the top of the social hierarchy. The exclusivity of the royal court was somewhat reduced by exhibiting a similar scene in such a public and socially diverse setting as the theatre. This resulted in the perception of the nobility as being more accessible and recognizable to the public and may have aided in the monarchy's own public relations. Nevertheless, the patronage of the monarchy suggests that the theatre was expected to mature into a symbol of Britishness and an authority on national taste and fashion.

It has been claimed that the British public was becoming increasingly aware of the nation's position as an imperial power, which resulted in an increase in historical dramas, such as *Boadicea* (1753) and *Henry the Second* (1773), which were looked upon for guidance and a better understanding of the past for future endeavours.²¹ The identification of individuals as a collective 'public' gave authority to the collective judgement of the people, by transforming the understanding of what was considered as 'opinion' from individual prejudice to 'rational objectivity'.²² The representation of nationhood in the theatre was believed to exhibit 'communal cultural experiences' and demonstrated the institution as an invaluable political tool.²³ The theatre and its performers, represented as educators of the nation's past struggles and successes, were to inspire British nationalism. Other European countries were similarly experiencing an artistic revival in promoting nationalism. Jerzy

²¹ Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, pp. 259-260. *Boadicea* (1753) was written by Richard Glover (1712-1785) and narrated the battle of Britons against a Roman invasion. *Henry II* was written by Thomas Hull (1728-1808) in 1773. See also La Vopa, 'Conceiving a Public', pp. 79-116.

²² La Vopa, 'Conceiving a Public', p. 79.

²³ Arciniega, 'National Myth and Imperial Fantasy', pp. 476-478.

Lukowski's study on the political initiatives of the Polish nobility during this period, confirms a comparable interest in artistic genres and endorsement of the monarchy. Lukowski argues that the establishment of the Polish National Theatre in Warsaw, while exposing the Polish people to contemporary European fashion and taste, also aided in revitalising a native culture. Those who were hostile to the invasion of European influence soon surrendered and accepted the transformation in order to maintain their sophisticated status.²⁴ Loren Kruger's research into the establishment of a national British theatre argues that it was not until the nineteenth-century (with the further expansion of the Empire) that the public recognised itself as unified.²⁵ Class division indeed existed within the theatrical structure, which corresponds with E.P. Thompson's argument on the emergence of the working class, however Kruger's assertion might be contested, and it can be argued that a united public voice did exist in the eighteenth century.²⁶ More recent research than Thompson and Kruger, argues that a national identity was constructed not only as a result of a common religion, but also from the identification of the 'other', and a mutual interest in colonial expansion and the economic growth of the country.²⁷ A collective voice was observed during times of unrest and rioting, which will be identified further below with the examination of the O.P. riots. When managers attempted to exert their authority, the collective anger this generated among the audience, composed of multiple classes, identified the theatre's division with the audience appearing as the employer and theatrical

²⁴ Lukowski, 'Political Ideas among the Polish Nobility in the Eighteenth Century', p. 20.

²⁵ Kruger, 'Our National House', p. 35. For further reading on the political and social instability of the period see Colley, *Britons*. Colley highlights the point that although Britain and the British Empire comprised multiple countries under the one political structure, Britishness was sub-divided into multiple internal differences.

²⁶ Further reading on the establishment of a conscious working class see, Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

²⁷ Koditschek, 'The Making of British Nationality', p. 390.

professionals as the servants of public entertainment, further subordinating actresses not only for being women, but for their choice in career.

By the latter half of the century newspapers published articles calling for more native performers to be engaged on the London stages, promoting British actresses over the continent's mademoiselles and signoras and criticising public admiration of foreign entertainment. This was partially due to their economic success over English performers as evidenced in their higher salaries, but also as a result of patriotic discourses – the visibility of female British performers was a lesser evil by promoting the nation's own talents, retaining the funds earned from the consumption of entertainment within the country and most importantly, maintaining ticket prices at a lower level than that demanded by foreign performers. The King's Theatre Hay Market staged the majority of London's foreign ballets and operas, engaging such celebrated dancers as Mademoiselle Grenier and Baccelli (c. 1753-1801). Evidence that the captivation of foreign performers was beginning to wane was observed in letters sent to newspapers. In 1760 one correspondent rejoiced in the 'decay' of the Italian opera and its 'insipid performances', believing that the British public now acknowledged the 'neglect of their own country, the productions of it and their countrymen'.²⁸ The author referred to the public's and nobility's infatuation with foreigners as a disease while the Italian female performers were 'Syrens' who lured the nation into destruction. The author's final argument rested in the degradation of the hero within Italian operas, threatening masculinity through the effeminacy displayed on the stage and if this

²⁸ *Public Ledger or The Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence* (London), Tuesday, Sept 16, 1760; Issue 213.

influence over Britain had not been present then 'a braver nation than it is' may have existed.²⁹ The ingratitude displayed by foreign performers who were admitted into the society of nobility and rewarded with superior salaries as will be examined in the following paragraph, was a common complaint. And yet there was a stark contrast between the treatment of foreign female performers compared to their domestic counterparts, with British actresses enduring associations with immoral and sexually active women by the British public.

The influx of foreign performers in London during the century suggests that Britain's culture was highly admired in the Continent. In *A Dialogue in the Green-Room upon a Disturbance in the Pit* (1763), the anonymous author stated that the British public gave such encouragement to the theatre that foreigners arrived in the hope of earning five times the salary they received on the Continent.³⁰ The anonymous writer argued that outside of Britain performers met with hostility, with many countries refusing Christian burial for acting professionals. Yet the British nobility cherished their players, kept their company, imitated their fashion and uniquely elevated the position of the theatre unlike in any other cultivated metropolis.³¹ The discrepancy in wages offered to foreign females over British actresses was a growing concern. A sarcastic journalist mockingly pitied the 'poor' foreign performers who suffered wages as low as £700 a year for performing two nights a week. The author compared this to the plight of Britain's greatest tragedian Mrs Siddons, who

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *A Dialogue in the Green-Room upon a Disturbance in the Pit*, p. iv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. v-vi.

received an estimated £300 annually for three performances a week at that time.³² The discourse over the payment of foreign performers reached its pinnacle in 1809 with the extortionate salary of the singer Mademoiselle Angelica Catalani (1780 – 1849). Catalani personally suffered the venomous censure of critics who questioned her value, as she was not only a foreigner in England during a time of European war and disorder, but the salary she demanded was considerably more than the incomes of Britain's leading actresses. When she first arrived in England in 1806 Catalani was engaged on an annual salary of £2,000, a sum much less than what she was accustomed to on the Continent, yet this was quickly increased to £5,250 by 1808.³³ To put this into perspective, in the 'meridian of her glory' Mrs Siddons received £1,000 for eighty night's performance and Mrs Jordan received thirty guineas a week at the height of her career.³⁴ Catalani was believed to have earned £75 per night while other foreign performers were on £10 or £12 a night and as one critic argued, 'What is Mrs Siddons worth? Why, double that sum; what Mrs Dickons? At least a third more than the foreign songsters'.³⁵ In order to pay for engagements such as Catalani, a rise in ticket prices was required, which provoked further hostility from audiences and subsequently led to theatre riots, as was the case in the 1809 *Old Price Riots*. In addition to being financially affordable, British actresses were also multi-skilled performers, often excelling in one genre and adequate in several. Mrs Siddons reigned as the tragic queen, but she also attempted comedy with little success; Mrs Jordan similarly diverged from her comedic success for the sombre roles of Shakespeare's *Ophelia* (in *Hamlet*) and *Imogen* (in

³² *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, May 13, 1783; Issue 792.

³³ *The European magazine, and London review*, Vol. 81 of 86, pp. 391-394.

³⁴ *The Standard* (London, England), Saturday, April 16, 1831; Issue 1224.

³⁵ *The Morning Post* (London, England), Monday, September 18, 1809; Issue 12056.

Cymbeline).³⁶ A writer who identified himself as 'a Friend to the British Drama' observed that a failing of Italian and French females on the stage was their limited capacity compared to the British actress. Actresses such as Dorothy Jordan could sing, dance and did not restrict themselves to either comedy or tragedy, which the author argued was motivation for the London theatres to 'gratify national taste and give encouragement to home-bred merit'.³⁷ In promoting British actresses above foreign performers, the theatre represented the larger problem that Britain faced as a result of colonial expansion – the emigration of foreigners into the country with their native customs, manners and consumables. Foreign influences needed to be suppressed and as the theatre was a popular platform of exhibition, it was an unsurprisingly influential instrument for British propaganda, with women's femininity (in the form of the actress) symbolic of the country's morality that required protection.

Patrons and Sexual Liaisons

Actresses emerged as attractive mistresses for the nobility and upper classes who objectified them as trophies of economic status. They were educated and beautiful, necessary requirements for a successful career and through the mimicry of upper class manners and fashions actresses were acceptable concubines. Some have argued that anxiety existed among the upper classes over the breakdown of social hierarchy caused by the ambitions of the lower and middle classes utilising fashion to blur obvious class distinctions.³⁸ This argument was based on Restoration political satires, which utilised the

³⁶ List of roles performed by actresses available in Simpson & Braun, *A Century of Famous Actresses*, pp. 353-372.

³⁷ *The Morning Post* (London, England), Monday, June 12, 1809; Issue 11972.

³⁸ Mowry, 'Dressing Up and Dressing Down', p. 79.

textile industry as facilitator to maintain hierarchy, by differentiating class fashions.³⁹ Prostitutes were the primary target of this anxiety and, like actresses; women of ill-repute could easily dress like gentlewomen and mislead respectable gentlemen and women. It is probable that actresses were aware of their significance as accessories for the wealthy and took advantage of their attractiveness to gain powerful patrons. These patrons provided gifts in the forms of gowns and jewellery; Mrs Jordan received an enamelled gold ring with a diamond inset from a gentleman who referred to the actress as 'his *better half*'.⁴⁰ The royal princes, particularly the Prince Regent and the Duke of Clarence, frequently relied on the theatre as a market of the country's most admired women, whose social position prevented the princes from engaging in legal unions and therefore both individuals acknowledged that a sexual liaison was all that could transpire.⁴¹ Sexual arrangements were beneficial to both parties – the gentleman became the envy of his associates with a celebrated beauty on his arm, while the actress benefited from the social exposure and admittance into upper class circles. Sophia Baddeley was mistress to a number of gentlemen who aided in obtaining her admission into the Pantheon when it first opened in 1772, a place of entertainment that attempted to exclude women with blemished reputations.⁴² The examples below examine those actresses who unreservedly sought and conspired to gain the protection of male patrons, while others agreed to such affairs out of desperation

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ *Star* (London, England), Thursday, April 12, 1792; Issue 1235. The gentleman documented in the article was possibly the Duke of Clarence as it was around this period that he first met with Mrs Jordan.

⁴¹ The Prince Regent had an affair with the actress Mary Robinson after seeing her on stage in 1779, the Duke of Clarence instigated a twenty year affair with the actress Dorothy Jordan in 1791 after viewing her in the theatre and the Earl of Derby courted and eventually married Elizabeth Farren in 1797.

⁴² Baldwin, Thelma Wilson, 'Baddeley, Sophia (1745?-1786)', *odnb*
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1017>]

or love; yet the actress was always an assenting participant to the arrangement and negotiator of the terms.

The Royal Prince, (George IV), was fond of the theatre and his attachment was evident when it was discovered that he had acquired the actress Mrs Mary Robinson. Although viewed as sexual commodities, actresses who captured the attentions of nobility earned the respect of their colleagues by attracting society's elite to the theatre and boosting the image of actresses as fashionable ladies, thus demonstrating the power that women could yield by utilising their sexuality. In 1780, articles and satires emerged referring to *Perdita* (one of Mrs Robinson's stage characters) and 'a certain young Prince, on the eve of being of age'. The Prince had given the actress many presents, 'both in money and trinkets' and within two months it was assumed the lady would be 'in dress and equipage out-rival the first Duchess in the kingdom.'⁴³ The wealth of the prince was lavishly adorned on the actress, whose own reputation was increased by her association with the royal. According to one journalist, it was the actress and a male friend who had designed to seduce the young prince, the actress's friend wishing to 'ingratiate himself with the *Rising Sun*', while also advancing the wealth of his beloved Robinson.⁴⁴ Dressed in her most captivating attire and seated in the opposite box to the Prince at Drury Lane Theatre, Robinson succeeded in capturing the young nobleman's attention and refused the demands of his mother to be removed from the box. The actress 'came to an immediate capitulation' and as another journalist stated, appeased her 'wanton airs'.⁴⁵ Although seen as a desirable object to the

⁴³ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, July 14, 1780; Issue 16 046.

⁴⁴ *Whitehall Evening Post (1770)* (London, England), October 12, 1780 – October 14, 1780; Issue 5383.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* & *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, February 12, 1780; Issue 2288.

Prince, it was Robinson who instigated the affair anticipating the benefits to be gained from the association. Mrs Jordan was likewise engaged in a sexual relationship with a royal prince, yet unlike Robinson's affair, Jordan and the Duke of Clarence's liaison grew into a twenty year partnership. The Duke initiated the affair at the peak of Jordan's career as a comedic actress. According to Joseph Haslewood's short biography of the actress, Jordan was suffering from the disappointment of a lover's deception and his refusal to legalise their relationship in marriage, when she was solicited by the Duke. It was this disappointment that was the catalyst for her decision to accept the Duke, whose resources would be the most beneficial for herself and her children.⁴⁶ As the Duke's lover, Jordan became mistress of a stately home and hostess to the nation's political and intellectual elite. It was Jordan's performance in the domestic sphere that redeemed her character from the decision to become a mistress, while the longevity of the liaison gave Jordan the admiration of her peers as a loyal partner. Her ill-reputed character was overlooked by the aristocracy and wealthy who attended her performances out of respect for her relationship with the Duke. At the conclusion of her performance in March 1793 Jordan was led by the Duke of Clarence to a box which seated the Prince Regent and other illustrious members of society, where she remained to watch the remainder of the performances.⁴⁷ Jordan's relationship with the Duke raised her profile as an actress and the actress's social position was elevated publicly by the Duke removing Jordan from the stage and placing her among the country's elite, which made the actress more appealing an acquisition for theatre managers and demonstrated the value of actresses.

⁴⁶ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 136.

⁴⁷ *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post* (London, England), March 1, 1793 – March 4, 1793; Issue 3720.

The benefits in obtaining a wealthy lover expanded beyond social acceptance; with examples such as Lavinia Fenton (1708-1760) and Elizabeth Farren (1759-1829) accomplishing what Robinson and Jordan failed to acquire – marriages into the nobility and social elevation. Both Joseph Haslewood and Farren's biographer, Arbiter Petronius, recorded the Earl of Derby's influence on the actress's professional career. Petronius argued that the gentleman 'took every means of promoting her interests', by securing her an engagement in Drury-Lane Theatre and acquiring Farren the patronage of many of society's Fashionable ladies.⁴⁸ The conduct of the actress and the patience of Derby in their fourteen-year courtship were greatly admired as newspapers documented the audiences' applause for both parties at the conclusion of Farren's final performance. The public 'manifested a zealous approbation' of his 'magnanimity' and Farren's 'virtuous conduct' in the affair, which earned the actress acceptance among the nobility and the public's approval of her social elevation.⁴⁹ The significance of both Fenton's and Farren's marriages and rise in rank above the theatrical profession, verified the ability of actresses to remain morally virtuous and deserving of admiration. Upon her retirement, the *Morning Chronicle* identified Farren as 'a lesson to the times', displaying 'how ample the rewards of moral purity added to professional merit' and earned her the opportunity to advance from performer to a countess.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Arbiter, *Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby*, p. 20.

⁴⁹ *The Morning Post and Fashionable World* (London, England), Monday, April 10, 1797; Issue 7824.

⁵⁰ *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Monday, April 10, 1797; Issue 8580.

Not all patrons were male, and with both wealthy men and women partaking in financing, protecting and presenting performers to fashionable society, actresses were unable to depend solely on their sexual appeal to aid in the manipulation of female benefactors. Patrons and actresses were in a symbiotic relationship, with obvious benefits for the performer, while the benefactor enjoyed the possession of an entertaining and desirable ornament which acted as a status symbol. The attraction of financially supporting an actress and introducing her into society was palpable for male spectators who sexually objectified them. When Mrs Siddons held a highly successful benefit with an overflowing crowd, the Gentlemen of the Bar honoured her with a sum of one hundred guineas, 'an honour unparalleled in theatrical annals; and indeed the benefit was, perhaps, the most lucrative ever known'.⁵¹ Yet the same motives cannot be seen to explain the patronage of the theatre's female benefactors. In a male-dominant world, it is possible that fashionable ladies were competing with male patrons, by obtaining those actresses who were sought after, as a form of social leverage. Or perhaps by removing actresses from the protection of gentlemen, female patrons were preserving the social hierarchy and morality of the wealthy by ensuring that female performers remained subordinate and unable to make prosperous marriages. However, it has been claimed that female patronage existed due to the beneficial exchange between patroness and actress for theatrical costumes and the 'fashion expertise' of actresses.⁵² This argument stems from the demonstrated influence of female patrons on the aesthetical taste within the playhouse – providing actresses with dresses, while also sometimes adopting the fashions observed on the stage, thus celebrating

⁵¹ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 12-14.

⁵² Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 147.

actresses' style. The imitating of actresses' fashions does indicate a level of respect held by female patrons of the theatre, yet the distractions and competitiveness demonstrated by female audiences during performances; suggest that gentlewomen embracing theatrical fashions were perhaps another ploy to remove the image of the exotic from actresses.

Male patrons offered funds and gifts to show their admiration of an actress, while female patrons could offer aid in establishing an actress's reputation and destroying the character of her rivals. George Anne Bellamy was fortunate to have Mrs Butler, an Irish gentlewoman, as patroness. This lady was instrumental in building Bellamy's reputation on the Irish stage, whereby she assisted in Bellamy's attacks on rival actresses. The lady provided fine gowns and costumes, helping Bellamy to acquire the appropriate attire for her characters and acceptance of her appearance from the fashionable audience. As discussed in the previous chapter, during the rivalry between Bellamy and Mrs Furnival regarding the 'borrowing' of a dress, Mrs Butler was active in denigrating Furnival's public reputation with accusations of robbery. Mrs Butler further promoted the actress when Bellamy's virtue came into question after a young man claimed to have seduced her. The patroness introduced Bellamy to the young man who clearly had no knowledge of the actress's identity, thus establishing himself as a liar and Bellamy as the innocent victim.⁵³ In documenting this episode, Bellamy revealed the suffering of celebrated women who were often unaccountable for scandalous rumours recreated by individuals pretending to have an intimate relationship with an actress. If her patroness was unable to reveal that Bellamy's character had been sullied by 'the rude breath of scandal, through the wicked machinations of the nobleman', the actress

⁵³ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 140-146.

would have been expelled from the fashionable company in Dublin and, as her aunt had warned, the truth would determine whether the actress would be noticed among her friends and family again.⁵⁴ Bellamy eventually lost her vital patroness once she entered into an affair with a Mr George Methan that did not result in marriage, no longer permitting the fine lady and her company to acknowledge Bellamy into their presence. Fortunately for Bellamy, by this time she had established herself as a fine actress in London and was rewarded from her acting merits rather than depending on the favours and opinion of her patroness. Mrs Butler had introduced the actress into the company of the upper classes, where she attracted the admiration of Methan and commenced a lucrative sexual relationship with the promise of marriage – something, however, that Methan failed to deliver. Once Bellamy came under the protection of Methan, she no longer required Mrs Butler's assistance as Methan held more influence in London than Bellamy's patroness. What the relationship between Bellamy and her patroness reveals, is the gender prejudice evident among the upper classes, whereby an association with an actress who became a gentleman's mistress was unacceptable to an upper class lady. Perhaps the relationship disintegrated due to Mrs Butler's failure to protect the wealthy gentlemen in her company from the alluring actress, therefore negating her intended purpose as a patroness. Nevertheless, Bellamy emerged as the more successful party in the relationship, having utilised her patroness to obtain a wealthy lover.

While the relationship between an actress and her patron was symbiotic, it would appear that actresses reaped greater benefit from the connection. For Miss Farren, Mrs Robinson

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 140, 148.

and Mrs Siddons, the patronage they received provided engagements on the London stages that quite often rewarded the actress with a higher weekly salary.⁵⁵ Both Siddons and Robinson were under the patronage of the fashionable Duchess of Devonshire, whom Robinson described as 'the friendly Patroness of the Unhappy'.⁵⁶ Miss Farren's patron was the manager of the Liverpool Theatre-Royal, Mr Younger, who was anxious to promote the young actress's talents on the greater London stages and equip her with the necessary apparel and salary.⁵⁷ But once at the top of her profession, it was claimed this actress disregarded her patron, claiming no prior knowledge of the man who had 'shielded her when unprotected, and rescued her from Poverty and Misery, if not from Ruin!'⁵⁸ Similar to Bellamy, both actresses neglected their benefactors once successful acting careers were established - Bellamy ignoring the importance of her maintaining an untainted and virtuous character and Farren failing to acknowledge the man who introduced her to the metropolis. The relationship between patron and actress was erratic, dependent on a mutual understanding between the two. In Bellamy's case, it is possible that she lost her patroness's favour not only by submitting to a relationship that did not result in marriage, but because she had obtained a suitor from above her station and transcended her subordinate position. The continued attention of the patron was also not guaranteed and as observed in the relationship between the Prince Regent and Robinson, the sponsorship of a gentleman or woman could be short lived when an actress was replaced by a younger and a more attractive ornament of the stage.

⁵⁵ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Rooms*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Robinson, *Captivity, a poem*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Petronius, *Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby*, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Audience as Spectacle rather than Spectator

When the public emerged as a unit, voicing a single opinion, the audience collective could be either damaging or beneficial for the actress. The spectator became a spectacle within the theatre – cheering those whom they admired and vocally chastising those who they disliked drawing the attention of their fellow spectators. The animation from such audience members, if used to promote an actress, complimented her greatly; but if employed to display discontent, the play or entire performance could be halted for the night. Actresses held the ability to manipulate such spectacles if the public were in a favourable mood, but a conflicting atmosphere could lead to disruptions or riots and remove all agency retained by an actress. Eighteenth-century audiences were better acquainted with the techniques employed by theatre players in exhibiting emotional pieces than in the previous century and played an integral part in the interaction between spectator and actress. Although the dependency on one's beauty to elevate a career within the profession was still pertinent, a growing expectation on actresses to display emotional and intellectually inspired drama to a cultured audience was stressed in publications. This explained the success of such actresses as Sarah Siddons and Elizabeth Bannister who were not characterised for their beauty but admired for unsullied reputations and talent. Newspapers frequently commented on the acting merits of new actresses accompanied with a description of their charms; yet the importance placed on the virtue and professional talents of a performer increased in the latter half of the century and persisted into the Victorian era.

There was an increase in the number of instructional books published for the purpose of educating both the dramatic players and their audiences on the techniques employed in the theatre. Their circulation indicates that a more learned and, therefore, middle to upper class of spectators attended the playhouses, who wished to understand better and appreciate the stage exhibition. However, it is more probable that the instigation of such publications originated from the entreaties of theatrical critics and playwrights who feared the corrupting influence of the theatre. In an article one critic argued that many players on the London stages exhibited a weakness in character and yet were 'publicly, and tumultuously Applauded, for their Ignorance'.⁵⁹ To combat the deficiencies of the theatre in the tragic genre, the author recorded a list of *principles* for the public to study and then critique what they observed on the stage. Directed at actors rather than their female counterparts, the critic emphasised that a performer should appear 'manly' rather than handsome as 'where Features are too delicately form'd, they are swallow'd, and lost, in the Distance'.⁶⁰ Facial beauty was considered a hindrance for the actor, while a delicacy in features was desirable for an actress, but both sexes were subjected to the basic principles of emotional exhibition. The anonymous article set a precedent for further analysis and identified a need to train new players, indicating that either the standards of acting had declined drastically or the expectations of audiences had risen. Both explanations are plausible with the word 'natural' commonly referred to in descriptions of the public's artistic tastes in the arts. The elevation of such actresses as Frances Abington who became best known for their off-stage antics than their acting talents was troubling to those more talented thespians. Publications such

⁵⁹ *Prompter (1734)* (London, England), Friday, June 27, 1735; Issue LXVI.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

as Cook's *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (1775) and Hill's *An Essay on the Art of Acting* (1779) assumed that an educated audience would be better acquainted with what was deemed a skilful performance and therefore celebrate those worthy of praise. William Cook's rationale was that by presenting a dramatic analysis for public consumption he was attempting to restore the theatre to 'that respectable character it originally possessed – a Public School of Virtue and of Manners'.⁶¹

The popularity of the theatre among the wealthy called for an examination of what was deemed proper decorum, not only for the players, but also of the audience. Although the public attended theatrical playhouses to view the drama exhibited on the stage, the spectators themselves were active participants in the entertainment through the exhibition of celebrated fashions and etiquettes. Theatres were spaces for social gatherings and interaction among the classes, rather than houses where the public were simple bystanders to be entertained.⁶² In the relationship between the actress and her audience, a form of power struggle occurred whereby both parties competed for attention, particularly evident between actresses and ladies of fashion. The sisters Sylvia and Mirabelle were infamous for their public exhibitions in the playhouse which distracted from the performers on stage.⁶³ On one occasion Sylvia was the centre of attention, which caused Mirabelle to throw her handkerchief into the pit drawing the eyes of the audience. In retaliation, Sylvia called aloud to an acquaintance, regaining centre stage. Arguably such behaviour ensured that on some evenings, often the 'ambitious fair' drew more attention than the players themselves and

⁶¹ Cook, *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism*, P. VII.

⁶² Davis, 'Spectatorship', p. 59.

⁶³ *A Guide to the Stage*, p. 19.

according to the self-titled 'first champion for theatric decorum' pamphlet *A Guide to the Stage*, they were often more successful than the performers.⁶⁴ *A Guide to the Stage* was not unique in instructing audiences on proper decorum, with texts such as *A Seasonable Rebuke to the Playhouse Rioters* (1740) circulated after a disturbance within Drury-Lane theatre. The significance of both these documents was their ridicule of the nobility and wealthy who attended the theatre and were 'more notoriously addicted to this tumultuous Vice, than the Vulgar and Illiterate' plebeian spectators.⁶⁵ Rather than accusing the theatre of inducing such behaviour, the author of *A Seasonable Rebuke* criticised gentlemen who wished to demonstrate their bravery and craved a 'Heroes Fame'.⁶⁶ 'Decency and good Breeding' were the only remedy to the problem of incivility within the theatre and so the education and governing of the audience's manners rather than the regulation of actors and actresses, were viewed as a necessity.⁶⁷

Laughter was often deployed for the disruption and humiliation of an actress by their female spectators, as in the case of Bellamy and Lady Coventry. The newly acquired wealth and elevation of Lady Coventry encouraged her in attempting to undermine the actress who was a rival beauty and admired greatly by male spectators, while also possibly reveals her ladyship's attempts to distance herself from her humble upbringing when she was once obliged to Bellamy. Lady Coventry's intended insult failed against Bellamy which resulted in Coventry's humiliation and removal from the theatre. Laughter was the preferred form of

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 & 20.

⁶⁵ *A Seasonable Rebuke to the Playhouse Rioters*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

abuse among the upper classes, described in *A Guide to the Stage* as solely to be used for negative purposes. The audience were advised to be wary of the use of laughter; it was primarily to be applied as an alternative to hissing, yet also acceptable if a blunder occurred on stage or an accident. Never was a polite audience to laugh at the jests of a comedy judged to be of low and 'rustic' taste. During the poison scene in *Romeo and Juliet* Bellamy suffered Lady Coventry's loud laughing that interrupted the scene and affected the actress's performance.⁶⁸ According to her *Apology*, Bellamy's audience was greatly offended by this sudden outburst and 'insisted upon the Ladies quitting the box'. One gentleman approached Lady Coventry and rebuked her for such rudeness, for which she replied that she could not bear the actress any longer after seeing Mrs Cibber in the part.⁶⁹ In other cases, when an audience emerged united under unfavourable circumstances against an actress, few could pacify the collective and conclude a play, displaying the authority of the spectators. The upper classes were deemed as the best judges of culture and virtue and were influential critics, however, as seen in the incident between Bellamy and Lady Coventry, it was unacceptable for a critic to exhibit an impoliteness that affected the larger audience.

The eighteenth-century understanding of 'politeness' was the 'proper state of wit, humour, understanding and manners, in individuals and in society at large' and was dependent on 'discursive freedom'.⁷⁰ The rudeness observed within the theatre during Bellamy's

⁶⁸ Gentlemen of Covent-Garden Theatre, *Memoirs of George Anne Bellamy*, p. 166.

⁶⁹ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 98-99. However, the accuracy of these events cannot be confirmed due to the lack of evidence found, which suggests either writers avoided disrespecting a member of the nobility, or the event was a fabrication of the actress's imagination to gain her readers sympathy.

⁷⁰ Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 197.

performance, emerged from the inequitable liberty held by the offender (Lady Coventry) over the actress that removed equal discussion and interaction and resulted in what the third earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) described as the ‘destroying of civility’.⁷¹ Lady Coventry had assumed her behaviour to be appropriate in a Britain that sought to be ‘polite’, with the lady identifying her position within the gentry as prerequisite for her gentility. However, the idiom, ‘politeness’, encompassed multiple meanings and was not associated with one particular social class. Lady Coventry’s belief that being a member of the gentry entitled her to be recognised as gentle and, therefore, an example of polite society, was unfounded. In recent research, politeness has been used as an analytical category to examine social interactions.⁷² Politeness held different connotations for each individual, but ultimately the term referred to the improvement of society. In art, conversational pieces became popular throughout the century, whereby sitters were portrayed engaged in social settings and surrounded by everyday items, particularly books, to highlight their improved cultural tastes. Actresses were often depicted surrounded by mythological emblems relating to their celebrated genres and reflected their understanding of history and literature. It has been argued that the impact of social politeness was most evident in language and in the theatre this can be identified from the examination of actresses’ merits in warranting patronage.⁷³ In 1765 a table was published grading the performers of Drury-Lane Theatre; but unlike previous charts, this included the category

⁷¹ *Ibid.* See also, Klein, ‘Cooper, Anthony Ashley, third earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713)’ *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6209>]

⁷² Historians such as Lawrence Klein, E.P. Thompson, Peter Borsay and Tom Williamson, have all utilised politeness and its influence on cultural areas of the arts, literature and religion to explain social interactions during the eighteenth century. See Klein, ‘Liberty, Manners, and Politeness’ and Williamson, ‘Polite Landscapes’.

⁷³ Klein, ‘Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century’, p. 871.

‘Dignity/Manners’, indicating the significance of actresses’ personal characters in relation to their acting ability.⁷⁴ Politeness and civility in these contexts, aided in comprehending interactions between the public and the theatre, patrons and actresses.

Class distinction appeared to have become void once an insult towards performers affected the general audience’s entertainment, with evidence that both the lower and gentry classes would turn on offending spectators. In the 1779 season at the York theatre, a Mrs Mason who was ‘destitute of voice, variety, and powers’ was cruelly humiliated by a wealthy lady known for her sarcastic humour and failure to curb her laughter. For reasons unknown the unidentified lady and her beau took a dislike towards the tragic actress and during the final death scene of the tragedy the lady ‘talked (and laughed) louder than the players’.⁷⁵ The pair was not reprimanded, as the actress had failed to inspire admiration and affiliation from the general audience. However, the actress’s fellow actor, Mr Kemble, disagreed with such behaviour and refused to continue the play until the lady had finished her conversation. The audience now turned on the lady and her gentleman, for their night’s entertainment had been interrupted and several cries demanded her removal from the theatre. In response to such an unexpected development the lady demanded the gentlemen and officers present to defend her and insisted on an apology from the players. The audience defended the players against the fashionable lady who was known to be ‘a constant disturber’. The young lady could ‘not bear such an unexpected insult, either from

⁷⁴ *A Critical Balance of the Performers at Drury-Lane Theatre*. From this table it can be observed that Mrs Pritchard, Mrs Yates and Mrs Cibber all received full marks for their dignity and manners, while Mrs Baddeley received half marks, relative to her promiscuous lifestyle.

⁷⁵ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 19.

the audience or the player' and fled the theatre.⁷⁶ Despite the lady's higher social ranking compared to many of the theatre audience she was not above the spectators' collective reproach, which indicates that the supposed authority of an individual with wealth held no influence in the playhouse compared to the classless collective opinion of an audience. The enmity which existed between the lady and actress highlighted the influence of the performer over her audience – the actress chose not to perform, which antagonised her public and resulted in the manipulation of the spectators into demanding the removal of the disrupter, in favour of the subordinate actress.

A further insult to performers was that an educated audience no longer needed to watch a play in order to know the emotion to convey for each act. By studying dramas the spectator knew when to react appropriately without hindering their socialising among the boxes, thus enacting their own performance off the stage. A 'Lady Betty' (whose full name is unknown but it was indicated by Tate Wilkinson that her respectability and authority would be sufficient clues of her identity for the public) excelled in displaying the correct amount of emotion even though her box seat often prevented her from viewing the players on the stage. Through diligent study of the plays billed, an educated 'Lady Betty' had:

...the advantage to know when any thing of consequence is to be acted.

*Thus she will shudder at the enterance of the Ghost in Hamlet, and turn pale during the enchantment in Macbeth; tho', by the rules of opticks the performers are three yards out of her sight.*⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-27.

⁷⁷ *A Guide to the Stage*, p. 3.

With an understanding of the play and emotions to be conveyed at each scene, a lady could perform her emotional display for the observation of her fellow spectators while also insulting the players by being detached from the stage performance.

The interface between superior actresses who commanded an audience's admiration and their female spectators differed from that between the actress and the male theatre goer, with the female audience often displaying an emotional connection towards the performance. Whilst the male spectator also engaged in a display of elegance and superiority, unrestrained displays of emotion were not acceptable. The male audience admired and protected the playhouse beauties – defending the integrity of upper class women from all vulgarity on the stage while also shielding actresses from unacceptable insults. Under stereotypical gender constructions, the female spectator was portrayed as vulnerable and weak to their emotions, thus requiring the protection of gentlemen. By the end of the century theatres saw an increase in the number of ladies attending from all social standings. A journalist observed that on one particular night, the Prince of Wales and Duke of Clarence were but two members of the illustrious audience surrounded by finely dressed ladies. The article stated that never before had such a number of female spectators been observed with even the pit containing two or three ladies for every gentleman present.⁷⁸ The feminine delicacy of fashionable ladies complemented the ostentation of male audiences and served as a subtle reminder and comparison for men of the coarseness in actresses who occupied the masculine public sphere, compared to the genteel ladies of wealth.

⁷⁸ *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland) Thursday May 21, 1801; Issue 12432.

Separate from the gender roles exhibited on the stage, gender binaries were enacted and exaggerated in the stalls. Male audience members performed the role of chivalry protector, while female spectators played on perceived feminine frailty, further distracting male attention from the actresses performing. Mr Frank Gayley was known as the 'knight errant of the stage', a regular attendee of the playhouses and was the first to 'cherish a solitary damsel in the green boxes.'⁷⁹ Although Mr Gayley had no business interests in the theatre, he acted the host and entertainer of 'his' audience, assuming that the public attended the theatre to admire him rather than the players. In his youth he had participated in brawls within the pit, drawing his sword to excite the public and add to the theatre's performance. Similarly, fainting fits among fashionable ladies were frequently reported, emphasising their vulnerability and strengthened theories that women were born with delicate nerves. By identifying the weakness of the female nervous system and separating women from men, physicians such as George Cheyne (1671/2–1743) presented the female gender as the more moral of the two – weaker nerves would not permit women to partake in indiscretions.⁸⁰ The fainting of theatre patrons was both distracting and complimentary to the performers – it highlighted the accomplishments of a performer, particularly one in the tragic genre, such as Mrs Siddons, in portraying high emotions and realistic scenes. In a performance of the *Desert* at Palmers Theatre, a French lady of fashion was required to be carried out of the house due to a fainting fit. Mrs D'Ufroy was so engrossed in the drama of the final scene that she truly believed the soldiers were about to fire, 'so high had the acting of the scene

⁷⁹ *A Guide to the Stage*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 24-25.

carried her imagination to reality'.⁸¹ The article continues by stressing that this lady was still affected by the evening's entertainment and was the first French woman that was known to have fainted in a British Theatre, as the French nation was not acknowledged for their enjoyment of 'sentimental feeling'.⁸² Whilst Mrs D'Ufroy recovered quickly, one woman was recorded to have suffered greatly after attending Mrs Siddons's performance as *Isabella* in *The Fatal Marriage*, resulting in her spirits not fully recuperating for six months.⁸³ Although this seems excessive nowadays, it was deemed perfectly plausible in the eighteenth century and a vast compliment to a performer on their acting capabilities, having the ability to take the audience's imagination away from the boards and into a battle field, a Shakespearean fortress or the degraded slums of the city. Edmund Burke best explained this phenomenon in his 1757 treatise on the sublime and beautiful. Burke argued that words were capable of exciting the sublime and creating 'deep' impressions on individuals more than any of the arts. Using the image of an angel, Burke argued that in paint an angel is represented as a person with wings, but through the use of words the image is transformed into an object of fascination – for example 'the angel of the *Lord*' expressed strength and importance.⁸⁴ Burke further explained that once an individual's mind was preoccupied by the sublime, 'it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it'. This rationalised uncontrollable exhibitions whereby the imagery formed on the theatrical stage consumed the audience's imagination and they were no longer aware of the display of their passions. Accounts of women being affected in this way, served as a

⁸¹ *World* (London, England) Thursday, January 10, 1788; Issue 322.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Burke, *A philosophical enquiry*, p. 182. For contemporary views for and against the concept of the sublime, see Ashfield & de Bolla, eds. *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theory*.

type of advertisement; these reports publicised the player's name and attributes numerous times in a myriad of newspapers and were promoting the players without any cost to theatre. The audience participation and interaction with actors and actresses operated as free publicity, but also allowed the female audience to hold a portion of accountability for the entertainment of the night, as they too became thespians of the house and were critiqued similar to the players. Mrs Siddons was critiqued in her performance that caused the woman's illness, and the female spectator was also censured due to the scene caused by her fainting fit. Performances were often halted until a fainted woman had fully recovered, stopping and starting acts. The King prevented the continuation of one play in January 1786, after a woman collapsed in the pit with His Majesty expressing 'a desire to suspend the performance' until she was fit for its continuation.⁸⁵ There were two performances taking place simultaneously, with actresses and female audience members both exhibiting their influence within the playhouse, making the theatre an arena for competing femininities.

Public Taste and the Judging Audience

The previous sections justified the public's belief that they held the qualifications necessary to judge theatrical performances, as identified in their improved knowledge of performative techniques. The influence of the public also manifested itself in the choice of plays exhibited on the stage and the style performed by the performers. To remain in the public's favour, managers adapted plays to suit audience tastes, while actresses chose their roles in the knowledge that the morality of their own character was in jeopardy if they were type casted

⁸⁵ *The Times* (London, England), Friday, January 20, 1786; Issue 335.

as corrupt stage characters. Public taste and morality were debated in the media focusing on the authority of the players over their audiences and the breakdown of polite society, which furnished anti-theatrical discourses. The exhibition of vices and sexualised characters threatened social morality – it was feared that audiences would mimic the transgressions seen on the stage. Anxiety also surrounded the performers who feared that their reputations would be tarnished in portraying characters of ill repute. Comedies, such as *The Country Girl* (1766), were regularly debated in newspapers, conduct literature and religious sermons, with the phrase ‘public taste’ appearing often.⁸⁶ David Garrick adapted the play *The Country Wife* to his *Country Girl* in response to the changing demands of audiences who sought a less sexualised and happier conclusion to the drama. *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* recorded that the new revision received the approbation of the public and the author owed much to the ‘little hints’ provided by the audience for the improvement of the piece.⁸⁷

The repercussions of immoral dramas also affected the decisions made by performers who feared a blurring in the distinction between reality and their stage characters. The suggestion of the two being alike or the same could have significantly injured an actress’s position among the upper classes, who would have had to condone her publicly, thus preventing the actress’s elevation in the social ranks. A recent study has revealed how

⁸⁶ *The Country Girl* was altered from William Wycherley’s (1675) *The Country Wife* by David Garrick. This was a tamer version of Wycherley’s offensive and sexually explicate comedy that was deemed ‘too lively’ for the ‘sentimental decency of the times’, which Garrick rewrote for modern tastes. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, December 2, 1774; Issue 1725. For further information see Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 2 of 2, pp. 120-122.

⁸⁷ *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), October 28, 1766 – October 30, 1766; Issue 883.

actresses of the eighteenth century employed the characters they performed to create a public representation and how they exploited the difficulty for audiences to differentiate between an actress's real and fictional character.⁸⁸ The cause of this confusion, the physical closeness between performers and their audience, will be discussed later in an analysis of the imagined intimacy that existed. Successful female performers could negotiate their professional and economic agency with the public's penchant for conventional female virtue because of their celebrated status.⁸⁹ In establishing a public identity associated with particular roles, actresses also secured their right to new roles with similar characteristics, transforming actresses into 'performative properties'.⁹⁰ These permitted actresses to demand specific roles from theatre management, in which their audiences expected to see them perform. This theory can also be applied to less agreeable roles that could damage the woman's character by associating her personae with immorality and anti-social behaviour. In 1775, Tate Wilkinson, manager of the Yorkshire Circuit, was confronted by an actress who was fearful that her reputation was in danger if she agreed to participate in the balled opera *The Beggar's Opera*. According to the manager, he knew not one other play that created such disputes outside of London, as it required a number of leading ladies to portray 'ladies of inferior quality'.⁹¹ No matter if actresses were acknowledged as professionals, their private characters were always in question by audiences, revealing the significance of actresses living a virtuous life outside the theatre to counteract the sexuality that was often portrayed on the stage.

⁸⁸ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-20.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹¹ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 203-204.

Comic actresses were considered professionally beneath the more serious tragic actress, whose sensibility was a virtuous attribute to the more pious public. Images of actresses cross-dressing and speaking crudely in the name of comedy were viewed as the degradation of society. But within the comic genre the audience's tastes extended into the accent of the actress and her acting style. In 1786 an article in *The Times* stated that 'public taste has degenerated...the avidity with which persons of all ranks attend the performances of such actresses as Mrs Jordan and Mrs Brown'.⁹² As already discussed, nationalistic ideals affected the British theatre audience in their preference for home grown actresses over their foreign counterparts. This was also evident in the public's taste in regional dialects and was publicly debated in the press over the merits of the actresses Mrs Jordan and Mrs Brown. Both led successful careers; Mrs Jordan more triumphant than Brown, but the division of the audience over which comic actress was the more socially acceptable posed questions regarding class tastes and geographical location of theatres. The patriotic undertones of the English audience were evident in the debate between Mrs Brown's British accent against the more rural Irish drawl of Mrs Jordan. Theatre audiences could often be defined by their geographical location - rustics verses the cockneys, country verses city folk - but in this instance the London audience was further divided between the educated upper classes and the cockneys or working class Londoners. Newspaper evidence indicates that Mrs Jordan won the public over by her 'natural vivacity' and her *Thalia* characteristics of playfulness and childlike innocence in her *Country Girl* and men's breeches

⁹² *The Times* (London, England) Friday February 03, 1786; Issue 347.

parts.⁹³ Yet the public were still divided on who made the best *Thalia*, Mrs Jordan or her predecessor, Mrs Brown. Three distinct factions appeared in an article dated 1786, where we see the *cockneys* favouring Mrs Jordan, while the *rustics* were for Mrs Brown.⁹⁴ The rustics claimed that Mrs Jordan was a copy of the original, Mrs Brown, yet Mrs Jordan was more natural than her predecessor. However, as one critic stated

*The difference between them in point of merit, is the fame that exists
between an original and a copy – between a sterling shilling and an Irish
brass halfpenny.*⁹⁵

The third group was defined as the ‘whole of the lettered part of the fashionable world, who are the best judges of human nature’.⁹⁶ Their choice was a ‘Little Wilson’, an actress who used less ‘vulgarity’ than Mrs Jordan and her appearance was more delicate than Mrs Brown.⁹⁷ The only fault that the critics could find in this actress was in her singing, which was inferior to Mrs Jordan’s. Was the ‘vulgarity’ identified in Jordan’s performances connected to her Irish nationality, or perhaps the prejudice emerged from a preference of the London wealthy for actresses who were trained and discovered in the capital rather than engaged from rural theatres?

⁹³ *Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, (Hull, England) Tuesday, December 11, 1810; Issue 1248.

⁹⁴ *The Times* (London, England) Thursday February 02, 1786; Issue 346.

⁹⁵ *The Times* (London, England) Friday February 03, 1786; Issue 347.

⁹⁶ *The Times* (London, England) Thursday February 02, 1786; Issue 346.

⁹⁷ It is possible that ‘Little Wilson’ was the actress Sarah Harlowe (1765-1852). Little is known of her early life and it is believed that her name was originally Wilson. According to *The Secret History of the Green Rooms* (1790), the actress chose the name Harlowe believing it would look good on a playbill. Sarah Harlowe’s first recorded appearance on the London stage was on 19 July 1786; five months after this article, as Kitty Sprightly in *All the World’s a Stage*, at the Windsor Castle Inn, Hammersmith. Boase, ‘Harlowe, Sarah (1765-1852)’, rev. Crouch, *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12348>]

London audiences owed much to their rural counterparts, as it was not the educated and refined city theatres that nurtured many of society's most celebrated performers. A diversity of tastes can also be seen between the London audience and spectators outside of the capital. The divide between country and London audiences was most felt in attitudes towards plays like the *Country Girl*, and the questions regarding the morality of performers. The arrogance of the London theatres seems to have been ill founded, as the accounts of country theatre managers and actresses illustrate a superior sense of morality in the country spectator. But most significant is that the majority of celebrated London performers originated outside the metropolis, or learned their trade touring the countryside, only to be lured to the city by the prospects of fame and fortune. The French theatres approached the increased popularity of provincial dramatics differently and attempted to promote the industry by entrusting the royal company, *Comédie-Francaise*, with advising provincial performers. In doing so, the royal court acknowledged the provincial theatres as arenas of recruitment for the capital's playhouses and so in aiding and training rural performers, the *Comédie-Francaise* was ensuring the dignity and taste of the Parisian public was upheld.⁹⁸ Another motivator for the standardising of theatrical practices was to sustain competitiveness and profit from the provincial audience's interest, through their attendance to the capital's theatres to view the country's celebrated performers. In Britain, mimicry of the fashions and performances of the London stages were not regulated, with managers pandering to the demands of their audiences, with examples such as the York audience taking a dislike to the popular London opera, the *Beggar's Opera*. Nonetheless, provincial companies remained a vast talent pool for London managers.

⁹⁸ Clay, 'Provincial Actors', pp. 659-660.

Performative talents were honed and developed in the travelling companies and rustic barns, where country audiences exhibited and exercised their moral convictions. The Yorkshire Circuit Theatre Manager, Tate Wilkinson observed that the characters of the *Country Girl* were coarse and not modern, and to 'the credit of Yorkshire, that comedy has never been classed as a pleasing play, even when Mrs Jordan performed the part'.⁹⁹ Wilkinson used the shifting weather as a metaphor in his theory on the transformation of audience tastes, acknowledging that his 'theatrical barometer' was 'much guided by London criticisms and decisions.'¹⁰⁰ He called this his 'Barometer for man's faculties' whereby the performers moved between the stormy passions of an unfriendly audience to the glorious sunshine at the height of a performer's career. Country theatres received the censorship of London as being uncultivated and modest playhouses, and yet many of the great players originated from theatres outside the metropolis, including Mrs Jordan, Miss Farren and Mrs Robinson. The abilities of these actresses were noticed by poaching London managers who 'will ever seize all such as attract fame so well' and the unfortunate country managers had to 'submit to their strong bow wows'.¹⁰¹ Wilkinson rested the blame on London's theatres, yet the prospect of a London career would have been the ultimate goal of a young actress, eager to become celebrated. While the managers facilitated a move to London stages, the success of an actress solely rested on herself, having to compete with the beauty, wit and accents of London born actresses. Country theatricals facilitated in the education of actresses, acting as nurseries for the theatre and prepared actresses for the hardships of a

⁹⁹ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, pp. 164-165.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 206.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 246.

London career, exhibiting the determination of those who chose to attempt to gain favour with the metropolitan audiences.

The theatre formed an arena for public debate often with the performers as the catalysts for moral discourses. The sexually-ambiguous characters enacted on the stage, particularly those that required actresses to wear men's attire, raised another concern over the appropriate age of performers. An actress's career was linked to her age and beauty; therefore, budding actresses began their stage careers from an early age with spectators preferring to watch a youthful maiden rather than an elderly actress as leading lady. John Philip Kemble, actor and manager of Covent-Garden theatre, compared the Playhouse to a court room, with the audience as judge and jury and the performers as defendants.¹⁰² His statement formed an argument in the defence of a young girl who was criticised for attempting to perform an inappropriate role raising questions over the corruption of children and the tastes of a provincial audience over London spectators. The girl in question was a Miss Mudie who rose to fame as a child actress in Liverpool. A newspaper reported in 1805 that the first appearance of the young Miss Mudie on the Covent-Garden stage, resulted in 'hissing, clapping, cries of – Off, off Manager, Manager! Kemble, Kemble!'¹⁰³ The article began by firstly congratulating the public for the low numbers of attendees at the theatre that night and secondly, for their censure of this young actress, whose audience in her provincial theatre had 'pronounced her equal , if not superior, to Master Betty', the celebrated child actor at the time.¹⁰⁴ Miss Mudie was an eight year old child who was given

¹⁰² *Hull Packet*, Tuesday December 03, 1805; Issue 986.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Arditti, 'William Henry West Betty 1791-1873' [<http://www.michaelarditti.com/master-betty/>]

the enormous role of Miss Peggy in *The Country Girl*. The author of the newspaper article was unforgiving in his critique of the child, stating she 'possesses no talents', her voice 'childishly shrill and feeble' and her petite size in comparison to the other performers of the piece 'struck every body with sentiments of ridicule'.¹⁰⁵ The performance was an embarrassment, not only for Kemble, but for her fellow performers, particularly the actor Brunton who played the stage lover of a 'baby scarcely tall enough to reach his knee, and who was in imminent danger of being trod upon every time he approached her.'¹⁰⁶ The audience's dissatisfaction increased when Kemble attempted to justify the engagement of the child who did not fulfil the London public's expectations.

*Ladies and Gentlemen – The great success which Miss Mudie has met with at several provincial theatres, induced her friends to hope that she possesses merit sufficient to offer herself before that tribunal in which your judgement was to decide [loud applause]. Far be it from the wish of the managers of this theatre to press upon you any species of entertainment which does not meet your decided approbation. They only hope that, as the play has proceeded so far, you will permit Miss Mudie to finish her character...I hope you will grant this favour; as this shall be the last night of Miss Mudie's performance here. [applauses]*¹⁰⁷

Miss Mudie arrived in London from a Lilliputian theatre where she was considered to be one of the finest child performers on the stage. London audiences regarded themselves as highly educated 'and refined by a series of masters in the dramatic art; by Foote,

¹⁰⁵ *Hull Packet*, Tuesday December 03, 1805; Issue 986.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Henderson, Garrick and Cooke'.¹⁰⁸ Thus, only a London audience could give proper criticism and teach 'sensible players to respect and to fear the public voice.'¹⁰⁹ The play chosen for Miss Mudie's entrance to the London stage was controversial, even more so for a child to perform. The plot focused on the corruption and seduction of innocence and tricks employed by a rake in order to obtain access to entrap women. The author of this article argued that the outcome of introducing children to plays like this would only 'contaminate their morals and initiate them into the paths of vice'.¹¹⁰ By enticing a girl of seven or eight into an adult role, which addressed complicated plots and glorified vice and seduction, the child could not possibly differentiate between what was acceptable in society and what was to be seen only on the stage. Therefore, like many of the conduct books published in the eighteenth century, the argument about the depravity of the theatre was strengthened by the use of innocent and impressionable children to portray adult themes. This is possibly the explanation of why so few attended Miss Mudie's debut. Kemble had gambled with the public's taste for comedy and the latest vogue of child actors, which resulted in the audience's outburst, the disruption of the play and the removal of the young child from that stage, never to return. The audience as a collective, dictated the future career of the young girl and their power resulted in the end of her career. Yet an alternative interpretation of the events suggests the public's judgment was not to harm the child's career, but rather to protect her from the dogmatic theatre management and to safeguard female virtue.

¹⁰⁸ *Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, (Hull, England) Tuesday, December 11, 1810; Issue 1248.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Hull Packet*, Tuesday December 03, 1805; Issue 986.

When theatre managers attempted to apply their authority and neglected the theatre's target audience, the disruptiveness of spectators often escalated into riots and the possible closure of the theatre. The performers became innocent bystanders as management and the public squabbled. As audiences became aware of their political influences, they began to seek 'parallels with state affairs in the theatre' and exercised their perceived authority over thespians.¹¹¹ This occurred in 1809 when the collective dissatisfaction of the Covent Garden audience erupted from a rise in ticket prices and the transformation of the playhouse's third tier (originally allocated for general public use) into private boxes only affordable for the wealthy. The *Old Price Riots* (often referred to as the OP riots) was politically and culturally a significant event, in exhibiting a united public, no longer divided by class, struggling to exert their influence within the theatrical sphere. Men and women from both working and genteel society were among the rioters, so this disturbance was not class or gender driven.¹¹² For the theatre, the riots demonstrated the hierarchical structure of the entertainment when money was at stake - the audience placed at the top, firmly letting theatre managers know 'how determined the public are to oppose *one innovation*, they [the theatre managers] will know better than to attempt *another*.'¹¹³ 'Emancipating both the Public and the Performers from the caprice of exclusive establishments' was the desired effect of the audience's protest and, although the public did receive an apology by a sheepish Kemble, it is doubtful the riots affected the situation of the players in a positive way who suffered three months of disruptions and heckling. The cause of this 'violence and hostility' which prevailed 'over order and decency', was the increase from six shillings to

¹¹¹ Hughes, *The Drama's Patron*, p. 9.

¹¹² Baer, *Theatre and Disorder*, p. 14.

¹¹³ *The Morning Post* (London, England), Tuesday, September 19, 1809; Issue 12057.

seven for a box, four shillings for the pit, from the original price of three shillings and sixpence and a tier that was originally retained for the public, was now converted into twenty-six private boxes with an annual rent of £300, dramatically reducing the number of cheaper seats in the house.¹¹⁴ The argument over the immorality that was assumed to take place within such private boxes was yet another cause of antagonism towards the new additions.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the audience were displeased with the theatre manager's decision to employ Madame Angelica Catalani, and demanded that more British opera singers be seen on the London stages, chanting 'God Save the King – no Foreigners – no Catalani – no Kemble'.¹¹⁶ On the opening night, 18 September 1809, commotion erupted throughout the two billed plays, with the audience happily believing they had succeeded in persuading Kemble to return to the old ticket prices; they began 'to celebrate by loud huzzas from all parts of the house.'¹¹⁷ The celebrated Mrs Siddons could not appease the audience, and sought the assistance of Mr Justice Read and several Bow-Street police officers. The *Riot Act* was read, which resulted in 'loud hisses' and many of the ladies in the house fainting from the extreme heat. In the early hours of the morning the crowds dispersed, expecting the manager, to yield to their wishes, which he did not.¹¹⁸ Newspaper reports depicted the event in favour of the public and anticipated their impending success in reducing the prices, stating;

¹¹⁴ *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Tuesday, September 19, 1809; Issue 12592.

¹¹⁵ *The Bury and Norwich Post: or, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Ely Advertiser* (Bury Saint Edmunds, England), Wednesday, December 20, 1809; Issue 1434.

¹¹⁶ *Crowds: Stanford Humanities Laboratory*, curated by Susan Schuyler, 2002 [<http://hotgates.stanford.edu/CrowdsWhiteSite/galleries/theatreriot/page2.htm>] *The Morning Post* (London, England) Tuesday, September 19, 1809; Issue 12057.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England, Tuesday, September 19, 1809; Issue 12592.

*The eye is struck with the uniformity of the audience part of the House,
and we should think that from the regular form of the area the voice will
distinctly heard; but we must wait for a more favourable occasion to form
an adequate judgment.*¹¹⁹

Their efforts and demands were not heard for a further 65 nights, yet the audience was not considered to be officially causing a riot - no violence occurred within this period of protest. It was simply the 'unremitting noise of cat-calls, howling, whistling, and drumming with their feet', allowing 'not a word or note' to be heard.¹²⁰ Subsequent to Kemble's apology, the audience was still unsatisfied even with the return to the old prices and the removal of the new private boxes. They wanted the metaphorical sacrifice of the Book & Housekeeper to the Theatre, Mr Brandon, who was hastily dismissed, causing 'the loud and general war-cry of the O.P.'s', with a large placard hoisted from the pit with the words '*We are Satisfied.*'.¹²¹ No physical harm came to any of the actresses, yet the scorn and hostility of the audience must have been felt as no sympathetic pleas for the welfare of the performers were evident during this time. The OP riots have been identified as a significant display of an organised social movement that aimed to defend the British economy and morality, with the years 1790-1810 as a 'transition era', which saw the theatre as catalyst of a new social movement.¹²² This movement appeared to be genderless, with both men and women participating in the disturbances, and yet the image of women materialised as central to the dispute – originating from a threat to a young girl's innocence and extending to the morality

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Wednesday, September 20, 1809; Issue 12593.

¹²¹ *The Bury and Norwich Post: or, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, and Ely Advertiser* (Bury Saint Edmunds, England), Wednesday, December 20, 1809; Issue 1434.

¹²² Baer, *Theatre and Disorder*, p. 48.

of the theatre's female spectators. The lack of violence throughout the riots can also be interpreted as demonstrating the public's concern for the safety of the female audience and therefore made the OP riots an important movement for gender construction.

In their attempt to raise the profits of the theatre by reducing the numbers of lower class seats, the manager and investors had insulted perhaps the most influential section of the audience. The lower classes situated in the pits and galleries were the most vocal and impetuous spectators, prepared to react if it felt an injustice to either themselves or their favourite thespian. The image of the actress was highly significant for this faction of the public – the majority of actresses originated from the lower classes and their success in rising above their station gave hope to others. Both the actress and the lower class spectators were dependent on the other, the actress requiring approval and the audience wishing to live vicariously through the woman as she was accepted into the circles of society's elite. The transience of actresses, shifting through class boundaries and their ability to mimic ladies of the nobility, demonstrated the performance and variableness of social status.¹²³ This changeable nature of a person's social position has already been observed in the elevation of the Countess of Coventry who assumed superiority over the actress George Anne Bellamy. The celebration of actresses exposed the lower and middle classes in the audience to the possibility of social advancement. However, the success of actresses could also manifest a jealousy among their public. The authority held by the lower ranks of the audience suggests that shifts in theatrical tastes represented the lower class styles more so than those of the fashionable society. Above the lower classes sat the

¹²³ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 43.

‘footmen of the nobility’ in the upper gallery where the price for admittance was as little as one or two shillings.¹²⁴ The pits seated those classed between the upper nobility of the boxes and the servants in the galleries. Merchants and professional men made up the majority of the pit audience, essentially the ever growing middle class. Analyses of eighteenth-century audiences, place the greatest influence emerging from the galleries and pits held over those in the boxes and the high regard held by the theatre managers and players for these sections of the house.¹²⁵ It was recorded that occasionally gentlemen in the boxes would draw their swords if they felt either a favourite actress had been insulted or their own status in society had been wounded, while those in the galleries expressed themselves more volubly and ‘often with a shower of decaying fruit or dried peas.’¹²⁶

Although the methods adopted by the fashionable audience detailed in the 1751 pamphlet *A Guide to the Stage* - loud discourse and statements of displeasure - were effective in upsetting an actress, it could be argued that the methods undertaken by the gallery and pit were more disruptive and forcible, resulting in choices of play and performers reflecting more the tastes of the lower classes in an effort to appease the audience. Therefore, although the upper classes deemed themselves the connoisseurs of high art and culture, it is possible that in reality the tastes of the lower classes were actually shaping society’s concepts of culture and thus, shaping the upper classes who had maintained that it was they who were the models of society. Paradoxically, actresses were viewed as instructors

¹²⁴ Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, p. 203.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204. For further reading on the influence of the pit audience, see Ravel ‘*La Reine Boit!*’ pp. 391-411. Ravel examines the role of the parterre (French equivalent of the British theatre’s pit) in the disturbances that emerged from Voltaire’s play *Mariamne* (1724).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

and models of fashion and etiquette for the lower classes, so arguably actresses were the dictators of theatrical tastes if we are to believe that the spectators outside the theatre boxes held the greatest authority among the audience.

Interaction with the Audience

Up until the second half of the eighteenth century, playhouses were often overflowing, with audiences seated on the stage where they interacted with the performers, while also engaging in conversation with the audience before the curtain. The actor and theatre manager, David Garrick, was recorded to have complained about the two audiences present within the theatre that removed dramatic illusion and damaged the integrity of theatrical performance, often making it difficult to separate the performers from the audience.¹²⁷ However, this has been challenged by research that argues the visibility of the public, particularly female spectators, on the stage added to the authority of actresses and women in the public sphere. Using the example of the 1746 performance of *The Fair Penitent* in Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre, George Anne Bellamy portrayed the female protagonist, Calista, and the image of the actress addressing her public while surrounded by female audience members upon the stage is believed to have added credence to her words of defiance against masculine governance.¹²⁸ In addressing members of the audience as part of the performance, actresses were appealing to mutual female experiences of subordination to gain support.¹²⁹ And yet the liberty exhibited by gentlemen and

¹²⁷ Davies, *Life of David Garrick*, p.329.

¹²⁸ Harris, 'Outside the Box', p. 55.

¹²⁹ For further reading on the use of epilogues by actresses to engage with the female audience, see Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p.p. 127-136. Nussbaum argues that actresses would often break character to

gentlewomen while seated upon stage, could be detrimental to the actresses personal character. It has been briefly mentioned, that the close proximity of the audience and performers often created an imaginary intimacy, whereby audiences believed their stage personas as true to life. This perhaps says more about the skill of the performers and in actresses' business sense to utilise their stage characters to establish an identity that audiences admired through the patronage of the theatre and of consumable goods such as actress memoirs, creating a celebrity status. However, an opposite public reaction could also take place, with actresses being identified as immoral seductresses and or prostitutes, from their appearance in plays and operas such as the *Beggar's Opera*.

The close interaction between actresses and their audiences sometimes posed both a threat to the woman's reputation and a physical danger to the performer; yet throughout the century precautions were implemented in the actress's favour. Similar to the voyeurism displayed in the consumerism and distribution of actress images, the admiration of the public could escalate to dangerous levels with confusion over the sexual accessibility of the actress. For a sum of money an individual could purchase her image, attend the theatre and be entertained by the actress. The individual may have also socialised with the actress and become a patron, making female players commodities that could be attained for a price. It was perceived that no boundaries lay between the actress and her audience. Regardless of rank, once a person had purchased a ticket the actress transformed into a public servant employed to entertain. Mrs Jordan experienced this from a discontented personal cook.

squabble or flatter certain members of the audience and demonstrated the participation of all within the theatre, both on and off the stage.

Unhappy with her dismissal and final wages, the cook boldly announced 'Arrah now, honey, with this thirteener, won't I sit in the gallery? And won't I give your Royal Highness a howl, and a hiss into the bargain?'¹³⁰ George Anne Bellamy stressed a similar concern in her *Apology*, recording that she could not bear to remain as an actress when 'every fool who happened to be possessed of a fortune, should think himself licensed to take liberties with me'.¹³¹ The actress was unprotected from the criticism of those who were socially beneath her outside the theatre along with those above her station. And yet the stage, by the end of the century, acted as a barrier that protected performers from a physically abusive audience.

Prior to 1763, when David Garrick made the unpopular decision to restrict the access of the audience in Drury Lane Theatre, wealthy spectators freely roamed backstage and as well as permission onto the stage. Actresses often had to contend with intoxicated audience members who obstructed their entrance on and off stage, occasionally pushing the boundaries between performance and reality. George Anne Bellamy suffered the inappropriate actions of a gentleman while performing in Dublin, who had mistaken her disposition as that of the character she was playing, confusing her moral integrity and sexual freedom that resulted in his assault on the actress. Mr St Leger kissed the actress's neck while she passed the stage door where he stood, resulting in Bellamy slapping the gentleman in retaliation. Her reprisal of the gentleman served not only as a natural reaction, but also demonstrated to the audience that Bellamy was a respectable woman and not to

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 344.

¹³¹ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 151.

be perceived as a common harlot. However, there was also a danger that striking a man of superior rank in a 'violent and unbecoming' exhibition may have caused the actress the scorn of her public.¹³² According to Bellamy's account, Lord Chesterfield was the first spectator to rise from his seat and applaud the actress for her commendable reaction towards the gentleman, who was later forced to make a public apology for his deplorable decorum.¹³³ Bellamy claimed that it was this incident that initiated the theatre manager Sheridan's actions in introducing a new directive, which prohibited gentlemen entry behind the scenes.¹³⁴ Whether or not Bellamy's assault was catalyst for Sheridan's decision or if it was the incident with Kelly and his gentlemen friends, the actions in the Irish theatre shaped the configuration of the London playhouses.¹³⁵ David Garrick, manager of Drury Lane Theatre, had observed the effect of Sheridan's ruling and the opposition he had faced in shutting the stage door to gentlemen. A similar occurrence had taken place in France in 1760, yet the success of both countries in restricting the freedom of gentlemen backstage was viable only with legal support.¹³⁶ Sheridan endured due to what he called 'the sanction of legal authority', derived from Sheridan being acquitted and allowed to resume theatrical performances, while Kelly and his supporters were found guilty of assault.¹³⁷ In France, the Comte de Lauragais 'delivered the French stage from this gross impropriety' by obtaining

¹³² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 137.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 137.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* It was not uncommon for audience members to be seated on the fringes of the stage and Mrs Cibber, while in the character of *Juliet*, found her only available route on stage to the Capulet's tomb, was by 'pushing her way' through the crowds of spectators. Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, pp. 202-203.

¹³⁵ During the Kelly riot in Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre, women became instrumental in the regulation of the theatre in Ireland – from Kelly's attack on the actress Mrs Dyer, to the non violent protests of the gentlemen who were attentive to the delicacy of the female audience. For further reading see, Harris, 'Outside the Box', and Thomson, 'Sheridan, Thomas (1719?-1788)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25371>]

¹³⁶ Davis, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 330.

¹³⁷ Burke, 'Acting in the periphery', p. 222.

permission from the king to forbid the audience entering the stage.¹³⁸ With both these prototypes, Garrick decided to enlarge Drury-Lane theatre, to increase the number of seating, thus excusing his decision to remove the 'illiberal behaviour' by banishing the public from the stage and recapturing the performance on stage for the players.¹³⁹

The manipulation exhibited by actresses over their audiences was primarily utilised against rival performers rather than aimed at those outside of the theatre community or above the actress's own social standing. This may be due to the actress understanding that she was more likely to succeed in her persuasion if her chosen target was of the same or lower social status, with an ambiguous character and exposed to public criticism. Fainting and jeering were common techniques employed by rival actresses in manipulating audiences - one actress went to excessive lengths to divert the public's attentions from her rival by creating hysteria claiming she saw a ghost. Others sought to impose on the public's sympathies and generate bias by portraying themselves as the victims of a rival's ruthlessness, as was discussed in chapter two.¹⁴⁰ Actresses could also take their revenge against an unreceptive

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-331. In a letter published in 1747, Thomas Sheridan defended his character in an affidavit to a grand-jury, claiming that his actions against Kelly were for the preservation of his property and the maintenance of public peace. Sheridan's self-righteousness and the fact that no prosecution was brought against him, may explain what the manager meant by 'legal authority'. *George Faulkner the Dublin Journal* (Dublin, Ireland), February 17, 1747 – February 21, 1747; Issue 2080.

¹³⁹ Davis, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 331-333. Garrick's 'plan of reformation' was completed in 1762 and influenced his rival theatre's practices. In 1763 a letter was published referring to Covent-Garden theatre's management's decision to remove the 'nuisance' of persons admitted behind the scenes, which the author saw as a 'reasonable and necessary regulation'. *Gazatter and London Daily Advertiser* (London, England) Wednesday, October 12 1763; Issue 10789.

¹⁴⁰ George Anne Bellamy notoriously held a rivalry against the actress Mrs Furnival. See *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 131-136. The great tradgian, Mrs Siddons criticised the comedian Mrs Jordan on her rustic appearance, fearful of the young actress's success in London. See Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 61. But Siddons's greatest rival was an actress within her specified genre, Mrs Yates, and a caricature depicting both women brawling was published in 1782. See *The Rival Queens of Covent Garden and Drury Lane Theatre, at a Gymnastic Rehearsal!* (c.1782)

audience or management who did not submit to their wishes. Mrs Jordan demonstrated her anger towards an unfavourable audience in York by claiming she was too ill to perform during the 1787 season. Jordan had established herself as a celebrated London actress and the slight she received from the provincial audience and the manager, Tate Wilkinson, resulted in her sending a substitute who was an inferior performer and unwelcomed by the spectators.¹⁴¹ Actresses at the height of the profession exploited the fame they had earned, in influencing public opinion and fashionable tastes.

The talents of an actress could be measured by the success of her mimicry and allusion to a lady of fashion. Actresses offered the public an alternative image of femininity compared to women born into wealth who were automatically perceived as virtuous creatures, unlike women born from the lower classes who were expected to learn how to become virtuous by observing the manners of the wealthy. A successful actress could transcend class boundaries owing to her beauty, intelligence and ability to perform the role of aristocratic ladies on and off the stage. It has been argued that the ability of actresses to mimic genteel ladies demonstrated the performative nature of class identity.¹⁴² Their success in doing so challenged patrimonial privileges and perceived feminine authority held by gentlewomen and women of the nobility. The appeal of actresses above their wealthier counterparts lay in their ambiguous morality and the suspicion that as women who performed for the

¹⁴¹ In London, the audience's 'preference of her was unshaken to the last' compared to the cold reception she received from York. Her replacement, Miss Barnes, was inexperienced and the abuse she suffered on her first appearance resulted in her retirement from the stage. Miss Barnes exemplified the differing standards of a country actress to a London performer and facilitated Jordan's scorn of the York audience. Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 189 & 110.

¹⁴² Rosenthal, 'Entertaining Women', p. 166.

public's entertainment, they would likely agree to perform for the private benefit of a paying gentleman. Already observed in the gifts actresses such as Mary Robinson received from their adoring patrons and lovers, the acceptance of actresses into respectable society proved the skill of actresses in mimicking the wealthy. This was not exclusively exhibited by actresses, as male performers similarly impersonated upper class characters on the stage and dressed accordingly. A young Mr Fleetwood exercised his gentlemanlike appearance in evading a bailiff who then mistook a legitimate gentleman for the actor. While attending a play in Beverley (c.1773) Sir Charles Hotham (1729-1794) was mistaken for the actor who had run high debts from an extravagant lifestyle.¹⁴³ Sir Charles' blue suit was similar to that worn by the actor the previous night, and led to his assault from a bailiff who stated that he knew who his prisoner was 'for all his play-house tinsel and tringum tranghams' proved that he was an actor.¹⁴⁴ Sir Charles' finery and fashion only strengthened the bailiff's conviction that the gentleman must have been an actor. The exhibition of wealth was a practice observed upon the stage to add to the illusion of grandeur, while off the stage this behaviour was utilised by actresses to conceal their true social status. The professional advancement of actresses provided them with the means to purchase fine jewellery and clothing, and was injurious to the distinction of fashionable ladies, allowing actresses to surpass these women as fashion icons.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ For a brief history on the life of Charles Hotham see, Capern & Pyle, 'Charles Hotham: an eighteenth-century life in letters'.

¹⁴⁴ Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 181.

¹⁴⁵ Frances Abington was one of the actresses during the period who became admired for her fashion, exemplified by the popularity of the night-cap she wore on stage. The 'Abington cap' refers to the night cap the actress wore in James Townley's farce *High Life below Stairs*, which Abington performed in Dublin 1759. Oddey, 'Abington, Frances (1737-1815)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/51>]

Conclusion

The Yorkshire Theatre Circuit manager, Tate Wilkinson observed that when an ill-humoured audience attended the playhouse ‘no persons suffer the lash more severely than the players’ who were considered to be the lowest class of servants.¹⁴⁶ But eighteenth-century actresses were not simply the victims of their subordination – they had the ability to transcend the restrictions of their social status with the aid of their sexuality and manipulate the public in their favour. The symbiotic relationship that existed between an actress and her public confirmed the importance of these women in representing Britain’s cultural achievements on the stage while outside the theatre actresses symbolised the wealth for their patrons.

Patrons sought to acquire actresses at the height of their profession, beauty and talent, thus becoming the envy of their companions while also displaying their wealth and authority. In return, actresses aspired to receive patronage that would further their careers and could therefore be selective in their decision. When George Anne Bellamy chose Count Haslang, Imperial and Bavarian ambassador, as a patron, ‘suspicious minds’ assumed that such a connection would be accompanied with sexual favours. The actress denied this and argued that if she wished to obtain a ‘tender connection’ with a patron, she could have chosen from a number of solicitations from gentlemen who could provide an extravagant lifestyle.¹⁴⁷ Bellamy had chosen Haslang above the others as he became a confidante and father figure who did not blur the boundaries between patron and lover. Patrons

¹⁴⁶Wilkinson, *Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 144.

¹⁴⁷ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 4 of 5, p. 111.

represented financial assistance to performers, presenting gifts and introducing their beneficiary to influential individuals and prospective sponsors. The social status of an actress was elevated if her presence was accepted among society's elite. This ensured her increasing notoriety and fed the voyeuristic hunger of the public who attended the playhouses to glimpse at the source of the *Bon Ton's* interest. The public's hopes of seeing celebrated actresses led to greater theatre attendance and thus enhanced an actress's financial worth to the theatre's management, assuring her greater engagements and stage characters. Within the theatre, patrons served as protectors and supporters to their actresses by rallying the audience in support of her, and were also utilised against rival actresses to undermine their performance and place doubt in the minds of the public over the virtue of the rival's character.

Actresses could engage with an audience's empathy – often pleading themselves the innocent victims of unnecessary insult. This manipulation took place against both rival actresses and the occasional spectator whose critique or distracting commentary interrupted the thespian's performance. When audience members took on a performative role within the theatre and became the spectacle, exposed the threat felt by the wealthy, who deemed it necessary to distract attention away from players. In doing so, their actions reveal the influence and capability of actresses in becoming more admirable women to the lower classes than gentlewomen, removing hierarchy and promoting alternative images of femininity that advocated women's influence in the public sphere. The rudeness exhibited by individual spectators not only affected the performers, but the audience also felt the injustice and created solidarity among the differing classes not seen before. The actress, it

may be argued was the catalyst for a united audience, who in defending the performer and voicing their anger over the disruption of their entertainment, overlooked class divisions to voice a single demand. When an audience did not come to the defence of an actress and instead erupted into riots, it was not a reflection on the performers but rather against theatrical management who attempted to impose their authority over the public. In the hierarchy of the theatre it is difficult to establish where the position of the actress lay. Felicity Nussbaum's new work on the influence of actresses in making the theatre a commercial success and the rivalry that existed between actresses and their male counterparts, proposes that the relationship between actresses and theatre patrons was founded on a hierarchical social order, which was preserved by the subordinate dependence of the actress on her patrons.¹⁴⁸ However, the admiration of female performers and the consumption of their painted images, would suggest a more complex picture with both parties benefitting to some extent from the relationship in almost a contractual way. Theatre managers emerged as being beneath the authority of the audience and, therefore, dependent on the successful performance of the actress; managers were dependent on the public's favour and financing, altering plays and themes that appealed to their targeted audience and making compromises with actresses as needs arose. The spectators exerted influence over the theatre in their numbers of attendance and in their appraisal through vocal interaction within the playhouse, with the actress appearing both vulnerable and domineering.

¹⁴⁸ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, p. 146.

Actresses were exposed to public criticism and scandal and yet their vulnerability aided in their influence over their public by appealing to the feminine qualities. Their perceived weakness bolstered their image in accordance to contemporary gender roles, making them acceptable members of society and thus gaining them public admiration and freedom to transcend social boundaries. Previous theatrical research has argued that the lower classes situated in the pits and galleries dictated the taste and tone of an audience and yet these classes looked upon the actress for guidance on social etiquette and fashion.¹⁴⁹ Actresses' ability to appear genteel and fashionable, revealed the vulnerability of class identities, whereby actresses utilised their talents to perform the roles of gentlewomen and could easily be mistaken for genteel ladies outside the theatre. Significantly, many of the superior actresses originated from the lower classes and represented an enchanted rags to riches story that served as encouragement for a heterogeneous audience that social advancement was possible and firmly placing the actress as an essential element of British culture.

¹⁴⁹ Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery*, pp. 203-204. Straub, 'The making of an English audience', pp. 131-142.

The Actress and the Print Media

Biography but seldom selects its ornaments from the gentler sex. Women are devoted as much by nature as custom to the domestic duties. Their merits are to be felt in their homes and in their offspring; if the former be well ordered, and the later well bred, the charm of both may without hesitation be ascribed to the mistress and the mother.¹

Biographies, memoirs, newspapers and similar forms of print were effective mediums for the characterisation of actresses. Often this group of women were portrayed as a scourge on society or as victims of their social circumstances – female poverty and sexual abuse. Many actresses accepted their perceived victimisation and even utilised it to their advantage by gaining public sympathy and support. Actresses could be skilful manipulators of their audience's emotions and in reality were not as helpless as how they were represented. The voyeuristic hunger for scandal presented female professionals with a niche market in readership and allowed women the opportunity to mould their public representation. Many of the actresses to be examined in the following paragraphs chose to display their feminine agency by playing a significant role in the recording of their own history. George Anne Bellamy was acknowledged as the author of her five volume narrative, which was later contradicted by the editor of the work, Alexander Bicknell, who claimed authorship.² Both Sophia Baddeley and Ann Catley heavily influenced the writing of their

¹ Boaden, *The Memoirs of Mrs Siddons*, p. 1.

² *The Pall Mall Gazette*, (London) Wednesday, November 6, 1872; Issue 2412.

memoirs, as both their biographers were close confidants to the actresses. James Boaden, a celebrated historical theatre recorder was both an admirer and the biographer to both Mrs Siddons and Mrs Jordan recording details of their private and public personas. The publication of the personal lives of actresses at the height of their profession, gave the general public a sense of ownership and ability to associate with women who often originated from the lower classes. Regardless of social status or wealth, actresses embodied a peripheral class of women whose transience intrigued the public. Yet, although actresses displayed 'male ambition' which 'rarely tempts the modest reserve of...females', many authors attempted to exhibit them under the prescribed domestic roles, as mothers, daughters and wives.³ In doing so, actresses were portrayed as principled women who did not neglect their female duties and were therefore more acceptable figures for the youth to admire.⁴ If an actress was known for her indiscretions, then her memoirs served as a platform for public apology and redemption – as in George Anne Bellamy's *Apology*. In Bellamy's memoirs the actress blamed her poor judgement on youthful naivety and the callous seductions of gentlemen who preyed on the girl, which exhibited the actress's 'power to detract from the disapprobation that ought to accompany the detail of her errors'.⁵

An actress's manipulation over newspaper and satirical prints was less evident, yet even negative publicity still served as self-promotion and could aid in career advancement. John Allen Stevenson argued that bad publicity was 'better than no publicity', in his examination

³ Boaden, *The Memoirs of Mrs Siddons*, p. 1.

⁴ Howard, 'A bright pattern to all her sex', p. 234.

⁵ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, March 25, 1785; Issue 15862.

into Charles Edward Stuart's fondness for Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749).⁶ Fielding's novel was critical of the 1745 rebellion and even satirised Charles Stuart himself. After re-examining Fielding's political position within the novel, Stevenson could only speculate that in his later years, Charles Stuart admired the text due to his own vanity and the fact that the novel was widely-read and popular for its social commentary. The appearance of actresses in articles critical of their characters and in gossip columns were beneficial in creating a public awareness of the actress, which could be moulded into a representation that was acceptable for celebration. Actresses participated in the production of such newspaper accounts by associating with characters of public interest that made performing women a rich source of scandal. However, women were not merely the subject matter of articles, but were sometimes involved in the print industry during the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century. The extent of work performed by women was limited to the amount that could be performed within the home, with the book trade in London existing as a 'series of small family-owned and operated businesses', the role of a wife within a family-run business an 'economic necessity'.⁷ However, regardless of the roles performed by a wife within a home business, women remained restricted under rigid gender constraints as described in literature. Kathryn Shevelow mapped the development of John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* and the paper *Addison's Tatler* by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, to explore the entrance of women into the print culture.⁸ Shevelow's pioneering theory was

⁶ Stevenson, 'Tom Jones and the Stuarts', p. 571.

⁷ McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, pp. 33 & 38.

⁸ See also Berry's *Gender, Society and Print Culture*, for an in-depth analysis on the *Athenian Mercury* periodical, which Berry argues was a culturally driven publication that was influenced and shaped by its readers. Written in the first person, the publication's popularity came from the answering of questions submitted from the public.

that by differentiating men and women on the pages of widely circulated papers, a unique ideal of femininity was formulated, whereby women were 'different in kind rather than degree from men'.⁹ This was performed by emphasising women's authority within the household, separating the genders while also allowing for equal shares of agency to exist. Yet actresses existed outside the home in the public sphere, which contradicted the prescribed female authority that was represented in the periodicals examined by Shevelow.

The discourse surrounding the interaction between the reader and newspaper points to an increase of female readership during the eighteenth-century and the acceptance of publications written by women and directed at a female audience that revolved around the concerns of the fairer sex. The *Tatler* and other early periodicals were heavily dependent on the submission of letters from the public, which included women who requested advice from the editor regarding daily issues such as love and household affairs.¹⁰ The publication of such normative concerns served in the construction of the feminine disposition and explains the hostility towards actresses in the first half of the century. Actresses were concerned with the masculine traits of ambition and career progression, rather than solely the worries of household management, thus acting contrary to their gender. It has been argued that the influence of women's domestic authority represented in early periodicals, aided in the refinement of masculine manners and the cultivation of polite society. The editors of the *Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Steele and Addison, encouraged the readership and contribution of women, which in turn improved their male readership to act more

⁹ Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24

gentlemanly by discarding aggressive behaviour and brutal sports, but maintaining 'manly courage and readiness for war' through the protection of women.¹¹ Early periodicals mimicked the format of conduct literature, prescribing and directing the behaviour of the female gender. There is little reference to early newspapers within this study as actresses rarely featured in their pages, but by the mid-eighteenth century individuals such as Robert Dodsley (1704-1764) and Edward Topham (1751-1820) with close connections to the theatre ventured into newspaper publications.

Both Dodsley and Topham had been employed in theatricals - Dodsley was a poet and author of several plays before he established the paper *The World* (1753) and later ventured onto another publication the *London Chronicle*, followed by the *Annual Register* in 1759 with the author Edmund Burke.¹² Edward Topham was a playwright prior to his involvement with the *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (1787) which was a periodical originally produced to celebrate the actress and Topham's mistress, Mrs Wells (1762-1829).¹³ However, according to her three volume memoirs, Mrs Wells complained that she was left with much of the 'burden' in running the newspaper. Letters written by Topham related instructions for her to 'Take care of The World', while reporting on theatrical occurrences and the more serious news such as the corruption claims in the Hastings trial (1788-1795).¹⁴ According to Mrs Wells, her duties within the newspaper were so extensive that Topham

¹¹ Lincoln, 'War and the Culture of Politeness', p. 65

¹² Tierney, 'Dodsley, Robert (1704-1764),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7755>]

¹³ Stephens, 'Topham, Edward (1751-1820),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27551>]

¹⁴ *Anecdotes and correspondence of celebrated Actors and Actresses*, Vol. 1 of 3, pp. 56 & 60 & 82. The Hastings Trial was the widely published trial of the Governor-General of India, Warren Hastings (1732-1818) who was accused of corruption while in Calcutta.

promised to give the actress a share of ownership, which he conveniently forgot once the relationship disintegrated. The influence of Wells and Topham was evident in its defence of the theatre and the praise of the profession's performers in the regular feature 'The Play-House' - Mrs Wells often praised for her 'playful manner' which 'went beyond any thing we have seen from a female performer on the boards of Covent Garden'.¹⁵ Mrs Wells' situation was a rarity – an actress with access to represent both herself and the theatre in a positive light within a format distributed to a large and diverse class audience. Mrs Elizabeth Hartley's (1751-1824) influence was also apparent in the *Morning Post* when Sir Henry Bate Dudley became editor in 1775. Previous to Dudley's appointment an article in 1773 stated that Mrs Hartley was 'the most tyrannical' woman who exhibited a 'haughty, over-bearing temper'.¹⁶ The objections against Hartley dramatically changed by 1775 with one article praising her as the greatest actresses upon the stage, who possessed an 'artless manner' and 'free from borrowed or gaudy plumage', contradictory to previous reports. It is uncertain if Hartley and Dudley were romantically involved (in 1780 he married the actress's sister Mary White), but the manipulation of the actress over her printed representation suggests the extended influence of actresses in literary formats.

The art of writing memoirs exhibits many parallels to the theatrical profession, whereby the writer reproduces their own character and enacts events within a narrative form. While the concept of a memoir is that of a true reflection of events and episodes from the author's life, there is an element of artistic liberty which allows the author to utilise the genre in

¹⁵ *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, May 23, 1787; Issue 123.

¹⁶ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, May 1, 1773; Issue 156.

reshaping their public representation or even altering social opinion. In defending the genre, the diarist and biographer, James Boswell (1740–1795) argued that biographers were restricted in the length of a narrative volume which the public would read and therefore in producing an accurate representation of an individual, only key events should be recorded. The biography transformed into a selection of scenes similar to a theatrical play by presenting the most significant details and interweaving the subject's private communication. The reader experienced the development of the character through the personal life events, allowing readers to emotionally connect with the subject.¹⁷ These texts also mirrored plays structurally - each act/chapter depicted a scene of intrigue, the spectators/readers were privy to undisclosed details that the text's characters were not aware of and perhaps would not discover. In Paul Alkon's study of Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), Alkon argues that it was Boswell who fundamentally changed the biographical process by making the task of maintaining authenticity a reality through limiting their narratives to a selection of anecdotes, which was evident in Boaden's histories on Mrs Siddons (1827) and Mrs Jordan (1831).¹⁸ The *Boswellian* interpretation of the relationship between 'real and represented time' can be perceived in the selected actress memoirs in this study, even though the concept had not been penned until after the publication of the majority.¹⁹ Actresses employed this 'represented time' by choosing to submit events that aided in their manipulation of their readers, which opposed Boswell's original directive and raised the problem of how true a picture can be derived from a memoir. Employing a term used by Judith Butler in her examination of gender, the notion

¹⁷ Boswell, *The life of Samuel Johnson*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 4.

¹⁸ Alkon, 'Boswellian Time', pp. 239-256.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

of 'performativity' can be applied to the memoirs of eighteenth-century actresses. Butler's argument derives from the idea that a person is not born into a particular gender, but the 'illusion' of a fixed 'gendered self' is formed through a multitude of 'acts' and performances; such as movement and gesture.²⁰ Similarly to this theory, the act of memoir writing may be viewed as the actress's attempts to reconstruct her feminine self, by allowing her to recreate/act out, her public identity through her performances within the narrative.

The language used by actresses and their biographers to record their performances differed throughout the eighteenth-century, shifting with the fluctuating public tastes, from factual theatrical accomplishments (as seen in the history of Anne Oldfield (1730)) to scandalous gossip memoirs (seen in Woffington (1760), Robinson (1784), Bellamy (1785)) and the emergence of more sentimental and romantic narratives (Baddeley (1787), Catley (1789), Farren (1797)). The emergence of scandal texts in the mid eighteenth-century displayed a voyeuristic approach to the narration of the lives of celebrated women from the stage. Scandal memoirs followed the example of popular gossip papers such as Richard Steele's *Tatler* which took advantage of society's carnal interest. Previously women's private affairs were of secondary importance to the history of the theatres and managers. In this format the public gained access into the personal adventures and sexual conquests of actresses, illuminating gender discourses on the perceived images of women and their position in society. By contextualising the memoirs of actresses, we can discover the agency held by these women in the production of their representation and contribution to conventional gender roles. The numerous accounts of actresses and their personal characters printed in

²⁰ Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 519.

newspapers illustrated that this sub-group of females were not only of interest to the general population but also confirmed them as a fixed image of British commerce and entertainment.

Actresses Critiquing Social Constructions

Class distinctions were frequently referenced in the narrations of actresses' lives and most effectively used against the gentry and nobility who suffered the ridicule and harsh critique from these professional women. In mocking and portraying those above their social station as bullies, a stark contrast was drawn between the rich who deemed themselves morally superior over the acting community and the image of the gentry intoxicated, brawling and seducing innocent young actresses into a life of debauchery. Although this thesis aims to prove that actresses were not victims, the portrayal of their suffering at the hands of those above them in social status was significant in their influence over society. In emphasising the abuse actresses endured, women could manipulate the public into believing them redeemable characters who were led astray by those with wealth. This was a courageous method by women whose morals were questionable, as they depended on the wealthy for patronage and theatrical attendances. Believed to be the victims of injustice, the public sympathised with actresses who suffered while attempting to provide for themselves and their families, making them admirable professionals and blameless of their misconduct. The authors of the *English Review* stated that 'the flattery and blandishments of men of high rank and fortune' were 'naturally' topics used to excuse 'female frailty'.²¹ However, their

²¹ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, March 25, 1785; Issue 15862.

criticism was not always aimed at a universal class of people, but rather directed at particular recognizable individuals in retaliation for the injustices felt by the actress.

For a professional woman to publicly name and shame their offender, she undoubtedly had to be certain of the public's support, otherwise the slander would have alienated her from patrons and influential friends. George Anne Bellamy's memoirs displayed the full names of her lovers and acquaintances, accompanied with an index of titled persons published in both the narrative and newspaper advertisements. The use of dashes to obscure the titles of persons - with the aim of protecting their identities - for example Charles F-x was clearly the politician Charles Fox, was commonly used in gossip columns and satires, creating a deciphering game for readers.²² This was not an effective method of protecting reputations but did provide the editors with a guard against potential libel actions. The significance of Bellamy's memoirs was that the author showed little concern for sullyng the reputation of those superior in rank to the actress. Its 'free mention' and 'reckless disclosures' concerning those 'unfortunate as to [have been] acquainted with Mrs Bellamy' allowed the public a liberty never seen before, whereby people of all ranks became privy to events and characters from the Bon Ton, removing their pious and untouchable position in society.²³ Some critics of the memoirs questioned the authenticity of events and character descriptions, with one article pondering if Bellamy's memoirs were a fabrication that was 'calculated to take advantage of the curiosity of the public'.²⁴

²² McCreery, 'Keeping up with the Bon Ton', p. 218.

²³ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, London, Wednesday, November 6, 1872; Issue 2412.

²⁴ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London England), Thursday, January 13, 1785; Issue 3719.

Taking this a step further was the history of Sophia Baddeley which recorded the full titles of the men cited in the text, including the publication of a list of such people in the papers to excite public curiosity.²⁵ The publication was advertised to the public as a text that would ‘undoubtedly add much to the morality of the age’ and beneficial to those ‘anecdote hunters’.²⁶ Yet it was assumed that the popularity of the memoirs would derive from the ‘*dominion of names*’ as was the situation with Bellamy’s narrative.²⁷ Baddeley’s memoirs openly slandered the gentleman John Hanger and mocked such characters as Lord March and Lord Palmerston, each gentlemen being recognisable figures in the Bon Ton. While the memoirs were of interest to the voyeuristic public with its many anecdotes relative to ‘the first characters of the age’, the text also caused unrest among the upper classes, and in the *World and Fashionable Advertiser* it was suggested that ‘no less than five prosecutions’ against the author were discussed in a ‘polite circle’.²⁸ Evidently the texts created a popular discourse among the upper classes surrounding the representation of the wealthy compared to theatrical professionals and introduced the actress to a larger audience than simply theatrical spectators.

There is no evidence that any legal cases were brought against the author of Baddeley’s memoirs or the authors of any of the actress memoirs in this study, but the criticism of wealthy individuals was a hazardous pursuit. An attorney, Edward Willett published a collection of letters addressed to George Anne Bellamy refuting claims made against him

²⁵ *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London), Monday, February 5, 1787; Issue 31.

²⁶ *Public Advertiser* (London) Thursday, Aug 10, 1786; Issue 16293.

²⁷ *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London) Thursday, May 24, 1787; Issue 124.

²⁸ *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, (London) Saturday, June 2, 1787; Issue 132. *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London) Saturday, June 9, 1787; Issue 138.

by the actress within her memoirs. Bellamy had accused the gentleman of poisoning the mind of a Mr Bromfield against her and failing to repay a debt to a Mr Woodward. Willett's text proved his innocence and revealed the actress to be 'guilty of evil speaking, lying, and slandering'.²⁹ Studies into the changing legislation in Britain and the dangers of slander during the eighteenth-century claim that the greatest threat to a man was the charge of being a sodomite that would result in the destruction of his reputation.³⁰ Although the memoirs in this dissertation did not claim the gentlemen criticised held homosexual tendencies, the association of their characters with feminine weakness or the defamation of their images, was not dissimilar from libel charges of 'sodomy blackmail'.³¹ The popularity which actress memoirs received from all ranks in society perhaps justifies why no prosecutions transpired and is evidence of the actress's manipulation of the public.

The Duplicity of Men

A recurring theme of ridicule in actress memoirs was the portrayal of gentlemen as immoral, uneducated and gluttonous men, whose perceived superiority over thespians was both amusing and distressing. In portraying the immorality of men, biographers and actresses were attempting to justify the loss of virtue of young performing women, evoking public sympathy and understanding by portraying themselves as victims of male dominance. Those born into wealth were deemed naturally moral compared to people born into the

²⁹ Willett, *Letters addressed to Mrs Bellamy*, p. 74.

³⁰ See the work of Gary Dyer, who examines the gothic paranoia evident in William Godwin's *Things as They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and compares the blackmail in the novel to the threat of individuals being accused of sodomy and how such intimidation was constituted as a form of robbery. Dyer, 'The Arrest of Caleb Williams', p. 31-32.

³¹ *Ibid.*

lower poorer ranks, who were required to mimic the virtues and good breeding of the upper classes. Often the opposite was closer to the reality of eighteenth-century society, where the wealthy depleted their wealth in the pursuit of such dissolute entertainments of gambling, drinking and fornication. There were several images of men utilised in female memoirs to mock the title of 'gentleman', which signified the man's genteel manners and a 'good or honourable extraction'.³² The first criticism of masculinity to be examined is the foolishness of men juxtaposed with the sensibility exhibited by actresses.

Even in today's culture the easy manipulation of men by attractive women is a common comical image which has changed little from the eighteenth-century. By exhibiting men's lack of self-control and enslavement to their passions, the female memoirs challenged the sentimentality that was perceived to be a primarily female condition. In an examination of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), James Kim has identified what he calls 'sentimental irony' evident that produced gender instability within the text.³³ The use of a black page after the revelation of a character's death demonstrated the representation of Tristram's 'overflow of feeling'; unable to put into words his grief.³⁴ While the male protagonist in Sterne's novel exhibited his excessive grief, many of the men represented in actress memoirs displayed similar heightened emotions of passion. The representation of gentlemen in the memoirs examined in this study were compositions that contested the taxonomy of emotions assigned to each gender, which Kim has identified, with 'learned wit, rational judgement, and fortitude of will' being masculine qualities and 'naive emotionality,

³² Defoe, *A new English dictionary*, p. Image 136.

³³ Kim, 'Good cursed, bouncing losses', pp. 4-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

intuitive perception, and delicacy of feeling' as feminine attributes.³⁵ The gender instability evident, particularly in the histories of George Anne Bellamy and Sophia Baddeley, strengthened the claim of actresses that they possessed an equal or greater amount of sensibility and propriety than the men around them. Both Baddeley's and Bellamy's memoirs ridiculed men's emotional irrationality around beautiful women, publically identifying and shaming the gentlemen. Lord Palmerston had forced entry into Baddeley's house only to fall over in the dark on a make shift stage, while Lord March felt the full wrath of Baddeley's maid when he refused to wait for the actress in her parlour and was thrust down the stairs with the contents of a pail over the his head.³⁶ The author of Baddeley's memoirs was a childhood friend of the actress, Elizabeth Steele, who abandoned her husband to live with Baddeley. There is no textual evidence explaining why Steele chose to leave her family, or why the biography was so critical of the gentry, but what is known about the woman was that once she parted from Baddeley she was employed in forgery and was a fugitive up to her death.³⁷ There are numerous accounts from Steele narrating the foolishness of gentlemen who succumbed to Baddeley's charms, including the author's astonishment at witnessing Lord Melbourne who, 'fearing an attack upon him personally' for having been caught secretly meeting the actress, 'threw up the parlour window, and precipitately leaped out'.³⁸ Woffington's memoirs also exhibited the idiocy of 'Lords, Baronets and Knights' who all waited their turn to be admitted into the actress's private chambers, knowing her to be engaged with several other gentlemen.³⁹ Figures from the

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 1 of 6, pp. 62-64.

³⁷ *London Chronicle* (London, England), November 15, 1787 – November 17, 1787; Issue 4845.

³⁸ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 1 of 6, p. 78.

³⁹ *Memoirs of the celebrated Mrs Woffington*, p. 26.

pinnacle of society, who were perceived as the moral role-models of the lower classes, were reduced to satirical characters within these memoirs. Lord Melbourne was a recently married man when he first became acquainted with Baddeley, whose marriage was not an obstacle as he was young and wealthy and therefore could pay for the privilege of the actress's company. In George Anne Bellamy's memoirs it was recorded that on one occasion a gentleman kissed the actress's neck as she passed him resulting in a slap to his face, much to embarrassment of the intoxicated gentleman and the actress who was aware that such a 'violent and unbecoming' act would receive the disapproval of the theatre's audience.⁴⁰ According to the actress the public supported her assault on the man above her station who was forced to apologise, thus indicating the public's belief in the actress's virtue and the absurdity of intoxicated gentlemen. Regardless of the superior social position of the gentlemen featured in the memoirs, the image of the actress compared to the foolishness of gentlemen challenged the morality of the wealthy and the intellectual authority of men. The weakness of gentlemen to their passions facilitated female manipulation and exertion of their influence.

The above examples portrayed the weakness of gentlemen to the charms of a beautiful actress, but an alternate critique drew on society's fear of the effeminacy of men, with descriptions of men begging and crying for forgiveness from actresses who had discovered their fickleness. As stated in a previous chapter, the representation of men with feminine characteristics was deemed a threat to society and national security, with the strength associated with manliness necessary for soldiers protecting the country. Within actress

⁴⁰Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 137.

memoirs, the effeminacy of gentlemen produced a gender imbalance and so to return the gender equilibrium, the masculinity lost in men was adopted by actresses who exhibited authority and performed masculine roles within the texts. The substitution of authoritative actresses to fill the vacuum created by the weakness of gentlemen, challenged what readers understood as the division of roles between the genders. The exchanging of gender roles that were exhibited in actress memoirs suggests that the display of masculine attributes in women was evident in other literature of the period. In 1760 *A series of genuine letters between Henry and Frances* was composed in the style of a dialogue between a man and woman and indicated that it was more tolerable for a woman to exhibit 'masculine sense'.⁴¹ The text claimed that masculinity can be an 'excellence in women', but that 'feminine manners [were] ridiculous in men', demonstrating the absurdity of the representation of emotional gentlemen described in actress memoirs.⁴² Jeng-Guo Chen's examination of Scottish images of India during the eighteenth-century and the significance of British colonialism on mercantilism, maps the transformation of British attitudes on effeminacy from a positive force of consumerism to the negative impact of excessive spending. Effeminacy referred to eighteenth-century society's 'moral and social concomitant of commerce, luxury, consumption, and corruption'.⁴³ In this sense, the language of effeminacy is equated to feminine behaviour – the consumption of superfluous goods and the exhibition of finery that was associated with women's duties of household management. This was particularly evident in the middling classes where women shopped

⁴¹ Griffith, *A series of genuine letters between Henry and Frances*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 64.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Chen, 'Gendering India', p. 194.

to furnish their homes and fashioned the act into a leisurely activity which exhibited taste.⁴⁴ Men who were identified as Macaronis exemplified the effeminate qualities according to Chen's argument and perhaps explains why their appearance in public was initially accepted, as their excessive attire reflected the grandeur being attained through the expansion of the British Empire.⁴⁵ However, the image of Hindu femininity and consumerism transformed into the representation of Hindu pacifism and a fear that this weakness would corrode British manliness which was required more than ever with the occurrences of the French Revolution. The distinction between Steele and the male characters cited in Baddeley's memoirs exhibited a reversal of gender roles whereby the biographer Elizabeth Steele negotiated the living expenses of the women, while decorative trinkets were purchased and presented by their gentlemen companions. It has been argued that 'flexibility in gender roles' existed in the eighteenth-century with educated women, such as the historian Mrs Macaulay (1731-1791), being celebrated for their logical thinking, while men exhibited sensibility.⁴⁶ In Baddeley's memoirs, the gentleman John Hanger adopted the appearance of an emotional woman when refused admittance into the actress's home and demonstrated an alternate image of effeminacy, whereby men displayed feminine traits and emotion. Mimicking the expressions of a woman, his eyes 'departing from the steadiness of manhood, played the woman; in short, he cried much'.⁴⁷ The French diplomat, Chevalier d'Eon (1728-1810) embraced accusations that he had transformed both emotionally and physically into a woman and utilised his ambiguous

⁴⁴ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, p. 267.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴⁶ Clark, 'The Chevalier d'Eon and Wilkes', p. 20.

⁴⁷ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 1 of 6, p. 68.

gender to challenge his political exile and negotiate a return to France from Britain.⁴⁸ However, as a French man and a foreigner in Britain, d'Eon's effeminate conduct was in conjunction with representations of outsiders (foreigners), as seen in Chen's study of India. The exchanging of gender roles was also visible on the theatre stages with David Garrick's comedy *The Male-Coquette* (1757) mocking the flirtatious and exaggerated behaviour of young gentlemen of fashion. The plot revolves around the character Daffodil who professes his love to all women and assumes the feminine trait of flirtation. One of his conquests, Sophia, disguises herself as an Italian gentleman, possibly mimicking the Macaronis due to her feminine mannerisms, in order to discover Daffodil's true character. Sophia is aided by her admirer Tukely, who masquerades as a woman to entrap the philanderer. Although no harm comes to the gender swapping characters, Garrick's criticism focused on the loss of morality if men were to adopt coquetry 'that marks the want of manhood, virtue, sense and shame', emphasising the need for people to act in accordance with their gender.⁴⁹ The depiction of gentlemen as effeminate in the memoirs of actresses not only was damaging to the individual's masculine character, but also threatened their Britishness by being associated with what was foreign. By diminishing the moral authority of gentlemen, actresses utilised the absence of masculine rationality to justify their defiance against conventional gender roles and their ambitions in the public sphere.

The image of the actress as victim alongside the scandalous behaviour of those above her station, served as protection from accountability for her immorality. Authors who

⁴⁸ Clark, 'The Chevalier d'Eon and Wilkes,' p. 20.

⁴⁹ Garrick, *The Male-Coquette*, p. 52.

emphasised the actress's victimisation were seeking the public's sympathy and acceptance by proving that the indiscretions of actresses were the result of naivety and the woman's trust in the honour of gentlemen. Women utilised their perceived victimisation by gentlemen to arouse sympathy for the hardships and prejudices they suffered and for actresses their anguish was often a result of the belief that performers were sexually active individuals and attainable to those who had power and wealth. In emphasising their moral superiority over educated men, actresses defended the entertainment industry, while also criticising the capriciousness of gentlemen. In the memoirs of actresses a common complaint was that female players were objectified as the play-things of the upper classes and nobility, targeted by philanders due to their public image. Sexual double standards are evident when the affairs between actresses and their gentlemen lovers is analysed, with the men emerging unscathed from public censor. In newspapers Ann Catley was depicted as a naive and seduced girl during a trial for emancipation from her parents, where it emerged she had been seduced by a gentleman who had removed Catley from her education. It was claimed that she was an impoverished girl who was driven to a life of vice in pursuit of wealth and fame, while her seducer, Delaval, was a gentleman married into wealth, and an unscrupulous man who enjoyed the seduction and ruin of young girls.⁵⁰ The depravity of London's elite was further analysed in *The Memoirs of Perdita* (1784), with the actress Mary Robinson utilised as the catalyst for the criticism of the wealthy. Robinson was an expert manipulator, her greatest triumph being the seduction of the young royal, Prince Regent, with 'her beauty, the fascinating charms of her person, the brilliant

⁵⁰ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, September 4, 1777; Issue 13388.

accomplishments of her mind, her poignant wit and agreeable conversation'.⁵¹ Yet Robinson later became a victim of the fleeting attentions of the prince who quickly discarded her for his next conquest. Robinson's memoirs deviated from the history of the actress and began a wider social critique on the corruption of the nobility and wantonness of the wealthy. Among the gentry, wives were often shared and willingly presented to the Prince when requested, as was seen when the Prince's attentions were directed to a Mrs H-s whose husband voluntarily resigned his duty and overlooked the Prince's private tête-à-têtes.⁵² However, rather than rebuff such behaviour contemporary texts claimed that 'the man of pleasure must be indured'; even though through the pursuit of 'his own selfish inclinations' he violates 'all decency, justice, and order'.⁵³ George Anne Bellamy suffered imprisonment and disownment from her family after she was kidnapped by Lord Byron, who believed that his social superiority over the actress entitled him to take Bellamy against her will.⁵⁴ The actress's own brother believed a lord was incapable of such cruelty and therefore assumed his sister had eloped with Byron of her own free will. The publication of Bellamy's memoirs revealed her innocence in the events and demonstrated the false opinion of people, including her own family, regarding her integrity. The fabricated lie about Bellamy's romance with Byron that was accredited by her family, juxtaposed the falsehoods presented to her by her gentlemen lovers regarding her future marital status. In drawing distinct contrasts between the immorality of the wealthy and the victimisation of actresses,

⁵¹ *The memoirs of Perdita*, p. 178.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-177.

⁵³ A.M., *Moral essays*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 223-224.

⁵⁴ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, pp. 68-74.

their memoirs sought sympathy, while also publishing a critical commentary on masculinity and the dangers of female submission.

The subordination recorded in the memoirs and histories of actresses resonated the subservience of female readers, with the romantic lives of performing women revealing similar difficulties faced by the female gender. The impact of marriage on the lives of women is indisputable, with much research available on the change of economic and social status once married.⁵⁵ In chapter two, the pros and cons discerned by actresses thinking of entering wedlock were examined, revealing the analytical business sense of successful performers who utilised their 'virtuous' representations as respectable wives, to conceal career ambition. However, the act of marriage fundamentally changed during the eighteenth-century by redefining what was considered as a legally binding matrimonial contract. Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 attempted to eradicate the performance of clandestine marriages, by regulating the allocation of marriage licenses and requiring a church service to take place before a couple were deemed man and wife. However, the expense of a ceremony and the strict guidelines of the Act requiring parental consent, forced many couples to postpone the legalisation of their relationship. Domestic cohabitation, with the promise of one day legalising the arrangement, meant that desertion, particularly male desertion, was not uncommon. There was no legal obligation for the individuals to fulfil their promise of marriage. This practice was evident throughout

⁵⁵ Once married, an actress was no longer the recipient of her theatre salary or had the ability to become a property owner without her husband's permission. However, if an actress married into a theatrical family or to an established actor, her career prospects increased. For further reading see, Brooks, 'Negotiating Marriage'.

the eighteenth-century in the memoirs of actresses who agreed to be the mistresses of gentlemen with the understanding that a marriage would someday legitimise their relationship. Similar to the narration of the authority gentlemen displayed over actresses, the revelation of their thwarted marriage expectations exhibited their victimisation and suffering. This was particularly apparent in the cities where there was a lack of community authority to pressurise couples into upholding their vows and preventing men abandoning their family duties. However, it was not only the woman who was the victim of men's deceit, but subsequent children of the relationships also suffered from their parents indiscretions. It has been argued that the increase of illegitimate births was partially due to the poor policing of society which facilitated loose morals, but more importantly, proposals and marriages without licenses were easily entered into and got out of by men with few repercussions.⁵⁶ Both George Anne Bellamy and Dorothy Jordan were deceived by their lovers into believing that their sexual relationships would lead to marriage. Their predicament was a common female concern and would have acquired them the sympathy of their female readers. Bellamy believed both the fathers of her children, George Metham and John Calcraft intended to marry her, but her eventual discovery of Calcraft's living wife put an end to the affair, while Metham claimed the uncertainty of his inheritance as an excuse for his resistance to marriage. Richard Ford similarly failed to fulfil his promise of marriage to Mrs Jordan after she had given birth to his three children and the actress was later abandoned by the Duke of Clarence after twenty years of domestic happiness for a wealthy heiress. In a letter published by her biographer, James Boaden, the actress candidly stated the reasoning for their separation was 'Money, money, my good friend, or the want

⁵⁶ Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity*, pp. 47-48.

of it, has, I am convinced, made him, at this moment, the most wretched of men'.⁵⁷ Jordan's devotion to the man she loved was a natural and virtuous characteristic, which contrasted with the suffering caused to her by the Duke. There was little legal protection for these actresses and their illegitimate children against abandonment.

Sir William Blackstone (1723-1780) stated that it was the 'natural duty' of fathers to provide for their children, but did not reflect on what was to be done for the mothers of these illegitimates.⁵⁸ In 1835 the author Sir Francis Bond Head (1793-1875) criticised the Poor Law that had been established between the years 1597 and 1601, which represented unwed mothers as charitable objects who were dependent on local parishes for support. Head argued that in reality these single mothers were not abandoned, but were clever manipulators of the Poor Law by ascertaining their personal marketability through the birth of children or what he called 'marriageable commodity'.⁵⁹ The more children a woman had the more child allowance she received from parish authorities, and made her an attractive potential partner. But the most significant aspect of his argument was his belief that the Law informed women not to 'wait for a seducer' but to be the seducer instead.⁶⁰ Under this premise, the contemporary critique of poor single mothers manipulating the poor law paralleled with actresses who had their lovers' children, assuming that offspring would further persuade men to marriage by entrapping them, supporting my argument that actresses were skilled manipulators. Regardless if this was the case, the revelation in

⁵⁷ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 250.

⁵⁸ Blackstone, *Commentaries on the laws of England*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 438.

⁵⁹ Bond Head, *English Charity*, p. 88.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

memoirs of the deceitfulness of gentlemen, who swore their love and made promises of marriage, portrayed actresses as pitiable women, seduced and duped into losing their virtue. Thus they appealed to female readers that consisted primarily of ladies from the upper classes, a faction of patrons who, it has been argued, were active participants in creating theatrical culture in parallel with actresses who challenged gender constructions upon the stage.⁶¹ The revelation of the duplicity of men in the memoirs of actresses justified the challenges professional women posed on conventional gender roles, which advocated the influence of women to be contained within the domestic sphere. The fallaciousness of men, particularly the lovers of actresses in failing to meet their promises of marriage, validated acting women's loss of virtue in exchange for their survival. The fact that actresses remained popular public figures despite their indiscretions, demonstrated society's acceptance of this alternative image of woman who existed between the polar representations of women – virtuous versus immoral. Actresses could pass back and forth from being identified as depraved women, to earning back their virtue, and so the narration of their suffering, which may have resonated with many female readers, established a new aspect to the female gender, where immoral behaviour was acceptable if in retaliation to female subordination.

Domestic Ideologies

In actress memoirs an emphasis was placed on the domestic achievements of professional acting women to counteract negative images of strong ambitious women or pitiable spinsterhood. The theatre and its female performers presented not only an alternative

⁶¹ Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, pp. 126-127.

occupation for women outside the domestic sphere, but also facilitated an unorthodox lifestyle whereby the salary earned by actresses reduced the financial need for husbands, challenging conventional ideologies of heterosexual domesticity. In literature the utilisation of the term 'Amazon' referred to two distinct types of women, both derogatory of feminine authority. In Henry Fielding's novels the image of the Amazon varied from the grotesquely buxom woman that symbolised men's carnal lusts, to the highly educated woman who lost her femininity from an excessive hunger for knowledge.⁶² Actresses impersonated aspects from both these figures – they depended on their sexuality to attract male patronage and were reliant on their knowledge of acting and memorising lines in order to sustain their theatrical careers. By defying conventional ideals of femininity which confined women to the home, the lifestyles of actresses were attacked in literature by being compared to Amazonian women. Actresses were influential women and like Fielding's representation of amazons, they were 'figures of social and sexual inversion'.⁶³ Daniel Defoe similarly employed the title of Amazon for his heroine in *Roxana* (1724), projecting society's anxiety of female economic independence from men and challenged women's perceived vulnerability.⁶⁴ Shawn Maurer describes Defoe's novel as an exhibition of the heroine's struggles to gain economic freedom from her ridiculous husband, but in attempting to achieve 'Amazonian independence' she appeared to lose her femininity and fell into the category of 'otherness' which led to her demise.⁶⁵ Echoing the concerns of society, Defoe's novel highlighted what would become of women who chose to break away from

⁶² Prytula, 'Great-Breasted and Fierce', p. 175.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Maurer, 'I woul'd be a Man-Woman', p. 364.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

conventional submissive domesticity. From my analysis of actress memoirs, those who did not marry were reliant on the female companionship of their relations or close friends, employing such texts as testimonials to female autonomy and survival. Actress memoirs defied conventional female submission by celebrating their 'Amazonian' likeness, and by revealing positive female camaraderie compared to the fickleness of gentlemen, something that appealed to a female readership.

The unorthodox domesticity evident in many of the memoirs analysed in this study proved to be a lesser evil than the subordination of women in unhappy marriages. In demonstrating the moral integrity of women and their upholding of the virtues of domesticity, actress memoirs emphasised the superior morality of women over gentlemen who were portrayed as a threat to female virtue. In 1778 two women attracted media attention by eloping from Ireland to a village in Wales, in the hope of living a retired lifestyle together. Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby became known as the 'Llangollen Ladies', whose domestic home mirrored a conventional heterosexual marriage. The women's marketing of their home village as a tourist attraction and their publicised living arrangement, reflected and appealed to the growing desires of women seeking independence.⁶⁶ Similar to the recording of the dangers men posed to the virtue of actresses, the story of the Llangollen ladies highlighted the sexual abuse suffered by Ponsonby from her guardian's husband, which justified her seeking protection under the guidance of a woman sixteen years her senior. Butler's validation for the affair was the persecution she sustained from her mother who no longer wanted the responsibility of a spinster daughter and so arranged Butler's removal to

⁶⁶ Reynolds, 'Cottage Industry', p. 212.

a convent. Their unique relationship was praised as being 'a model of perfect friendship', with the women sheltered from 'the attacks of satire and envy' in their secluded home.⁶⁷ A similar story is narrated in the memoirs of Sophia Baddeley, recorded by her companion Elizabeth Steele, with revelations of the ladies alternative domestic arrangement where husbands were no longer required. Amy Culley refers to the work as a 'feminist polemic' in which the actress and her biographer substituted the conventions of a marriage between man and woman, for an unorthodox female companionship resembling a marriage, similar to the Llangollen ladies.⁶⁸ In order for such a domestic arrangement to be accepted by society, it was necessary for women to maintain conventional feminine gender roles within the home, therefore identifying the unconventional arrangement as a morally superior choice to the alternative of an unhappy or violent marriage. Both women were married yet chose to remove themselves from the protection of their husbands - Baddeley, according to the text, was young and naively fooled into committing adultery, while Steele sacrificed her marriage in aid of her friend. Unlike the Llangollen ladies who transformed their home into a guest house, the actress's approach to financial independence was less virtuous. To maintain independence from their husbands Baddeley exchanged sexual favours, thus removing the necessity of men from the household and utilising them as financial suppliers to the women's domestic bliss. To salvage the moral character of the actress, Steele depicted the domestic harmony that the women enjoyed, with Steele describing Baddeley as 'a tender and endearing partner of domestic life'.⁶⁹ Although the actress prostituted herself in exchange for financial liberation, her behaviour was exonerated by the tranquil

⁶⁷ *The Morning Post* (London, England), Tuesday July 14, 1829; Issue 18279.

⁶⁸ Culley, 'The Sentimental Satire', p. 683.

⁶⁹ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 6 of 6, p. 189.

serenity of the women's private routines, from their experience with the hairdresser to the enjoyment at spending time with their cats and birds.⁷⁰ In highlighting mundane domesticity, the author reinforced the stereotypical roles of women in the private sphere and proved that although the women did not reflect the typical family unit, their companionship did not threaten social moral order. Actresses challenged perceived notions of the necessity of a husband as head of the household, while reinforcing ideas that the home was a primarily female domain where female virtue was safeguarded. Although Baddeley's memoirs challenged the role of men, it also strengthened women's influence within the private sphere and made the character of the actress and her history more acceptable for public consumption.

Their memoirs served as defence for the decision of some actresses not to marry and although they were criticised for their promiscuity, the memoirs celebrated the ability of actresses to maintain their independence and femininity while competing in the public sphere. The title of 'spinster' was used as a pejorative term against George Anne Bellamy by Edward Willett in his text, which accused the actress of being guilty of slander.⁷¹ However the image of 'old maids' or spinsters was gradually transforming into a more respectable representation of feminine independence at the turn of the century. Attitudes towards single women appear to differ greatly between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the acceptance of 'old maids' as useful contributors to society. In examining nineteenth-century spinsterhood, Zsuzsa Berend has argued that the decision of middle-

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 6, pp. 97-98 & p. 104.

⁷¹ Willett, *Letters Addressed to Mrs Bellamy*, p. 74.

class women not to marry was an indication of their superior morals and independence rather than a pitiable situation they found themselves in. Regardless of the social pressures on women to find a husband, Berend claims that spinsters chose not to 'compromise their moral principles' by settling for an unworthy husband.⁷² Instead, Berend believes that it was imperative for women to firstly seek employment and become self-sufficient, making them attractive and useful partners and worthy of a loving marriage.⁷³ Although the majority of actresses originated from the lower-classes, they were educated women due to the profession and were self-sufficient because of their employment. Therefore, a husband was not a necessity. Peg Woffington, George Anne Bellamy and Dorothy Jordan were three examples of actresses whose memoirs reinforced the concept that women could lead independent lives without the protection or security of a husband. In comparing the difficulties Sophia Baddeley faced while married, to the freedom she enjoyed once separated from her husband, the text challenged the virtues of matrimony.⁷⁴ A poem published in 1813 in defence of unmarried women detailed the 'matrimonial woes' of wives who were condemned to be submissive to scornful husbands, embarrassed by 'fools', or forsake all domestic comforts to their gambling 'gamester' spouses.⁷⁵ If a woman could not respect her future husband then this justified her decision to remain a spinster. Actresses such as George Anne Bellamy enjoyed a freedom that married women were prohibited from acquiring – their salary belonged to themselves rather than a husband and it gave them the liberty to transcend class boundaries and acquire wealthy lovers who helped promote their

⁷² Berend, 'The Best or None!' p. 936.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 949-950.

⁷⁴ As part of her separation negotiations, Sophia Baddeley's husband demanded that in exchange for her freedom, the actress had to pay off his debts which had amounted to eight hundred pounds.

⁷⁵ *The Satirist. Or Monthly Meteor*, p. 110.

careers. Although in the memoirs of Bellamy and Jordan, these women emphasised the duplicity of their lovers who had promised marriage, the unattached single life of a professional actress was perhaps a better alternative than a domesticated life under a despotic husband with little or no fiscal authority. The alternative lifestyles of actresses also contributed to discourses on the roles of women within the home, with actresses demonstrating that dignified domesticity as prescribed in conduct literature could still be attained by women with public careers. By chronicling domesticity, while also challenging conventional ideologies of the family unit, actresses fed the public's hunger for intimate knowledge of celebrated individuals, both in the public and private spheres, which in turn aided in the construction of gender roles within society.

Voyeuristic Public

The public's hunger for scandal increased with the popularity of actresses, creating a genre that has been identified as 'scandal chronicles'.⁷⁶ Celebrated for their beauty and renowned for their illicit affairs with members of the gentry and nobility, actresses aroused immense public interest in the chronicling of their sexual adventures – making their memoirs commercially lucrative and expanded the reach of their influence outside the theatre and into the homes of readers. The female sexuality observed in the memoirs of actresses reflected the century's existing gender discourses that condoned the irrationality of female passions and the importance of a chaste life. The voyeuristic interest of the public to know every detail about their favourite performers produced a market for scandalous memoirs and gossip columns and it has been argued that it was this ability of individuals to engage

⁷⁶ This term has been used by Culley, 'The Sentimental Satire', p. 677.

the public's interest that created a celebrity culture.⁷⁷ In order to achieve this a 'virtual intimacy' between the subject being celebrated and their audience was necessary.⁷⁸ As already discussed in chapter three, this is apparent when analysing the relationship between actresses and their spectators, where there was confusion over the accessibility of performing women, either romantically or as objectified symbols of a patron's wealth. The close proximity between actresses and the audience, particularly in the first half of the century when audience members sat upon the stage caused spectators to often believe that the characters being performed by actresses resembled their true natures. Therefore, the soliloquies and monologues recited by actresses formed the audience's belief that they were privy to the private lives of players and created a celebrity status. The concept that the personal characters of actresses aided in creating public voyeurism has been expanded further in recent research, suggesting that the commercial value of actresses rested more on their private lives than in theatrical talents.⁷⁹ The popularity of memoirs, exposing the private thoughts and events in the lives of actresses was commercially lucrative and etched out a unique literary style most associated with female histories.

Female chronicles such as actress memoirs, divulged key life moments and regrets that served as warnings to readers and it has been argued that voyeurism through literature was a positive social pursuit that aided in the education of individuals, primarily in the sexual education of people and the regulation of their curiosity.⁸⁰ Using the example of Mirabeau's

⁷⁷ Tuite, 'Tainted Love and Romantic Literary Celebrity', p. 60.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ Nussbaum argues that the theatre stimulated public interest surrounding the personal lives of women and challenged the boundaries between public and private. Nussbaum, *Rival Queens*, pp. 44-45.

⁸⁰ Steigerwald, 'Curious Imagination or the Rise of Voyeurism', p. 926.

novel *Le Rideau levé* (1786), Jörn Steigerwald argues that female voyeurism was beneficial in preventing fanatical imagination caused by curiosity that would lead to immoral behaviour and the ruin of women. Under this nuance, it can then be argued that the public's voyeurism directed at actresses could be defended as being socially beneficial – by engaging in the consumption of gossip and observing the sexuality of actresses, audiences were capable of regulating their sexual appetites rather than being powerless to resist carnal lusts. Although it is difficult to verify the legitimacy of Steigerwald's argument in an analysis of actress memoirs, and whether or not the sexuality demonstrated in the texts helped to control male urges, the actresses' sexuality clearly promoted their notoriety outside the playhouse.

The sexual freedom of women was destructive to conventional gender roles and displayed an independence contrary to women's perceived subordination and yet the sexuality exhibited by actresses added to their popularity and resulted in greater audience attendance, therefore making her a more attractive engagement for theatre managers. It is therefore arguable that her sexuality aided in establishing a permanent career, with the theatre acting as a legitimate profession that allowed an actress to provide for her family and perform the virtuous female role of mother. Female sexuality was a necessity for a successful theatrical career and boosted the woman's vanity, with the potential of earning her a healthy income without having to prostitute herself. In highlighting such behaviour within the theatrical profession, it can be argued that these memoirs formed an anti-theatrical debate, whereby both Woffington and Robinson only found salvation after they had retired from the stage and sought the public's forgiveness for their past indiscretions.

A document published in c.1750 identified similarities between actresses and prostitutes stating that the same qualifications which aided an actress in establishing a successful career were the same that would 'equip her for the Bed-Chamber'.⁸¹ The anonymous author's assumption was that those women who occupied the stage had given up their modesty similar to those who surrendered their charms for money – both professions catered to a 'sinful Audience, or a lustful Lover'.⁸² The connection between the sexualised woman and the theatre did not subside once the popularity of scandalous chronicles evolved into the celebration of sentimentalism, with memoirs seeking the public's empathy and admiration. Ann Catley's memoirs (1789) appeared to strengthen the concept of the theatre as a breeding ground for vice with the actress utilising her profession to secure lovers and benefactors. An alternative interpretation of scandalous actress memoirs would be that the popularity of immoral actresses indicated the celebration of sexually liberated women and the erotic. The argument of this thesis is that actress memoirs represented female performers as women who earned an independent salary and held some level of authority over their careers and choice in lovers – they were not victims of their social subordination or abused as sexual commodities that made them objects of public interest.

The juxtaposition of the amorous lifestyles of actresses like Peg Woffington and the celebration of them on and off the stage indicated the power these women held over the public's curiosity. The narration of sexual conquests within actress memoirs mimicked the sensational periodicals of the early half of the century, which reflected Restoration

⁸¹ *Characterism, or, the modern age display'd*, p. 87.

⁸² *Ibid.*

pornographic texts in the language employed. Women were portrayed as weak in the face of their emotions, unable to resist the amours of a flatterer and this continued to be a prevalent theme in actress memoirs throughout the century. There are conflicting representations of actresses in their memoirs that emulated the variable nature of actresses' public identities. Whilst they challenged gender constructions of female submissiveness by leading public lives and earning an independent salary, within the texts actresses played on the frailty of women to excuse any decisions they independently made that the public may have frowned upon. The technique employed by the anonymous author of Woffington's memoirs to prove the frailty of female self-control was to narrate the actress's first sexual experience up to the point of execution and allowed the reader to speculate the outcome. The recounting of this event when the actress was eleven years old and with a neighbouring boy of seventeen, abruptly concluded at the point when the young, 'tender, innocent Girl' could no longer resist the boy's advances and exclaimed 'oh happy Bob!'⁸³ The language used in Woffington's memoirs resembles what would have been considered as pornographic to an eighteenth-century audience, whereby the author depicted the actress as an eroticised woman whose sexuality was pertinent to her success. The argument that pornography was a 'reading process rather than a genre', was dependent on how the reader interpreted the tensions between personal sexual pleasures and societal morality.⁸⁴ Woffington's memoirs imitated popular early eighteenth-century pornographic texts, in that the actress's sexual adventures were recorded without reference to Woffington's own emotions or suffering. However, the conclusion of each

⁸³ *Memoirs of the celebrated Mrs Woffington*, pp. 14-15.

⁸⁴ Thauvette, 'Defining Early Modern Pornography', pp. 26 & 40. Juengel, 'Doing things with Fanny Hill', p. 438.

actress memoir narrated the woman's repentance for the sins she had committed, therefore removing associations with pornographic literature and verifying the texts as acceptable for female readership.

Similar to Woffington's first sexual experience, Mrs Robinson's loss of virtue occurred after her resistance to a sailor's seductions failed and the young girl gave in to the persuasive youth. Robinson's submissiveness to the sailor's sexual advances was excused by the male author of her memoirs, as the girl surrendering to her passions rather than suffering an attack by a man who pushed her onto a bed and refused to free her from his grasp. Thus, the author avoided discourse or acknowledgment of the sexual abuse suffered by Robinson by portraying her as a willing participant, weak to her passions.⁸⁵ The representation of women enjoying sex and manipulating it for their own material gain was also evident in novels of the period and was a prominent theme in John Cleland's pornographic bestseller, *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748-49).⁸⁶ By presenting the novel in the form of a memoir, the female protagonist exhibited sex as pleasurable, regardless of how it came to happen, similar to the representations of Woffington and Robinson in their memoirs.⁸⁷ The seriousness of a woman's rape or sexual abuse was therefore reduced, and female suffering or emotion excluded from the text so as not to distract readers from the pleasures of sexual encounters. Both *Fanny Hill* and the memoirs of Woffington and Robinson were written by male authors who glorified sexual liaisons with no reference to

⁸⁵ *The Memoirs of Perdita*, pp. 9-11.

⁸⁶ Haslanger, 'What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage', p. 163.

⁸⁷ Cleland, *Memoirs of a woman of pleasure*, Vol. 1&2. See Haslanger, 'What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage' for further analyses of Cleland's novel.

personal feelings of the women. Yet readers were not expected to condone the fictional Fanny Hill or the two actresses who found redemption at the end of the texts. Scott Juengel has examined the salvation of Fanny's character from the immorality of her life in the brothel by the marriage to her first love and argues that the redemption of Fanny displayed Cleland's understanding of shifting tastes in society, whereby pornographic literature was viewed more negatively due to society's rejuvenation of 'polite' manners.⁸⁸ To ensure that his novel would connect with future audiences, Cleland, according to Juengel, exhibited a moralistic finale with Fanny finding salvation through marriage – conforming to conventional gender roles and becoming an acceptable woman in society. A similar conclusion may be derived from actress memoirs, whereby the moralistic image of a remorseful actress who lamented her 'ill-spent Life', retiring from the stage to become a 'useful Member of Society', was common practice.⁸⁹ According to the author of Woffington's memoir, at the time of her death actresses lived like common prostitutes and were un-Christian-like.⁹⁰ By representing actresses and the theatrical industry as exotic or as arenas of forbidden pleasure, authors presented scandalous narrations as legitimate forms of entertainment with moral undertones through the eventual redemption of the women. Such texts appealed to the public's interest for scandal, while the consumption and readership of actresses' sexuality revealed a female eroticism that challenged conventional gender roles by displaying the authority that actresses exercised due to their sexualised image.

⁸⁸ Juengel, 'Doing things with Fanny Hill', p. 438.

⁸⁹ *Memoirs of the celebrated Mrs Woffington*, p. 58.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

The exposure of actresses on the stage and the imagined intimacy of audiences often resulted in the generation of gossip. Gossip has been characterised as a 'mode of interpretation' that strings ordinary occurrences together in order to interpret hidden meanings.⁹¹ In examining the relationship between the reading of gossip and its production, multifaceted negotiations between the public and private sphere can be identified.⁹² The intimacy that arises from the knowledge obtained through gossip and scandal, bridges the privacy of individuals with the external world by exposing secrets and this is evident in the representations of actresses in memoirs and periodical form. The *Town and Country Magazine* featured a popular column that appealed to all classes in society and introduced the intimate affairs of London's Bon Ton. Although this was written without participation of its subjects, the *tête-à-tête* series revealed the scandalous relationships of individuals and it was these affairs that became the vehicles for the recording of personal histories. In his examination of the series Horace Bleackley identified the author of the column as the Italian Count Carraccioli, whose contribution to the magazine resulted in an estimated 14,000 copies circulated each month.⁹³ According to a document titled *The London anecdotes* (1848), after twenty years of printing the 'pretended amours' of individuals and the death of this gentleman in 1792, the magazine lost its alluring narration and the publication was terminated.⁹⁴ The articles formed a social commentary on the relationships between the

⁹¹ Parsons, *Reading Gossip*, p. 34.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁹³ Bleackley, 'Tete-a-Tete Portraits in the Town and Country Magazine', p. 241

[<http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/>] Carraccioli was possibly Charles Caraccioli who was brother to the Marquis Caraccioli (1719-1803) and resided in London where he published a number of ill-written accounts. In 1775 his *Anecdotes of New Hall* was 'little more than a prurient discussion of the amours of former residents of the Essex mansion'. Whittick, 'Caraccioli, Charles (b. 1722?)', *odnb*

[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4600>]

⁹⁴ *The London anecdotes*, p. 73.

sexes and social classes, with their mixture of written and pictorial satire. The *tête-à-tête* format presented two miniature pictures of the man and woman side by side with a history of the gentleman and a brief description of the female. The employment of miniatures, imitated the contemporary use of marriage portraits – the exhibition of pictorial images alluded to the private intimacy of lovers that was to be exposed, similar to the personal character of the actress narrated in memoirs, the images of scandalised lovers satisfied the voyeuristic interest of the public by blurring the boundaries of public and private.⁹⁵ Although written without the actress's contribution, the *tête-à-tête* series was a commercially valuable publication to the performer. In augmenting the volume of information publically available on celebrated actresses and fuelling the inquisitive hunger of the public, it can be determined that the notoriety and respect for the players were similarly increased, as only influential members of society who were of public interest appeared in the text.

It has been argued that the revelation of secrets was more significant than simply a form of public entertainment, whereby gossip was comparable to currency.⁹⁶ Not only was gossip circulated similarly to money, but its value depreciated over time when the information had reached all who were interested or had already heard the news.⁹⁷ In examining plays such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777), Joseph Roach identifies a social pressure that was created by people's fear of becoming the subject of gossip rather than

⁹⁵ McCreery, 'Keeping up with the Bon Ton', p. 213. McCreery argues that miniatures in gossip columns mimicked the representation of lovers in marriage portraits.

⁹⁶ See Roach, 'Gossip Girls', p. 297-310.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

the consumer.⁹⁸ From the numbers of the *tête-à-tête* series published and the lack of evidence that any libel prosecution were instigated by the subject of the text, it would appear that the 'fear' of being a subject of scandal did not deter gentlemen from seeking the company of actresses. As discussed in chapter three, to be associated with an actress was similar to a badge of honour and the *tête-à-tête* series would confirm this theory, proving the actress to be a desirable prize and therefore challenges the belief that all women strived to appear virtuous in accordance with prescriptive texts. Scandalous actresses, as has already been stated, were aware of the instability in the image of female virtue and exploited the capacity of women to regain an honourable image when needed. There was no shortage of material for the writers of the *tête-à-têtes* and the public's hunger for scandal was satisfied by the authors stating that they held a list of potential heroes and heroines to occupy their pages for at least two years.⁹⁹ The frequency that some women appeared in the series and similar periodicals indicated a level of celebrity status that was usually only enjoyed by women from the aristocracy. The notice of scandalised women caused ambiguity among readers over the social status of mistresses and the actresses represented in such works. By using pseudonyms with anecdotal references alluding to the characters' true identities, there was often confusion as one letter exhibited in 1783. Its confused author referred to himself as '*Rusticus*' and queried the identities of '*Dally the Tall*', '*the Bird of Paradise*' and '*Perdita*'.¹⁰⁰ The gentleman had concluded that from

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ 'Histories of the tête-à-tête annexed: or, Memoirs of Colonel Las-Iles and Miss C-tl-y' *The Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 2 (November, 1770), p. 570.

¹⁰⁰ 'Rusticus To the Man of Pleasure,' *The Town and country magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 15 (February, 1783), p. 70.

examining the frequency of their appearances in the *tête-à-têtes*, the women must have been high ranking ladies and perhaps 'foreign princesses' who were celebrated for their 'learning and virtues'.¹⁰¹ The *Man of Pleasure's* response clarified that the women in question were not princesses but did reign over the passions of princes and most significantly, the women were not celebrated for their intellect or virtue.¹⁰² The three women in question were Mary Robinson (*Perdita*), Gertrude Mahon (*Bird of Paradise*) and Grace Elliott (*Dally the Tall*), all courtesans with Robinson and Mahon attempting theatrical careers. But their popularity was a fabrication of '*puff makers*' who were employed to advertise these women's merits and reputation in the public prints. It was due to such confusions that in 1905 Horace Bleackley began his compilation of possible identities for all parties represented in the magazine, which confirmed that almost a century later that the interest in such 'chroniques scandalouses' did not diminish over time.¹⁰³ The *tête-à-têtes* entertained readers in 'the pursuit of novelty' and knowledge about the 'toast of the period', identifying actresses as important figures in the cultural identity of the era.¹⁰⁴

The general representation of actresses throughout the series was of determined women who utilised their sexuality as a tool in applying their authority in their work and romantic relationships. The social standing of actresses was not fixed, their career facilitated their transience of class boundaries. The confusion that this caused to the public, with the

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰³ Bleackley, 'Tete-a-Tete Portraits in The Town and Country Magazine,' p. 241
[<http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/>]

¹⁰⁴ 'Histories of the tête-à-tête annexed: or, Memoirs of Colonel Las-Iles and Miss C-tl-y,' *The Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 2 (November, 1770), p. 570.

increased visibility of actresses, confirms the influence they held in par with ladies of the aristocracy in shaping female representations. In November 1770 a *tête-à-tête* appeared under the title *Memoirs of Colonel Las-Iles and Miss C-tl-y*, which celebrated the independence of Ann Catley who 'broke her shackles' and fled her father's authority.¹⁰⁵ Frances Abington was similarly admired in her article for exhibiting autonomy in negotiating terms of the affair in the form of an income.¹⁰⁶ Abington's companion, referred to as *Malagrida*, was a statesman with 'classical, historical and political knowledge', later identified as Lord Shelburne who was a popular subject of scandal.¹⁰⁷ The actress's attitude towards romantic affairs reflected Abington's business-like approach to love and echoed Joseph Roach's argument that money and gossip were the driving forces of eighteenth-century plays.¹⁰⁸ For a relationship to be instigated between a gentleman and a female from a lower social standing, a mutual understanding was required, whereby the woman received financial compensation in exchange for physical gratification. Bellamy's *tête-à-tête* explored public discourse surrounding the morality of older gentlemen being romantically involved with young girls and once again demonstrated the potential profit to be gained in imbalanced relationships. Unlike Abington's financial reward, in Bellamy's relationship with

¹⁰⁵ 'Histories of the tête-à-tête annexed: or, Memoirs of Colonel Las-Iles and Miss C-tl-y,' *The Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 2 (November, 1770), p. 570.

¹⁰⁶ 'Histories of the Tête-à-Tête annexed: or, Memoirs of Malagrida and Thalia,' *The Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 9 (January, 1777), p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9. William Petty, Earl of Shelburne (1737-1805) had been a leading speaker for the opposition to the British occupation of America prior to the War of Independence and had been suspected for inside dealing in the East India Company while secretary of state for the south, hence the pseudonym of *Malagrida*, a reference to a corrupt Jesuit missionary, Gabriel Malagrida. Cannon, 'Petty, William, second earl of Shelburne and first marquess of Lansdowne (1737-1805),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22070>] See also 'Thalia/Malagrida,' *The British Museum* [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?partid=1&objectid=3204438]

¹⁰⁸ Roach, 'Gossip Girls,' p. 305.

Bobadil, whom Bleackley identified as the elderly actor Henry Woodward, the actress presumably profited from the actor's experience and established following of admirers. Woodward was 'upwards of sixty', yet continued to perform 'with as much ease and agility as he did at five and twenty'.¹⁰⁹ The article revealed to the public the admirable career of the actor and his prize in the form of the young and beautiful Bellamy. Although the series narrated the intimate details between lovers, they also formed a type of advertisement of the private qualities of actresses. But most significantly, such texts highlighted the profitability of illicit affairs with gentlemen, where actresses could exert their authority in negotiating the terms of their affairs.

The significance of the public's voyeuristic interest in the lives of actresses is how their images were utilised not only by themselves but by other authors to promote work. The association of an individual with a popular actress enticed public consumption of items advertised as such and therefore demonstrated the influence of actresses in the construction of consumer tastes. A supplement to Woffington's memoirs was advertised shortly after the publication of her own history, which narrated the story of a sexual deviant. By using the fleeting affair between the gentleman and the actress the power of Woffington's image to attract public attention aided in the selling of the document.¹¹⁰ In advertising the text in relation to Woffington the association of the woman enticed readership and displayed the marketability of actresses. Their memoirs catered to the erotic

¹⁰⁹ 'Histories of the tête-à-tête annexed: or Memoirs of CAPT. BOBADIL and Mrs B-LL-MY,' *The Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal repository of knowledge, instruction, and entertainment* 8 (September, 1776), p. 457.

¹¹⁰ *A Supplement to the Memoirs of Mrs Woffington*, briefly mentions an affair between the hero and the actress, utilising Woffington as advertisement of the text.

lusts of the public, while also serving as a platform for actresses to carefully package their images as victims of the theatrical profession and differentiating themselves from associations with prostitution. The popularity of such texts indicates society's awareness and possible acceptance of female sexuality, while actresses utilised their sexuality as a form of self-promotion, exhibiting female agency.

Female Salvation

The redemption of actresses in narrative histories was a universal theme in the eighteenth-century. Domesticity was the key to a woman's salvation according to conduct texts and popular literature such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778). Actress memoirs did not stray from ideologies of the virtue of female domesticity, but juxtaposed the private sphere with their public career to support the argument that a symbiotic relationship existed. In Anne Oldfield's memoirs (1730) a moralistic approach was taken in recording the actress's past, with the anonymous author choosing to overlook her many indiscretions and instead present her as an admirable mother and partner. The author of the *Authentick Memoirs* represented the actress under the conventional female roles of mother and 'wife', although she was not legally married to either of her sons' fathers. Her affairs were briefly mentioned and viewed as trivial due to the indifference she displayed to her lovers' wealth, thus proving the actress's devotion towards the subsequent children whom Oldfield prioritised over material wealth. As a caring mother, Oldfield was vindicated from being an unwed mother and as a talented actress her career excused any imperfections of character. Oldfield's character embodied and strengthened stereotypical qualities of women; being of charitable nature, a caring mother and powerless against her

emotions and the flattery from men. In a domesticated role a professional woman could be accepted by the public – she did not neglect her feminine duties and remained subordinate to her husband. The benefit of such an image portrayed in an actress's memoirs, was that it legitimised the theatrical industry by establishing its performers as moral characters who did not corrupt society's youth by their indiscretions. By packaging their images in memoirs under stereotypical ideals of femininity, actresses were able to reinvent themselves as moral figures, concealing their sexuality that was essential for career progression.

From the mid-eighteenth-century onwards sentimentalism and moral reform were prominent elements of texts. Memoirs were based on the 'standard seduction narrative' with its theme of prodigal daughter succumbing to the advances of an unscrupulous man who then abandons her, leaving the girl to repent for her sins.¹¹¹ Such texts sought the readers' sympathy and as seen in the memoirs of actresses, the compassion they generated from the public aided in excusing their affairs and any acts of dishonesty, and helped promote their characters as worthy of celebration. The dominant theme throughout the century was of 'moral didacticism' which could be used to identify and ridicule the corruption existent within society, but was also valuable in recognizing the ideal image of women as subordinate and dutiful daughters, wives and mothers.¹¹² The decline in taste for scandalous memoirs to a more romantic representation of women suggests that female writers discovered a literary market for conventional feminine language, a 'privatized language', that separated them from the political discourses that were conveyed in a

¹¹¹ Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth-Century*, p. 143.

¹¹² Howard, 'A bright pattern to all her sex,' p. 232.

masculine idiom.¹¹³ While *memoires scandaleuses* were viewed as entertaining anecdotes of vice, the reader was emotionally detached from the subject. Sentimental memoirs sought the public's empathy for the heroine, by reporting the circumstances surrounding the fall of the actress - the majority of cases involving the woman's seduction by a deceitful philanderer and then highlighting her accomplishments under conventional gender roles. Prescribed gender roles recognized the belief that women were slaves to their passions compared to the perceived sensibility of men; therefore young females who strayed by following their hearts were excused for their offences.

George Anne Bellamy's narrative bridged the scandalous and sentimental, whereby the author recounted many of the actress's personal pleasures and transgressions, while also apologising for such behaviour and attempting to remove her accountability. This was challenged by Edward Willett who featured in the memoirs and argued that a more realistic title would have been 'An Attempt to justify the Life and Vindicate the Misconduct of G.A. Bellamy'.¹¹⁴ Bellamy directed the blame for her indiscretions on the men who seduced and lied to her, for 'men in general are rascals' according to her manager James Quin.¹¹⁵ The actress represented herself as a loving and affectionate daughter who relinquished her father's wealth in support of her destitute mother, adopting the conventionality of a dutiful daughter's virtue. In her later years, Bellamy emphasised her maternal affection for her children, following the careers of her sons and recording her concern for their safety. Ann Catley's character was similarly salvaged through motherhood according to the memoirs,

¹¹³ Culley, 'The Sentimental Satire,' p. 678.

¹¹⁴ Willett, *Letters addressed to Mrs Bellamy*, p. 73.

¹¹⁵ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 59. (Advice given to the actress from James Quin theatre manager)

which negated previous accounts of the actress's violent temper and recorded Catley's retired life in Ealing where she was 'beloved by the poor to whom she became a beneficent friend'.¹¹⁶ The appeal to public sympathy is evident in both these texts, more so in Bellamy's as it was written by the actress and was a personal account of the hardships she faced while attempting to lead a virtuous life. By abiding to the conventional ideal of the daughter, Bellamy lost her father's wealth and engaged in a stage career to support herself and her mother. All the unhappy events that took place in her life were blamed on external consequences and may have earned Bellamy respect from her readers. The significance of sentimental memoirs was that actresses could enjoy lives of debauchery and when faced with public scorn, they could simply ask for forgiveness and plead their innocence with little damage done to their character – proving actresses to be skilled manipulators.

The memoirs of Siddons and Jordan presented the symbiotic relationship between the professional careers of these actresses and their domesticity, giving equal weight to both the public and private spheres. Their biographer James Boaden (1762–1839) was a playwright and journalist with strong ties to the theatre and personally knew both these actresses. He presented both Siddons's and Jordan's strong work ethic alongside the provision and protection of their families, identifying the relationship between the successes of an actress's career to the economic security of the family. The theatre was exhibited as beneficial for the family unit as Siddons earned a substantial living which catered for her obligations as wife and mother. Although critics have argued that the memoir was a continuation of Boaden's chronology of the theatre, with Siddons absent in

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

many of the events recorded, the text describing Siddons's multidimensional femininity and commitments as both an employee and mother presents a unique insight of an actress.¹¹⁷ Siddons was represented as the 'most excellent wife, mother, sister, friend' and a character that deserved to be recorded.¹¹⁸ The memoir was divided between two premises – a cataloguing of the theatre and the representation of Siddons under the conventional roles of mother and wife and how she coped with becoming the chief earner and provider for her family, which made a theatrical career virtuous and acceptable. Jordan was also the chief earner in her family, subsidising the Duke of Clarence's wealth by repaying debts the family accumulated. The theatre became a wholesome arena, where women could earn a living and maintain their moral reputation. Siddons's chosen lodgings was evidence of her intertwining of the domestic and public roles, with the family's 'genteel lodgings' in the Strand allowing Siddons easy access between her professional and domestic responsibilities.¹¹⁹ According to Boaden's sympathetic history of Mrs Jordan, it was evident that the theatre was the most lucrative and legitimate means for the actress to financially provide for her family. The domesticity of actresses may have salvaged their moral characters, but most significantly the juxtaposition of the actress as professional employee alongside virtuous mother and wife, justified their choice in career by revealing the theatre as an obstacle to female destitution. These texts further identified the employment potential for women in the public sphere, challenging the scripted female constraints within the home, while also strengthening conventional roles of motherhood by equating a woman's career with the provision of her family.

¹¹⁷ *The Morning Post* (London), Thursday, December 21, 1826; Issue 17478.

¹¹⁸ Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Siddons*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. xii.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203

Female Work and Ambition

George Anne Bellamy was responsible for the production of her image and the information which the reader was made privy to, but most significantly the woman herself profited from the publication. Men held a monopoly over all aspects of publication and distribution, yet women such as Eliza Haywood became successful manipulators of the publishing system. By utilising her sexuality and reflection of female ambition, Haywood redirected the negative into an advertisement tool, creating public intrigue.¹²⁰ The fear of female poverty was expressed throughout Bellamy's memoir with the author narrating her constant struggles to maintain solvency. At times she was reduced to the dependence of her friends to financially relieve her. The threat of female poverty was a prevailing concern and featured heavily in the narratives of Jane Austen who revealed the difficulties of women who failed to secure a marriage or profession.¹²¹ Poverty was a universally feminine problem and not class based, with women who were the head of households or in possession of a profession also susceptible to poverty, as female wages were often lower than male counterparts.¹²² In the eighteenth-century the dilemma that female poverty presented was the likelihood of women being tempted into prostitution out of necessity, as was argued in many of the period's reformist essays.¹²³ However, recent studies into the activity of lower middling class women in the British economy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, suggest that there were a number of occupations available to women,

¹²⁰ Hollis, 'Eliza Haywood and the Gender of Print', pp. 52-55.

¹²¹ In Jane Austen's *Emma* the character Miss Bates was a poor spinster who cared for her elderly mother and depended on the aid of her neighbours. In conjunction to the image of these two pitiable women was the relentless search for a husband by the youths of Austen's novels, from the Bennett sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, to the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility* who were forced from the family home upon the death of their father and forced to reduce their domestic expenditure.

¹²² Smith, 'Female Householding', pp. 83-107.

¹²³ See Fielding, *A plan for a preservatory and reformatory*, p. 5.

although these were mainly confined to traditionally feminine industries such as retail, education and catering. The influence of fashion and decoration in the representation of the upper classes, would indicate the significance of a skilled female workforce in the clothing industry and yet conduct literature of the period maintained the importance of women's confinement to domestic work.¹²⁴ The utilisation of the image of an actress facing poverty due to the wickedness of gentlemen was an emotional ploy to target Bellamy's readers and gain the public's sympathy while also emphasising her argument against certain socially superior individuals.

Survival was a prevailing theme throughout Bellamy's five volume work, in which the public observed the actress's struggles from leaving the protection of her father, to entering the stage and defending her honour against philandering gentlemen. Bellamy's final attempt at survival was the publication of her memoirs, although there is evidence suggesting that Bellamy was not the actual author but had used a ghost-writer, Alexander Bicknell, to record her adventures in print.¹²⁵ Similar to the fictitious and authentic memoirs of prostitutes, actress chronicles demonstrated how the subject's sexual life was shaped primarily from a determination to survive, making the protagonists both 'admired and vilified'.¹²⁶ Sophia Baddeley's biographer, Elizabeth Steele, utilised the publication of the actress's memoirs to secure an income and grafted her own history onto Baddeley's. The memoir became a

¹²⁴ For further reading on the economic activity of women, see Hannah Barker's analysis of directories that recorded the occupations of individuals from three of the major northern cities - Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds. Barker believes that women from the middle classes were not a marginalised group that were confined to feminised industries. In a table, Barker illustrates that in 1788 the estimated population of Manchester was 43,000 and 4.7% were occupational women. The figures in Sheffield and Leeds were lower, but still indicated a proportion of the population were businesswomen. Barker, *The Business of Women*.

¹²⁵ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, (London) Wednesday, November 06, 1872; Issue 2412.

¹²⁶ Jones, 'Luxury, Satire and Prostitute Narratives', p. 187.

vehicle for the author to establish herself in history, as Steele's character would not have been of interest if it were not for her connection with Baddeley. Steele recognized the opportunities from her association with celebrated figures and exploited the memoir to rewrite her own history by reforming the image she held. According to the *London Chronicle*, it was Steele who was the beneficiary of the publications and not Baddeley, which strengthens the idea that Steele desired to be recognised in history and to profit from her relationship with Baddeley.¹²⁷ James Boaden had similarly utilised his knowledge of and relationships with theatrical performers to replenish his personal finances in 1824.¹²⁸ At the time of the publication of her *Apology*, Bellamy was facing poverty - she was by now too old to play her once celebrated characters and after a lifetime of extravagance the actress was reduced to begging from her friends. Her publication would have secured a healthy income, but aside from financial reasons, revenge may have been a greater stimulus, making the scandalous history a narrative critiquing sexual double standards. In other words these texts solicited the 'social as well as financial survival of their authors' who had been abandoned by deceitful men.¹²⁹ Through their confessions of sexual encounters with philanderers and their feigned atonement, female writers employed the sub-genre of memoir-writing as compensation for men's cruelty - profiting from affliction.

Aware of the competitiveness of gentlemen wishing to gain an actress as lover, actresses employed their bodies for financial reward and subsistence. Frances Abington's negotiations with the Earl of Shelburne have already been discussed in the *tête-à-tête*

¹²⁷ *London Chronicle* (London, England), November 15, 1787 – November 17, 1787; Issue 4845.

¹²⁸ Stephens, 'Boaden, James (1762–1839)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2730>]

¹²⁹ Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth-Century*, p. 143.

series, but she was not the only actress who required a salary in exchange for a sexual liaison. Essentially such financial arrangements reflected the prostitute/customer relationship, but as these actresses were employed in a legitimate industry, any funding received from a lover was excused as compensation for the extravagant lifestyle and appearance they were expected to lead as mistresses and ornaments. According to a collection of anecdotes accumulated in 1793, the corruption of young men was considered less significant a social problem than the visibility of sexually-liberated women; a theory which has been disputed by Stephen Gregg who claims that the anxiety surrounding prostitution only emerged out of concern over the effects on masculinity and the spread of disease which weakened the country's men.¹³⁰ Ann Catley's indiscretions were deemed the more threatening to the nation, compared to the actions of her lovers. Her recorded history depicted an assertive and resolute woman who 'measured love by profit, and enjoyed sensual indulgence without the least relish for mental satisfaction.'¹³¹ Although this representation would have made her a pariah among fashionable ladies, with Catley exemplifying the more masculine traits of sensibility and greed, the actress conveyed a life of independence that other females may have envied and demonstrated her knowledge of female marketability.

Actresses were skilled and ambitious businesswomen who manipulated their images to the desires of their audiences, whether this was the representation of themselves as victims of persecution that required the public's protection, or as sexually active women who

¹³⁰ Addison, *A collection of interesting anecdotes*, p. 322. Gregg, 'A Truly Christian Hero', p. 21.

¹³¹ Ambross, *The life and memoirs of the late Miss Ann Catley*, p. 36.

attracted voyeuristic spectators and gossip-mongers. It has been argued that a 'sexual panic' was evident in Britain during the 1790s, when women were portrayed as both the victims of seduction and as Amazons who abandoned their femininity.¹³² As noted above, the French Revolution displayed the transformation of women from delicate females to armed and forceful members of the Revolution in the streets of Paris. Anxiety for the loss of femininity in France permeated into British society, with patriarchal texts targeting female professionals, such as actresses and novelists, as damaging virtuous femininity. The argument rested in the assumption that not only were these women employed in the public sphere, but in aspiring to succeed they exhibited masculine qualities of ambition and competitiveness. Contradictory images of Sarah Siddons as a maternal woman providing for her family and as a prima-donna in the theatre reflects gender anxiety and explains the public's hostility towards the actress's career goals. Siddons suffered criticism for being career driven and was accused of disregarding those who had previously helped her career. A critic eloquently described Siddons as 'virtue in the Extreme is said to border on Vice; but the Extreme of OEconomy, in Mrs S.'s Idea, is no more, than *extreme Prudence*'.¹³³ Her vanity and greed was satirised in the media and caricatures of the period, yet according to her biographer Boaden, she displayed no such faults. Boaden's argument was that the tragic muse possessed both the feminine domestic qualities which exemplified her family devotion and the masculine ambition to succeed professionally. The most publicised argument against the actress was an incident which took place in 1784 when she was believed to have refused a benefit performance for an elderly actor, West Digges. Siddons

¹³² Binhammer, 'The Sex Panic of the 1790s', pp. 409-434.

¹³³ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), September 18, 1784 – September 21, 1784; Issue 3673.

claimed that she 'could not spare time to act for the benefits of performers' during the busy summer season and more significantly she could not afford to do so unpaid as it would have been 'a palpable injustice to her family'.¹³⁴

The 'interest of her Family' was Siddons's primary concern and yet this did not protect her from media attacks.¹³⁵ In the media Siddons's character was separated into a private domestic persona and her public image as a career woman. The symbiotic relationship between the conflicting interests of actresses was not considered – that the maternal instincts and professional ambitions of acting women coexisted. In the press Siddons's loyalties to her family were misinterpreted as evidence of her ruthless ambition and it was reported that the actress was 'resolved to profit by the unhappy situation of poor Digges' by demanding she be paid fifty guineas.¹³⁶ Joseph Haslewood (1769–1833) the biographer, defended the actress against the 'paragraphical assassin' who initiated this assault by suggesting that the allegations were produced by a gentleman whose ego was deflated by the actress.¹³⁷ In *St James's Chronicle* one reader questioned the accuracy of the accusatory report and whether or not the actress was right to make such a demand, taking into consideration her commercial value.¹³⁸ The journalist argued that in requesting fifty guineas payment it was assumed that her appearance in Digges's benefit would ensure a minimum of between one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds return, an amount that was

¹³⁴ Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Siddons*, p. 286.

¹³⁵ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), September 18, 1784 – September 21, 1784; Issue 3673.

¹³⁶ *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* (London), Friday, September 10, 1784; Issue 2442.

¹³⁷ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁸ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), September 16, 1784 – September 18, 1784; Issue 3672.

unreasonable to expect without the actress's appearance.¹³⁹ Another article justified her demand of payment for if she were to agree to one free benefit she would therefore be obliged to perform them all as it would be detrimental to her public character if she were to display favouritism.¹⁴⁰ Mr Siddons published a letter of defence in the *London Chronicle* in which he declared that his wife had 'never wished, asked, nor accepted, a single farthing' from Mr Digges.¹⁴¹ But the attack was not aimed at Mrs Siddons's domestic character, but attacked her professional character, disputing that friendships were not possible for a career ambitious woman. A letter published by an anonymous author identified as *Dramaticus*, stated that the attack on Mrs Siddons's sensibilities was not an attack against her private character, but on her reputation as an actress.¹⁴² Siddons's career ambitions were linked to her duties as a parent, the theatre providing the actress a means for supporting her family financially and was therefore a natural maternal instinct, conforming to conventional femininity and acceptable to the public.

Elizabeth Farren was similarly criticised for the wages she demanded while touring the provincial theatres of Yorkshire, but did not have children to use as an excuse for her financial demands. Farren based her request of a high salary on her intellectual and skilled acting abilities, demonstrating the qualifications required to be a successful actress. Prior to her engagement in York, Mrs Siddons had performed with Tate Wilkinson's theatre company, where the actress received no less than £180.¹⁴³ Farren anticipated 'near 200l'

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* (London), Monday, September 27, 1784; Issue 1223.

¹⁴¹ *London Chronicle* (London), September 30, 1784 – October 2, 1784; Issue 4356.

¹⁴² *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* (London), Saturday, October 2, 1784; Issue 2461.

¹⁴³ *World and Fashionable Advertiser* (London), Wednesday, June 13, 1787; Issue 141.

during a period that would not attract as many visitors to the region, as Siddons had acted during the city's Race Week.¹⁴⁴ Farren's determination to succeed may have caused her misjudgement of the pragmatism of her demands. The biographer James Boaden justified such behaviour as evidence of the intellect and beauty that successful actresses possessed, exhibiting sensibility and an education superior than many of the female gender, for what other group of women would possess such 'an army of good words', 'polished thought' and 'equal self-possession' than an actress?¹⁴⁵ However, while the wealthy were portrayed as pretentious and satirised in actress memoirs, Farren's memoir cautioned that if a performer achieved success they were in danger of becoming as voracious as the gentry they mocked. The actress was accused of exploiting Lord Derby's affection in order to promote her career, encouraging his attentions 'which so emboldened the *lusty Earl*'.¹⁴⁶ With the patronage and support of Lord Derby and the upper classes, the actress began to aspire to ascend class boundaries and 'the golden circle of Nobility which she hoped might some time encompass her brow'.¹⁴⁷

Public anxiety surrounding the ambition of actresses also denoted the elevation of the lower classes and the erosion of the perceived moral superiority of the upper classes. The theatre was an ideal arena for beautiful young women to attract wealthy gentlemen and the intelligence of performing women with their ability to mimic the fashions and manners of gentlewomen, made them attractive partners. Elizabeth Farren and Mrs Jordan were

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Arbiter, *Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

both criticised for attempting to improve their living situations and advancing socially. Her biographer recorded that Farren's sense 'of her own importance prevented her dropping one tear' for her public, revealing the actress's arrogance once she had achieved success and admiration from individuals above her social standing.¹⁴⁸ It was feared that the humbleness of acting women was in jeopardy once success was attained and turned delicate femininity into distasteful superiority. The danger of this behaviour and the possibility for actresses to attain prosperous marriages with wealthy patrons and admirers, was that lower class women could become the equals to those born into the upper classes and nobility. Both Jordan and Farren attracted gentlemen from the nobility, but only Farren succeeded in acquiring a marriage and secured her position among the upper classes. Farren embodied a 'rags to riches' story and served as a powerful metaphor for the lower classes - a woman who rose from 'a Barn to a Court' owing to her own personal integrity.¹⁴⁹ The actress accomplished her wishes in retiring from the stage to marry Lord Derby and admittance into the company of a 'bevy of high illustrious Dames', yet according to her biographer, Petronius Arbiter, this happiness was a facade.¹⁵⁰ The author, whose name was a pseudonym which referred to the Roman courtier, Gaius Petronius Arbiter who had written the satirical novel *Satyricon*, was critical of Farren's rise in status.¹⁵¹ Arbiter crudely stated that the couple spent the first month of marriage at engagements and 'could not find their way to the Hymeneal Bed *before Four o'clock each Morning!*'¹⁵² Regardless whether

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26 & Postscript Extraordinary.

¹⁵¹ 'Gaius Petronius Arbiter,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v., [<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/454501/Gaius-Petronius-Arbiter>]

¹⁵² Arbiter, *Memoirs of the present Countess of Derby*, p. 26 & Postscript Extraordinary.

this was true or not, the actress demonstrated within her memoirs that an ambitious and virtuous lifestyle within the theatre was possible and would be justly rewarded through social advancement and admiration.

Conclusion

The biographer James Boaden, believed that actresses were predestined to suffer as their 'extraordinary beauty' confirmed them as victims of public amusement and 'public prey'.¹⁵³ The recording of their lives not only challenged conventional ideologies of gender roles, but aided in establishing them as sympathetic women who succumbed to the seductions of men as a means for survival. By defining feminine influences outside the private sphere, in the economy through consumerism, shaping public tastes in literature and fashion, and conversing with the country's elite intellectuals, actress memoirs provide evidence of the ability of lower-class women to maintain feminine domesticity in conjunction with a professional public career. Ann Catley's biographer, Miss Ambross, argued that there was a distinct absence of women in recorded histories that narrated the lives of 'great men'.¹⁵⁴ The exception to this were a few Empresses and 'slight sketches of the Roman matrons and of two ancient courtesans', yet as seen in the analysis of actress memoirs, the recorded lives of lower-class women reveal 'hidden and subtle springs' of feminine authority and gender construction.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 94.

¹⁵⁴ Ambross, *The life and memoirs of the late Miss Ann Catley*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Fashioning the reader's empathy, actresses were portrayed as innocent dupes to the philandering of men, making them pitiable and recoverable from corruption. Gentlemen were often the fiends of these texts while the heroines suffered for their efforts to maintain their virtue. The immorality of the upper classes featured in each memoir analysed in this thesis, with the observation that the image of the actress was often utilised as a vehicle for a greater social discourse surrounding the morality of society. While the representation of actresses may appear to have been subversive of eighteenth-century social order, their memoirs also attempted to portray actresses under conventional ideologies of femininity, balancing their professional ambition with the virtuous female duties of daughters, wives and mothers that established them as admirable women. The upper classes were represented in actress memoirs as being accountable for the decline in social morality. Extravagant lifestyles, the pursuits of pleasure and the seduction of those from lower social standing with the temptations of wealth and admiration, were to be observed from the gentleman at the peak of authority. Actress memoirs identified the failings and conduct of the rich who proved more of a threat to society than the perceived danger from the success of these professional women. James Boaden attested to this when he questioned – 'Who would have believed in the virtuous resistance of an actress' against the temptations of fame and wealth?'¹⁵⁶ In emphasising their perceived victimisation at the hands of gentlemen in their texts, actresses were able to gain the public's admiration for the hardships they suffered while attempting to establish themselves professionally.

¹⁵⁶ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 360.

The print media formed a platform for the recoding of gender roles that were more realistic than the feminine duties detailed in conduct literature, which revealed that actresses were not static individuals who merely recited lines from scripts, but were active participants in their careers and challenged societal constraints on femininity. The narration of their sexual conquests served as enticement for the public to consume such texts, feeding the voyeuristic appetites of spectators. In 1787 the newspaper *World and Fashionable Advertiser* stated that 'Scandal, if related in an entertaining manner, will always be acceptable'.¹⁵⁷ Advertised under the guise of scandalous narratives, memoirs such as George Anne Bellamy's gathered much attention and popularity, but within the pages were images of these women performing traditional female duties that made them acceptable for celebration. Female memoirs challenged conventional scripts on femininity and representation, providing an arena for female writers to conceal or bring to light personal histories, but also identifying the economic significance of a female readership. Domesticity was utilised as the woman's salvation and proof that the theatre facilitated the maintenance of a virtuous home by providing legitimate work for women and allowed them to provide for their family. Although the majority of actress memoirs were not authored by the women themselves, the representations of acting women depicted in texts exhibited the influence of actresses in identifying social problems – from the immorality of the gentry to the dilemma of female poverty – with actresses emerging as formidable models of femininity.

¹⁵⁷ *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, (London), Saturday, June 2, 1787; Issue 132.

The Actress and her Painted Representation

*I appear on my trial in the court of physiognomy, and am as anxious to make good a certain idea I have of myself, as if I were playing a part on the stage.*¹

The worlds of art and theatrical performance shared a significant interdependence with one another in the eighteenth-century, most evidently observed in the collaborations between actresses and portrait artists. The observation quoted above, emphasised the comparisons between both genres, implying that the portrait sitter was performing similarly to theatrical actors - anxious to exhibit their best qualities to spectators. Actresses exerted their agency through the manipulation of their image into a desired representation, while the artist's interpretation of the sitter was dependent on the personal and professional relationship held between the two. Throughout this research I was unable to find any written evidence of actresses commissioning portraits, so the display of their agency and influence can only be determined through the examination of the paintings themselves. Symbolism and the representation of the actress in art form determined the image a woman wished to convey to her audience, employing prints and portraiture as self-promotion and advertisement. Scholars such as Laura Engel have similarly concluded that actresses were active agents in their pictorial images by establishing themselves as consumers.² In displaying the current

¹ 'Table Talk – No. IX. On Sitting for one's Picture,' *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 8:31 (1823), p. 474.

² Engel, 'The Muff Affair', pp. 279-298. See also Ou, 'Gender, Consumption, and Ideological Ambiguity', pp. 383-407.

fashion trends and accessories, the actress was consciously removing herself from the notion of her body as an object of consumerism, to becoming the patron of elegance and style. The following paragraphs will examine the structural changes which occurred simultaneously in both genres as both the theatre and art worlds aspired for social acceptance and professionalization.

Women were more visible during the eighteenth-century than previously before. They were to be seen on the streets - selling and whoring, in the theatre - entertaining and inspiring and on the walls of art exhibitions alongside portraits of high society ladies. Although not always portrayed in a positive light, the increased visibility of working and somewhat independent women, undoubtedly impacted dramatically on social attitudes towards the female sex and gender construction. Yet as the portraits examined in the following paragraphs will confirm, actresses held greater authority over painted images of themselves than previous scholarship has suggested. In her analysis of Mary Robinson's portraits, Anne Mellor concluded that, similar to public opinion, Robinson's portrait artists reinforced the perceived images of actresses as whores, dangerous females and yet were also unprotected and vulnerable women.³ The interpretation of eighteenth-century actress portraits as representing these women as seductresses is also echoed in Gill Perry's examination into Dorothy Jordan's curls as a form of flirtation and Frances Abington's manipulation and modification of her painted image in later years to market a more youthful and sexually-appealing self.⁴ The actress's sexuality was an essential asset to a woman who depended

³ Mellor, 'Making an Exhibition of Her Self', pp. 271-304.

⁴ Perry, 'Staging Gender and "Hairy Signs"', pp. 145-163. Also, Perry, 'Ambiguity and Desire', p. 76.

on her figure to transform into character and attract audiences. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe and will be proven in the subsequent paragraphs, that the sexual representation of actresses in portrait form was as much the actress's own choice as the artist's composition. Similar to the recording of their characters through written biographies and memoirs, actresses manipulated their painted images to accommodate public taste and promote their versatility as sexual individuals who could impersonate women of the aristocracy.

Creating Celebrity Status

Actresses were natural subjects for the art world – they could embody beauty, innocence, sexuality and already held a strong following of admirers from their presence on the stage. As a result they were lucrative models for artists, while for those actresses who agreed to become an artist's muse, the reproduction of their image in print formed free advertisement and was utilised in increasing the woman's social visibility and acceptance. Actresses bridged the gap between the socially acceptable but less fascinating portraits of ladies from the nobility and the sexualised images that depicted street walkers and women of an ambiguous nature, making the representation of actresses a compromise between the two. Seventeenth-century fine art primarily represented the beauties seen at court and royal mistresses, but eighteenth-century tastes witnessed a shift in the representation of the female figure with an increasing number of women from the lower classes being exhibited. The visibility and familiarity of actresses to a diverse audience resulted in the coveting of their images above the lesser known court beauties. By the eighteenth-century

the British court was no longer seen as a place of inspirational beauty or culture.⁵ Artists now found their muses in the theatres, pleasure gardens and recreational events, with actresses and women with less than desirable morals replacing the portraits of the perceived chaste ladies of the court.⁶

The actress Sophia Baddeley (1745-1786) often frequented Vauxhall Gardens and enjoyed socialising with respectable society.⁷ Indeed the visibility of actresses and lower class women at pleasure gardens and public attractions visited by the Bon Ton was often discussed in the media. An article in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* published a letter from a lady referred to as *Arabella* who had visited Bagnigge Wells. This lady voiced her disgust at observing 'women of the town' who deprived the 'women of character the pleasure of the gardens'.⁸ The journalist sympathised with this lady's complaint but questioned how the proprietors of such public areas could exclude 'the abandoned of their sex'. He continued by stating that gardens, playhouses and parks 'all swarm with them' and 'it is next to an impossibility for the proprietors of them to distinguish what women are by their appearances, as the circumstances of dress is quite equivocal' as many of the fashionable ladies mimicked the fashions of celebrated courtesans.⁹ A woman's social status could therefore not be determined simply by her attire and made the distinction between respectable ladies and the professional actress in the gardens and on the walls in paint difficult to differentiate.

⁵ McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze*, pp. 84-85.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 1 of 6, p. 143.

⁸ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, August 29, 1765; Issue 11377.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The popularity of the theatre flourished throughout the eighteenth-century as observed in the numbers of newspaper advertisements and dramatic memoirs published. At the same time the artistic world was undergoing a transformation to legitimise the profession and recode the moral characters of artists in a similar fashion to actresses. Both the artist and the actress sought public acceptance by defining their characters as virtuous, whether through the printing of memoirs seeking sympathy and forgiveness or in the publication of discourses regarding the morality of those fortunate enough to be admitted into artistic circles.¹⁰ Actresses had featured in the art work of institutions such as William Hogarth's *Foundling Hospital* (f.1746), but the establishment of the Royal Academy of Arts reinforced the relationship between both genres. The Royal Academy was envisioned as a centre for cultural and social debate, comparable to the theatre as stage for political discourse. In December 1768, the Royal Academy was initiated in an attempt to establish the professional status of the artist and to serve as a platform to exhibit the artist's works. This institution formed a type of art school, where training and instruction was carried out and comprised of thirty-six artists with differing techniques and backgrounds. It was advertised that 'no Country can boast of a more useful Establishment, nor of any establishment upon more noble Principles.'¹¹ To be a member of the Academy, the artist was expected to be twenty-five years of age or over, was a resident of Great Britain, was a man of 'fair moral

¹⁰ Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), painter and one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Art, published a number of artistic *Discourses* between the years 1769 and 1790 that instructed pupils in the artistic process and will be examined in subsequent paragraphs.

¹¹ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, December 20, 1768; Issue 10652.

characters, of high reputation in their several professions', but most importantly, members could not be connected with another artistic society.¹²

In the decade up to the establishment of the Academy, there had been friction within the artistic community of the then leading society, *Incorporated Society of Artists*. Those who formed the new Royal Academy had been a minority group within the society, under the leadership of Francis Hayman. Hayman envisioned an exclusive society that consisted of artists who exemplified British high art, but internal frictions about the direction and scope of the society resulted in the resignation of directors. To some, the society was a stage for commercial purposes rather than an institution for the sharing of ideas and discourse. When the directors resigned and the society disbanded, King George III commissioned William Chambers, Benjamin West, George Michael Moser and Francis Cotes to design a royal academy for the art community. Initially the first thirty-four were nominated by the King, with Sir Joshua Reynolds as its founding president until his death in 1792. The remaining six artists were later nominated and voted for by Academy members, comprising of twenty-eight painters, five architects and three sculptors. The professionalization of the Academy came in the appointments of honorary professors, although these engagements held no formal responsibilities, but those who directed the Academy were deemed as belonging to 'the first Rank in their professions'.¹³ The Academy was an exclusive society and unlike its predecessors, wealthy art enthusiasts were prohibited from becoming members. Women were also excluded from the society, according to the criteria, with the

¹² Hoock, 'Founders of the Royal Academy of Arts (act. 1768-1825),' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/94593>]

¹³ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, December 20, 1768; Issue 10652.

exception of the two female founding members - Mary Moser (1744-1819), daughter of George Michael Moser, one of the King's appointments, and Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807), who had gained international recognition. The establishment of this Academy resembled the early beginnings of the eighteenth-century theatre, with a strong relationship held between the aristocracy and playhouses through the issuing of Royal patents by King Charles II in 1662 and the impact on the social status of women upon the introduction of the first women on the stage.

Actresses employed artist's work in two distinct ways – as advertisement for their stage characters and as an attempt to recode their public reputation as respectable genteel ladies. I will firstly examine the female body represented in character and how the blurring of reality affected the personal character of the actress. The majority of actress portraits and prints depicted them in stage character, rather than seated elegantly, gazing at the spectator. Such paintings served as promotional tools to attract and emphasise the superior talents of the actress in her celebrated role. The actress was known for her actions upon the stage and so her movement and gestures were significant in her representation. Actresses were not static figures known only for their appearance, as upper class ladies were often illustrated in the seventeenth-century. Therefore, in the portrayal of actresses, theatrical props and performative gestures were employed to reflect the woman's character. An alternative reason as to why actresses were often depicted on stage mid-performance may rest in a contemporary debate that questioned the influence of private interests, such as the production of portraits, on society. An examination of eighteenth-

century novels and portraits has identified the presence of social anxiety arising from the creation of a narcissistic society through the production and consumption of portraits.¹⁴

The feared vanity was intensified by criticisms on the 'conversations' which female portraits held with their spectators – the potential for a spectator to assume erotic intent existent in a portrait while examining the facial expression of the sitter threatened to transform the 'spectatorial moment' into a 'sexual conversation'.¹⁵ Criticism about the sexual innuendoes present in portraits of actresses will be discussed at a later stage, but suffice to say that women from the comedic genre primarily suffered from presumed eroticism. For this reason historical paintings were deemed the superior art form as observed in 1776 when it was lamented that Sir Joshua Reynolds failed to exhibit any historical pieces, but presented to the public four full-length portraits at the Royal Academy Exhibition.¹⁶ However, there was a danger in the use of historical and mythological references employed by those outside the theatre, whereby the sitter's aim of being represented as knowledgeable and tasteful, paradoxically became a satirical discourse on exhibitions of wealth. A novel published in 1761 utilised the fictitious family, the Primroses, to illustrate the ridiculous performance of portrait sitting by a family with more wealth than taste.¹⁷ The Primroses, employ the family portrait to declare their social superiority over their neighbouring families, and decide to have each family member represent a historical figure. Rather than presenting a realistic representation of the family, an 'ideal' or aesthetically pleasing portrait was the final

¹⁴ Conway, 'Private Interests', p.1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, April 27, 1776; Issue 1094.

¹⁷ Flint, 'The Family Piece', p. 127-152.

product.¹⁸ This echoes criticisms regarding the accuracy of actress images, with both the artist and the actress converging to present a flattering representation of the woman, and often adopting celebrated stage characters.

Rather than simply accept that spectators perceived actresses as animated figures and desired for them to be depicted as such, it has been claimed that there were distinct number of factors that contributed towards a transformation in the voyeuristic interest of the public. In the first half of the century, facial expressions were prominent in the observation of female portraits, but in the late eighteenth-century the focus had turned to the female body and symbols. With the increasing numbers attending the theatres through the century, there was a need for the expansion of the play houses resulting in more audience members sitting a further distance from the stage. Therefore, facial expressions of the players were difficult to observe and made body gestures and props utilised by the performers the more significant in the portrayal of sensations.¹⁹ It is likely that spectators may not have known the faces of their favourite players, but the figure's posture, hand gestures and symbolic props would have made the sitter of the portrait identifiable to the public. This suggests a true reflection of the actress's image was not necessary, but rather a likeness which allowed the public's interpretation was the essential outcome.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁹ West, 'Body Connoisseurship', p. 154. In her paper *Body Connoisseurship*, West maps this evolution and the significance of the female body in the theatrical profession.

²⁰ Davis, 'Spectatorship', p. 60.

The advances in theatrical costume also aided in the public's admiration of the female body. The transition in attire and the popularity in breeches roles that exhibited the actress's figure, allowed more freedom of movement and gestures identifiable to spectators.²¹ Coupled with this, was the 'intensification of visual stimuli' and increase of theatrical critiques from the art exhibitions of such institutions as the Society of Artists and the Royal Academy.²² These are all valid explanations, but fail to identify the agency of the actress in the pictorial process. The representation of the actress's figure, whether in breeches or through dramatic gestures, served as advertisement of her talents on the stage and attractiveness in such roles. The birth of celebrity culture coincided with actresses allowing themselves to be represented in paint under the guise of their most celebrated characters and the increased visibility of performers in society. The actress's body was viewed as a commercial commodity for the voyeuristic eighteenth-century society, but in artistic form this 'lustful' desire of the female figure in stage costume was excused as legitimate cultural admiration of the sister arts. Therefore, while the exhibition of the actress's body on stage and in art may have been sexually charged, paradoxically this created what we would consider nowadays as celebrity infatuation that benefited the actress professionally through greater audience attendance.

By the late eighteenth-century, an increasing number of actress portraits were produced illustrating these women as elegant fashionable ladies. This transformation demonstrated

²¹ For further reading on actresses wearing male clothing, or what has been referred to as 'gender-bending' attire both on and off the stage, see Shevelov, *Charlotte; Being a True Account of an Actress's Flamboyant Adventures*, p. 176.

²² West, 'Body Connoisseurship', p. 154.

the sought after professionalism and respectability which actresses who had achieved celebrity status desired. If successful in establishing themselves as genteel women, actresses could further transcend class boundaries and be accepted as members of society's elite. In gaining the ability to do so, the actress threatened the contemporary hierarchy and hostility was evident from journalists who insisted that the morals of the acting profession were no different than the depravity of London's courtesans and prostitutes. An article in the *Daily Universal Register* (The Times) (1786) censured the Royal Academy's decision to display portraits of 'notorious prostitutes, triumphing as it were in vice, close to the pictures of women of rank and virtue'.²³ It went on to say;

*A speculative eye may easily distinguish the vicious courtesan from the modest maiden or chaste wife.*²⁴

Although aimed at prostitutes, the above quote reveals the rising concern over the increasing number of actress images, illustrations of the lower ranking woman in polite society. The author made no distinction between the professional career-driven actress and a common prostitute on the streets. The representation of an actress set amongst ladies from fashionable society suggested three possible arguments in the actress's favour. Firstly, it indicated that both the artist and the actress in question were aspiring to represent the woman as a respectable lady, removing the sexual ambiguity that surrounded the profession. Secondly, by exhibiting her portrait surrounded by elite society, it elevated the actress's status as a professional in her field, one to be respected and admired. Lastly, the author stated that a 'speculative eye' may distinguish between the actress and the upper

²³ *Daily Universal Register* (The Times) (London, England) May 10, 1786.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

class lady. However actresses were notorious mimics of the fashionable world and to some extent, ladies from the gentry would imitate the dress of those actresses at the top of the profession. Was there a possibility for spectators to differentiate between the two? The canvas allowed the actress to be seen as one of the fashionable ladies whose scandals and gossip were often portrayed in the media of the period. Thus birth right was no longer a necessity for persons to be respected or given recognition. Portraits such as *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784) and *Mrs Jordan as the Comic Muse, Supported by Euphrosyne, who represses the advance of a satyr* (c. 1785-86), depicted these actresses as ladies of fashion.²⁵ They wore elegant gowns, jewellery (but not excessive amounts as this was deemed vulgar and an obvious sign of a woman trying to mimic respectability) and appropriate pose.

Classical imagery was frequently used to represent both upper class women and actresses as Grecian Muses or Goddesses and it could easily be assumed that genteel women were imitating female performers who assumed the roles of *Thalia* (the comic muse) and *Melpomene* (the muse of tragedy) upon the stage. The illustration of upper class women in the form of mythological figures was a direct response to the influence of the acting world on taste. It may also have been an attempt to distract male attention away from the stage beauties and remind gentlemen of the superiority to be found in the females of the Bon Ton. Thus the blurring of class boundaries was intensified by the use of a common theme

²⁵ *'Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse'* (1784) by Sir Joshua Reynolds, National Portrait Gallery D9069 & *'Mrs Jordan as the Comic Muse, Supported by Euphrosyne, who represses the advances of a satyr'* (c. 1785-86) by John Hoppner held in the Royal Collection <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/404611/mrs-jordan-1761-1816-as-the-comic-muse> print available in National Portrait Gallery D36742.

and a comparison drawn between the women's beauty. The actress Mrs Abington (1737–1815) was admired as a performer but was remembered more as fashion 'guru'. In a brief history of the actress recorded by Joseph Haslewood, it was observed that 'whatever dress she wore was generally adopted by the politest circles, and her example gave law to fashion', making the theatre a social space of taste and criticism.²⁶ The moral status of fashionable ladies was in danger as the number of actress images increased and were more habitually seen at high society gatherings by the end of the century. It is doubtful that many spectators would have had the capacity to distinguish between a portrait of an actress and an aristocratic lady sitting side-by-side. However, reviews and newspapers often named the sitters of exhibitions in an attempt to protect moral society from making any errors by bestowing their admiration on a painting of a corrupt woman. By doing so, newspapers merely added to the public's curiosity and wish to familiarise themselves with the faces of actresses and courtesans who frequented the gossip pages and captured the hearts of princes, thus increasing exhibition admissions.

Actress's Sexuality

Actresses exhibited their sexuality both on and off the stage, exploiting their public visibility by appealing to male admirers and boosting their celebrated reputation. To understand further the influence exercised by actresses in the creative process of their painted representations, female sexuality and the ambiguity surrounding the morality of the artistic profession require discussion. An actress's body and feminine sexuality were essential tools in her stage career and often caused her the reputation of a seductress. The questionable

²⁶ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 81.

morality of the artistic world, which often employed prostitutes as cheap models for struggling artists, further hindered the actress's desire for respectability. Sir Joshua Reynolds used high-class prostitutes in many paintings, either for the attention these gathered to his work or as a consequence of his friendship with the sitter. But in choosing women with loose morals, it also meant that the artist had the freedom to compose the subject as he wished without fear of damaging the female's reputation or succumbing to rebuke from her family and friends. A prostitute could hardly object to removing her clothes and so the artist had a complying subservient model. It has been argued that Reynolds intentionally chose female sitters to depict 'male fantasy' in a male driven society.²⁷ Female agency was removed from the artistic process according to this argument, claiming that Reynolds promoted himself as the dominant artistic influence in his noticeably 'homosocial' collection of clientele.²⁸ The female body was simply a tool in the manufacture of male idealised femininity and yet, by exhibiting their bodies or moulding their femininity to male fantasy, actresses were acting as businesswomen, creating a self-image for professional advancement.

The acceptance of sexualised images of women was a result of artists' 'quasi-allegorical portraits' that represented sexually ambiguous women as goddesses, nymphs or mythical figures.²⁹ Yet the sexualisation of such women was desirable for their careers and artists' use of their beauty did not harm their social standing but rather promoted their attraction. The transition for Reynolds from the illustration of prostitutes to female performers was a

²⁷ Postle, 'Painted Women', pp. 22-56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

natural evolution and confirmed his development as a highly regarded professional. Actresses were more socially accepted and legitimate public women whom the public could admire. The theatre and sexual professions were sometimes interconnected as illustrated through the lifestyles of Kitty Fisher, Elizabeth Hartley and Frances Abington, all originally courtesans who utilised their sexuality to advance onto the stage. But while the use of women whose personal chastity was questionable due to the exhibition of their sexuality aided in promoting his work among male admirers who coveted these women, Reynolds's choice of the actress was a sign of his evolution into high art portraits which were more legitimate images to be admired by the Bon Ton.³⁰

In the character of Queen Cleopatra, Kitty Fisher (1741?-1767) flaunted her superiority as a sexual and unique female, while also alluding to her short-lived career on the stage. In the sexually charged painting *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl*, exhibited in 1759, a number of innuendos are evident, but I challenge the argument that Reynolds was exploiting the woman's image for male fantasy. An alternative interpretation of the sexual symbolism suggest that it was Fisher utilising art in an attempt to advertise her superior status over common prostitutes. The rumours behind the symbolism of the painting were that Cleopatra had dissolved a pearl in wine before drinking it. Pearls symbolised unblemished femininity, but also referred to uniqueness and the value of these gems, used frequently in art as seen in Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (c.1661). Was the image of the pearl in Fisher's portrait a sarcastic taunt at her loss of purity? This can be disputed by the fact that Fisher featured in a number of portraits by this artist and so the pearl most likely

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

represented her as a precious treasure that was admired and desired by men. An account of Fisher's natural 'elegance and delicacy' recorded the 'union of so many perfections' such as 'beauty, judgement, and wit' that Fisher exhibited and she was 'never without votaries' or admirers.³¹ Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz also commented that the woman 'knew her own merit' and demanded a sum of one hundred guineas for the pleasure of her company on a night.³² Fisher was believed to have exaggerated her wealth and grandeur by eating a one hundred pound note, although the author of the above record stated that it was only a fifty pound note which she proceeded to eat for her breakfast.³³ In the portrait her forefinger and thumb make the figure 'o' while holding the pearl, a subtle reference in art to the woman's sexuality.³⁴ It is unlikely that Reynolds's admiration for Fisher evolved into a sexual relationship as according to studies on the artist, his studio hosted numerous guests who were entertained as he painted, resulting in him seldom working alone.³⁵ This suggests that the artist performed in his studio similarly to the players on the stage and both artistic forms enjoyed the spectatorship. For Fisher, not only did the painting allude to her stage persona, but also illustrated her sexual dominance over the female gender – bridging eroticism and legitimate art.

Reynolds's natural progression from the depiction of prostitutes to courtesans and then onto actresses, reflected his professional growth and the representation of actresses within

³¹ Archenholz, *A picture of England*, p. 191.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Postle 'Painted Women', p. 25.

³⁵ Davis, 'Spectatorship', p. 60. See also Postle, 'Painted Women', p. 29, where he argues that a romantic relationship did not exist between Reynolds and Fisher.

society at that time. In his 1786 discourse, Reynolds described the theatre as a mirror to nature and justified his attention to the performing arts.³⁶ As the artist's career advanced so too did his use of legitimate and sociably acceptable models; thus the actress represented the sexualised imagery of immoral women but was a tolerable figure in the public sphere. Some artists still chose to misrepresent these women as vulgar and degenerate figures, who sold their bodies on the stage similar to the prostitute on the street. However, by exploiting the woman's body in paint, actresses could utilise their tainted image and attract wealthy admirers – this was particularly effective for young performers who employed their beauty for career advancement and later salvaged their character through the publication of an apology. As already discussed in the previous chapter, George Anne Bellamy and a number of other actresses published memoirs recording their many sexual indiscretions in a form of repenting for their sins. In her *Apology*, Bellamy sought the public's sympathy, blaming her follies on youth and naivety, thus removing her accountability. In presenting actresses as scornful sexualised individuals an opposite reaction was awakened, whereby male audiences became tantalised by the prospect of meeting such women who mirrored the fashion and manners of respectable ladies but were sexually obtainable. This in turn would have aided in audience attendance and profits for both the manager and players.

William Hogarth's work forms a satirical social criticism on ordinary life, and the theatre served as an appropriate arena for sexual discourse. Prior to the time of Reynolds, Hogarth's work openly criticised the theatrical institution, unlike his later counterparts who subtly

³⁶ Reynolds, *A discourse*, p. 18.

alluded to the lack of virtue in the profession. It has been argued that Hogarth's interest in the stage demonstrated the recognition of the playhouse as a distinctively 'English contribution to art', with such works as Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, providing the artist material to develop conversation pictures.³⁷ From 1724 his focus was the British stage and Hogarth began his analysis with the engraving *A Just View of the British Stage; or Three Heads are Better than One* (1724). The piece was an attack on the degradation of theatrical tastes that were dictated by the theatre managers. Actresses were not a feature of the engraving, as the artist focused on satirising the gentlemen responsible for introducing such plays to the public as the failed *Harlequin Sheppard* (John Thurmond's 1724 pantomime), which was presented in the print. The play represented the notorious life of John Sheppard, a thief who had broken out of prison twice before he was finally executed, not the kind of character moral society deemed worthy for celebration.³⁸ In this portrayal of the theatre, the artist was establishing the playhouse as a place where corruption was cultivated and immoral persons glorified.

By 1733/34 Hogarth introduced the image of actresses into his satirical commentary in his *Southwark Fair* that displayed a 'variety of humours and diversions in a Fair', as described in an art catalogue.³⁹ The central figure among the dark crowd and shadows was a fair skinned drummeress whose plumed hat and billowed sleeved dress was prominent from the surrounding darkness. Travelling performers would employ a drum at the front of their

³⁷ Paulson, *Hogarth; the 'Modern Moral Subject'*, p. 159. 'Conversation' pictures refer to art work that generates debate and discussion.

³⁸ *Select trials at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey*, Vol. 2 of 4, p. 147.

³⁹ Bowles & Sons, *A catalogue of maps, prints, copy-books*, p. 22.

troop to announce their arrival and upcoming performances to the public. The drummeress was the first member of the company to be greeted and the person who lead the players, but in Hogarth's interpretation, she was the one responsible for leading vice and immorality into the town. In the shadows and shaded characters surrounding the female drummer, Hogarth had illustrated such vices as prostitution, thieving and gambling. The ambiguous sexuality of female players was insinuated by the peep-show and the falling woman whose tumbled dress had left her thighs exposed. These images have been interpreted as Hogarth's attempt to represent either the 'practised or encouraged' prostitution of travelling actresses, while the depiction of other vices suggested the class of people who emerged at the arrival of actresses - thieves and drunkards.⁴⁰ Travelling actresses posed a double threat to society – they were women who worked in the public sphere whose sexuality was uncontained and the visibility of these women led to romantic notions for young women who sought a life outside the home. These vagrant women were painted no different than prostitutes, and were rarely differentiated from street-walkers. An article in 1717 described an unfortunate circumstance that occurred to an 'Eminent Quaker' after a visit to the Drury-Lane theatre when he was accosted by two 'Strolling Females', who took the 'Holy One' to a tavern where he was relieved of his money.⁴¹ Hogarth's painting reinforced the negative image of female travelling players, illustrating their mobility and the threat of their exposed female sexuality on townsfolk.

⁴⁰ Kiaer, 'Professional Femininity', p. 246.

⁴¹ *Original Weekly Journal* (London, England), November 30, 1717 – December 7, 1717.

Travelling troops were a topical subject in the 1730s, with the Playhouse Bill introduced to Parliament in 1735 only to be abandoned for the Licensing Act of 1737, which was directed at the players rather than the copyright issues of plays and playwrights. The increasing worry about the morality of society and the dangers presented from the acceptance of itinerant players into polite gatherings instigated the regulation of the theatre and limitation of its activities. Strolling actresses were an obvious target for Hogarth's attacks and in 1738 he produced his *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn* depicting a troop of travelling actresses preparing for a performance in a country barn. The women were scantily dressed in the semi-privacy of their makeshift dressing room and undertaking the duties of nursing children, pulling out teeth, squeezing pimples, mending stockings and becoming intoxicated. By emphasising their ability in maintaining a career alongside typical domestic roles from the rearing of children to darning stockings, it can be argued that Hogarth's depiction aided in displaying the virtuous representation which they sought to create, in establishing themselves under stereotypical gender roles. This is unlikely, taking into consideration Hogarth's previous theatrical representations and was arguably the artist's satirical attack on the government's attempt at containing travelling players by identifying the dilapidated reality of a strolling life.⁴² It is also possible that Hogarth was attempting to remove the exotic mystique that surrounded the image of the actress by exposing these scenes to the public.⁴³ On the stage actresses transformed into goddesses, queens and heroines, but behind the stage their fanciful props were used objects of fantasy for their ordinary domestic duties; a crown was utilised as a stand for the baby's food. The

⁴² Davis, 'Spectatorship', p. 61.

⁴³ Kiaer, 'Professional Femininity', p. 247.

professional and domestic spheres were blurred portraying the reality of an actress's life. Although Hogarth was ridiculing strolling actresses by illustrating them in humble employments, it can be argued that to spectators the image of actresses in a domestic capacity may have assisted in their attempts to prove themselves honourable women, which was sought after as evidenced in actress memoirs. Yet the disorder of the scene depicted by Hogarth strengthened the public's perception that women, and the sexuality of travelling actresses in particular, needed to be contained. Their half-naked bodies and beautifying regimes were warnings of these women's forms of seduction, adopting the characters of goddesses and using fantasy to enthrall audiences on the stage. This was not dissimilar from the beatifying regimes of upper class ladies and suggests that the images of actresses were juxtaposed with their female spectators, making criticisms surrounding the seductions and sexuality of actresses, a discourse on the immorality of upper class ladies.⁴⁴

Hogarth's illustrations of the theatre focused on rural theatricals and travelling companies, and potentially aided the influence of London's actresses. In presenting the vulgarity of country playhouses and their performers, the superiority of metropolitan female thespians was emphasised by their appearance in elegant clothing and the display of refined manners. The distinct comparison between the country and city actress justified why the London theatres appealed to young women and how an actress's ultimate goal was to succeed on the London stage, as has been seen with Dorothy Jordan's career.⁴⁵ There is no evidence to

⁴⁴ For further reading on cosmetics see, Chico, 'The Arts of Beauty', pp. 1-23. Ronald Paulson also examines the close proximity of the gentry seated on the stage and how the characters performed by players were often satirical criticisms of the spectators who seemed unaware of the likeness.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Jordan was successful in the Yorkshire theatres before she attempted a career in London. The authority of a celebrated London actress was evident when Jordan returned to Yorkshire and could not be

prove whether Hogarth's negative imagery of the profession was utilised by London's actresses, but nevertheless, the prints served as promotion of the morality to be found on the capital's boards.

One of the most notorious lower class women of the eighteenth-century was the actress and courtesan Kitty Fisher. This woman's sexuality has briefly been discussed in the examination of her portrayal as *Cleopatra*, but the manipulation and reproduction of her image to target specific audiences denotes the agency held by celebrated public women over their painted representations. Fisher utilised all forms of media (gossip, art and the theatre) to advertise her persona and attract clients. Although in this context she is an example of an influential actress, Fisher's primary occupation was as a courtesan, while the stage acted as a platform to exhibit herself as an attractive companion and sexually active woman. Similar to actresses, courtesans mimicked the fashion and manners of upper class women, but unlike the perceived morally chaste gentry, the courtesan offered men a sexual relationship in exchange for comforts. By objectifying both the actress and courtesan as objects of male desire, a further understanding in the significance of their images can be acquired. Male spectators coveted these women and those artists who painted and kept in the company of such females, had their profiles raised by association. This was a significant strategy of the artist for self-promotion, and yet it cannot be assumed that actresses were ineffective pawns to the exhibition of an artist's masculine prowess. Both parties were fully aware of the fiscal advantages available to them. It is unknown who originally

reproached by the manager or public for her ill behaviour towards the rural company's actresses as her social position was elevated.

commissioned Kitty Fisher's most notable portrait, *Cleopatra*, with speculation that Sir Charles Bingham, later Lord Lucan, requested the image.⁴⁶ Yet in July 1759 the *London Chronicle* advertised prints of the notorious portrait stating that the original was in the possession of Fisher herself, making the prints more sought after. Therefore, it is arguable that Fisher was responsible for the production and manipulation of her image into male fantasy, and that served her as an opening into the theatrical profession and the admiration of gentlemen from all classes.

Curious Metzotinto Print of Miss Kitty Fischer, done from an original

Picture in her own Possession, lately painted from the Life by Mr

*Reynolds.*⁴⁷

That same year Reynolds painted Fisher once again, but instead of using theatrical imagery, the woman was portrayed as an aristocratic lady – perhaps displaying her versatility from playing the seducing queen of the Nile to a refined lady. While posed as an upper-class woman, Fisher was clearly identified as courtesan by the introduction of a love letter, thus confirming her status as sexual woman. The crossing of Fisher's arms supporting her weight forward against a surface was employed by Reynolds in representations of respectable ladies – Anne Irwin (a general's wife) and Lady Selina Hastings - but the lace of the actress's dress surpassed the finery of these gentlewomen.⁴⁸ The portrait displayed Fisher dressed in

⁴⁶ McCreery, *Satirical Gaze*, pp. 96-98.

⁴⁷ *London Chronicle (Semi-Annual)* (London, England), Thursday, July 12, 1759; Issue 397.

⁴⁸ 'Anne Irwin' mezzotint by Samuel William Reynolds, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1761), National Portrait Gallery D36458 & 'Lady Selina Hastings' mezzotint by Richard Houston, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1759), National Portrait Gallery D2958.

an extravagant dress with ruffles, which made it difficult for the spectator to identify her as the famous courtesan without the one distinguishing symbol to help differentiate Fisher from an aristocratic lady.⁴⁹ A letter was placed in front of Fisher with the legible introduction 'My Dearest Kit', identifying her and implying a romantic intimacy with the author of the letter which suggested her profession and loose morals. The image of a romantic letter may also allude to the voyeuristic tendencies of society seeking an intimacy with public women such as actresses and courtesans. The portrait allowed spectators an insight into the woman's private reading of her intimate letter.⁵⁰ But the ultimate result was clearly to identify Fisher in her role as lover. The portrait succeeded in promoting Fisher's beauty to the gentry, proving her ability to compete against the sexuality of fashionable women of superior birth and wealth. It may also have advertised her profession as a high class courtesan. The portrait was not a tool utilised in excusing her career, nor was it satirising or condemning her immoral character; instead the portrait served the actress as a form of self-promotion while also endorsing the artistic skills of the artist.

Unlike Fisher, the actress, courtesan and author Mary Robinson utilised portraits to distract from her ambiguous character and sexuality. Prior to the exhibition of Gainsborough's and Reynolds's portraits of this actress in 1792, Robinson had engaged in a publicised affair with the young Royal Prince and the estranged relationship with her husband confirmed her reputation as a sexualised woman.⁵¹ However, through the use of portraits Robinson

⁴⁹ Mezzotint by Richard Houston, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, National Portrait Gallery D1952.

⁵⁰ See Pointon, 'The Lives of Kitty Fisher', pp. 77-97, who examines the voyeuristic hunger of the spectators and symbolism evident in images of Fisher.

⁵¹ Her highly publicised affair with the Prince of Wales captivated the nation's interest when it was revealed that the Prince had addressed himself as 'Florizel' and the actress as 'Perdita' in a love letter. The media

recoded her image and presented herself as a respectable genteel woman. The significance of Robinson's attempt to desexualise her character was that at this period the actress was seeking to establish herself in the literary genre. Anca Munteanu's deciphering of these portraits supports my interpretation of Robinson attempting to personify a dignified lady of fashion.⁵² However, both Anne Mellor and Eleanor Ty have claimed that such portraits promoted Robinson as courtesan rather than establish her as a moral character. According to Mellor, Robinson's clothing did not distinguish her as a member of the demimonde but rather illustrated the actress's unsuccessful endeavours to elude the public's knowledge of her fallen status.⁵³ This, coupled with her 'half-closed, calculating eyes and slightly pursed lip' highlighted the woman's marital infidelity.⁵⁴ Regardless if Robinson purposely or accidentally displayed an element of wantonness in pictorial representations, her image could easily be misinterpreted due to her notorious reputation.

In Gainsborough's 1781 portrait, Robinson was depicted sitting in woodland with a locket in one hand and a handkerchief in the other, accompanied by a dog. Once again Mellor concluded that the artist was critiquing the woman through his use of symbolism to illustrate her immorality.⁵⁵ Mellor argued that the locket held a distorted image of the Prince Regent and referenced the couple's notorious affair that alluded to the actress's

adopted these characters from then on. In a print of the pair from 1783, titled *Florizel and Perdita*, Robinson's face was depicted as the right half of the Prince's referring to the theatrical masks of comedy and tragedy. The figure of Thomas Robinson, Mary's rejected husband with the caption *King of Cuckolds* implied her husband's knowledge of Robinson's sexual transgressions.

⁵² Munteanu, 'Confessional Texts Versus Visual Representation', p. 126. Also see Mellor, 'Making an Exhibition of Her Self,' pp. 271-304. Ty, 'Engendering a Female Subject', pp. 407-431.

⁵³ Mellor, 'Making an Exhibition of Her Self,' pp. 280-81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

seduction of the young Prince. An opposing but equally plausible explanation that challenges Mellor's argument is that the exhibition of the Prince's image established the romantic loss which the actress suffered, as a locket was often a personal gift presented to a woman by her lover. Mellor also claimed that the symbolism of the dog verified the woman's animalistic sexuality with the visible dog's tongue (that is was the same colour as Robinson's painted lips) and panting, represented her sexual endeavours.⁵⁶ I understand Mellor's interpretation of the lapping dog, but I argue that the symbolism here was derived from the historical employment of the dog as a symbol of faithfulness and strengthened the argument that the locket represented a romantic affair. Similarly, Reynolds depicted the notorious courtesan Kitty Fisher with a locket and two doves that symbolised peace and devotion, which the woman employed to distance herself from her immoral profession and establish her virtue as a respectable woman.⁵⁷ The same dog appears in another Gainsborough portrait of *Mr and Mrs William Hallett* (1785) and confirms the dog as symbolic of union and loyalty. Others have similarly translated the painting as an exhibition of a love story rather than female sexuality, arguing that Gainsborough represented Robinson as the suffering *Perdita* in *The Winter's Tale*, surrounded by the conventional images used to illustrate conventional aristocratic coding.⁵⁸ This theory is plausible as Robinson was identified to as *Perdita* in the press throughout her relationship with the Prince and his image within the locket would reinforce this interpretation.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ 'Kitty Fisher' line engraving by William Humphrys, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1762), National Portrait Gallery D14540. In recoding her character Fisher's marriage to a man in a position of authority was generally accepted. In 1766 she married the MP of Rye, John Norris (1740-1811) and was praised for her influence over the gentleman. See McCreery, 'Fisher, Catherine Maria [Kitty Fisher] (1741?-1767)' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9489>]

⁵⁸ Perry, 'Ambiguity and Desire,' p. 66. See also, Munteanu, 'Confessional Texts verses Visual Representation', pp. 124-152.

There are many similarities in Gainsborough's representation of Robinson with images of the nobility that strengthen the argument that Robinson's image was recoded using stereotypical aristocratic imagery. The woodland scenery was frequently employed in his portraits as seen in his *Mr and Mrs William Hallett* and *Mrs Thomas Hibert* (c.1782). Reynolds also represented Robinson in conventional imagery of a respectable woman. His *Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1782) depicted Robinson sitting and her hands folded across her lap, wearing a large feathered hat with a ribbon tied around her neck. Her hair was powdered, her black gown was finished with a large lace collar and no jewels or decorations were displayed. An examination of this portrait raises further questions about Mellor's hypothesis of Robinson portraying herself as courtesan, as the woman was clearly not illustrated in excessive grandeur, which was a stereotypical design employed by unchaste or lower class women to impersonate virtuous superiority. Munteanu similarly does not accept Mellor's theory, and identified the image as a derivation of Peter Paul Rubens's portrait of his wife Helene Fourment (1632), commenting that both women wear similar dark garments, feathered hats and hands resting on their laps.⁵⁹ If we accept Munteanu's comparison of the two, then it can be assumed that Reynolds held Robinson in high regard, as Rubens had loved his wife whom he depicted numerous times, signifying the admirable relationship that was evident between the artist and sitter.

In Reynolds's portrait of the actress looking out to sea (1784), Robinson's gaze was directed away from the spectator and a melancholy peaceful mood emerged from the scene.

⁵⁹ Munteanu, 'Confessional Texts versus Visual Representation,' p. 132.

Robinson was presented in a pale gown against a dull overcast background and yet there was a stillness to the material in her dress and powdered hair. It is assumed that the pose and gaze of the actress was intentionally portrayed to convey the illness that Robinson was infected with by the age of twenty-six, possibly a paralytic stroke; or it was an allusion to her dilapidated financial and emotional state after a miscarriage and the demands of creditors.⁶⁰ An alternative interpretation of the work might view this piece as the strongest exhibition of the actress's agency from all her portraits. Robinson was successfully presented as an elegant lady with no questionable facial gestures to suggest her wantonness. Reynolds's and Robinson's collaboration succeeded in redefining the woman by removing theatrical references and represented her move into the literary profession, female sexuality was no longer required now that she did not depend on attracting audiences, instead female sensibility was portrayed to signify her transition.

Mutual Admiration

In a poem dedicated to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mary Robinson, who had retired from the stage in pursuit of a literary career, declared the artist to have been the Muse of Genius's favourite, 'the Phoebus of his day' and 'Britain's Rafaele'.⁶¹ Professional admiration and friendship were key factors in the production of actress portraits, but also an awareness was required regarding the implications for her character with increased

⁶⁰ Mould, 'Portrait of Mary Robinson, 'Perdita', *Historical Portraits Image Library*
<http://www.historicalportraits.com/Gallery.asp?Page=Item&ItemID=1353&Desc=Mary-Robinson-as-%91Perdita%92-%7C-Sir-Joshua,-After-Reynolds>

See also, Levy, 'Robinson, Mary [Perdita] (1756/1758?-1800)', *odnb*
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23857>]

⁶¹ Robinson, *Poems by Mary Robinson*, Vol. 2 of 2, pp. 2-3 & p. 10.

exposure of her person. By maintaining relationships with the country's most prominent artists, an actress could exercise more agency in the creation and distribution of her image. Reynolds is perhaps the best known example of an artist who socialised, befriended and portrayed many of the eighteenth-century's greatest thespians which included Mrs Siddons, David Garrick and as already mentioned, Mary Robinson. Robinson's praise for the painter determined that he possessed the divine touch in his representation of the 'mental soul to mortal sight', earning him the 'best diadem! The Wreath of Fame'.⁶² Robinson admired Reynolds's natural ability to present emotions and beauty in paint that warranted him the title of 'Britain's darling – Nature's fav'rite child', and the admiration of the public.⁶³ The verse epitomized the actress's high regard for the painter and the loss felt personally and to society by his death. In an address to the same artist, Robinson continued her praise for his hand that was by 'Nature guided' and marked 'the line that stamps perfection on the form divine', which exhibited his 'magic skill to trace the perfect semblance of exterior grace'.⁶⁴ Reynolds's personal correspondence sheds light on the personal friendships and high regard that the painter felt for Robinson and other actresses such as Mrs Abington. In a letter addressed to Abington the artist confirmed his intentions to wait on her one Sunday afternoon, while a letter to Robinson discussed the business of a commissioned engraving of her portrait, demonstrating the friendship between artist and some of his sitters and the participation of Robinson in the production of her image.⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Robinson, *The Beauties of Mrs Robinson*, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Both letters can be viewed in *The Letter of Sir Joshua Reynolds; edited by Ingamells & Edgcumbe*, Letters 210 & 231. The portrait of Robinson which Reynolds refers to was produced in 1783 and later engraved by Thomas Burke as a front piece for her *Poems* (1791).

Yet despite Robinson's admiration of Reynolds's skill at capturing the sitter's beauty, the actress was also cautious towards the popularity of portraits and in particular the voyeuristic desire for her own image. A stanza published in 1791 addressed to a friend who had requested her portrait, indicated the reluctance for her memory to be represented in paint; a frozen image with 'looks eternally the same, and lips that NEVER move'.⁶⁶ A portrait was lifeless and not a true reflection of Robinson's personality that caused her to fear that the gentlemen's admiration of the piece would be a deficient memory of her persona. Robinson sought to be recognised for her stage presence and acting talents according to the memoirs published by her admirers.⁶⁷ Yet it was her affair with the Prince Regent and extra marital affairs that thrust her into the public's view. To be admired in a static image for only her beauty may have caused her alarm and highlighted her failure as a professional actress. Robinson's concern may also be an indicator of her abandonment of a stage life and all negative associations in order to pursue a legitimate literary career. Research into spectatorship and the connoisseurship of art suggests that this was primarily a masculine occupation and that a danger lay in the sexually voyeuristic admiration of unmarried, unprotected women and perhaps justified Robinson's hesitance in allowing such a portrait.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Robinson, *Poems by Mary Robinson*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 221.

⁶⁷ *The memoirs of Perdita*, p. 180.

⁶⁸ For further reading on spectatorship see West's 'Body Connoisseurship' and Bleichmar, 'Learning to Look', pp. 85-111.

Robinson acknowledged that there were benefits to possessing pictorial works, as ‘those lips no anger can betray’ and ‘no keen reproach to wound the heart’.⁶⁹ The figure in a painting would never age, never speak an angry word or abandon the possessor of the piece. A portrait of Robinson would outlive the actress, yet the Robinson represented in paint was one dimensional and could not possibly portray the different facades of her personality. Beauty was a valuable asset for a young actress, with many of the popular eighteenth-century dramas portraying youthful country girls who succumb to seduction. Yet as the actress grew older and her figure changed over time, her once celebrated characters were no longer believable or attractive for the spectator; particularly if like the actress Mrs Jordan, the player’s most notable roles were in breeches. Players were often identified by their most admired stage characters more than their own personal attributes or skill at portraying such characters.⁷⁰ Therefore, by capturing Robinson’s image in paint, her beauty would never fade and she would eternally be remembered in the representation of that character, cementing the actress’s celebrity status long after she had died.

The actress Mrs Jordan was identified as the *child of nature* and it was only fitting that an artist who was celebrated for his realistic depictions should represent her in paint.⁷¹ James Boaden’s biography of Mrs Jordan referred to the death of the great painter, Romney to

⁶⁹ Robinson, *Poems by Mary Robinson*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 221.

⁷⁰ Fisher, ‘Creating Another Identity’, p. 57. Fisher has explored the image of the aging actress and the effect of old age on a theatrical career.

⁷¹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 71.

whom he believed the public were indebted for the artist's likeness of Mrs Jordan.⁷²

Quoting Cumberland, he described Romney as

*A rapturous advocate for Nature, and a close copyist, abhorring from his heart every distortion or unseemly violation of her pure and legitimate forms and proportions.*⁷³

The relationship between this artist and actress was one of 'entire harmony' and the decision for Mrs Jordan to sit for him was agreeable to both parties. Romney was a 'shy and retiring' man who preferred his own company. He avoided the social gatherings of exhibitions and Sir Joshua Reynolds's dining parties, where Boaden noted that Romney's pride would have made him 'too conscious of defective education to give utterance to his thoughts.'⁷⁴ But his attention to the natural form and realistic proportions, complemented the comedic and child-of-nature image of Mrs Jordan. In Romney's painting Jordan's hair was down with loose curls, her attire was feminine and simple and her posture was mid-turn. The painting captured one of her most prominent roles as *The Country Girl*. Boaden re-examined this portrait while writing Jordan's biography, to remember the actress who had died approximately sixteen years before his publication. His only negative remark about the painting was the view of 'rather more back than we should now shew in lady portraits', but essentially the image was 'perfect as to likeness'.⁷⁵ Boaden verified the truth behind the praise given to Mrs Jordan's appearance by narrating a chance meeting he had with a young

⁷² Romney depicted the actress in her role as the Country Girl. A stipple engraving by John Ogborne (1788) available at National Portrait Gallery D8046.

⁷³ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 102. It is likely that the gentleman Cumberland was the English writer and amateur artist, George Cumberland (1755-1848) who in his later life became an art collector.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 103.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 274.

woman who questioned him about that actress's beauty. The lady enquired if she was 'critically handsome', to which Boaden replied that if the young woman had seen the actress as he had done, 'the question would never have occurred'.⁷⁶ Therefore, Mrs Jordan's infamous beauty lived on as a prime example of how a woman of low social status could leave her mark in history and forever be remembered in her most celebrated role.

The artist Thomas Lawrence depicted Sarah Siddons in several paintings and was closely intertwined with the Siddons family. His representations of the actress all portrayed Siddons as a genteel lady that corresponded with the woman's public character. What is interesting in examining Lawrence's portraits and images of Siddons is that they presented the woman as herself rather than in character. Siddons's superiority as a tragedian was indisputable, so the production of her image was not necessary as a form of advertisement but rather represented her as a respectable member of society instead of identifying her as an actress. A criticism of the actress was that her ambition made her impersonal; something that Siddons refuted as simply providing for her family and ensuring a future for her children. The personal sketches and portraits created by Lawrence may have been Siddons's attempt to restore her femininity in the public's eye. As an intimate friend of the family, Lawrence sketched the actress with her two daughters, both of whom the painter had romantically been involved with, and indicated the artist's personal esteem for the family.⁷⁷ In his oil painting, c.1797, a melancholy Siddons was portrayed in white gown and cap, with the

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 275.

⁷⁷ Lithograph by Richard James Lane, taken from Thomas Lawrence drawing, published 1830 in National Portrait Gallery D21827. This featured Sarah Siddons and her two daughters, Cecilia Combe (née Siddons) and Maria Siddons.

actress surrounded by darkness. Siddons was positioned sitting staring directly at the spectator from under her bushy fringe. It has been claimed that the sadness exuding from the portrait reflected the personal loss that the actress had felt through the deaths of her children and the breakdown of her marriage.⁷⁸ However, the melancholy expression on the actress's face was a common image in Siddons's portraits. In 1786 Thomas Beach exhibited his representation of the great actress that was critiqued for being a 'very miserable picture', with only Siddons's face emerging from a brown background.⁷⁹ No costume or decorative hair was used, simply the artist's study on the actress's solemn expression, perhaps Beach's attempt at capturing her technique used to evoke sorrow in the role as Lady Macbeth.⁸⁰ The critic, identified as Fresnoy, continued by stating that he should not have taken notice of the work as he 'deemed it beneath the dignity of criticism to touch on so wretched an attempt of the art, had not the portrait of so exquisite a performer, given importance to the canvas'.⁸¹ After analysing a number of portraits with Siddons as subject, I would argue that rather than promote herself in her most celebrated stage roles, Siddons employed portraits to elevate her personal character – as a respectable, not-sexually overt woman who suffered due to her status as an actress while protecting her family, facilitated by the personal relationship she held with her portrait artists.

⁷⁸ Shaughnessy, 'Siddons [née Kemble] (1755-1831)', *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25516>]

⁷⁹ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) Wednesday, May 10, 1786; Issue 4127.

⁸⁰ Hamilton, 'Sarah Siddons,' *Victoria and Albert Museum Prints* (1784), DYCE76
[<http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/67127-popup.html>]

⁸¹ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) Wednesday, May 10, 1786; Issue 4127.

Symbolism

Distinct from the portraits of British nobility and royalty, paintings of eighteenth-century actresses are a rich source of ambiguous meaning and symbolism, depicting contemporary discourses on sexuality, gender and the social status of the theatre. A gaze, pouting mouth, tilt of the head or fashion of the woman's hair was all symbolic imagery used to characterize the female subject. Laura Engel analysed the sexual connotations behind the illustration of fur muffs that symbolised the wealth of the aristocracy while alluding to a lower class woman's wantonness.⁸² According to Engel the use of the muff in portraits of actresses such as Elizabeth Farren and Mary Robinson, exhibited the dual nature of the object and the ambiguous sexuality of the public woman. Actresses employed these mechanisms in establishing their desirability both on and off the stage, while also ascertaining their chosen genre. Reynolds utilised the image of the muff in a number of his paintings and it is questionable if he would have depicted such an object so often if the public could misinterpret the meaning. Lady Fenoulhet, Miss Knight, Catherine Schindlerin and the artist's own niece, Theophila Gwatkin, all held muffs in their respective portraits.⁸³ Therefore, if the actress holding a muff was deciphered as a reflection on her sexual freedom, then this interpretation would have been the woman's own doing as a subtle promotion of her femininity.

⁸² Engel, 'The Muff Affair', pp. 279-298.

⁸³ 'Lady Fenoulhet' mezzotint by James Macardell, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1760) in National Portrait Gallery D1937. 'Miss Knight mezzotint by Samuel William Reynolds, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1836) NPG D3375. 'Catherine Smith' mezzotint by John Raphael Smith, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (c. 1775) NPG D4168. 'Theophila Gwatkin' mezzotint by Samuel William Reynolds, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (c.1767) NPG D35086.

Performers associated in the comic genre exhibited energy, youthfulness and beauty, as opposed to the sombre actresses of tragedy who displayed dramatic poses accompanied by animated facial expressions to convey emotion. Mrs Jordan was praised for her natural style of acting, particularly in her portrayals of country maidens – her gestures and movement were never mechanical or forced, which was translated onto paint. A review of her performance in *The Country Girl* confirmed that the actress ‘never played artfully artless Peggy, in a higher stile of excellence’ and performed in such a ‘flattering manner’ that justified a crowded and esteemed audience.⁸⁴ Portraits illustrating the actress with curls have been interpreted as indication of this woman’s loose morals and uncontrolled sexuality.⁸⁵ However an alternative observation would be to compare the natural curls with Jordan’s humble origins and her stylistic acting. Mrs Jordan was born in Ireland and rose to fame while touring the Yorkshire theatre circuit. Her rustic accent and mannerisms were both admired and criticised in the metropolis. A review of the theatre in 1786 argued that she displayed a ‘vulgarity’ upon the stage,⁸⁶ while another article stated that her excellencies were frequently ‘deprived of their delicacy’ due to her ‘broad, rough, and course accent’.⁸⁷ Research suggests that an actress’s hair was used for manipulation and flirtation, reinforcing a negative representation of female players. The curl could be symbolic of seduction with loose unrestrained curls representing a woman’s loose morals.⁸⁸ Hair could suggest a myriad of both social and sexual associations. Yet in Jordan’s case it is

⁸⁴ *The Morning Post and Fashionable World* (London, England), Monday, October 3, 1796; Issue 7664.]

⁸⁵ See Gill Perry, ‘Staging Gender and ‘Hairy Signs’’, pp. 145-163.

⁸⁶ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England), Friday, February 3, 1786; Issue 4057.

⁸⁷ *Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, (Hull, England), Tuesday, December 11, 1810; Issue 1248.

⁸⁸ Rosenthal, ‘Raising Hair’, pp. 1-16.

more probable that the young woman's innocence and naivety were the primary characteristics being portrayed as befitting the characters she portrayed on the stage.

A blurring between fictional characters played by the actress and reality was, and still is, a major concern for scholars examining the representations of actresses. It is difficult for the spectator to decipher the true character of the actress when she was depicted in costume. Confusion over whether the actress's successful roles were a triumph as a result of the close relationship between the character and her own personality, or that the fictional character was a more true reflection of herself, conflicted with theories that she was similarly performing in her portraits. Was the actress purposely depicted flirtatiously in paint as her fictional character would have been or was she employing her sexuality to attract admirers and greater audiences? It can then be argued that it is the scholar's own interpretation when examining actress portraits, whether or not the actress was role-playing within the painting or recoding her public image for a marketing purpose. Actresses portrayed in breeches roles were examples where the blurring of role-playing and the woman's true character was evident.

Women dressed in male attire were a social taboo in the eighteenth-century, yet breeches parts were highly sought-after roles for comic actresses. They were sexually-charged yet allowed the actress to demonstrate strength and masculine traits. Often portrayed in the celebrated characters of Sir Harry Wildair in *The Constant Couple* (1788), Viola in *Twelfth Night* (hand-coloured line engraving NPG D20567) and Rosalind in *As You Like It* (print by George Pulman & Sons, after John Hoppner NPG D36741), Mrs Jordan's figure in male attire

was a popular sight and attracted audiences.⁸⁹ Jordan's 'beautiful compact figure' was captivating with her 'wild activity' and 'quickness of turn'.⁹⁰ According to James Boaden, her appearance did not go unnoticed by the 'great painter of the age' (the identity is unknown, but it is possible the artist was George Romney whom Jordan held in high regard), who 'pronounced her figure the neatest and most perfect in symmetry'.⁹¹ Jordan's sexual appeal was an essential tool to attract audiences and a valuable method of measurement to gage the success of the actress's career, while also depicting herself as a strong independent woman for her female audience.⁹² With her figure and 'shapely legs' on display, the actress attracted both male spectators (who wished to view her figure) and female theatre goers (who desired to view the actress's masculine performance while still retaining female allure).⁹³ Jordan's biographer, James Boaden commented that 'her figure in the male attire was for years remarkable; but the attraction, after all, is purely feminine, and the display of female, not male perfections'.⁹⁴ Jordan was frequently portrayed in breeches and regardless if the eroticism was based on the feminisation of masculinity or the actress adopting masculine traits on the stage and in art, it was a commercially lucrative sight.⁹⁵ Nearly eighty years after her death, images of Mrs Jordan in breeches remained popular. In a collection auctioned by Messrs Christie a portrait of this actress as Rosalind was exhibited. The piece was in the collection of the late Onley Savill Onley, Esq. and sold for one thousand

⁸⁹ Bridgeman Art Culture History, 'Mrs Jordan as Sir Harry Wildair from the rare portrait of 1788,' engraving LLJ 584363 [http://www.bridgemanart.com/search?filter_text=llj+584363]

⁹⁰ *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, December 19, 1891; Issue 1151.

⁹¹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 72.

⁹² Ribeiro, 'Costuming the Part', pp. 104-128.

⁹³ Bate, 'Shakespeare and the Rival Muses', p. 82.

⁹⁴ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p 46.

⁹⁵ See Perry, 'Ambiguity and Desire', p. 72.

guineas.⁹⁶ In art, actresses portrayed in breeches were sexually provocative and added to the voyeuristic culture under the pretence of the actress simply representing herself in a legitimate stage character rather than seducing spectators and obtaining admirers.

The implied sexual ambiguity of comedic actresses in breeches roles within artistic imagery further divided the moral hierarchy within the theatre, but incongruously benefited the prosperity of the comic genre and its players. Although the tragic genre was deemed the morally acceptable entertainment, public interest in the light-heartedness of comic characters boosted the careers of actresses and made their images the more desirable. By representing herself in the form of Thalia, the muse of comedy, an actress informed spectators of her chosen genre, employing fashion to attract admirers and establish her prominence within the playhouse. Actresses such as George Anne Bellamy, Francis Abington and Dorothy Jordan were depicted in delicate Grecian styled dresses adorned with flower prints and often with their curled hair free from ornament. John Hoppner's *Mrs Jordan as the Comic Muse* (1786), Mackenzie's engraving of *George Anne Bellamy as the Comic Muse* (1803) and Francesco Bartolozzi's stipple engraving of *Francis Abington* (1783) exemplified the conventional Thalia imagery. There was fluidity within these pieces that referred to the joyful sprightliness of the comic actress. Yet as previously examined, this playfulness was often misinterpreted as sexual freedom rather than the celebration of natural humour and innocence of the comedic genre. Images of comedic actresses were aesthetically more pleasing than their tragic counterparts. Sarah Siddons and Mary Ann Yates were portrayed in dark heavy materialled attire, posed in static and rigid gestures

⁹⁶ *The Morning Post* (London, England), Monday, June 11, 1894; Issue 38065.

alluding to their art – *Mary Ann Yates as Tragic Muse reciting the monody to the memory of Mr Garrick* by Thomas Stothard and Thomas Cook’s *Sarah Siddons as Tragic Muse*. The association of comic actresses to sexually active women was a consequence of the depiction of female players in revealing clothing in art.⁹⁷ Alternatively it can be argued that the contrast in costume between comic and tragic actresses, and the increasing popularity of the comic genre indicated the public’s growing preference for naturalness.

The light and colourful material employed in images of Thalia implied the simplicity and artlessness of the comedic stage compared to the dull and restrictively heavy attire exhibited by tragic actresses. The dark and sombre costume emphasised the carefully calculated and controlled performances of tragedians. The celebrated Mrs Abington, whose most notable contribution to the theatre was her sense of fashion, was frequently illustrated as Thalia that demonstrated the innovativeness and novel taste in comedy. According to the memoirs of the great actor David Garrick, Abington’s taste was ‘superior’ and often she was consulted by ‘her female friends in high life’.⁹⁸ Two images of this actress painted as the comic muse were Reynolds *Frances Abington as Thalia* (c.1764-68) and a stipple engraving taken from Richard Cosway’s portrait by Francesco Bartolozzi (1783).⁹⁹ Both images represented the actress as a genteel lady of fashion surrounded by the symbols of her trade - the comic mask and Grecian dress with floral pattern that denoted the fashion currently in vogue. The distinct difference between both images was the lack of movement

⁹⁷ Bate, ‘Shakespeare and the Rival Muses’, p. 82.

⁹⁸ Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 172.

⁹⁹ ‘Frances Abington (née Barton) as Thalia,’ mezzotint by James Watson, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (published 1769) in National Portrait Gallery D7153. ‘Frances Abington (née Barton),’ stipple engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi, after Richard Cosway (published 1783) in National Portrait Gallery D968.

and atmosphere of Reynolds representation, which positioned the actress in a relaxed standing pose with her head tilted towards the spectator. The suggestive positioning of the actress's figure could be viewed as reference to the seductive and playful comic muse, which held similarities to her private life. Abington's scandalous liaisons with male admirers was recorded in Joseph Haslewood's *Secret History*, where he attempted to show how 'the lowest individual may in time grace the most elevated circles.'¹⁰⁰

Yet despite Abington's recognized 'power of pleasing', it was her 'great elegance' and animated expression that earned her the privilege of the public's admiration.¹⁰¹ The actress's good humour and youthfulness was depicted in Bartolozzi's engraving, with Abington dancing around a bust of a gentleman. Accompanied with the musical instruments of a flute, harp and tambourine (to verify her status as the Comic Muse) Abington crowns the statue with a laurel and garland. The print does not identify the gentleman; however it is plausible that the bust was of William Shakespeare due to the significance given by the action of placing a crown on his head. The actress represented the queen of comedy alongside Shakespeare, the 'glory of the British Nation', presented Abington as a respectable and admirable actress.¹⁰² The actress's dress as depicted in art formed a vehicle for such performers to exhibit their superior knowledge of fashion and elevated them in the admiration of upper class ladies, thus making them consumable objects of desire for both sexes.

¹⁰⁰ Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 2 of 2, pp. 66-75.

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Memoirs of the life of David Garrick*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 169.

¹⁰² *The beauties of biography*, Vol. 2 of 2, p. 121.

In the guise of Thalia, Dorothy Jordan represented herself as the innocent victim of the voyeuristic public, redirecting the criticism surrounding the sexuality exhibited by comedic actresses and making the spectator accountable for objectifying the female player. In 1786, John Hoppner unveiled his controversial painting, *Mrs Jordan as the Comic Muse, Supported by Euphrosyne, who represses the advances of a satyr* that was viewed as a complementary reaction to Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784). Hoppner's depiction of the actress illustrated the light and dark sides of comedy – the playfulness and mirth of Jordan juxtaposed to the dangers of the voyeuristic and deviant satyr. Yet the actress appeared the innocent and naive figure within the painting, unaware of the lurking menace. Jordan was depicted holding the mask of comedy, wearing a wreath in her curly locks and classical costume. She was accompanied by two figures, Euphrosyn, sister goddess to Thalia, and one of the three Graces representing mirth and joy, and a satyr. Satyrs were mythological goat-like creatures known for their promiscuity and debauchery. The image of the satyr may have been used as reference to the sexual ambiguity of the comic genre, or perhaps was a more personal attack on Mrs Jordan, alluding to her modest rural background and manners.

Negative critiques claimed that Jordan excelled only in the representation of 'characters of low humour' and yet the utilisation of Euphrosyn suggests an attempt to redefine the actress's reputation.¹⁰³ It may also be determined that Jordan made a conscious decision to position herself between the two figures with her back to the immorality suggested by the image of the satyr. The painting was a form of high art, contradictory to the scornful

¹⁰³ *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England), Saturday, January 21, 1786; Issue 5207.

newspaper articles that deemed her unfeminine and vulgar. In the *Public Advertiser* (1786), one critic questioned 'what school of female dramatism' had she derived from for her representation of the character Hoyden was 'coarse and indelicate', contrary to the image audiences received from Hoppner's work.¹⁰⁴ Criticised for her unsuccessful attempts at portraying chaste ladies displaying 'little connection with genteel life', the elegance of her figure and dress in Hoppner's depiction confirmed the agency of the actress in representing herself the equal to Richard Ford, the gentleman she was living with at the time.¹⁰⁵

Hoppner's artistic skills and integrity were questioned at the time of exhibition perhaps as a result of Jordan's influence in recoding her character. One critic observed that Hoppner possessed no true genius for art and so no great disappointment could be found in his portrayal. Jordan was 'lamely drawn', 'badly coloured' and held no resemblance to the sitter according to the critic, and questioned who the artist attempted to represent under the guise of the satyr that 'hath been lying violent hands' on the actress.¹⁰⁶ Masculine desire is certainly represented by the image of the satyr, but it is unclear as to the man in Jordan's life that is presented or if perhaps the artist compressed the voyeurism of the male audience into the single image of the satyr. Clare Tomalin and Jonathan Bate have concentrated on the image of the predatory satyr and both argue that it represents male obsession with the actress. Tomalin believes the satyr symbolised the male theatre audience who saw the actress as 'sexual prey', yet her smile suggested she did not feel

¹⁰⁴ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, January 12, 1786; Issue 16111.

¹⁰⁵ *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, January 31, 1786; Issue 5215.

¹⁰⁶ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) Wednesday, May 10, 1786; Issue 4127.

threatened or in any danger.¹⁰⁷ Bate argues that the images of Euphrosyn and the satyr were modelled on real people, similarly to how Jordan was depicted as the mythological Thalia. He suggests that Euphrosyn may have originally been the actress Anna Crouch, who performed this role on stage alongside Jordan in Colman's *Comus*.¹⁰⁸ There is no evidence to prove that Mrs Crouch was the model for Hoppner and in comparing a stipple engraving of the actress by Edward Harding there is little resemblance.¹⁰⁹ Yet what was recorded of the actress was that her beauty equalled the sweetness of her voice, which rendered a 'magnetic impression' and 'universally allowed to be the most beautiful that ever graced the English Stage'.¹¹⁰ Unlike Tomalin's belief that the satyr represented the male theatre goers, Bate argues that if the artist purposely depicted Thalia to be identified as Jordan and Euphrosyn recognised as Crouch, then based on this it can be assumed that the mythical creature had a specific sitter. However, Bate does not succeed in identifying the man and suggests that perhaps Hoppner depicted himself as satyr, mirroring himself as the sexual prowler examining the actress's body.¹¹¹ This is an interesting theory, as it would place the artist within the performance of the painting and excuse voyeuristic interest in the actress as essential to the production of art. Therefore, in removing the sexual aspect from the piece, a legitimate interest in the actress's figure was established for the artist and justified the work as a representation of the actress in her professional status.

¹⁰⁷ Tomalin, *Mrs Jordan's Profession*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁸ Bate, 'Shakespeare and the Rival Muses', pp. 85-86.

¹⁰⁹ 'Anna Maria Crouch,' by Edward Harding, after James Barry in National Portrait Gallery D13716.

¹¹⁰ *The green-Room mirror. Clearly delineating our present theatrical performer. By a Genuine Reflection* (London, 1786), p. 49. Haslewood, *The Secret History of the Green Room*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 97.

¹¹¹ Bate, 'Shakespeare and the Rival Muses', p. 85.

Unlike Hoppner's portrait, Sir Robert Ker Porter's *Comedy* represented the actress by herself with only the mask of comedy in her hand to indicate her representation of the comic muse. From an examination of the stipple engraving published in 1806 by James Godby of Porter's *Comedy*, the actress wore a high ruffled collared dress and a wreath of roses in her hair, symbolic of a crown and the actress's superiority in the comic genre.¹¹² An article published in 1786, stated that Jordan was crowned with 'more wreaths of laurel, than any other person in the army' of comedic theatrical players.¹¹³ The wreath of roses placed on her head in Godby's print symbolised the actress's status as the queen of comedy, with the rose representing authority and the laurel denoting her triumph on the stage. Jordan's gaze was engaging and similar to Hoppner's *Comic Muse*, the pose was mid-movement, turning to confront the audience with the actress's left hand open and almost as if she was about to grab the spectator. The innocence of Jordan's gaze has been disputed with claims that by engaging eye contact with the observer the actress was confirming her wantonness and representation as an 'object of sexual consumption'.¹¹⁴ It is apparent that Jordan and the majority of celebrated actresses, exerted their sexuality as a form of promotion, attracting audiences and male admirers, with no Euphrosyn to protect against unwanted attention. According to her early critics, Jordan had no 'genius' on the stage or 'novelty' in her performances that forced her into 'misleading the people' by utilising her sexual appeal to attract audiences, indicating the necessity of the actress's deceptive stares in her paintings.¹¹⁵

¹¹² "Comedy' (Dorothy Jordan),' stipple engraving by James Godby, after Sir Robert Ker Porter (published 1966) in National Portrait Gallery D3322.

¹¹³ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, September 13, 1786; Issue 16322.

¹¹⁴ Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations*, p. 45. Perry, 'Ambiguity and Desire', p. 70.

¹¹⁵ *Public Advertiser* (London, England), Wednesday, January 11, 1786; Issue 16110.

Beautiful and talented, the actress Elizabeth Hartley embraced the conflicting representations of femininity and in art she was presented as a sexual woman, an apologetic sinner and an innocent woman, identifying the diversity of actresses in representing the multiple images of femininity. Sir Joshua Reynolds produced three images of Hartley - *Nymph with Young Bacchus* (also known as *Mrs Hartley as a Bacchante*), *Mrs Hartley as a Madonna* and *Mrs Hartley as Jane Shore*. In each painting the actress was presented as a gentlewoman displaying her feminine beauty that was often celebrated in the media, more so than her skills as an actress. Shortly after her death, it was claimed that she was the favoured subject of this great artist and his high regard for her was evident in the capturing of her appearance that 'attracted universal admiration'.¹¹⁶ Portrayed as a nymph in 1771, Hartley represented natural beauty and charm, but the masquerade may also have been indication of her seductive powers over male audiences and her managers. A letter sent to the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle* claimed that although she possessed a 'fine figure' that 'may please Mr Colman, but her acting will never the public'.¹¹⁷ Mrs Hartley was an average actress whose attractive features secured her theatrical engagements and leading roles. Further negative imagery may be deciphered by examining the young Bacchus, the Greek god of wine and fertility, who was later adopted by the Romans as the god of nature and the theatre. In depicting the actress and Bacchus, Reynolds was implying that it was Hartley's beauty and charisma that gained her public approval, which was virtually inebriated by her appearance. An anonymous poet wrote – 'If to her share some

¹¹⁶ *The Morning Post* (London, England) Wednesday, February 4, 1824; Issue 16575.

¹¹⁷ *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (London, England) Saturday, November 13, 1773; Issue 1397.

female errors fall, Look in her face, and you'll forgive them all.'¹¹⁸ For a woman attempting to become a professional on the stage, the emphasis on her beauty over her acting talents may not have been desirable, yet the exhibition of female attractiveness would have boosted her ticket sales. On returning to London after an absence of twenty years, a gentleman under the alias Dramaticus, was eager to visit the theatre immediately upon hearing of Hartley's beauty. Unfortunately he found her appearance 'everything that could disgust a British audience' and angrily lamented the easy manipulation of the public by a pretty face.¹¹⁹

Reynolds's second piece was of a virginal Mrs Hartley as the Madonna in plain dress and veil, which displayed what one admirer described as her 'angelic figure'.¹²⁰ While the image of the Madonna signified purity and beauty, Reynolds's portrait may have also denoted Hartley's authority in her profession or have been an attempt by the actress to plead her innocent of all transgression. However, it was Reynolds's subsequent painting that became a celebrated representation of the actress. The portrait of Hartley in the character of Jane Shore, received the highest compliments when it was exhibited in the Royal Academy and it was recorded that its addition to the collection made the exhibition the greatest event since the opening of the Academy.¹²¹ The character Jane Shore was Hartley's first performance on a London stage and became associated with the actress throughout her career. The painting was complimented for being 'uncommonly striking' and depicted the

¹¹⁸ Hawkins, *Miscellanies in prose and verse*, p. 52.

¹¹⁹ *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* (London, England) March 5, 1774 – March 8, 1774; Issue 771.

¹²⁰ *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) Tuesday, January 3, 1775; Issue 682.

¹²¹ *London Evening Post* (London, England) February 17, 1774 – February 19, 1774; Issue 8097.

final scene of the drama where the heroine faints.¹²² In the portrait the actress faces away from the spectator in a dishevelled and pitiable position with loose curls hiding her facial features. This was not a portrait exhibiting Hartley's beauty, but rather praising her acting skills in the portrayal of a remorseful Jane Shore and reflecting the apologetic actress seeking public forgiveness. Reynolds portrayed women's 'tripartite appeal' in presenting Hartley as a nymph, a virgin and a whore.¹²³ Yet in all three Hartley appeared as a refined beauty, particularly in her representations of the Madonna and Jane Shore. It is also arguable that Reynolds depicted the actress in parallel with the public's opinion of her – firstly their admiration of her beauty which grew to an appreciation of her stage performances and gained her the reputation of being 'the finest figure on the London stage'.¹²⁴ Angelica Kauffman's portrait of Hartley reinforces this argument - the actress was represented as a refined woman in white neoclassical robe. Portrayed as Hermione the virtuous Queen in *The Winter's Tale*, Hartley identified herself as an imposing figure within her tragic genre and reinstated the morality associated with Melpomene, the muse of tragedy. Similar to the employment of memoirs by actresses to excuse and apologise for their past indiscretions, art could reflect the actress's atonement and establish the performer's professional and moral character.

The representation of actresses as genteel women was more easily accepted by the public if the subject performed in the tragic genre. Identified by a dagger and chalice, Melpomene,

¹²² *Middlesex Journal or Universal Evening Post* (London, England) October 12, 1773 – October 14, 1773; Issue 709.

¹²³ Postle, 'Painted Women', p. 37.

¹²⁴ Hawkins, *Miscellanies in prose and verse*, p. 52.

the tragic muse represented classical imagery and socially-acceptable exhibitions of sensibility. The most celebrated representation of this muse was Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784), which depicted the great actress sitting on a throne with two allegorical bodies of Terror and Pity in the background.¹²⁵ Similar to the laurel crowning the heads of Jordan and Abington in their representations of the Comic Muse, the symbolism of Siddons on her throne illustrated her superiority in the tragic genre and reflected the high regard Reynolds placed on the actress. Siddons was portrayed as a queen in paint and was crowned the 'Queen of Tears' by her public.¹²⁶ In Reynolds's portrait, Siddons is slouched in her seat, face tilted upwards, one hand sprawled lifeless to one side while the other is raised from her elbow towards her head. This was not a unique pose for Reynolds, who employed this display in his depiction of aristocratic women. In his image of Maria, Duchess of Gloucester (exhibited c. 1771-1774), the duchess emerged from a dark shadowed background, against a neo-classical pillar, gaze directed to the sky with her head rested on one arm, the other lethargic hand to her side. Reynolds had even mimicked the duchess's clothing and plaited hair in his representation of Siddons, with both women displaying long braids falling down their shoulders.¹²⁷ In reusing similar artistic methods used in his representation of upper class ladies, Reynolds was establishing Siddons as their equal in fashion and manners, while Siddons fortified her image as the undisputed empress of the stage and equal to the ladies of court who frequented the theatre.

¹²⁵ 'Sarah Siddons (née Kemble) as the Tragic Muse,' Stipple engraving by Francis Howard, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (published 1787) in National Portrait Gallery D9069.

¹²⁶ *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (London, England), Thursday, October 12, 1797; Issue 19749.

¹²⁷ 'Portrait of Maria Walpole, Duchess of Gloucester (1739-1807),' *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maria,_Duchess_of_Gloucester_\(1739-1807\).jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maria,_Duchess_of_Gloucester_(1739-1807).jpg)]

Siddons's portrait symbolised the professionalism of the actress but also performed a significant role in the art world by exhibiting a high art portrait of a woman born outside of the gentry.¹²⁸ In a letter from the Russian Ambassador, believed to have been in the hand of the Russian Empress, Reynolds's portrait was described as the 'most impressive and unequalled picture of the Tragic Muse', being 'something more' than a painting of the actress with its dignified representation.¹²⁹ William Beechey's attempt at portraying Siddons's superiority in the field of tragedy received mixed reactions from critics who lamented the lack of grandeur compared to Reynolds's representation. Beechey illustrated the actress in plain dark attire and holding the conventional emblems of the genre – the dagger and mask, with a weeping cherub above her shoulder. The lack of opulence in this portrait, *Sarah Siddons with the Emblems of Tragedy* (1793), emphasised the actress's talents on the stage and the morality of her performances and diverted the public's attention away from her perceived greed for money as depicted in satirical prints.¹³⁰ This representation of Siddons's figure was recorded as the 'most faithful copy of her features' and yet her posture was deemed more staged than exhibiting an emotional figure of tragedy.¹³¹ The artist was recommended for his attention and delicate touch that was visible in the portrait, yet criticised from a technical analysis in his use of aerial perspective and light. The figure of Siddons stood centre stage surrounded by darkness and according to a critic in 1794, 'the black ground...is liable to objection, for it is not possible that the traces

¹²⁸ Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations*, p. 36.

¹²⁹ Felton, *Testimonies to the genius and memory of Site Joshua Reynolds*, p. 30.

¹³⁰ 'Sarah Siddons (née Kemble) ('Mrs Siddons with the Emblems of Tragedy'), by Sir William Beechey (1793) in National Portrait Gallery 5159. In George Cruikshank's satirical print, *The Rehearsal or the Baron and the Elephant* (1812), the actress was seen in the background walking off stage carrying two large bags of money under each arm.

¹³¹ *Sun*, (London, England), Wednesday, April 30, 1794; Issue 495.

so near the eye should exhibit so blue a tint.’¹³² Unlike Reynolds’s illustration, Siddons was not glorified as the queen of her genre, but rather as a professional on the stage mid performance.

Only the actress’s face and dagger-wielding hand are lit from the shadowy backdrop, highlighting what Tate Wilkinson observed as her ‘graceful and commanding expression’.¹³³ It has been argued that the ‘artful pose’ of the actress demonstrates ‘stage artifice’ rather than a picture of genuine sadness and exemplified the difficulties in depicting the multifaceted image of the actress in paint.¹³⁴ However, an alternative argument as to why Beechey’s portrait failed may rest in the lack of finery that was evident compared to Reynolds’s work. Siddons’s pose and gypsy attire may be indicators of the actress’s sexual ambiguity rather than supporting the tragic genre’s claim of moral superiority.¹³⁵ I would argue that perhaps the artist did not feel the need to depict the actress in the finery usually worn by Siddons, and suggest that the artist consciously stripped the painting of all unnecessary richness in favour of portraying the natural simplicity of the emotion in the actress’s expressive face. This is justified by the unquestionable virtue of Siddons who was praised for being a devoted mother and wife, and supported her family financially. Reynolds echoed the opinion of her admirers such as Tate Wilkinson, who stated that if he was ever asked to give an example of one who represented the embodiment of a queen, then he would point to Mrs Siddons in her role of Queen Catherine.¹³⁶ Beechey chose a more subtle

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 65.

¹³⁴ McPherson, ‘Picturing Tragedy’, pp. 420-422.

¹³⁵ Perry, *Spectacular Flirtations*, p. 79.

¹³⁶ Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 4 of 4, p. 23.

approach in praising her accomplishments, representing the stage as her royal court accompanied by her prized dagger, the 'stamp-royal of Genius' according to one newspaper, where she reigned as 'the first actress' of the period.¹³⁷ Through art, Siddons's superiority in the tragic genre was exhibited, but unlike portraits of comedic actresses, Siddons did not employ feminine sexuality to promote herself. The static, dark tones and sombre atmosphere depicted in tragic images, legitimised female performers of the genre as serious professionals and virtuous women in the public sphere.

Conclusion

Actresses' most admirable performances were transient events in the eighteenth century, without the availability of modern technology to create a digital memory of the recital. Only the audience had the capacity to recall a night's performance and once they had passed away, the memory of the players would be forgotten if not recorded in print and paint.¹³⁸ The production of high art portraits was profitable to both the artist and actress, fashioning a symbiotic relationship whereby the reputation and celebrated status of both increased from the subsequent consumerism from a voyeuristic public. By employing performers as sitters, artists exploited the growing popularity of the theatre and society's consumption of luxury goods, while actresses utilised fine art portraits as evidence of their professionalism and in the distribution of their image to gain patrons and admirers.

¹³⁷ *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (London, England), Tuesday, October 13, 1795; Issue 19 135. See also, Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, Vol. 1 of 4, p. 207.

¹³⁸ See, Walter Macqueen-Pope, 'Ladies First'. Macqueen-Pope argues that the fleeting career of an actress often only existed during her generation, with her name dying with the last of her public.

Both the theatre and artistic genres experienced a boost in the promotion of the arts as national accomplishments to be celebrated and revered by foreigners, as one journalist stated – ‘it must afford real pleasure to every lover of his country’ to see that England was evolving into a cultural haven.¹³⁹ Portraits were often commissioned to depict the enlightened superiority of the sitters by exhibiting books, musical instruments or in the case of actresses, displaying specific symbols associated with their chosen genre, with actresses such as Mrs Siddons represented as queens in their fields. The painted representations of actresses aided in the construction of their public identities, allowing the performers to challenge negative images of the theatre or to exhibit their sexuality.

Portraits were legitimate artistic products that were used to depict court beauties in the seventeenth century. The composition of actresses in portraits during the eighteenth century, dressed and positioned similarly to ladies from the nobility, associated female performers with gentlewomen and therefore presented them as worthy of the public’s respect and admiration. Many portraits displayed sexual innuendoes and allusions to female promiscuity, indicating the exploitation of deprave masculine voyeurism by actresses and their artists. However, the purchase of actress images was excused by consumers under the guise of cultural authority, identifying themselves as connoisseurs of the arts. Actresses further manipulated such desires through the volume of prints distributed around the country, increasing their notoriety among those who could not attend theatrical performances, and created a celebrity culture.¹⁴⁰ In regards to gender

¹³⁹ *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser*, (London, England), Tuesday, April 26 1774; Issue 793.

¹⁴⁰ Gollapudi, ‘Selling Celebrity’, p. 56. Gollapudi argues that images of players in print form were largely responsible for the advancement of a celebrity culture. Examining John Bell’s *British Theatre* prints,

construction, the acceptance of portraits portraying actresses alongside images of individuals from the nobility and upper classes, insinuated an acceptance of women who originated primarily from the lower classes, utilised their sexuality and exposed alternative lifestyles. Art allowed actresses to become both the objects of consumerism and the producer of their images and self-promotion, in feeding the public's voyeuristic hunger and establishing their representation both on and off the stage as legitimate art forms.

Gollapudi analysed the depiction of mediocre performers who were raised to celebrity status, despite the spectators having no knowledge of the player. Gollapudi's rationale of the print is that it is evidence of Bell's innovative understanding of marketing and sensationalism for profit.

Conclusion

The world has been always extremely inquisitive after secret memoirs of such persons as have become eminently conspicuous in the public eye; and this has been more particularly the case with regard to those who have risen from the shade of obscurity, and from the humble walks of life, to the circle of fashionable splendour, and to the enviable distinctions of opulence and rank.¹

The examination into the lives of individuals long deceased often requires an element of speculation from the scholar attempting to contextualise a period. This is particularly necessary when analysing the lives of women during a time when few recorded histories are available and when the majority of subjects were lower class women who left little original evidence of their existence. With this in mind, my thesis has examined the influence of successful British actresses throughout the eighteenth-century. The actresses discussed in this study originated from diverse social classes, experienced different hardships and were associated with a variety of stage characters, yet all accomplished celebrity status and were documented in newspapers, portraits, theatrical catalogues and memoirs. I am not suggesting that the selected actresses represented the collective experiences of all female performers, but the symbolism of the actress in society was universal and so I have ventured to state that all actresses held an element of agency, whether over their audience, manager or career.

¹ *The Testimony of Truth to exalted merits*, p. 3.

Previous research into the influence of eighteenth-century women has concentrated primarily on female domestic authority and the conformity of prescribed gender roles dictated in conduct literature and religious sermons. Within the confines of the home women still held significant power over public affairs, in being responsible for the moral upbringing of future generations. The presence of women on the pages of periodicals that were aimed at male readership, regulated the 'performance of masculinity' by manipulating men's behaviour in the public sphere.² Writers were required to compose their work with caution in case a woman may view the piece and so the mannerisms and tastes of men were regulated through the perceived delicacy and virtuous domesticity of women. Jo Alyson Parker's analysis of the novel, *A Simple Story* (1791), by the actress and author Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821), supported this argument by identifying different forms of female influence.³ Two images of women are represented by Inchbald – the defiant female who resists male authority, and the obedient submissive.⁴ A woman who retained a passiveness and accepted her subordinate role, could more easily manipulate than a woman who was outwardly argumentative and disobedient. Yet a woman's compliance also made her vulnerable to male abuse, as was narrated in *A Simple Story* with the attempted rape of the heroine. Inchbald represented the power of the young Matilda through her obedience and victimisation, depicting the virtue and admiration that a woman obtained by remaining

² Powell, 'See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil', p. 263.

³ *A Simple Story* was divided into two halves, the first part revolves around the love story between Miss Milner and her guardian, Dorriforth a priest. Miss Milner's defiance and attendance at a masquerade resulted in Dorriforth's ending of the engagement, but his love for her eventually induced him to marry Miss Milner. The second half narrates the story between Dorriforth and his daughter Matilda, after the death of her mother. Both mother and daughter had been ostracized after Miss Milner's (Lady Elmwood's) adulterous affair and so the story narrated the struggle to repair the father/daughter bond.

⁴ Parker, 'Complicating *A Simple Story*', pp. 255-270.

submissive to a father's or husband's demands. In the novel, the heroine was persecuted by her father for reminding him of his wife's deceit, while the image of Matilda as the innocent victim, who abidingly sought paternal affection, won her the love of a gentleman. Actresses also utilised their victimisation to manipulate the public and thus exerted agency by recoding their representation to reflect accepted gender roles.

Social historians have published a significant volume of research on the theory of separate spheres – whereby women inhabited the private domestic sphere while men resided in the public sphere of politics, the economy and production. Conduct literature prescribed women's supremacy in the home as mother and wife, yet recent analysis of the eighteenth-century suggests that society did not conform to documented gender roles. It has been argued that the volume of conduct literature circulated during the period was evidence of an 'anxious response' to counteract the presence of women in the public sphere.⁵ In promoting these gender specific roles and appearing to preserve the social hierarchy, actresses transformed themselves into acceptable women who worked in the public sphere, attracting by exhibiting their sexuality, yet also capable of becoming moralistic mothers and devoted wives. Representations of actresses as dutiful daughters and wives aided in their redemption, in that by distancing themselves from the image of the seductress the actress became a more respectable member of society.

Along with presenting themselves as women who worked to provide for their family, actresses held agency over their marital status. Earning their own living allowed theatrical

⁵ Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage', p. 27.

women the option to marry, whether it be for love or profit. I have stated that the marriages of professional women need to be understood as business transactions, whereby the advantages and disadvantages of the union were assessed prior to the legalisation of the marriage. Actresses such as Susannah Cibber and Sophia Baddeley married into the theatre – Cibber married a manager and Baddeley secured one of the leading male actors on the stage, both advancing their careers and notoriety. Neither marriage ended happily with the women separating from their husbands once the marriages had succeeded in elevating the actresses' professional statuses. Mary Robinson utilised her married status to conceal her adulterous affairs and maintain her virtuous image in public. However, when the affair between her and the young royal prince emerged in the gossip columns, Robinson manipulated the media into accusing her husband of supporting his wife's indiscretions and profiting from her lovers. Thus the actress enjoyed her sexual liberation under the guise of a wounded wife complying with her husband's directions.

Actresses who decided not to engage in marriage enjoyed the freedom to pick and choose lovers while remaining administrators of their own wealth. Mrs Jordan's history demonstrated the positive and negative effects on a woman who lived as mistress rather than wife. She was publicly celebrated for her comedic performances on the stage and as a homemaker with a prince, the Duke of Clarence. Jordan enacted the roles of wife without the economic constraints, which allowed her to remain working and responsible for her earnings while also managing an illustrious mansion and being host to the Duke's distinguished guests. However, Jordan discovered the vulnerability of unwed mothers when after twenty years and thirteen children with the Duke, she was dismissed by her lover in

the pursuit of a wealthy heiress to repay his debts. Similar circumstances occurred to George Anne Bellamy and Sophia Baddeley, when their gentlemen lovers failed to honour promises of marriage and claimed that their financial situations prevented marriage. Without the restraints of a marriage, a disappointed young actress could quickly move onto her next advantageous conquest. The freedom of choice that an unwed woman held became the basis of Venetia Murray's argument that it was better to be a mistress than a wife during the Regency Period (1788-1830). Murray claimed that mistresses held a 'status of their own', with some regarded as respectable individuals due to the status bestowed onto the mistresses of the royal princes, such as Mrs Jordan.⁶

The influence of actresses posed a double threat to the court beauties and noblewomen of the period – admitted into the company of the country's elite decision makers and with the ability to advance socially, actresses held authority that many aristocratic women could never possess. Naturally, the influence and ambition of actresses at the top of their profession germinated a highly competitive female atmosphere where rivalry among actresses was a common occurrence. Intelligence, cunning and determination were essential for victory over fellow performers and was accomplished through the manipulation of masculine hegemony; the theatrical management, gentlemen patrons and the voyeuristic male audience.

A power struggle existed throughout the eighteenth-century within London's playhouses between theatre companies and the audience over who held the superior authority.

⁶ Murray, *High Society in the Regency Period*, pp. 134-135.

Incidents of violence that were often directed towards the players occurred when theatrical management attempted to impose regulations on the audience's accessibility or introduced performances not to the public's taste. In Ireland a similar pattern was occurring that emphasised the theatre as a platform for political and social discourses, with the actress's body an integral symbol in debates surrounding gender and class distinction. When an Irish gentleman by the name of Kelly, forcibly went backstage of the Smock Alley Theatre to assault the actress Mrs Dyer, tensions erupted at the removal of the man from the theatre that resulted in several nights of disruption.⁷ Members of the gentry were angry at Thomas Sheridan's (1719?-1788) egotism and treatment of a gentleman who was above the manager's social standing. It has been claimed that the riots were initiated by the women of the theatre company, rather than the tensions between Kelly and Sheridan over status and class authority.⁸ According to the affidavits published in *George Faulkner the Dublin Journal* (1747), it was the resistance of the actresses Mrs Dyer, George Anne Bellamy and the wardrobe assistant Anne Banford against the sexual assault from Kelly that resulted in the theatre's disruption. The interesting detail recorded in Bellamy's statement was her threat to the manager that neither woman would return to the stage and continue their performance until the gentleman was removed.⁹ Although the context of the Kelly Riots surrounded discourses on class (Protestant and Catholic gentlemen attempting to prove who held social superiority), the body of the actress formed a basis of the argument. A

⁷ The Kelly Riots occurred during Sheridan's second season as manager of the Smock Alley, on 19 January 1747. The actress Mrs Harriet Dyer was approached by the gentleman in the green-room and escaped with the aid of the actress George Anne Bellamy. Kelly was forcibly removed and later prosecuted by Sheridan, who defended his decision as protector of his company. See Thomson, 'Sheridan, Thomas (1719?-1788)' *odnb* [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25371>]

⁸ Harris, 'Outside the Box', pp. 33-55.

⁹ *George Faulkner the Dublin Journal*, (Dublin, Ireland), January 20, 1747 – January 24, 1747; Issue 2072.

liberty given to 'gentlemen' was the consent to visit performers behind the stage, which alluded to a sexual freedom and ownership of actresses. Kelly, who manoeuvred past spikes that Sheridan had in place to separate the pit from the stage, assaulted both Mrs Dyer and Bellamy under the belief that by having 'carnal knowledge' of an actress his position as a 'gentleman' would be firmly entrenched, objectifying the actress body as a tool of measurement of social standing.¹⁰

In the printed press, Sheridan was portrayed as the women's saviour and protector of the theatre's moral integrity. However, the historical context of the dispute highlights the social significance of the actress's image – as a sexual possession, intimacy with an actress was a privilege only given to men of a gentlemanly rank and was therefore a rite of passage for a man seeking public status. This privilege removed some female agency from the actress, yet the interest and endeavours to be a favourite of the country's most celebrated performers offered actresses a rich pool of admirers as potential patrons. Benefactors were valuable allies against rival actresses and could be utilised for the promotion of the woman's talents. The influence of actresses within the theatre company was demonstrated in the Kelly incident by the women's choice to reject the gentleman's sexual advances and then the manager's yielding to the actress's demands by offending Kelly as Bellamy had requested. Although publicly Sheridan was seen to be defending the honour of his actresses, Bellamy's legal statement illustrated that it was the female cast who dictated the regulation of backstage space. The prevention of spectators occupying the stage was extended to the

¹⁰ Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 1 of 5, p. 154. *George Faulkner the Dublin Journal*, (Dublin, Ireland), January 20, 1747 – January 24, 1747; Issue 2072.

London theatres by Garrick in the 1750s that further increased the voyeuristic interest in the actress by making her body more unattainable.

A unique new method of analysis into the impact of actresses on the stage in history is to recreate and perform the plays and struggles evident in women's literary work. Gilli Bush-Bailey has examined the lives of English actresses and female playwrights of the late seventeenth-century and concluded that the theatre was a 'site of radical female discourse'.¹¹ By reproducing a similar environment as that of a seventeenth-century performance and abiding by recorded stage directions, Bush-Bailey was able to further understand the close interaction between performer and spectator. These performative instructions aided the actress to either distance her personal character from her stage persona or to further confuse reality from fiction, by allowing the woman to manipulate her public representation. With audience members sitting upon the stage during the first half of the eighteenth century, sharing the same space, the actress's own identity could be easily misinterpreted as the character she was portraying. Therefore, by distancing herself from the audience further upstage, the 'fictitious nature of the scene/character can be played' and a distinction made between the true character of the actress and her stage persona.¹² Bush-Bailey's deductions are not innovative, as the actress's struggles with her voyeuristic audience was apparent in the actress memoirs examined in this study, yet the use of practical research by today's female performers adds a greater appreciation of the pioneering professionalism of early actresses.

¹¹ Bush-Bailey, 'Putting it into Practice', pp. 77-96.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 85.

The presence of women in the economy became more apparent in the eighteenth-century than previously before, with increased female consumerism due to cheaper products from innovative mass production. Fashion and literature are perhaps the best examples of areas in which female influence could be observed and actresses utilised both these mediums to their advantage. Memoirs formed both a mode of advertisement and a tool for manipulation of the actress's public representation. The purpose of recording an individual's history is to provide an accurate account of events and yet all texts display bias, conscious or otherwise. The memoirs authored by actresses in this study present women seeking sympathy and approval through the justification of their actions on and off the stage. The texts indicate that these women were apologetic; George Anne Bellamy's memoirs were titled *An Apology* for her life, and yet a subtext exists whereby these women were not seeking forgiveness but rather excusing their indiscretions.

The victimisation of actresses features in each cited memoir, with a distinction made between the naive lower class woman and the philandering gentleman who seduced her into folly. Therefore, by exaggerating the cruelty of gentlemen the actress became a sympathetic creature who deserved the public's support and admiration for attempting to maintain a career and provide for her family. The empathy cultivated through this representation suggests that the targeted readership were upper class ladies, who required further persuasion of the actress's merit than the more easily seduced male audiences. The employment of memoirs in this way reveals the intelligence of these actresses and the role of women as producers of their image and consumers within the marketplace. In Susan

Zlotnik's research of female economic influence in Jane Austen's novels, she argues that *Northanger Abbey* (1818) displayed female consumption as an assertive form of agency.¹³ The significance of Austen's novel was its heavy reliance on female reading, particularly the gothic novel, whereby the fictional heroines offered their readership various versions of female control. The characters within *Northanger Abbey* discuss narratives written by female authors and denote the presence of women in the public sphere, both as creators and purchasers of literature similar to the role of actresses in reality. With women as the consumers of memoirs, it is feasible that actresses wrote in a style directed at female readers and represented themselves under conventional ideals of women – as mothers and wives. In recording the characters of actresses under the titles of mother and wife, the literary representation conflicted with the public's perception of the immorality within the profession. Memoir writing allowed the actress to conceal personal flaws and reveal injustices inflicted onto her, manipulating prejudices against scorned lovers and rivals. By contextualising these texts and examining contemporary accounts, the accuracy of events recorded can be determined. However, regardless of the authenticity, the texts remain invaluable as testimony to the growing influence of women in the literary world and of the intelligence exhibited by actresses who attempted to recode their representation.

The participation of actresses in the production on their painted images is more difficult to prove, but the permission for artists to depict these women and the value of that representation to their admirers suggests feminine authority. Similar to the production of memoirs, the voyeuristic public demanded a more personal understanding of the actress,

¹³ Zlotnik, 'From Involuntary Object to Voluntary Spy', p. 279.

which allowed the woman to exercise her influence as producer. The actress fulfilled this by choosing her favoured artist and in identifying the pose/stage character that her public desired and would be the most profitable image for print production. Further research into the meaning behind portraits of the period has led Mark Hallett to examine the placement of specific paintings in relation to each other. Focusing primarily on the portraits of the Prince of Wales within the Royal Academy, Hallett theorised the importance of positioning and the public's knowledge of the subjects portrayed in paint, whereby certain portraits were purposely placed as if having a dialogue amongst themselves. The significance of this placement is the effect the position of the portraits had on the social standing of the sitters. For portraits of actresses to be exhibited alongside members of the aristocracy, this would imply a level of authority and respect for female performers expected from spectators. An example employed by Hallett was of the positioning of Reynolds's *Mrs Smith*, which we are led to believe was a courtesan, with the woman depicted to be moving from right to left (away from the portrait to her right). To the right of Reynolds's portrait was William Beechey's image of a clergyman, thus Mrs Smith appeared to be departing from morality, while her turned figure was said to have been in full view of the portrait of the philandering Prince of Wales.¹⁴

A further example of the significance of positioning within an exhibition was Reynolds's two large portraits of the Prince of Wales and of the actress *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* facing one another. Both these portraits were placed centrally on their facing walls that signified Reynolds' 'artistic and academic authority' in the 1784 exhibition, yet the

¹⁴ Hallett, 'Reading the Walls', pp. 581-582.

symbolism of an actress represented in the similar grandeur as royalty is notable.¹⁵ As queen of the tragic genre, the image of Siddons on her throne was a remarkable representation and exhibited in the proximity of the royal prince would have elevated the woman's public status, thus benefitting the actress both professionally and privately by allowing her to transcend class boundaries. A rigorous study of the Royal Academy's exhibitions will need to be pursued to discover if Hallett's theory could be applied to the portraits of actresses. However, a reviewer of the 1784 exhibition discussed the merit of Reynolds' work and identified only these two pieces, which would suggest that the grandeur and central positioning of both was socially significant.¹⁶ A brief overview of the portraits listed in the Principal Room of the Academy's 1797 exhibition, reveal that Mrs Siddons' image appeared twice; #166 *Mrs Siddons by T. Lawrence* and #203 *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (*G.F. Joseph*), surrounded by images of Lords, Dukes, the Bishop of Salisbury, the royal princesses and the Prince of Wales. William Beechey's portrait of a Miss Leake of the Drury Lane Theatre also featured on the walls, illustrating the broad variety of personalities that was seen within the Academy.¹⁷ The image of an actress placed amongst the portraits of nobility and the country's elite individuals, was likely to have been a perplexing sight to the public. As women employed in the public sphere exhibiting the masculine trait of ambition and often described as immoral characters akin to prostitutes, often contrary representations of actresses were produced in art, with female performers embodying respectable ladies in fashion and mannerisms. It was difficult to differentiate the image of an actress from the portraits of court beauties and therefore actresses were socially

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 587.

¹⁶ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, (London, England), Tuesday, April 27, 1784; Issue 17277.

¹⁷ *A guide to the exhibition of the Royal Academy for 1797*, p. 17.

elevated as admirable and legitimate public women whose bodies were consumed and reproduced in paint.

This thesis has identified the eighteenth-century actress as an influential figure in the public, utilising female determination and suffering to further her career and prosperity. Actresses may have been victimised as a result of their profession or social status, as the biographer James Boaden believed, yet they manipulated their pitiable image to gain public support and forgiveness for indiscretions. Boaden alleged that the demise of actresses was a natural occurrence, predetermined to those with 'extraordinary beauty'.¹⁸ However, the memoirs of acting women disputes this predestined defencelessness, with Elizabeth Steele recording that the actress Sophia Baddeley 'was mistress of her own actions' and George Anne Bellamy stating that she too was 'mistress of my own actions'.¹⁹ The actresses in this study were ambitious, intelligent and determined to succeed as celebrated individuals. They exploited their sexuality and ambiguous morality to advance socially and professionally, making them a superior group of women who exercised influence greater than the subordinate ideal described in literature. They may have been viewed as servants for the public's amusement, but actresses during this period were not the public's prey.

¹⁸ Boaden, *Life of Mrs Jordan*, Vol. 1 of 2, p. 94.

¹⁹ Steele, *The Memoirs of Mrs. Sophia Baddeley*, Vol. 3 of 6, p. 79. Bellamy, *An Apology*, Vol. 5 of 5, p. 170.

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