Acting Theory and the English Stage, 1700–1830

Lisa Zunshine

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Paul Hiffernan, *Dramatic Genius*

Paul Hiffernan, *Dramatic Genius: In Five Books* (London: Printed for the Author, 1770). British Library, shelfmark 1346.l.3.

Paul Hiffernan (1719–77) was born in Dublin and educated as a physician at the University of Montpellier, but his attempt at practising medicine was short-lived, and he turned to writing. In the late 1730s and 1740s, he published a series of political pamphlets and poems (none particularly successful) and in the early 1750s, he started writing for theatre. His comedy, *The Self-Enamour'd, or, The Ladies Doctor* (1750) was produced in Dublin; his farces, *The Maiden Whim, or, The Critical Moment* (1756) and *The New Hippocrates* (1761) each played once at Drury Lane. While in Dublin, Hiffernan also brought forth a short-lived theatre periodical, the *Tickler* (*c.* 1748); after his move to London, he published the *Tuner* (roughly five issues, from 1754 to 1755), which contains a number of suggestive critical arguments, in which he 'put himself imaginatively into the scenes which he [was] discussing … to describe important characters' and pondered 'the problem before the actor who would interpret these characters'.[1] Gray considers the *Tuner* Hiffernan's 'best contribution to theatrical criticism, though it cannot be said to have done much either to enliven or to dignify the profession'.[2]

Dramatic Genius (1770) reflects Hiffernan's long-standing interest in anatomy (hence his discussion of the 'cures for strengthening a weak voice'), his occasional stints at teaching acting and elocution (hence his self-serving description of a 'duly qualified' acting coach and his assertion that such a 'truly valuable advisor' is hard to find), as well as his tumultuous relationship with prominent theatrical figures, such as Samuel Foote and David Garrick. Hiffernan dedicated the treatise to Garrick, but this dedication was preceded by a long quarrel. According to Betty Rizzo, in 1764, Hiffernan

> published *The Earl of Warwick*, 'a very indifferent translation of Monsieur de la Harpe's play'. (Genest, 4: pp. 457–8) The play was never produced, but when Thomas Francklin's translation of the same play had a triumphant run at Drury Lane in 1766, Hiffernan responded with violence, issuing a new edition (1767) of his play in which he criticized the taste of the managers. Hiffernan went on to attack Garrick in 'A

> Letter from the Rope-Dancing Monkey in the Hay-Market to the Acting Monkey of Drury Lane.' Garrick capitulated, produced *The National Prejudice* for Hiffernan on 6 April 1768 (one performance), and helped him achieve a splendid subscription for his *Dramatic Genius* ... (1770), which apotheosized Garrick.[3]

With the exception of these personal touches, *Dramatic Genius* is entirely derivative; its discussions of the classical stage, of training for aspiring actors, and of tragedy as conducive to the greatest pleasure in the observer can be traced to Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* (1753).

Notes:

1. C. H Gray, *Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 126.
2. Ibid., p. 128.
3. B. Rizzo, 'Hiffernan, Paul', *ODNB*

DRAMATIC GENIUS.

IN

FIVE BOOKS.

By PAUL HIFFERNAN, M. D.

Eſt quoddam prodire tenus, ſi non datur ultra.

HOR.

IMITATED.

T' have gone thus far, ſhou'd ſoothe all Critic Spleen,
And gain ſome Credit with ingenuous Minds.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.
M, DCC, LXX.

THE THIRD BOOK

EXHIBITS A

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

OF THE

PRE-REQUISITES

TO SUCCEED IN

THE ART OF ACTING,

WHEREIN WILL BE SHEWN

Many eſſential Articles omitted by thoſe who have written upon that SUBJECT.

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DRAMATIC GENIUS.

BOOK III.

THE art of acting is a topic of almoſt univerſal converſation, yet how very few among playhouſe frequenters, or even thoſe who encumber the ſtage, know any thing of the matter?

To excel in this profeſſion is indeed a very arduous undertaking; and but little leſs on many occaſions, than to be a living and moving epitome of thoſe arts that rank foremoſt among the polite.

In the performer's countenance is to glow all the impaſſioned colouring for painters to copy after; while from his or her affecting attitudes, the ſculptors may derive new models for the improvement of their art. A pleaſing ſway of the limbs, and eaſy deportment of the body are to notify their having been tutored by the graces. Muſick muſt alſo appear to have taken a peculiar care in harmonizing thoſe accents that are to give new charms and force to all the beauties and energy of poetic diction.

This is what hath been done (therefore not to be held as an impoſſibility in nature) by the Grecian actor *Satyrus*, who reſcued *Demoſthenes* from deſpair, and to whom the world is obliged for that great

great orator, through virtue of his precepts and example. Nor have leſs wonders been performed by the Coryphæus of the Roman ſtage, *Roſcius*, whoſe acquaintance was courted, and even inſtruction ſolicited by a *Cicero*, the great luminary of Latin eloquence.

England can boaſt a theatrical ornament not inferior to either, but perhaps equal to both the Roman and Grecian; becauſe whatever *Satyrus* might have done by ſpeaking example in the point of oratorial execution for *Demoſthenes*; not leſs hath been done for young aſpirers to oratorial fame among us, in ſpeaking the jubilee ode to *Shakeſpear*'s commemorative praiſe. And whatever might have been *Roſcius*'s merit as an actor, I cannot be accuſed of adulation to think ours not only equal, but—nay I will venture the word without reſerve, ſuperior to him, when we conſider the manifold characters in which the latter ſhines by his own features, by his own natural tones, not artfully ſtrained utterance! Beſides how limited, maſked, and forced in theſe articles muſt the former have been?

But let Mr. *Garrick*, our cotemporary *Roſcius* and *Satyrus* in one, be left for the preſent to enjoy the publick's repeated admiration and applauſe, while I proſecute the analyſis propoſed for young people to try themſelves by, before they become declared candidates for mounting the theatre.

Although it hath been given but to a few, a very few indeed, to attain ſuch heights of excellence as the three above mentioned; there are, notwithſtanding, ſeveral ranks of repreſentative merit, in which eſteem, and a certain degree of fame may be acquired.

Let me be allowed to give an anſwer here to a queſtion frequently ſtarted—"What is the reaſon that among young petitioners for the "ſtage, they for the moſt part deſire to appear rather in tragic than in "comic characters?" It can be derived from the doctrine advanced in the

the preceding book. As they had felt more pleaſure in being made to *weep* at a *tragedy*, than to *laugh* at a *comedy*; ſo, conſequently it would prove more flattering to their pride, to excite the ſame effect in a crowd of ſpectators.

There is another article not unſeaſonable for animadverſion here, becauſe we often hear it previouſly boaſted as an aſſurance of ſucceſs in the behalf of young candidates—" Such an one is a very good ſcholar. He has had an univerſity education." But though that makes not againſt, it does but little for him; becauſe there are more eſſential pre-requiſites, without which that can be of no avail.

For as a dramatic poet may be a monſter of uglineſs, yet give proofs of an admirable genius; ſo the performer being much more of the inſtrumental than of the compoſing department, in general, ought to have a well-formed perſon, and a well-toned voice, ſince, *the art of acting conſiſts entirely in being ſeen and heard with pleaſure.*

Although learning cannot hurt, but rather aſſiſt; yet no more is to be inſiſted on as neceſſary than a tolerable ſhare of inſtruction at ſome of our reputable ſchools, or by private ſtudy under a judicious guide. An undeniable proof in ſupport of this aſſertion are the many celebrated actreſſes in this and all other countries, and ages, wherein dramatic exhibitions have flouriſhed.

The uſual method of a perſon applying to a critical friend, or ſome other deemed competent judge of theatrical matters, is to ſet off by declaiming a wrongly choſen ſpeech or ſcene, becauſe one in which ſome celebrated performer ſhines; and ought therefore to be avoided: ſince too frequently in ſuch attempts, there is more of the ape than of genuine talents to be diſcovered.

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If writers find it a very rare thing to hit upon a duly qualified critic to reviſe and give them a candid opinion of their works; it is not leſs ſo to light upon an intelligent and taſteful guide to direct young candidates for adventuring on the ſtage: yet may daily be ſeen one or other impudent pretender, of whoſe utterance can be aſſerted, that there is nothing either pleaſing, eaſy, or flowing to be heard; it being buckramed with an offenſive ſtiffneſs, *Nil lene, nil placidum riget ejus-cratio:* and on whoſe ungraceful countenance is engraved a legible prohibition from any interfering exemplary inſtruction in the ſcenic art; becauſe all copying of their tones, looks, &c. can be productive of nothing better than ſo many theatrical ſoleciſms. Let all ſuch horrours be avoided.—But when a truly valuable adviſer is luckily found, he will treat the perſons applying to him with politeneſs, will never call upon them immediately for a ſpecimen, conſcious that their ſpirits ſeldom fail, on ſuch occaſions, of being thrown into an hurry and confuſion at the alarm of ſo ſudden an examination before the tribunal of judgment.

He will not, till after a few viſits and encouraging converſations, thereby to remove the firſt impreſſions of fear, propoſe any trial; but during the ſaid viſits and converſation, without ſeeming ſo to do, this obliging director will obſerve the intended pupil's ſhape, manner of moving, features of the face, and tones of the voice, &c. In all which, if there occur no remarkable exception, he will then proceed, according to what he has perceived his powers to be adapted for, to make choice of a part for him firſt to read, and after to ſtudy for ſpeaking, in order to ſet him right in both. He will gradually favour the ſtudent from time to time, not unmercifully cram him at once, or in a few meetings, with inſtructions proportioned to his faculties unfolding themſelves.

The analytical method concerning the pre-requiſites for *The art of acting* now comes under conſideration.

In

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In the firſt place we are to examine if the candidate ſtands upright and gracefully, if the forehead have a pleaſing openneſs, if the brows be placed equal, well turned, formed alike, and move congenially; if the eyes be endowed with vivacity and expreſſion; if the noſe be in a juſt direction, and proportioned to the face; if the mouth be no way miſhapen or diſtorted, nor too narrow, nor too wide; if the chin be neither too projectile nor too depreſt.

The countenance being ſo far examined, the next object of enquiry is, to ſee how its features are expreſſive of the paſſions, and of their tranſitions from one to another; which deſirable effect is often incurably prevented by a layer of fat between the exteriour teguments and the muſcles of the face; whence the more pathetic ſo unfortunate an actor attempts to be, the more laughable he becomes, from an apparent diſſention between animated or mournful eyes, and a vacant phiſiognomy.

What proves equally a blemiſh is, when the fibres of theſe muſcles, though not covered by any intervening impediment, end ſhort and abruptly, without a proper ſweep tending to the line of beauty; becauſe being ſo formed they produce a ridiculous appearance in efforts to expreſs affliction and excite pity, nay often provoke a contrary effect, and the more ſo, the more pains are taken, inaſmuch as the face looks like a piece of ſcratch-work, and that the eyes are in a manner thruſt forward with an ideot glare.

The exteriourly conſtituent parts of the head being unexceptionable, or rather free from giving any offence to, or diſappointing the ſpectators eye (abſolute perfection is by no means inſiſted on in each article) the next ſurvey of our analytic enquiry is to ſee if the head be put on well, which implies the neck's being duly proportioned, elegantly rounded, and rather *long* than *ſhort*, becauſe the latter is not a friend to the *graceful*.

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The ſymetrical qualification of the breaſt, as well as of the upper and lower extremities, the one containing the ſhoulders, arms, and hands; the other the thighs, legs, and feet, with the body, is next to be enquired into; which, to complete a pleaſing ſtage figure, ought to be neither *fat* nor *lean*.

Let us now proceed to an examination of the two principal articles on which the ſucceſs of a theatrical performer chiefly depends, the *voice* and the *geſture:* beginning with the former.

The firſt requiſite of the voice is to be articulate, clear, and audible through the full extent of the audience, without any painful effort in the ſpeaker, becauſe that would occaſion a kindred effect in the hearer. To be heard ſimply is not the thing, but with pleaſure is the deſirable point.

Defects in this firſt poſtulatum are cauſed by a faulty formation, either of the mouth, the tongue, the throat, the breaſt, the lungs; therefore all who labour under a confirmed and invincible liſping, ſtuttering, drawling heſitation, ſmothering precipitancy, unintelligible thickening, diſagreeable creaking of the voice, &c. muſt renounce the ſtudy of theatric elocution.

However, in a well formed organization, a clear, although weak voice at firſt, may by frequent practice, and dint of continued application, if accompanied with a ſober and chaſte courſe of life, be made in time not only to pervade, but to convey itſelf not unpleaſingly to the remoteſt part of an audience; ſo the ſpeaker fail not in the article of breathing, whoſe imperfection, to a certain degree, is to be remedied by a due care, and ſtudious perſeverance in the means preſcribed.

One of the beſt cures for ſtrengthening a weak voice, and lengthening the breath, is every morning to frequently read and rehearſe aloud in private,

private, which moreover is a very ſalutary cuſtom, as it greatly contributes to expand the lungs, and cauſe by degrees a freer circulation of the blood.

Let the ambitious patient begin this vocal regimen with ſhort ſpeeches, or moderate paragraphs of an eaſy utterance; then proceed to others longer, and conſiſting of more difficult words: thoſe words which are felt by him to be the moſt impracticable he muſt conquer by degrees, ſyllable after ſyllable, then by joining a quarter, next a half, and finally let them all be pronounced in the aggregate, which will be the triumph of his induſtry.

In a like manner the reſiſting obſtinacy of particular letters is to be ſubdued, and forced to a due obedience by the dint of indefatigable application.

There are two faults of abſurd affectation in opening the mouth; the one too much, as if to bawl out every word; the other too little, as if to whiſper them only.

With judgment in theſe articles a middling, clear, piercing voice may be rendered more diſtinct to an audience than a louder, a fuller, and rounder; which indeed depends on an acquired and maſterly ſkillfulneſs in the mechaniſm and cunning of articulation, as well as in a knack of jockeying the breath.

Let a moſt ungraceful cuſtom of hawking, coughing, ſpitting and forcibly breathing be avoided as a peſtilent nuiſance would, becauſe where ſuch an offenſive noiſe and diſcharge are habitually prevalent, thence no elegance of pronunciation can be expected.

When a tongue is too large for the mouth; there being no chirurgical operation inſtituted as yet for paring down ſuch an excreſcential

error

error to a proper ſize, it is to be looked upon as an abſolute diſqualification for becoming an actor.

There yet remains another article of analytic enquiry about the head, and that a very eſſential one, which is *the faculty of hearing*.

For without (according to the received expreſſion) *a good ear*, the fineſt toned voice in the world muſt by ever erring in a diſagreeable and haraſſing monotony, ſink its poſſeſſor, although endowed with every advantage of figure and complexion, to the low denomination of a bad actor.

Yet even this blemiſh might in part be removed, or at leaſt ſoftened by following advice that cannot be ſo intelligibly delivered in writing, as by converſation, and through a method not altogether diſſimilar from that of teaching dumb people to ſpeak, who are ſo in conſequence of a co-æval deafneſs, but not of their voices organization being vitiated.

So far is ſufficient for our readers to conceive what are the eſſential pre-requiſites for an actor's correct utterance. Let us now conſider him in another material point of view, and form an ocular analyſis of thoſe relative to his geſture. Since, as already hinted, to be *heard*, and *ſeen* with pleaſure, is the abridgment of his profeſſion. The taſteful ſpectators ears and eyes are in an uniſon with his tones and geſture; they are inſtinctively hurt by the leaſt failing of either.

As by *ſpeaking* we can convey our ſenſe to the blind; even ſo by geſture we can to *deaf* natives, and to foreigners who underſtand not our language, eſpecially on the ſtage. But for the effectuating of it ſtill further and with applauſe, let the following directions be obſerved.

The

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The entire body is to bear firmly on the floor, and not to ſhift its place, or change its attitude every moment, which would incur the charge of an unballaſted reſtleſsneſs.

There muſt be a meaning of neceſſity, or of grace, for every diverſified direction of the head. It ſhould never be kept too ſtiffly erect (when not in character) which denotes an air of inſolence; nor let to ſupinely incline towards the breaſt, nor awkwardly lean towards either ſhoulder, which would exhibit a languid remiſsneſs.

The head of a performer, even when not ſpeaking, is neither to be immoveable, like that of a ſtatue, nor veering about to every blaſt like a weather cock; no, it is to enjoy an eaſy uprightneſs between motion and reſt without particularly marking either.

The countenance is always to be turned towards the ſpeaker, and from the eyes through an eſcaping look no conſciouſneſs is to be gathered of any ſpectators being preſent, even in ſoliloquies, which are but thinking aloud; *or in ſide ſpeaking.* They muſt ever accompany, with a ſocial direction the movement of the hands, when averſion is not expreſſed, and every movement of the hands is to have its appropriated meaning and indication, not applicable to any other.

Wherefore it follows that the direction of the eyes muſt always illuſtrate the ſenſe of the words. When heaven, the ſtars, ſun, moon, &c. of elevated ſituation are mentioned, or addreſſed to, they are to be turned upwards: but when earth, hell, &c. downwards.—Yet how often on our ſtage, to the ſhame of ſuch ignorant offenders, do we ſee this very obvious rule ſinned againſt, as well as a pointing their hands *from*, when ſpeaking *of* themſelves.

In ſwearing by any Deity's ſhrine, when in the temple that contains it; or appealing to the ſtatue of ſome revered perſonage in a public or other

other place, the eyes muſt be directed thither; the hand; or hands tending that way.

The duty of the eye-brows is to be neither too ſluggiſhly quieſcent, nor too wantonly active; but to obſerve a free, eaſy, and well-timed obſequiouſneſs to the ſentimental expreſſion of the eyes, which may poetically be called the ſoul of the countenance.

Upon their judicious combination, well-managed direction, and co-impaſſioned energy depends the chiefeſt claim to excellence in *the art of acting*, as RICCOBONI, in his poem upon that ſubject, has diſplayed in a maſterly manner, and well worthy of a ſerious attention from every aſpiring performer.

Wherefore to his Italian text, that ſuch doctrine may not appear an affected inſinuation of mine, I ſhall annex a faithful tranſlation, to ſet forth that author's rule in the ſtrongeſt and the cleareſt light; whoſe evidence is to be the more relied on in this caſe, as he was both a good writer, and an actor not unknown to fame.

Oh! ſe agli occhi di tutte le perſone
Foſſe appicato un filo, e ſi portaſſe
Al punto ove lo ſguardo ſi diſpone?
Ai quai de' membri credi ſi attaccaſſe.
La gomena formata? ſolo al viſo
Ne altrove penſar gia che terminaſſe.
A tutti quanti gli auditori fiſo
Guarda negli occhi, e ogn'un di lor vedrai
Pender dà tuoi, quaſi d' amor conquiſo.
Trema di quegli ſguardi: ſe nol ſai
Aſpetta ogn'un di piangere al tuo pianto;
O come i tuoi farli ſereni, et gai.

Or

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Or di, che non importa tanto, o quanto,
D' aver cura al tuo volto, ſe a lui dei
Interamente la vergogna, O il vanto.

" If from the eyes of every ſpectator a thread were to be drawn to that point, whither all their converging viſion tends, on what part of the body think you this optic chain would terminate? On the face alone. Now turn your eyes attentively on theirs, and you will obſerve them to be ſo fixed upon yours, as to thence expect a leading example whether they ſhall be overcaſt with ſorrow, or brightened into joy. Wherefore it is a matter of no ſmall importance to give your countenance a due direction, fitting to the ſcene; ſince from a carefulneſs of ſo doing you are to hope applauſe, or fear cenſure from a neglect."

According to this very ſenſible doctrine, how improper in our theatric ladies is all ſcreening of the eyes and countenance behind a fan, in order to take a ſly peep around the boxes, to deſcry if any friends or admirers be there; and learn from their approving looks, if the dear creatures be enraptured with one's acting that night.

Another ſiſter-fault to this, which we may often perceive, is, an actreſſes looking into her boſom, and feeling there as for a roſe-bud that hurts her; although ſhe be ſpeaking at the ſame time. This is paying no great attention to the other performers; and as for the audience, the rays of her voice, pleaſed with a new direction, and charmed with the place, forget to reach their ears, being loſt in ſo lovely an abſorption!

If pronunciation ſuffer through the faulty organization, adventitious mutilation, or other incurred diſgrace of the noſe, that is a diſqualification; as are all deforming diſaſters of the face, ſuch as wens, large ugly moles, frightful ſcars, ſcrophulous tumours, &c.

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Our analytical attention here regards only the pre-requiſites for that ſpecies of acting which is to repreſent the poliſhed elegance, or elevated dignity of human nature; becauſe every departing widely from it either to the ſtupidly vacant, glaringly abſurd, deformed, or groteſque, needs but very little, or indeed no inſtructions: ſeeing that the enactors fit for ſuch parts come ready miſhapen, or unfiniſhed from the hands of nature, in the inattentive hours of her careleſsneſs and negligence: ſince by a peculiarity in their make, an oafiſhly inane, or ridiculouſly marked face, with a ſingular tone of voice, they are the beſt adapted for theatrical productions which traffick in the deformity and turpitude of mankind. All ſuch actors' claim to their peculiar ſhare of the publick's notice, ariſeth, however paradoxical it may ſeem, from their imperfection.

A twiſting and ſcrewing of the mouth is to be avoided as a practice very unpleaſing; nor, is leſs ſo, a frequent licking, ſucking and biting of the lips.

To ſhrug up the ſhoulders often may do well in taking off a French outré character; but is elſe-where culpable. Thoſe actors who in ſpeaking are apt to raiſe one ſhoulder higher than another may be cured of this fault, by having a perſon near them in their private training to prick with a pin or needle the tranſgreſſive inſurgent.

Perſons inclined to ſtoop ought to make uſe of a collar with ſmall ſpikes on the fore part.

To throw the head back, and thruſt the belly forward in ſpeaking, is groteſque, unartful, indecent. An air of the laſt is betrayed by a conſtant ſticking of the left hand in a not very moral neighbourhood, beſides giving now and then a jerk or a pull-up to it, to enforce an unchaſte image.—For were the actreſſes to deprive themſelves alſo of the uſe of a hand, by faſtening it in the left pocket, what a pretty effect?

A proper

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A proper and free command of the ſhoulders, arms, and hands, is to be acquired by an application to the art of fencing, as that of the thighs, legs, and feet is to be attained by the precepts of dancing. Through an unpardonable neglect of theſe auxiliaries, I have ſeen ſome, miſcalled players, who are capable of no other action with their hands, but that of catching flies, or imitating palſied fingers, or ſhort convulſive dartings of the hand, as in St. Vitus's dance.

Others I have ſeen ſo infirm about the ankles, as, like tender-hoofed horſes, not to be able to preſs with their feet ſignificantly upon the ſtage; wherefore upon ſuch weakly grounded, and tottering foundations no ſuperſtructure of dignity or grace can be erected.

Among the ancients, young tyros were a long time preparing, nay ſerved a kind of apprenticeſhip ere they adventured to exhibit themſelves. Quite the reverſe is practiſed among us, and hence ſo few ſucceed; but by crude and precipitate eſſays become objects of the publick's laughter.

The firſt reformer of *acting* into an *art* was the Grecian tragic poet *Æſchylus*, as we are told by *Horace* in a verſe that has not been rightly underſtood by the crowd of tranſlators and commentators;

" *Et docuit magnumque loqui, nitique Cothurno:*

which, ſubſequent to the preceeding text for ſome lines, ſignifies, and can ſignify nothing elſe, but that *Æſchylus*

From ſcenes obſcure to fame his actors led,
Teaching with pow'r to ſpeak, with dignity to tread!

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

[John Potter], *The Theatrical Review; or New Companion to the Play-House*

[John Potter], *The Theatrical Review; or, New Companion to the Play-House: Containing A Critical and Historical Account of every Tragedy, Comedy, Opera, Farce, etc. exhibited at the Theatres during the last Season; With Remarks on the Actors who performed the principal Characters. The Whole Interspersed with occasional Reflections on Dramatic Poetry in general; the Characters of the best English Dramatic Authors; and Observations on the Conduct of the Managers. Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of every Lover of Theatrical Amusements. By a Society of Gentlemen, Independent of Managerial Influence*, 2 vols (London: Printed for S. Crowder, 1772), vol. 1, pp. i–v, 15–20, 32–4, 65–7, 142–4, 133–7; vol. 2, 1–3, 7–11, 33–4, 86–7, 90–1, 100–1. British Library, shelfmark P.P.5111.

'A Society of Gentlemen' was a pseudonym of John Potter (*c.* 1734–after 1813), musician, writer, and later, medical doctor.[1] He edited newspapers (*Devonshire Inspector*, 1756) and wrote poetry (1754), treatises on music (*Observations on the Present State of Music and Musicians, with General Rules for Studying Music*, 1762), novels (*History and Adventure of Arthur O'Bradley*, 1769; *Olivia, or the Nymph of the Valley*, 1813), and medical treatises (*Treatise on Pulmonary Inflammation*, n.d.). He also wrote music for Drury Lane (1763–5) and Vauxhall Gardens (1764–77) and contributed essays on theatre to the *Public Ledger*, in which, in 1766, he published his attack on Garrick, 'The Rosciad, or a Theatrical Register'. The *Theatrical Review* reprinted materials from the *Public Ledger* (September 1771–June 1772), and the title's emphasis on its 'independence of managerial influence' might be a reference to the earlier quarrel with Garrick. T. C. Gray sees Potter's reviews as 'full of conventional critical terms of the century', but his writing can still be lively even as he holds forth on such traditional topics as the natural qualifications of a 'theatrical genius'.[2] Thus in discussing the appearance and performance of Robert Nugent Owenton, who played Tamerlane in Covent Garden Theatre's 1771 production of Nicholas Rowe's 1702 play, Potter describes 'this stalking Hibernian on the Stage' in the following terms: 'His features are contracted and peevish, his deportment falsely consequential, and his action so mechanically extravagant, as to put us in mind of a pasteboard

figure, whose arms and legs are moved with wires: Add to this that his voice is … so constantly unharmonious, as to render his recitation laborious to himself, and disagreeable to an Audience. Nature seems to have denied him all those essential qualifications which constitute a theatrical Genius'.[3]

Notes:

1. Arnott, J. F., and John W. Robinson, *English Theatrical Literature 1559–1900: A Bibliography. Incorporating Robert W. Lowe's A Bibliographical Account of English Theatrical Literature* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1970), p. 361.
2. Gray, pp. 195–6.
3. Potter, *The Theatrical Review*, vol. 1, pp. 161–2.

THE
THEATRICAL REVIEW;
OR,
New Companion to the Play-Houſe:

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WITH

REMARKS on the Actors who performed the principal Characters.

The Whole interſperſed with occaſional REFLECTIONS on DRAMATIC POETRY in general; the CHARACTERS of the beſt ENGLISH DRAMATIC AUTHORS; and OBSERVATIONS on the CONDUCT of the MANAGERS.

Calculated for the

Entertainment and Inſtruction of every Lover of Theatrical Amuſements.

By a SOCIETY of GENTLEMEN,
Independent of Managerial Influence

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
Printed for S. CROWDER, in Pater-noſter-Row; J. WILKIE, No. 71. St. Paul's Church-yard and J. WALTER, at Charing-Croſs. MDCCLXXII.

Neither a borrower, nor a lender be;
For loan oft loſes both itſelf and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of huſbandry.
This above all; to thine own ſelf be true,
And it muſt follow, as the night the day,
Thou can'ſt not then be falſe to any man."

The Part of *Ophelia* was performed by Mrs. *Mattocks*, being the *firſt* time of her appearing in this Character, and we hope it will not be the *laſt*.

To which was added,

THOMAS and SALLY.

THIS little Entertainment was written by Mr. *Bickerſtaff*; the Plot is extremely ſimple, and the Conduct of the Piece has little to recommend it, except in the inſtance of *Sally*'s integrity to *Thomas*, who, though in an humble ſituation in life, rejects every tempting ſolicitation from the *Squire*, notwithſtanding his importance and ſuperiority; a circumſtance, that affords a very uſeful leſſon to the Fair Sex. It was excellently ſet to Muſic by Dr. *Arne*, and not only met with great ſucceſs on its firſt appearance, but has frequently been performed every Seaſon ſince, with great applauſe.

DRURY-LANE THEATRE, *September* 26.

CYMBELINE:

A Tragedy, by Shakeſpear.

THIS pleaſing Dramatic Romance (for it cannot be conſidered in any other light) is one proof, amongſt many, of the amazing

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amazing fertility of *Shakeſpear*'s unbounded fancy; for though the Plot, as far as it relates to *Poſthumus* and *Imogen*, is taken from *Boccace's Decameron*, and the reſt from the ancient traditions of the *Britiſh* Hiſtory, there is little hiſtorical beſides the names.

Dr *Johnſton* obſerves of this Play, that "it has many juſt Sentiments, ſome natural Dialogues, and ſome pleaſing Scenes, but they are obtained at the expence of much incongruity. To remark (continues he) the folly of the Fiction, the abſurdity of the Conduct, the confuſion of the names and manners of different Times, and the impoſſibility of the Events in any ſyſtem of Life, were to waſte Criticiſm upon unreſiſting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too groſs for aggravation."——Whoever places himſelf in the Critics chair, muſt ſubſcribe to theſe ſentiments; but then, it ſhould be conſidered of whom we are ſpeaking: Of *Shakeſpear*, the firſt Dramatic Author in the World; who, ſcorning to be bound by any Laws, gave a looſe to the workings of the moſt extenſive imagination that ever poſſeſſed the mind of Man. The irregularities in this Piece are numerous, we confeſs; yet, notwithſtanding all theſe, it contains an infinity of Beauties, both with reſpect to Language, Character, Paſſion, and incident; and the ſeverity of Criticiſm muſt abate of its rigour, by contemplating on thoſe wonderful ſtrokes of Genius with which it abounds; ſo that while the Judgment is diſpleaſed with the improbability of the Plot, and inconſiſtency of the Dramatic

Action,

Action, the Mind muſt receive the higheſt ſatisfaction from the pleaſing excurſions of Fancy: and though it is impoſſible we can be inattentive to the obvious defects of the Piece, the pleaſure we receive from it, on the whole, naturally inclines us to behold them with an eye of favour.

This Piece was revived ſome years ſince with great Alterations, conſiſting chiefly of a removal of the moſt glaring Abſurdities, with reſpect to Time and Place, an omiſſion of ſome Characters and Scenes not neceſſary to the general Deſign, and which, only increaſed the number of its Perplexities, and retarded the progreſs of the main Deſign. As it now ſtands, its Merit is ſufficiently known, and the ſatisfaction it has conſtantly given in the Repreſentation, has always been expreſt with the higheſt applauſe.

The learned and ingenious Mr. *William Collins*, of *Chicheſter*, wrote a very elegant Song for the Obſequies of *Fidele*, in the room of the old one, and we believe it was introduced on the revival of the Piece, but is now omitted. We do not think the Managers blameable in this, as the performance of it muſt rather retard the Action, for which reaſon, part of the old one is repeated by *Guiderius* and *Arviragus* with more propriety.

With reſpect to the Repreſentation of this Piece, we are ſorry to obſerve, that the Parts of *Poſthumus*, and *Jachimo*, ſuffer greatly by the loſs of thoſe excellent Actors, Mr. *Powell*, and Mr. *Holland*. We do not mean to depreciate the Merit of Mr. *Reddiſh*,

diſh, and Mr. *Palmer*, by this remark; it is to be preſumed every Performer does his beſt, and conſequently deſerves commendation: Compariſons are odious, when injurious to the reputation or intereſt of any one Individual whatever, and, to praiſe the Dead at the expence of the Living, is neither juſt, nor generous. Mr. *Reddiſh* rants a little too much in ſome of the paſſionate Speeches, which is injurious to his voice, as well as unneceſſary to that propriety he means to ſupport by it. To "*tear a paſſion to tatters, to very rags, to ſplit the ears of the groundlings*," (to uſe the language of *Shakeſpear*, in *Hamlet*'s remarks to the Players) is a practice avoided by every judicious Actor, who has taken the pains to inform his underſtanding in the arts of his Profeſſion, and acquire a perfect knowledge of the Parts he plays. All unneceſſary force is unnatural, and tho' it may ſtrike the ears of the ill judging, a repetition of it will ſoon loſe its influence even with them, while every inſtance of it will be ſure to meet with the diſapprobation of the more judicious.

Mr. *Palmer*, in *Jachimo*, has, with great judgment, corrected one error which his predeceſſor Mr. *Holland* repeatedly committed in this part; and which was abſolutely inconſiſtent with that attention to propriety ſo neceſſary to be preſerved inviolable in every Dramatic Action: we mean the appearance of reality. Mr. *Holland* never lowered his voice, or however, not ſufficiently, in the *Chamber Scence*, Act 2. *Imogen* is ſuppoſed to be aſleep, and while

Jachimo

Jachimo notes the particulars of the room, &c. too much caution and ſtillneſs cannot be uſed, which Mr. *Palmer* very judiciouſly obſerves.

Miſs *Younge*'s excellent performance in the part of *Imogen*, naturally leads us to congratulate the Managers on her return from *Ireland*. In the preſent dearth of good Actreſſes, eſpecially in the Tragic Walk, ſhe is a very valuable acquiſition to the *Britiſh* Theatre. Her voice is inimitably ſuited to the Stage, her deportment eaſy and natural, and her ſenſibility forcible and affecting. We rate this Actreſs very high in our eſteem, becauſe her merit is conſpicuous, and ſhe has repeatedly diſcovered evident tokens of laboured attention, to the duties of her profeſſion.

After this, we muſt beg leave to point out a ſmall error in her playing the part of *Imogen*; and which was too obvious to eſcape notice.—When *Jachimo* arrives from *Italy* at the *Britiſh* Court, he is introduced to her by *Piſanio*, who ſays to *Imogen*, on his approach, "Madam, a noble Gentleman of Rome comes from my Lord with Letters." And *Jachimo*, on his firſt entrance informs her, that "the worthy *Leonatus* is in ſafety." Theſe circumſtances ought to awaken the higheſt joy and tranſport in *Imogen*, inſtead of which, we were ſorry to obſerve, ſhe dropped a ſolemn curtſey, and without one joyous feature ſaid, with the utmoſt languor, "Thanks, good Sir, &c."—And even after ſhe had read the Letter he brought from *Poſthumus*, and ſhe addreſſes herſelf to him again,

again, her indifference was ſtill the ſame. As this was evidently want of attention, it is remarked with a view to prevent a repetition of the ſame impropriety, and not from a diſpoſition prompt to cenſure.

To which was added,

The MAYOR of GARRATT.

THIS is a very indifferent Performance, and greatly inferior to many of Mr. *Foote*'s Pieces. The Incidents are trifling, and produced without regularity, and the Satire is directed to very improper Objects, and ſuch as are beneath the importance of ridicule. *Weſton* is inimitable in the Part of *Jerry Sneak*; nor do we think *Love* without merit in *Major Sturgeon*. The Song, of *Johnny Pringle*, is contemptible to the utmoſt extreme; and we hope, never to hear the *firſt* Theatre in *Europe* diſgraced with it again.

COVENT-GARDEN THEATRE, *Sept.* 27.

The STRATAGEM:

A Comedy, by Farquhar.

THIS well known Comedy was brought on the Stage in the year 1710, and met with great ſucceſs; ſince which time it has frequently been repeated every Seaſon with general applauſe.

The Plot is judiciouſly contrived, and the Author has been very happy in the choice of his Subject. It contains a variety of Incidents, which render the Repreſentation pleaſing

ſhe will amply recompence the Public for the favourable reception, and general applauſe ſhe experienced on this occaſion.

COVENT-GARDEN THEATRE, *October 2.*

OROONOKO:

A Tragedy, by Southerne.

THIS well-known Tragedy, was brought on the Stage, in the year 1696, and is the moſt perfect, as well as the moſt pathetic of all *Southerne's* dramatic Pieces. The tragic Part is truly intereſting and affecting, and ſufficiently atones for the low trifling ribaldry of the comic Part. The Language of the former is truly poetical, and the Sentiments ſuch as do honour to the dignity of human Nature. In the year 1759, the ingenious Dr. *Hawkſworth*, brought out an Alteration of this Play, at *Drury-Lane Theatre*, in which the comic Part is entirely expunged, greatly to his honour, and the credit of the Stage; and though the additional extent he has there given to the Characters of *Aboan* and *Hotman*, does not ſufficiently fill up the hiatus which the omiſſion of the Comic Part has occaſioned, the attempt to clear this excellent Piece from the filthineſs which empoiſoned the Merit of the other Parts, was ſo truly laudable, that we muſt excuſe that apparent deficiency in the Piece, which was almoſt unavoidable, from the conſiderable ſhare the Comedy

Comedy had in the length of it. The Scene is laid in one of the Engliſh Colonies in *America*, and the Plot profeſſedly borrowed from a Moral of Mrs. *Behn's*, of the ſame name. We are ſorry to find that the Managers of this Theatre, have not thought fit to adopt this Alteration, in preference to the Original. If by the continuing to perform the *Oroonoko* of *Southerne*, it is intended to avoid that deficiency we have been ſpeaking of, we cannot help obſerving that Regularity is purchaſed at the expence of Decency and good Manners.

We wiſh the Repreſentation of this Play here, would give us an opportunity to ſay any thing in favour of it.

We do not think Mr. *Savigny's* powers, ſo well ſuited to *Oroonoko*, as ſome other Characters he has played. His manner of ſpeaking, is ſometimes expreſſive and pleaſing, but in other inſtances, deficient in that ſtrength of power neceſſary to command a large Audience: nor do we think his Perſon happily adapted to this Character: However he is much ſuperior in *Oroonoko*, to Miſs *Miller* in *Imoinda*. The Managers muſt ſurely have a partial fondneſs for this young Actreſs, to ſport with theatrical propriety, and their own credit, by giving this capital and exalted Character to her; in which we are afraid, ſhe will loſe that reputation ſhe has acquired in others more aptly ſuited to her Abilities.

Mr. *Benſley* gives evident demonſtration of an endeavour to pleaſe in the Part of *Aboan*, and therefore, we are unwilling to enter too