

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

9-2017

Fit for the Stage: Regency Actors and the Inspiration Behind Romantic Drama

James Armstrong

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2317

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

**FIT FOR THE STAGE:
REGENCY ACTORS AND THE INSPIRATION BEHIND ROMANTIC DRAMA**

by

JAMES ARMSTRONG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2017

© 2017

JAMES ARMSTRONG

All Rights Reserved

Fit for the Stage:
Regency Actors and the Inspiration Behind Romantic Drama

by

James Armstrong

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 12, 2017

Date

Chair of Examining Committee
Marvin Carlson
Distinguished Professor

May 12, 2017

Date

Executive Officer
Peter Eckersall
Professor

Jean Graham-Jones
Professor

Annette J. Saddik
Professor

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

**Fit for the Stage:
Regency Actors and the Inspiration Behind Romantic Drama**

by

James Armstrong

Adviser: Distinguished Professor Marvin Carlson

In this dissertation, I argue that British verse tragedies of the Romantic era must be looked at not as "closet dramas" divorced from the stage, but as performance texts written with specific actors in mind. Because individual actors inspired and helped to shape dramatic works by early-nineteenth-century canonical poets, these works cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of the performers who helped make them what they are. By examining those performers, their public personas, their personal strengths, and the cultural ideals they embodied, we can better appreciate what the plays were trying to achieve. Also, knowing who was meant to perform a role can prevent us from going astray with misinterpretations that fail to account for how dramatists intended their main characters to be perceived. By properly understanding the plays of this era within the contexts in which they were meant to be performed, we begin to get a better understanding of the course of British drama in general.

In the first chapter, I outline the key characteristics of Romantic drama that separated it from the rising melodrama of the period. Romantic drama was character-based, utilized ambitious poetic language, and seriously considered moral questions. These qualities, I argue, all

required skilled actors. Thus, Romantic drama is inherently linked to the star actors of the Regency period who dominated the stage at the time. The chapter includes an in-depth analysis of William Wordsworth's *The Borderers* as the Ur-text that embodies all of the elements of Romantic drama, as well as a survey of the development and decline of verse tragedy in the nineteenth century.

The following three chapters offer case studies of individual performers who influenced dramas by canonical authors. Chapter 2 examines Sarah Siddons's role in Joanna Baillie's tragedy *De Monfort*. Chapter 3 looks at Samuel Taylor Coleridge's rewriting process in turning his unperformed manuscript *Osorio* into the stage hit *Remorse* with the aid of Julia Glover. Chapter 4 relates to Eliza O'Neill, the actress who converted Percy Shelley to write for the stage and inspired the heroine of *The Cenci*.

Acknowledgements

I am exceedingly grateful to my committee members, Marvin Carlson, Annette Saddik, and Jean Graham-Jones, who have all offered invaluable comments on drafts of this dissertation. Chapter 3 began as a paper for Alan Vardy's Romanticism seminar "Landscape, Aesthetics, and Romantic Writers" offered by the English department at The Graduate Center. I am grateful to him not just for allowing me into the course, but for always making me feel welcome in spite of my coming from another discipline. As I began my research into Samuel Taylor Coleridge, he helped steer me in the right direction on a number of occasions. He also pointed me in the direction of Deven Parker at the University of Colorado Boulder, and I am grateful to her for sharing her unpublished paper on "The Foster-Mother's Tale." I would like to also thank David Willinger, whose expertise on *fin de siècle* Symbolism has guided my research on the continuing influence of *The Cenci*.

Some of the ideas I explored regarding *The Cenci* were developed in a paper I presented at the International Shaw Society's Shaw in New York Conference at Fordham University, and a version of that paper will be published forthcoming in the journal *Shaw*. I greatly appreciate the way the Shaw community has embraced me, even though the thrust of my research is aimed at an earlier period. The Society for Theatre Research has been just as welcoming, and parts of this dissertation were originally developed for a paper I gave at STR's Theatre in the Regency Era Conference at the University of Cambridge. I received funding to attend that conference through a Doctoral Student Research Grant offered by The Graduate Center, and a version of the paper will be published in *Theatre Notebook*. Chapter 4 is in part based on a previous article I wrote for

Theatre Notebook, "Shelley's Unsung Muse: Eliza O'Neill and the Inspiration behind *The Cenci*."

The editors and readers at both *Shaw* and *Theatre Notebook* have given me invaluable advice as I have reworked articles, parts of which are included in this dissertation.

This dissertation would not be possible without professionals in various archives, including the Billy Rose Theatre Division and the Pforzheimer Collection at the New York Public Library. I have also received assistance from the staff at the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Garrick Club in the United Kingdom. The staff at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin helped me get a digital copy of *Miss O'Neil's Welcome to Kilkenny*, and countless other librarians have greatly aided my research by making otherwise obscure works available online. I am particularly grateful to Marci Morimoto of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for guiding me through how to access eighteenth-century newspaper collections, as well as for putting up with my occasional frustrations with technology. Thanks also go to Lynette Gibson for leading me through the various pitfalls of The Graduate Center and helping me to navigate some of the more frustrating aspects of academic bureaucracy.

Finally, I owe an undying gratitude to Judith Milhous, who mentored me through the beginning stages of this project. This entire dissertation began with my wanting to know who Eliza O'Neill was, and why—though Mary Shelley claimed the actress had been instrumental in inspiring *The Cenci*—no one seemed to have heard of her. Judy encouraged me to follow up on the leads I had found, and provided several others that would otherwise have escaped me entirely. After I wrote a paper on O'Neill for her theatre and opera class, she encouraged me to prepare it for publication and read so many versions I eventually lost count. It was Judy who suggested I submit the article to *Theatre Notebook* and Judy who told me to apply for the STR's

conference in Cambridge. She has served as a model for being a scholar, a teacher, and a human being. I dedicate this project to her.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One The Elements of British Romantic Drama	13
Chapter Two Summoning Siddons: Joanna Baillie's Play for the Stage	64
Chapter Three Without <i>Remorse</i> : Coleridge's Unapologetic Dramatics	111
Chapter Four Succeeding Siddons: Shelley's Unsung Muse	155
Conclusion	195
Bibliography	203

INTRODUCTION

All too often, scholars view serious British dramas of the Romantic period as if they were divorced from the stage. The inaccurate term "closet drama" sticks to some plays of the era as if their authors never intended them to be performed. However, many of the so-called closet dramas of the era were not only written to be performed, but to be performed by specific actors. These actors and their unique talents left an indelible mark on major dramas of the period. By better understanding the actors who inspired these plays, we can more fully appreciate the plays themselves.

Literary historians tend to exalt the tail end of the Georgian Era for its tremendous innovations in poetry, not for its innovations in drama. When scholars examine the period, from the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 to the untimely deaths of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and George Gordon Byron in the 1820s, they find it to be a golden age of canonical verse. The core of this period corresponds roughly with the Regency (1811-1820), when the Prince of Wales assumed the responsibilities of his father, George III. Regency literature, which includes the novels of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, is not only still read today, but also continues to shape mass entertainment. A new film based on an Austen novel or a new stage adaptation of *Frankenstein* comes with a built-in fan base. Romance novels set in the Regency era (usually very loosely defined to include everything from early Georgian to high Victorian) make up an important and lucrative sub-genre of popular fiction. Meanwhile, the former homes of Keats and Shelley continue to draw thousands of visitors each year.

Regency theatre, on the other hand, has not drawn similar attention, either in popular culture or among scholars. The 2016 conference on the Regency stage by the Society for Theatre Research was a notable exception to the general scholarly neglect of the period. Whenever theatre historians (as distinct from literary historians) do examine the Regency era, they tend to focus on it as an age of great acting or of impressive spectacle rather than as a period with strong dramatic writing. When Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor published *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre* in 2014, for example, they included eight sections, only one of which focused on writing by canonical authors.¹ That section included only four essays. (No other section had fewer, and most had more.) Of those four essays (out of a total of 40), one covered the novels of Jane Austen rather than drama.

This dissertation aims to correct the scholarly neglect given to dramatic texts of the Regency era. However, the problem is not simply that these texts have been largely ignored. The larger problem is that when scholars have examined these works, they have frequently misidentified many plays as "closet dramas" that were meant to be read rather than performed. In the twentieth century, Catherine Burroughs reclaimed the plays of Joanna Baillie, too long neglected by the male-dominated academy. However, the very title of Burroughs' 1997 book on Baillie, *Closet Stages*, shows a predisposition to examine Baillie's plays as personalized literary exercises rather than as performance texts.

In fact, Baillie's tragedy *De Monfort* cleverly utilizes the star actress Sarah Siddons's celebrity image. Some modern theatre historians have tended to focus on Siddons's acting as being so restrained it was even "oppressive" in creating an "epitome of perfect womanhood by the standards of late-eighteenth-century middle-class London society."² Burroughs uses this "oppressive" image of respectability to argue that Jane De Monfort is the villain of Baillie's play.

This, however, overlooks the frequently reproduced images of Siddons as the avenging liberator Euphrasia in Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter*, or as Elvira, the fallen woman who speaks truth to power in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro*. These images, along with other depictions of Siddons, show audiences would have been unlikely to perceive Jane De Monfort as the villainess Burroughs describes, at least if they were watching it as intended and not simply reading it at home in their closet.

Similarly, critics have treated Samuel Taylor Coleridge's tragedy *Remorse*, which owes a great deal to Baillie, as the work of a poet who knew little of the theatre. Rosemary Ashton, in a recent biography of Coleridge, characterizes the author's presence at rehearsals as a mere excuse not to go visit his friends.³ In fact, Coleridge's revisions of the play show him to have been a shrewd dramatist intent on creating a workable performance script. The actress Julia Glover in particular had a profound impact on the piece, as her accomplished but under-acknowledged acting allowed Coleridge to use powerful poetry, deal with moral ambiguity, and focus on a strong character. Contemporary reviewers found Glover's role of Alhadra "as full of poetic imagination as it is bold and masterly."⁴ This was a direct result of Coleridge's ability to write and rewrite for the strengths of his performers.

Percy Shelley's *The Cenci*, though less frequently described as "closet drama" than in previous years, still tends to be seen more as poetry than as drama. Unfortunately, the first histories of the Romantic movement in Britain minimized the importance of the theatre, and these works have shaped the narrative of British Romanticism down to the present day. Thomas Medwin's 1847 biography of Percy Shelley, for instance, which first introduced large audiences to the author's life, goes out of its way to belittle any contributions by the actress Eliza O'Neill.⁵ In spite of Mary Shelley identifying O'Neill as the muse behind *The Cenci*, modern writers

persist in seeing the drama as poetry rather than a performance text. In a recent essay, the otherwise insightful critic of Georgian drama Felicity A. Nussbaum called *The Cenci* "almost unperformable" in spite of the many successful productions of the play, including two commercial runs in London West End theatres.⁶

Even thoughtful and respected scholars still treat English Romantic dramas as something other than performance texts—that is, when they discuss these plays at all—largely because they overlook the importance of performers in the creation of these texts. The great flowering of verse drama during the Regency came about specifically because of the prominence of star actors capable of interpreting complex characters and speaking powerful verse. In the decades that followed the Regency, though, the theatre took a very different path. In France, René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt had pioneered the new form of melodrama with such plays as *The Ruins of Babylon* and *The Dog of Montargis*. In 1802, the British playwright Thomas Holcroft adapted Pixérécourt's play *Coelina, or The Child of Mystery* as *A Tale of Mystery*, calling it "A Mélo-Drame in Two Acts." Holcroft's play sparked numerous imitations, which were themselves frequently adaptations of other French plays.

Melodrama ultimately took over the British stage, and the very qualities that made melodrama popular were in some ways antithetical to the Romantic poetic dramas of Regency authors. Melodramas typically reduced language to the lowest common denominator the audience was capable of understanding, while Romantic plays by contrast were poetically highly ambitious, sometimes even to the point of semantic obscurity. Melodrama also sought out moral clarity, often with simplistic conflicts between good and evil.⁷ Romantic drama, on the other hand, sought to deal seriously with politics, religion, and ethical decisions, which frequently required a nuance or ambiguity generally avoided by melodrama.

These differences ultimately stem from the largest core difference between the two genres: melodrama tended to be plot-based while Romantic drama was character-based. Complex language interferes with understanding the twists and turns of a melodramatic plot. Similarly, pausing to consider the moral implications of a given decision prevents the audience from enjoying the ups and downs of heroes and heroines struggling to overcome the perils that beset them on stage. As George Bernard Shaw famously objected to melodrama, the genre tends to be based "on broad contrasts between types of youth and age, sympathy and selfishness, the masculine and the feminine, the serious and the frivolous, the sublime and the ridiculous, and so on."⁸ Though there are notable exceptions, the sensational stage situations in melodrama tend to rely on the audience not thinking too closely about people as individuals rather than as types. Perhaps for this reason melodrama, while it created stars, never produced the grand kings and queens of tragedy seen in the Georgian era.

Because late-Georgian theatre was focused on charismatic performers, Regency dramatists like Baillie, Coleridge, and Shelley wrote character-focused works. These works could have poetic ambition, because the gods and goddesses of the stage not only knew how to handle sophisticated language, they excelled at lofty speeches. Such actors also gravitated toward sympathetic but morally ambiguous characters, as more complex characters gave them a chance to display internal struggle. The great dramatists of the day, far from writing closet dramas, were crafting their plays to display the strengths of great actors. Furthermore, these writers tended to compose their works with individual performers in mind. Their plays were written not simply for a general style of acting, but for the specific traits, strengths, and celebrity auras of particular actors.

Hence, in order to fully appreciate these plays, we have to recognize them as living performance texts inseparable from the stage. This is diametrically opposed to how they have been seen in the past. When investigating great performers, many theatre historians—including Arnold Hare (George Frederick Cooke), Giles Playfair (Edmund Kean), Alan Downer (William Charles Macready), W.W. Appleton (Madame Vestris), Shirley Allen (Samuel Phelps), and Carol Jones Carlisle (Helen Faucit)—have recognized the importance of star actors.⁹ However, they have overlooked those actors' importance in the creation of Romantic, or Regency-period dramatic texts.¹⁰ This is because Romantic playwrights by and large did not interact with their actors in the same manner as dramatists of previous generations. When William Shakespeare wrote a part for Richard Burbage, the role was intended for a fellow company member with whom he was on close terms.¹¹ When Aphra Behn planned a role for Nell Gwyn, she meant it to be performed by a friend she knew quite well.¹² When Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote a play, the entire cast might consist of his own employees.¹³ This was not the case with Romantic writers like Baillie, Coleridge, and Shelley, who conceived of roles without ever having spoken to the individuals for whom they were written.

It would be a mistake, however, to claim that these authors did not interact with the celebrity actors who inspired them. As avid fans of star performers, Romantic writers engaged in what the critic Chris Rojek has termed "para-social interactions" with their favorite actors.¹⁴ First identified by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl in 1956, para-social interactions originally referred to "the illusion of [a] face-to-face relationship with the performer" in mass media, including radio, television, and film.¹⁵ While Horton and Wohl were primarily concerned with the new medium of television, later theorists have commented on the para-social interactions celebrities of all kinds have with their fans. Rojek notes that while para-social relationships are a

secondary form of intimacy, they can still be a significant aspect of people's lives and can give rise to deep emotions.¹⁶

Celebrity culture certainly existed long before the invention of television. According to Rojek, celebrity becomes a public preoccupation as a result of three historical processes: democratization, the decline in organized religion, and the commodification of everyday life.¹⁷ All three of these factors were important trends in Regency Britain. In addition, the growth of celebrity culture was fed by technological innovations of the period, including increasingly affordable access to images of star actors in the form of prints and ceramic miniatures.¹⁸ Far from being contained to the lower classes, these images circulated among all strata of society. Lord Byron, for instance, was so enthralled by celebrity performers he decorated one side of a screen he owned with a collage of prints of his favorite actors.¹⁹

Playwrights understood the importance of an actor's public persona. As audience members themselves, they knew how audiences perceived the stars they wanted to perform their plays. Consequently, when they crafted characters, writers had to keep in mind how an audience would react to seeing a star performer in a new role. These audiences would relate any new role both to previous roles they had seen the actor perform and to the material images, such as portraits, prints, and miniatures, that helped to fuel fan culture. It was the rowdy, opinionated, sometimes even riotous theatre audience of the Regency stage that dramatists were trying to reach, not the tranquil, idealized reader sitting at home in a closet.

Writers of literary ambition during the early nineteenth century did not shun the stage, but instead wrote about actors, collected images of actors, and above all went to the theatre to see actors again and again. They penned character-focused dramas, with star actors and their particular strengths and talents constantly informing the writing process. Thus, the characters

brought forth by the Romantic stage were not the sole creations of playwrights. In many ways, they were collaborations between dramatists and the actors who originated the roles. In some cases, the actors who inspired roles did not ultimately perform them, but they nonetheless left an indelible mark upon the plays they inspired.

This study will take an in-depth look at three pairs of performers and playwrights: Sarah Siddons and Joanna Baillie, Julia Glover and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Eliza O'Neill and Percy Shelley. Siddons is the only performer of the three widely known to theatre historians today, but Glover and O'Neill in their own ways have also greatly impacted the history of the British stage. As I will show, these charismatic performers, knowingly or not, helped to guide the development of a character-based theatre—from the emotion-dominated plays made popular by Baillie to the pinnacle of Romantic drama under Shelley. They shepherded in a new style of writing that had verbal sophistication and engaged meaningfully with the moral issues of the day. They helped to create not just new modes of acting, but new ways of writing that could make use of their extraordinary talents.

Siddons and Baillie are a natural starting point, since their contemporaries considered them to be (respectively) the greatest actor and the greatest playwright of the era.²⁰ Coleridge's play *Remorse* is the next logical step, since not only was it the most successful new play of the Regency period, but it is intimately linked to both Siddons and Baillie. Coleridge wrote the first draft of the play as *Osorio* with Siddons in mind for the leading role. When he reworked it as *Remorse* for Drury Lane, however, he was following up on the dramatic theories of Baillie, who held that remorse was one of the passions "best fit for representation."²¹ The success of *Remorse* inspired other authors to write for the stage, including Byron and Keats. Of the Romantic dramas that followed it, however, Shelley's *The Cenci*, which he wrote with O'Neill specifically in mind,

has had by far the largest impact on the history of the theatre, making it a suitable endpoint for this study.

By the close of the Regency, a new type of play was rising to dominance, and so great would be its popularity that the character-driven works of Romantic drama would all but be forgotten. Melodrama had little use for sophisticated characters, or for the sophisticated acting required to play them. The great Victorian tragedian William Charles Macready saw his role as reviving the drama to the splendors of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages, but instead he presided over the debasing of the government-sanctioned theatre into the sensational thrill rides already popular on the "illegitimate" stages beyond London's patent houses. The last great hopes for the British drama, writers like Robert Browning and Thomas Lovell Beddoes, turned exclusively to poetry, or in the case of Beddoes, to the grave. Playwriting was no longer a serious pursuit, and writers who wished to engage with their audience on a meaningful level usually avoided the theatre.

By the 1890s, though, things began to change. George Bernard Shaw energized Realist drama in Britain by focusing on character-centered plays that engaged with social issues in ways that were discomforting to audiences. At the other end of the spectrum, Symbolist dramatists in continental Europe were creating an *avant-garde* with linguistically ambitious and morally complex poetic dramas. The fact that these two new approaches emerged during the same decade is no coincidence. Both Shaw and the Symbolists were influenced by the Romantic dramatists that preceded them and both had been involved in *fin de siècle* attempts to stage the greatest of the British Romantic dramas, *The Cenci*. Thus, the Regency-era experiments in Romantic drama were not a theatrical dead-end, but rather continued to reverberate throughout the history of theatre.

This study seeks to show the enormous role that performers had in the construction of works for the Romantic stage. The chief qualities of these performer-based dramas—poetic ambition, moral complexity, and focus on character—were by and large not taken up by the popular melodramas that followed them. However, these plays did have a lasting impact, and they merit far more attention than they have received in the past. Romantic drama on the Regency stage was intricately connected with the work of performers, and it is precisely because it was connected with the work of performers that it had such a strong impact on subsequent drama. Thus, the collaborations between actors and playwrights two hundred years ago continue to reverberate in the theatre of today. If we wish to fully understand these dramas we must examine them not merely as products of a playwright's imagination but as works of art inseparable from the performers who aided in their creation.

¹ Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), ix-xii.

² Catherine Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997), 127.

³ Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 282.

⁴ "Unsigned review, *Morning Post*, 25 January 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 118.

⁵ Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford UP, 1913), 219.

⁶ Felicity A. Nussbaum, "The Challenge of Tragedy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 387. For an extensive stage history of *The Cenci*, see Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970).

⁷ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 12.

⁸ George Bernard Shaw, "Two Bad Plays," in *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, vol. 1 (New York: Brentano's, 1909), 73.

⁹ See Arnold Hare, *George Frederick Cooke: The Actor and the Man* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1981); Giles Playfair, *Flash of Lightning: Portrait of Edmund Kean* (London: William Kimber, 1983); Alan Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966); W.W. Appleton, *Madame Vestris and the London Stage* (New York: Columbia UP, 1974); Shirley Allen, *Samuel Phelps and Sadler's Wells Theatre* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1971); Carol Jones Carlisle, *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000).

¹⁰ While the terms "Romantic" and "Regency" are sometimes used interchangeably, it should be noted that strictly speaking "Romantic" refers to a literary movement while "Regency" refers to a time period. Not all Romantic writers were active during the Regency period, and not all Regency writers were Romantic. However, Romanticism came to be the driving force of British drama during the period I am examining (from Wordsworth's beginning *The Borderers* in the 1790s to the publication of *The Cenci* in 1819), which also roughly corresponds to the Regency era.

¹¹ Studies on the importance of Burbage on the formation of the Shakespeare canon go back at least as far as Charlotte Carmichael Stopes' book *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage* (London: De la More Press, 1913).

¹² Behn dedicated the published text of her play *The Feigned Courtesans* to Gwyn, writing that she possessed "all the charms and attractions and powers" of her sex, as well as "an eternal sweetness, youth and air, which never dwelt in any face" but hers. *The Rover and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 91.

¹³ Christian Deelman argues persuasively that with *The School for Scandal* Sheridan "put the play together with a particular cast in mind" in "The Original Cast of *The School for Scandal*," *The Review of English Studies* 13 (1962): 257.

¹⁴ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 52.

¹⁵ Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215.

¹⁶ Rojek, 52-53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ Felicity Nussbaum touches on the importance of ceramic figurines of actors in her essay "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1799-1800" in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 159. Heather McPherson provides a more full accounting of this phenomenon in "Theatrical Celebrity and the Commodification of the Actor" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 192-212.

¹⁹ The screen recently underwent conservation and is currently at Byron's former home of Newstead Abbey.

²⁰ See Jeffrey N. Cox's "Baillie, Siddons, Larpent: gender, power, and politics in the theatre of Romanticism," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2000), 23-47.

²¹ Joanna Baillie, *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Hurst Rees Orme, and Brown, 1812), xv.

CHAPTER ONE

The Elements of British Romantic Drama

Visitors to Strawberry Hill, Horace Walpole's estate in Twickenham, are today invited to take a self-guided tour of the distinguished author's old home. In doing so, they trace the steps of countless visitors who have toured the building since Walpole himself opened it to the public, turning the gothic-style country retreat into an attraction for eighteenth-century tourists. In 1784, Walpole even printed a description of his villa to further aid those touring it. According to the itinerary set by Walpole's booklet and still followed by guests today, after visiting the Great North Bedchamber, visitors should enter "The Beauclerc Closet" which is "hung with Indian blue damask, and was built on purpose to receive seven incomparable drawings of lady Diana Beauclerc for Mr. Walpole's tragedy of the Mysterious Mother."¹ In one of the drawers of a writing table, the booklet promised, visitors could find a copy of the play itself, "bound in blue leather and gilt."²

Walpole's drama *The Mysterious Mother* was thus quite literally kept in a closet. The play had been printed privately in 1768 and only shared with a few of the author's friends.³ Though written in the form of a play, Walpole never intended to have *The Mysterious Mother* performed, and indeed wrote in a letter that he was "perfectly secure" it would never be acted.⁴ In one letter Walpole seems to have fantasized about Hannah Pritchard and Kitty Clive reciting parts of the play, but he did so while admitting he was "not yet intoxicated enough with it to think it would do for the stage."⁵ The only performance of the play he realistically envisioned was in the solitary performance of guests reading it, and perhaps also gazing at the few illustrations of the

piece he kept in a small octagonal room. *The Mysterious Mother* was in every sense of the term a closet drama.

That appellation of "closet drama" refers to a play never intended to be performed, and while such a creation might seem anathema to those who study theatre, certain literary-minded individuals from time to time—like Walpole—have wanted to use the form of drama without having their work "sullied" by collaboration with mere actors. The practice of writing closet dramas dates back to classical times, but according to Marta Straznicky the division of plays into those meant for the stage and those meant to be read at home (in a person's "closet") became popularized in the late eighteenth century, around the time of Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother*.⁶ "Closet drama" accurately describes such purely literary texts as John Milton's *Sampson Agonistes*, which is rarely, if ever, performed. Other closet dramas, such as Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, were not intended for performance, but have subsequently entered the standard repertoire of regularly performed plays. In the case of *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen had to struggle to accommodate those wanting to perform his behemoth, even suggesting they drop Act IV rather than try to stage the entirety of a massive poem meant to be read, not staged.⁷

A play intended for performance but not produced immediately (perhaps not even in the author's lifetime) is not a closet drama, but such works frequently acquire a reputation of being difficult or even impossible to perform. The dawn of the nineteenth century saw a number of such belatedly produced plays, including Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Remorse*, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci*. Theatre historians have paid scant attention to these plays because of their perceived closet status, and that same perception has frequently led literary critics to misinterpret them. Time is past due to reclaim these plays as part of theatrical history, both the history of British drama in particular, but also that of Western drama in general.

That can only be done if we move beyond the notion that these plays were meant to be read in a closet rather than performed at the Theatres Royal at Drury Lane and Covent Garden.

The powerful plays Britain generated as the nineteenth century was being born are properly called Romantic dramas, not simply because they were written during what has come to be known as the Romantic period, but because they all adhere to a certain set of aesthetic values which can be called Romantic. These Romantic values caused a delay in the performance of these plays, but they also account for their long-lasting influence on subsequent drama, which continues to be felt even today. Romantic writers were by nature outsiders, and as scholars of Romanticism have long observed, their innovations made their work inherently different from the more popular authors of their time. In *The Romantic Imagination*, Maurice Bowra observed that Romantics saw imagination as "fundamental" to their art, rather than a mere ornament.⁸ Expanding on this idea, M.H. Abrams observed that Romantics had shattered the mirror their predecessors had held up to nature, seeing art rather as something "projecting life" out from an individual's genius.⁹ Still, Romanticism cannot be identified by any one element. As Isaiah Berlin stressed in his famous lectures on Romanticism, the Romantics did not so much break the rules of classicism as declare that individuals must come up with their own rules and "dedicate themselves to these values with all that is in them."¹⁰

More recently, theorists have identified Romanticism as resistant to the "spirit of capitalism"¹¹ or as interrogating "modern imperialism."¹² While there are a number of aesthetic values that can be considered Romantic, I will concentrate on three that are essential to Romantic drama. These are: a complex moral universe, poetic ambition, and a fundamental emphasis on character. Dramatists from other periods have also embraced these values, so they are not solely Romantic. However, during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, these values set

plays belonging to the Romantic movement apart from much of the mainstream drama of their period, a period we have come to identify as the Romantic era.

The Characteristics of Romantic Drama

The word "romantick" goes back at least as far as 1650, when Thomas Bayly used it to describe that which is imaginative, not literally true.¹³ More than a hundred years later, Richard Grave described in his book *The Spiritual Quixote* a "romantic taste" which contained "a proper mixture of the *allegro* and the *penseroso*, the chearful [sic] and the gloomy."¹⁴ From the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, Romantic aesthetics frequently incorporated the mixture of seeming opposites Grave described. This was certainly true of Matthew G. Lewis, who in the prologue to his 1797 play *The Castle Spectre* invoked a "fair enchantress" whose name is "Romance" and is "the moon-struck child of genius and of woe."¹⁵ Lewis has this figure speak of "prosperous vice" and "triumphant woe" to emphasize the dual nature of the Romantic.¹⁶ Practitioners of this type of writing frequently acknowledged the contradictory aspects of Romanticism. Coleridge referred to the central idea of his unfinished poem "Christabel" as "the most difficult, I think, that can be attempted to Romantic Poetry—I mean witchery by daylight."¹⁷

Invoking "witchery by daylight"—bringing enchantment to an age of science and reason—was a goal shared by many Romantics. However, detractors pejoratively used the term "romantic" to deride what they saw as nonsensical and frivolous. When she was governess to the Kingsborough family, the budding philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft wrote: "I almost wish the girls were novel readers and romantic, I declare false refinement is better than none at all."¹⁸ This charge that Romanticism offered a false refinement was not unique to Wollstonecraft. For many

who prided themselves on clear, straight-forward thinking, Romanticism's emphasis on contradictions seemed patently absurd.

John Keats famously defended the paradoxes of Romanticism as a quality of genius he called Negative Capability. In a letter to his brothers George and Thomas on 21 December 1817, Keats called Negative Capability "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."¹⁹ Keats criticized those who sought after a single solution to the mysteries of the universe rather than accepting the natural complexity of the world. This concept of Negative Capability is essential to Romantic literature and to Romantic drama in particular. Romantic plays examine all questions, whether personal, political, or even cosmic, as highly complex and inherently filled with contradictions.

Scholars of Romanticism frequently cite Keats' "Negative Capability Letter" when trying to define what Romanticism meant to its practitioners. However, they rarely acknowledge that the letter begins with a critique of an individual performer. The first line of the letter begins: "I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this & I saw Kean return to the public in Richard III, & finely he did it..."²⁰ Keats's letter, long seen as key to understanding Romanticism, was in fact occasioned by the poet witnessing the triumphant return to the stage by Edmund Kean, the Prodigal Son of Regency drama, who had been absent from the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane for about six weeks following a dispute with the management.²¹ Keats goes on in the letter to discuss Kean's performance in Sir James Bland Burges's play *Riches*, which was adapted from Philip Massinger's *The City Madam*. Clearly, Kean was very much on the poet's mind when he discussed Negative Capability, and called it a quality "which Shakespeare possessed so enormously."²²

It is easy to see how Romanticism's love of paradoxes led to an embracing of moral complexity. However, a fondness for paradox also led to another element essential to Romantic drama: poetic ambition. Romantic writers, whether writing in poetry or prose, exalted language. This was in part because rich language allowed them to embrace Negative Capability. Rather than reducing their words to a series of simplistic syllogisms, Romantics utilized language to explore complexity, whether they were writing in poetry or in prose. Most Romantic writers privileged verse, though, which is why prose dramas like Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* or Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* are frequently labeled "Gothic" but not necessarily "Romantic" dramas.

Coleridge believed that poetry had an almost mystic ability to bring about harmony among contraries. According to him, the poet creates "a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each."²³ Thus, for Coleridge, poetic language was central to achieving what Keats identified as Negative Capability. This language had to be ambitious, whether written in poetry or prose. John Keble gave a famous definition of poetry as "the indirect expression in words, most appropriately in metrical words, of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling."²⁴ Notice that Keble finds poetry "most appropriately in metrical words" rather than necessarily in a strict meter. The Romantics famously experimented with meter (most notably in Coleridge's *Christabel*) but did not find meter to be the goal of poetry. Rather, poetic form represented a grander attempt to reach beyond the ordinary, to achieve the "overpowering emotion" at the heart of a drama.

The third quality essential to Romantic drama is grand and frequently conflicted characters. Just as Romantics valued Negative Capability in themselves, they valued it in their onstage personas as well. This did not mean that Romantic dramas could not have heroes and

villains, but it did mean that hero-villains were far more common. Romantics exalted the individual, which meant that their characters tended to drive plot, rather than the characters existing "for the sake of their actions" as Aristotle recommended.²⁵ Though plots of some Romantic dramas can be quite complicated, character tends to reign supreme.

In *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age*, Joseph Donohue identified character as the central concern of Romantic drama, with plays of that era increasingly emphasizing characters' subjective mental states.²⁶ Here, the aims of performers and playwrights intersected perfectly. Romantic dramatists wanted to portray characters as soaring above the common mob, and this was precisely what actors wanted to play. Due to the economic realities of the theatre at the time, though, writers had to do more than pen good roles and hope that someone would want to play them. As Donohue notes, the successful Romantic playwright had to have a knack for "tailoring his piece to the abilities and tastes of players."²⁷ Dramatists had to be familiar with the major performers of the day and write their plays specifically to suit a potential star, or the work had little hope of being performed.

Here we begin to see why the interplay between performers and authors of the Romantic era is so important to understanding the plays of the period. Moral complexity, poetic language, and powerful characters all require skilled actors in order to be realized in performance, something not necessarily true of melodrama or other dramatic genres. The great flowering of verse drama during the Romantic era came about at least in part because of the prominence of star actors who were capable of interpreting complex characters and speaking powerful verse, and who were interested in exploring new approaches to moral issues. The period leading up to and including the Regency featured many such actors, including John Philip Kemble, Sarah Siddons, Edmund Kean, and Eliza O'Neill. These actors inspired writers to create plays

specifically tailored to their individual strengths and talents. Even after the actors who inspired the works were largely forgotten, the plays themselves continued to be read and performed.

Though scholars have traced threads of British Romantic drama back to such works as John Home's *Douglas* (1756), Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter* (1772), and Horace Walpole's true closet drama *The Mysterious Mother* (1768), the Romantic movement proper did not emerge until the 1790s, as writers struggled to respond to the French Revolution. It was after returning from France, where he witnessed the Revolution firsthand, that William Wordsworth began his play *The Borderers*. This remarkable drama anticipates not only the plays of Baillie, Coleridge, and Shelley, but also later works by Lord Byron, Robert Browning, and Thomas Lovell Beddoes, to be discussed later in this chapter. After the Theatre Royal at Covent Garden rejected the piece, Wordsworth kept the play to himself, not publishing *The Borderers* until 1842. However, even though the play did not immediately influence the British stage (outside of its effect on Coleridge), it exemplifies all of the most important characteristics of British Romantic drama. For that reason, it deserves close consideration here. As an Ur-text of all the later plays to be discussed, *The Borderers* will establish the elements of Romantic drama that subsequent playwrights used in crafting works for the great performers of their era. After that, this chapter will trace the course of Romantic drama throughout the Regency era, and then explore how during the early Victorian period this type of drama was smothered, only to be reborn later in the century.

Drama of the Borderlands

Wordsworth had partially completed his tragedy when he first met Coleridge in 1797. Coleridge arrived at Wordsworth's home carrying the first two and a half acts of his own play,

Osorio.²⁸ The two men enthusiastically read and commented on each other's dramas, and, by the end of the year, Wordsworth had finished his tragedy and sent it off to Covent Garden. The theatre rejected the play, and the later version Wordsworth revised for publication in 1842 was indeed meant to be read, not performed. Rather disingenuously, Wordsworth claimed when publishing the play that "it was at first written, and is now published, without any view to its exhibition upon the stage."²⁹ This belies the fact that Wordsworth actively tried to get the play staged back in the 1790s, and even believed himself close to accomplishing that goal. His sister Dorothy had confided in a letter on 28 May 1797 that Wordsworth had "good hopes" of getting the play shown to Sheridan, then manager of Drury Lane.³⁰

Wordsworth's initial enthusiasm for Drury Lane rather than its rival patent theatre at Covent Garden could indicate he wrote the play with John Philip Kemble in mind. Kemble was the leading actor at Drury Lane in 1797, and had excelled at playing such Shakespearean roles as Hamlet, Macbeth, and Coriolanus. During his earlier residence in London, Wordsworth had seen him in action at Drury Lane.³¹ Though at the time Covent Garden did not have tragic actors of Kemble's quality, Coleridge was able to get the play read there while Sheridan dragged his feet at Drury Lane. Coleridge was still trying to get a response from Sheridan concerning his own play *Osorio*, when he "procured for Wordsworth's Tragedy" an opportunity to have the manager of Covent Garden "read it attentively and give his answer immediately."³² Apparently eager to have his play produced as quickly as possible, Wordsworth consented.

Looking back from 1842, Wordsworth maintained the work had been intended as a closet drama, but, again, Dorothy Wordsworth's letters indicate that this was not the case. Not only did her brother submit his tragedy to Covent Garden, but he actually travelled to London "to alter his play for the stage at the suggestion of one of the principal Actors of Covent Garden."³³ The

letters are not clear concerning which actor made the suggestions, but the comments might have come from the theatre's chief leading man at the time, Thomas Knight.³⁴ In spite of the rewrites, Thomas Harris, who was manager of Covent Garden, rejected the piece. Rather than rush to have the play printed, as would have befitted a closet drama, Wordsworth was "undetermin'd" whether it might be best to wait for a change in theatrical taste so the play could be performed after all.³⁵ While the 1842 published version might well be considered a closet drama, Wordsworth's earlier manuscript version of the play, titled simply *A TRAGEDY*, was clearly intended for production, and it is this earlier version of *The Borderers* that most notably displays the hallmark features of Romantic drama.

The play is set during the reign of Henry III, and as its name implies, it takes place in the borderlands between England and Scotland. Just as importantly, the tragedy also investigates the border between right and wrong, probing personal morality in an era of political uncertainty. Much of the criticism on *The Borderers* surrounds its debt to Shakespeare, particularly *Othello*.³⁶ Certainly the character of Rivers has much in common with Iago. Rivers connives to get his master Mortimer, leader of an armed band along the English-Scottish border, to enact revenge on the innocent old Herbert and his daughter Matilda. Unlike Iago, though, Rivers does have a strong sense of morality. It is simply the inverse of Wordsworth's own.

Our first clue into the character of Rivers comes when he is gathering plants in the woods. He tells Mortimer his favorite plant is: "That which, while it is / Strong to destroy, is also strong to heal" (1.1.18-19).³⁷ In his own mind, Rivers's poison words are also needed medicine. He proceeds to poison Mortimer against Herbert, claiming the old man has slandered the band of borderers and accused Mortimer of only pretending to uphold the just so "that Indolence / Might want no cover, and rapaciousness / Be better fed" (1.1.37-39). Having biased his leader against

Herbert, Rivers proceeds to twist Mortimer's love for Matilda into hatred for the old man. This hatred is based on Mortimer's need to protect Matilda from a grasping invalid who, according to Rivers, is not even her biological father. Through a series of deceptions, Rivers leads Mortimer to believe that Herbert bought Matilda from a beggar woman when Matilda was still a baby, and that the old man now plans to sell his supposed daughter to satisfy the lust of a corrupt nobleman. Though we later learn that all of Rivers's tales about Herbert and Matilda are false, they serve to urge Mortimer on to commit a horrid crime in the name of a laudable motive.

In the second act, Rivers reveals to the audience that he, too, believes he has a laudable motive for his deception. After Mortimer exits the stage, descending into a dungeon where presumably he will murder Herbert, Rivers delivers a telling soliloquy, which runs in part:

How many fools
 Would laugh if I should say this youth may live
 To thank me for this service! I have learned
 That things will work to ends the slaves of the world
 Do never dream of. I *have* been what he,
 This boy when he comes forth with his bloody hands,
 Might envy, and am now—but he shall know
 What I am now.

(2.3.234-41)

Iago wants revenge on Othello, but Rivers wants something more. He wishes to do Mortimer a "service" by showing him how the world really works. Currently, Mortimer is a slave of the world because he is bound by conventional morality. Rivers assures us that he was once even more innocent than Mortimer. He has also known the guilt of seeing his own bloody hands, but now he is—something to be revealed soon.

Mortimer does not murder Herbert, instead simply abandoning the blind man on a desolate heath in Act III. In the scene that follows, the men of his band discuss Rivers and his

strange ways. While in Syria during the Crusades, "he did despise alike / Mohammedon and Christian" (3.4.19-20). Yet though he does not seem to believe in God, Rivers does recognize some higher power. Another member of the band recalls how when asked by a foreign king to swear fealty, Rivers answered, "I hold of spirits, and the sun in heaven" (3.4.32). The borderers understand that Rivers is not mad, but they cannot wrap their minds around how he could hold a set of values so different from their own.

The fourth act begins with echoes of *King Lear*, as the blind Herbert wanders on the heath like a North-country Duke of Gloucester. In the following scene, Wordsworth finally reveals Rivers's history illuminating at last the villain's strange motive. Rivers tells Mortimer a story of how during the Crusades he was a victim of a conspiracy in which he believed the captain of his ship was the "prime agent" (4.2.11). Going on shore, he quarreled with the captain, nearly killing him. Though he did not kill the captain directly, the crew abandoned the hated man on an island where no one "could give him any aid, / Living or dead" (4.2.43-44).

Continuing the story, Rivers reveals that the captain had in fact never harmed him, but rather the crew had laid "a plot / To rid them of a master whom they hated" (4.2.72-73). Thus far, Rivers's story mirrors that of Mortimer. Both men were tricked into believing a lie against an innocent man. Both inadvertently caused the death of someone who had never harmed them. Rivers claims he was wracked with guilt, as no doubt Mortimer soon will be as well. However, Rivers describes his guilt giving way to a revelation:

Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on
 Through words and things, a dim and perilous way;
 And, wheresoe'er I turned me, I beheld
 A slavery, compared to which the dungeon
 And clanking chains are perfect liberty.
 You understand me, with an awful comfort
 I saw that every possible shape of action

Might lead to good—I saw it and burst forth
 Thirsting for some exploit of power and terror.
 (4.2.103-10)

Like the French revolutionaries who had given Wordsworth feelings of increasing ambivalence, Rivers came to understand he should be liberated from any constraint on his action, including the sacred injunction against taking another human life. From that moment on, Rivers claimed he had within him "A salient spring of energy, a fire / Of inextinguishable thought" (4.2.119-20). He is the image of the "new man" so popular in revolutionary rhetoric.³⁸ Rivers now sees himself as "a being who had passed alone / Beyond the visible barriers of the world / And travelled into things to come" (4.2.143-45).

Without being told, Mortimer understands that like the captain, Herbert, too, is innocent. He also understands that by abandoning the innocent man, he is now inextricably bound together with Rivers, who tells him that henceforth they will be "fellow-labourers—to enlarge / The intellectual empire of mankind" (4.2.188-89). Mortimer rejects this proposal, however, and instead runs off, seeking to find the blind Herbert if he is still alive. In the fifth act, Matilda discovers that her father died alone, and learns that the one man she could have loved is morally culpable for her father's death, even if he never delivered a death blow. For Rivers, the end of any possible love for Mortimer completes the transformation of his new apostle. However, Mortimer refuses to join him, and Rivers calls the leader of the borderers "A fool and Coward" (5.3.256). Though Mortimer's men drag Rivers off to be killed, he dies smiling. Mortimer, by contrast, is left alive, but "loathing life, till heaven in mercy" allows him to die (5.3.274). *The Borderers* thus gives us characters with two distinct approaches to standard morality, with neither coming to a particularly pleasant end.

In his book, *A Mental Theater*, critic Alan Richardson warns against taking the moral vision of the play's villain too much to heart. However, Rivers's voice crept into that of Wordsworth in his autobiographical poetry. As Richardson himself points out, both *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* recycle lines originally spoken by the villain.³⁹ This is not to say that Wordsworth endorses Rivers's project; he does not. It does show, however, that it was the voice of Rivers more than that of any other character in the play that captured the author's imagination.

The Borderers does not dispense with morality. Instead, it opens up a moral universe in which the audience is invited to explore the complexity of the human condition. Rivers speaks not just of the physical but of the metaphysical location of the play when he says that the borderers "live in these disputed tracts that own / No law but what each man makes for himself" (2.2.52-53). This does not lead him to a cynical argument that might makes right. Instead, it is only in an environment free from outside moral influence that he believes "justice has indeed a field of triumph" (2.2.54).

Though Mortimer ultimately does not side with Rivers, he does receive a moral education. Slowly, he comes to understand that the simplistic justice doled out by his band is insufficient. As he says to one of his band members in Act II:

Lacy! we look
 But at the surfaces of things, we hear
 Of towns in flames, fields ravaged, young and old
 Driven out in flocks to want and nakedness,
 Then grasp our swords and rush upon the cure
 That flatters us, because it asks not thought.
 The deeper malady is better hid—
 The world is poisoned at the heart.
 (2.3.337-44)

The Borderers urges the audience to look beyond "the surfaces of things" and not just in a simplistic manner, such as seeing that a particular villain is a liar or an individual old man is actually wronged. Instead, it seeks out the underlying causes of suffering in the world. The solution is not simply to "grasp our swords" as the French Revolutionaries did and as the counter-revolutionary British forces would do. The play urges us to think about the true forces (be they political, spiritual, economic, or something else) that have "poisoned at the heart" the world in which we live.

This passage, in addition to illustrating the moral complexity of *The Borderers*, also demonstrates some of the poetic ambition Wordsworth had for the piece. Sound and meter seamlessly blend together with the meaning of the passage, increasing its overall effect. The speech begins in a very regular iambic pentameter. Wordsworth then adds an extra syllable at the beginning of the line "Driven out in flocks to want and nakedness," thus driving the line forward with the extra beat in the word "Driven" and then settling back into the standard meter. The meter continues in an essentially regular fashion, culminating in "The deeper malady is better hid—" which could be a schoolbook illustration of iambic pentameter. However, instead of Wordsworth following this up with another line of regular meter, Mortimer's line "The world is poisoned at the heart" has only four iambs, and is completed by Lacy responding, "What mean you?" (2.3.344). The superfluous syllable in the irregular line hangs in the air like the question Lacy has just asked. Form and meaning are one.

Few people will be shocked that a play by Wordsworth has passages of great poetry. What is surprising, though, is that the earlier version of *The Borderers* has magnificent pieces of verse that Wordsworth excised when preparing the play for publication in 1842. Having by his own account given up on the play ever being performed, Wordsworth removed some of the

passages that might have been most effective in performance. He trimmed and altered passages throughout, but the most noticeable abandoning of dialogue occurs in the final scene of the play. In the sequence after Matilda collapses, Wordsworth cut about 60 lines of dialogue, replacing them with a mere four lines.⁴⁰

In the version intended for the stage, Mortimer sees an image of Herbert's staff, much like Macbeth hallucinates a dagger, but instead of leading him on to a crime, the staff bars the road before him. Realizing that Herbert is dead, and recalling the old man's dog killed by Rivers, Mortimer cries out:

Howl, howl, poor dog! Thou'lt never find him more;
 Draggled with storm and wet, howl, howl amain,
 But not in my ears—I was not the death of thee.
 What dost thou there, friend? Get thee out of the way,
 We must not trouble it—

(5.3.203-7)

This passage, reminiscent (perhaps even derivative) of *King Lear*,⁴¹ copies not just the loose meter of Shakespeare's mature tragedies, but also the ambiguity so prevalent in *Lear* and other plays. To whom is Mortimer speaking? Does the addressee shift? Is Mortimer actually mad at this point, or has he reached a more profound level of insight than sanity? Perhaps because Wordsworth realized such ambiguities might confuse a reader, this passage, and many similar ones, vanish from the published text. In attempting to mimic not just the poetic form but the poetic heights of Shakespeare's verse, the young Wordsworth demonstrated a striking level of ambition, an ambition the more mature Wordsworth noticeably toned down when he presented a text for the reading public.

Both Mortimer and Rivers have passages that soar above ordinary verse, but it was Rivers who most interested the author. After he had finished most (if not all) of *The Borderers*,

Wordsworth wrote an essay meant to be a preface to the early version of the text. This essay on the character of Rivers sought to explain a villain that apparently confused the readers at Covent Garden who turned down the play. The vogue for the Gothic meant the public hungered for marvelous events on the stage, but Wordsworth pointed out that an audience's love for the marvelous need not be confined to external phenomena. He suggested that people would be most delighted when examining the marvelous qualities of "our own minds" instead.⁴²

The key to Rivers's motive, Wordsworth wrote, was "in the very constitution of his character."⁴³ The introductory essay to *The Borderers* foregrounds character as the most important element of the play, and defends the decision to have an unusual and extraordinary character at the heart of the piece. It seems, however, that it was the extraordinariness of the character of Rivers that led to the play's banishment from the stage. Wordsworth's aunt, Elizabeth Threlkeld, claimed that "the metaphysical obscurity of one character, was the great reason of its rejection."⁴⁴ Wordsworth's characterization, perhaps too far ahead of its time, ultimately doomed the play to never being performed during his lifetime.

Yet it is the characterization of Rivers that fascinates us today. The bizarre motive for his deception confused readers like Covent Garden's Harris who were accustomed to simplified playing texts. This, after all, was a theatre that preferred Colley Cibber's *Richard III* to that of Shakespeare and would perform the happy ending to *King Lear* penned by Nahum Tate rather than the original.⁴⁵ Harris apparently had no use for "metaphysical obscurity," but Wordsworth rebukes the groupthink of the eighteenth-century theatre in his introductory essay to the older version of *The Borderers*. He complains that contemporary audiences "are too apt to apply our own moral sentiments as a measure of the conduct of others."⁴⁶ He argues that it is the

differentness of Rivers that should be the focus of our attention, not his similarities to the average man.

For all its faults, *The Borderers* presents a fascinating case study of an individual who challenges conventional concepts of morality. If Threlkeld was correct, it was this, the very thing that makes the play interesting, that prevented its performance. Fortunately, dramatists who followed Wordsworth continued to push the limits of British theatre in their day. They proceeded to present moral issues in a complex and serious manner, to create extraordinary characters, and to write in a manner that took advantage of the potential of English language verse. These writers also met with resistance from the theatrical establishment, and the texts they created, even when specifically tailored for performance, often took on the musty reputation of closet drama.

Enacting Romantic Drama

One of the most infamous stage failures in the decade that followed the composition of *The Borderers* was Matthew G. Lewis's one-act play *The Captive*. The play, written in the form of a dramatic monologue, or monodrama, was performed only once in Lewis's lifetime. Harriet Litchfield played the titular captive, a woman wrongfully committed to a madhouse in spite of the fact she was quite sane. Over the course of the play, however, she gradually loses her grip amidst the sights and sounds of the asylum and ends up calling out, "Your task is done!—(*With a loud shriek.*) I'm mad! mad!" (65).⁴⁷ Wollstonecraft's novel *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*, which deals with similar subject matter, had been posthumously published five years earlier in 1798, so the idea of a sane woman locked in a madhouse was not entirely new. Litchfield's acting, however, shocked audiences so much that the entire theatre erupted into chaos.

Descriptions of precisely what happened at Covent Garden on the night of 22 March 1803 vary. However, Lewis's own account in a letter to his mother gives the basics:

It proved much too terrible for representation, and two people went into hysterics during the performance, and two more after the curtain dropped.... In fact, the subject (which was merely a picture of madness) was so uniformly distressing to the feelings, that at last I felt my own a little painful; and as to Mrs. Litchfield, she almost fainted away.⁴⁸

After unleashing pandemonium on the theatre, Lewis withdrew the play from performance. It is important to note, however, that the play did not fail due to its lack of dramatic effect. To the contrary, it was precisely because the play was *too* effective (apparently even disquieting Litchfield herself) that it disappeared from the stage.

What shocked the early-nineteenth-century audience so profoundly? For one thing, the play forces an audience to lose its moral bearings. The woman's husband is supposed to be her protector. Instead, she relates, "My tyrant husband forged the tale, / Which chains me in this dreary cell...." (9-10). The other authority figure, the gaoler in the asylum, ignores the woman's cries and allows her to waste away in her cell in spite of her quite reasonable-sounding pleas. Most disturbing, however, is that the woman herself does not remain consistently reasonable. As she gradually loses grip on reality, the play seems to lose its moral clarity. Stage directions call for the woman's father, sister, and brothers to enter at the end of the play. They present her with her child, and, through the magical power of maternal instinct, she miraculously recovers her senses. It seems, however, that the actors never got a chance to play this closing scene, or if they did, the audience was already too disturbed to notice it.⁴⁹

Since the play is a monologue, the audience must experience the story through a single character. That character is the only individual with whom the audience can identify, and she is gradually losing her mind. The audience thus must experience through this character the process

of going insane. Though Lewis claimed the play was "too terrible for representation," it was not the mere representation of madness that disturbed people. Audiences of the period were well accustomed to seeing madness onstage, yet *Lear* and *Ophelia* rarely provoked disturbances. As good as Litchfield's acting might have been, it seems to be the form of monodrama itself that caused havoc. A single character overwhelmed the entire performance, forcing audience members to identify themselves with a character rapidly losing her sanity. While the music and sound effects that accompanied the drama enhanced the effect, it appears to have been the play's complete focus on a single, extraordinarily disturbing character that caused the chaos at Covent Garden.

Lewis's verse, written in short lines of iambic tetrameter, at first seems a far cry from the poetry of Wordsworth. However, Lewis (best known as author of the spectacularly successful gothic novel *The Monk*) wished to be taken seriously as a poet. In 1812, he published his collected poems, including among them the text of the play under the title "The Captive: A Scene in a Private Mad-House."⁵⁰ This version of the text removed all stage directions and contained no hint that it had once been a performance piece. Though Lewis chose to include several explanatory notes in the volume, no such notes accompany the text formerly known as *The Captive*. By publishing his script as a poem without any markers indicating its past life as a drama, Lewis closeted his own work to posterity, erasing its history as a dramatic text.

Not all Romantic dramas were as unfortunate as *The Borderers* and *The Captive*. Charles Robert Maturin achieved great success with a play that premiered at Drury Lane on 9 May 1816: *Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand*. Though Maturin had written some minor novels, he had not yet penned *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the book for which he is best remembered today. Fortunately, Maturin had friends in high places. Both Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron pulled

strings to get *Bertram* staged at Drury Lane, and Maturin later dedicated the published version of the play to Scott.⁵¹ Perhaps most importantly, the piece provided a star vehicle for Edmund Kean, whose acting no doubt contributed to the play's success.

Maturin was an ordained Protestant minister, yet *Bertram* is perhaps most fascinating for its moral ambiguity. Though we later get a more complete picture of him, the title character at first appears as an amoral hero, neither good nor bad, standing alone and completely self-sufficient. After he survives a storm at the beginning of the play, a monk reports that "No hand did aid him, and he aided none" (1.3.8).⁵² We later discover that Bertram preserves his own life not because he wants to live, but because he does not want to have the crime of suicide on his soul. He sees poison in the touch of anyone else and prides himself on the fact that he stands out from all others.

When Bertram is reunited with his lost love Imogine, she reveals that she married his enemy in order to save her father's life. According to Imogine, her wedding was not a sacred ritual, but a kind of anti-marriage:

For broken-hearted, in despairing hour
 With every omen dark and dire I wedded—
 Some ministering demon mocked the robed priest,
 With some dark spell, not holy vow, they bound me,
 Full were the rites of horror and despair.
 They wanted but—the seal of Bertram's curse.
 (2.3.131-36)

Imogine's speech reverses the religious values of sacred marriage, making the ritual demonic. Every expected element of marriage is replaced by its opposite. The result is profoundly disturbing, as it calls all of the socially accepted values associated with marriage into question.

Indeed, Bertram ultimately claims his enemy's wife and child as his own, completely heedless of the laws of wedlock.

However, Maturin is not merely reversing the poles of morality. Bertram's rival, Aldobrand, presents a very different view of the situation. He claims that Bertram in his ambition had rebelled against the king, and it was the duty of the king's true subjects to remove him. Given how Bertram has acted thus far, Aldobrand's account sounds plausible. He also claims to have wooed Imogine honestly and tenderly, which could also be true, even if his wife accepted him out of a desire for familial security. Whom are we to believe?

Though the opening acts paint Bertram in a somewhat sympathetic light, Maturin portrays his protagonist more and more like a villain as the play continues. When Aldobrand returns to his castle, Bertram slays him mercilessly, even as the defeated rival cries out pitifully for his child. Instead of running from his guilt, Bertram embraces it. As Dale Kramer has observed, he seems "possessed by inclinations to do what society would term evil."⁵³ When knights surround him, preparing to do justice, Bertram cries out, "Let rack and pincer do their full work on me— / 'Twill rouse me from that dread unnatural sleep, / In which my soul hath dreamt its dreams of agony—" (5.2.65-67). Instead of dying under torture, though, Bertram ultimately stabs himself with a sword, perishing boldly and tragically. Everyone else onstage is left in a state of wonderment, as is the audience.

The character of Bertram transcends simplistic moral judgments. Whatever the personal opinions of his clergyman creator, Bertram rises beyond the wisdom of this world. He is beyond our sympathy or even our prayers. In fact, in the original ending of the play, revised before the Drury Lane production, a prior declares that "It is too late to pray for Bertram's soul."⁵⁴ As Maturin well knew, from the perspective of a Catholic like the prior, it is never too late to pray

for a soul that might be in purgatory. Even the prior, however, senses that Bertram's grand fall exceeds the scope of his moral universe.

Like the original ending, Maturin's preface for the play also went unpublished. In it, he explicitly stated his full ambition for the piece. He claimed to have "looked as much as possible to dramatic speech, and as little, as possible to mere practical writing, or dramatic speech-making."⁵⁵ The distinction, according to Maturin, is the same as the "distinction between the play of the closet, and the play of the stage."⁵⁶ The preface also defends the use of heightened language in the play, citing as precedent Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as "the language of a modern dramatist (Miss Bailey [sic]) scarce inferiour to any of them."⁵⁷

It is somewhat jarring to hear the dramatic poetry of Joanna Baillie praised as being near to that of Shakespeare. Maturin's preface reminds us just how well regarded Baillie's writing was at the beginning of the nineteenth century and just how lofty were the goals of dramatists at that time. Maturin, by his own account, was using Baillie as a model, and he believed that model to be in the same league as the greatest dramatists in British literature. Even if Maturin's verse rarely rises to the level of Baillie and Shakespeare (two names joined together in his mind if not always in ours), it was at that high level he was aiming. Equally important, such lofty verse did not belong in the closet, but according to Maturin only on the stage.

Lord Byron missed the premiere of *Bertram*, having left Britain the month before the first staging of the tragedy. As a member of the subcommittee at Drury Lane and a champion of Maturin's work, though, he was well acquainted with the play, which seems to have had an impact on his own work. While abroad, Byron produced a number of dramas of his own, beginning with *Manfred*, which he published in 1817. Byron had mixed feelings about writing for the theatre, vacillating between wanting to reform the stage and fleeing to a drama purely of

the mind.⁵⁸ Still, *Manfred* was exquisitely suited for performance, as many subsequent productions would prove.⁵⁹

Like Bertram, the title character in *Manfred* suffers due to his love for a woman, in Manfred's case, the beautiful Astarte. Though Byron is noticeably ambiguous about precisely how Manfred wronged Astarte, his pain comes from the fact that she died without forgiving him. This parallels the plot of *Bertram* (at least in the staged version), where the protagonist is pained not just by the death of his love, but by her failure to forgive him. Bertram cries out, "She must not, shall not die, till she forgives me" (5.3.146). In *Manfred*, this desire of the hero to cheat death in order to gain forgiveness takes on a supernatural element. With the aid of spirits, Manfred conjures up the phantom of his beloved Astarte from beyond the grave. After prophesying his doom, though, she disappears without bestowing the forgiveness he seeks.

Like Bertram, Manfred stands above the moral codes of all those around him. Also like Bertram, this towering figure dies through his own struggles, depriving those who wish to kill him of their own brand of justice. Bertram, though, is foiling the attempts of knights, while Manfred rises above otherworldly spirits who wish to destroy him. At the end of the play, he announces:

I have not been thy dupe nor am thy prey,
But was my own destroyer, and will be
My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me—but not yours!
(3.4.398-401)⁶⁰

Manfred dies his "own destroyer" and like Bertram leaves those around him mystified, a feat all the more remarkable in Byron's play, since even mystical beings are shocked and humbled by the hero's death.

Despite the parallels between *Bertram* and *Manfred*, Byron's drama was not performed during his lifetime. The one play he wrote that was produced while he was alive was *Marino Faliero*, which he wrote after completing *Manfred*. Drury Lane's production of the play (while Byron was in self-imposed exile on the continent) did not have the authorization of the author, and Byron even went through some futile legal maneuvers to try to stop performances from proceeding without his permission.⁶¹ However, his written preface to *Marino Faliero* shows a marked ambivalence towards performance. In it, he suggests his opposition to production does not come from an antipathy to the theatre itself. Rather, it comes from his own insecurity over his work being received in a public manner.

As the preface makes clear, Byron's reservations came from the fact that he had been intricately involved with the theatre at Drury Lane in the past. "I have been too much behind the scenes," he protests, to consider the stage "a very exalted object of ambition."⁶² Most distressing, he writes, is that the author of a play is at the mercy of a live audience:

The sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges.⁶³

Writing a successful play, Byron claims, would give him "no pleasure, and failure great pain."⁶⁴

Still, the preface goes on to praise contemporary playwrights, including Joanna Baillie, H.H. Milman, and John Wilson, specifically citing Baillie's tragedies *De Monfort* and *Ethwald*.

The failure of *Marino Faliero* seems to have hardened Byron against the theatre, though it did not stop him from writing dramas. The types of plays he wrote did not find immediate approval, yet after his death Byron's works entered the standard repertoire. *Manfred* remained

unproduced until 1834, but Samuel Phelps later made it a hit at Drury Lane, where it ran for nearly a hundred performances.⁶⁵ Charles Kean received critical acclaim for his elaborate productions of Byron's later historical drama *Sardanapalus*.⁶⁶ Perhaps the most successful of Byron's plays in the nineteenth century was *Werner*, a piece he worked on for years in fits and starts, finally publishing it in 1822. William Charles Macready turned the play into a popular vehicle for himself, and it was that play which the young Queen Victoria commanded to be performed after she ascended the throne.⁶⁷

The Rise of Melodrama

Running parallel to this tradition of Romantic verse drama was another tradition, plot focused, written largely in prose, and seeking out moral clarity rather than complexity. Plays in this tradition tended to rely on music (in part to get around the monopoly granted to London patent theatres) and became known as melodramas. While Romantic verse drama looked to Britain's own literary traditions (as well as to Germany), authors of melodrama usually looked to France for their models. It was René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt who first pioneered melodrama in Parisian theatres after the Revolution, winning popular acclaim with such plays as *The Ruins of Babylon* and *The Dog of Montargis*. In 1802, the British playwright Thomas Holcroft adapted Pixérécourt's play *Coelina, or The Child of Mystery* as *A Tale of Mystery*, calling it "A Mélo-Drame in Two Acts."

Holcroft's play sparked numerous imitations, which were themselves frequently adaptations of other French plays. Later successful melodramas included John Baldwin Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer*, Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan*, and the anonymous *Maria Marten*. While these melodramas were primarily staged at the smaller "illegitimate" houses, they

increasingly made appearances in the patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Isaac Pocock's two-act melodrama *The Miller and His Men* literally went off with a bang when it premiered at Covent Garden on 21 October 1813. An explosion in the final scene set a new standard in stage effects and helped the play to run 50 performances in its first season.⁶⁸

The Miller and His Men, it should be noted, opened the same year as the Drury Lane premiere of Coleridge's *Remorse*, by far the most successful new tragedy of the Regency era. The rival patent houses had come up with rival strategies to attract audiences. Drury Lane (with Byron on its governing subcommittee) had recruited one of the finest poets in the country to present a tragedy of literary ambition. Later that year, Covent Garden presented a melodrama by Pocock, the author of such successful musical farces as *Yes or No?* and *Hit or Miss!* The result for Covent Garden was most certainly not a miss. After *The Miller and His Men*, there could be little doubt that even in the patent theatres melodrama would rival what most people considered to be the "serious" drama of the day.

Without judging the seriousness of Pocock's melodrama (as his contemporaries most certainly did), it is important to point out the differences between the play and the Romantic dramas being composed around the same time. *The Miller and His Men* tells the story of Grindoff, a hard-working miller who gives to the poor and befriends an old man named Kelmar. As it turns out, the miller is not what he seems. He actually leads a band of robbers terrorizing the countryside. Moreover, Grindoff is intent on killing the just Count Friberg and marrying Kelmar's daughter against her will. Appearances can be deceiving.

This reversal of the expected is neither complex nor problematic in *The Miller and His Men*. Within the opening minutes of the play, Kelmar's daughter Claudine expresses her affection for the impoverished hero, Lothair, and declares that she "can never love the miller."⁶⁹

After Grindoff enters, he begins speaking in asides, informing the audience of his opposition to Lothair and his designs against Kelmar and Claudine. From the very first scene, the play instructs the audience how to track who is good and who is evil. Lothair need have no more motivation in the play beyond his pure love and duty, while the miller needs no motivation other than his villainy.

The Borderers came out of Wordsworth's intense ambivalence concerning the French Revolution. As someone once sympathetic to the Revolution but now open-eyed concerning its excesses, Wordsworth writes his villain from the inside, a fact that becomes increasingly clear when we consider how much of Rivers's dialogue made it into the autobiographical poems *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*. Wordsworth takes both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces seriously. This is not true of Pocock. *The Miller and His Men* ends with the count's soldiers arriving as a deus ex machina "in uniform and armed with sabres."⁷⁰ The forces of the aristocracy restore order while the mill explodes spectacularly onstage, killing the ruffians inside.

Not only do the characters of *The Miller and His Men* seem flat and two-dimensional, but they literally became so when the play was adapted into cardboard, becoming the most popular choice (bar far) for toy theatres in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Through toy theatre adaptations, children were encouraged to re-enact the play at home, giving Grindoff his proper comeuppance prior to the fall of the final paper curtain. The fact that the play became a favorite for toy theatres does not mean it was not a serious drama. After all, Byron's *Manfred* was reincarnated in the toy theatre as well. When manufacturers advertised *Manfred*, though, they displayed a scene of awe and wonder, as the phantom of Astarte appears to the hero.⁷² Advertisements for *The Miller and His Men* inevitably focused on the final explosion scene with its implications of counter-revolutionary justice.

The choices made by manufacturers of toy-theatre versions mirror the choices made by dramatists. The most visually spectacular scenes in *Manfred* are also scenes of moral and psychological complexity. The visual highlights of *The Miller and His Men*, by contrast, are moments of moral clarity, where the delineation between good and evil characters is made manifest and individuals are judged accordingly. The iconography of toy theatres tells us how audiences received, interpreted, and remembered plays. At least in the cases of *Manfred* and *The Miller and His Men*, these receptions, interpretations, and memories come directly from the choices made by playwrights. The contrasts between advertisements for the two toy-theatre versions reflect a deeper contrast between Romantic drama and the melodrama that rivaled it.

One thing the toy theatres could not easily capture was the language used on stage, though manufacturers did sometimes print special books with abbreviated versions of the text.⁷³ While melodramas like *The Miller and His Men* were written primarily in prose, they did have some verse passages meant to be sung. Still, these sections often remained plot-focused rather than expanding the complexities of a character or of a moral situation. For instance, the sestette that ends Act One, scene three of *The Miller and His Men* simply recaps why the count and his servant Karl must stay the night in Kelmar's cottage. Claudine urges the visitors, "Stay, prithee, stay—the night is dark, / The cold wind whistles—hark! hark! hark!"⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the count and Karl protest, "We must away. / Pray, come away."⁷⁵ Each character in turn presents his or her point of view, but the poetry never strives after more original images than a "dark and dismal night" or a "rising lark."⁷⁶ The sestette is about as far away from the poetic ambition of Wordsworth and Byron as one can imagine. While some other songs have slightly better lyrics, the verse still lacks the ambition to rise above the predictable. It might be lovely to hear, but it is

not particularly surprising when a chorus of Banditti sing: "In darkness we secure our prey, / And vanish at the dawn of day."⁷⁷

Pocock went on to write the successful operatic drama *Rob Roy Macgregor*, based on the 1817 Sir Walter Scott novel *Rob Roy*, which premiered at Covent Garden in 1818 with William Charles Macready in the title role. Pocock seemed equally comfortable whether writing musical farce, melodrama, or operatic drama. Indeed, the three genres were closely related, in part because their use of music allowed minor theatres to get around the monopoly the patent theatres had on spoken drama. Still, Pocock worked in a variety of genres, and his name was not purely associated with melodrama. The same could not be said for Edward Fitzball.

After some clumsy attempts at five-act tragedies, Fitzball wrote the melodrama *The Ruffian Boy* adapted from a story by Amelie Opie.⁷⁸ The play premiered in Norwich in 1820, and enjoyed a successful run. Thomas Dibdin, then manager of the Surrey Theatre, encouraged the young author to continue in this vein, and Fitzball's new melodrama, *The Innkeeper of Abbeville*, received productions throughout the 1820s. Dubbed "The Terrible Fitzball" by critics, this prolific dramatist wrote, adapted, and doctored works for the patent houses and minor theatres alike.⁷⁹ He kept writing (and getting produced) up until his death in 1873. The novelist Robert Louis Stevenson later declared Fitzball, together with the melodramatic actor O. Smith, to be synonymous with "the great age of melodrama."⁸⁰

The Innkeeper of Abbeville is representative of the types of plays that became increasingly common after the close of the Regency. We are introduced to two lovers, the virtuous Charles and the equally virtuous Louise, who is daughter of the titular innkeeper, Clauson. After Charles proposes marriage, the couple exit to the accompaniment of music. There is some comic business with Zyrtillo, the servant of the Baron Idenberg, and since this is

melodrama and requires music, a funny song. As the first act continues, though, the mood becomes noticeably darker. The villain Dyrkile tries to convince the orphan boy Ozzrand to rob the innkeeper and Baron Idenberg. When Ozzrand hesitates, Dyrkile replies, "Psha! Let us but steal enough to bribe the judge, and depend on't, there will be no fear of execution."⁸¹ At the close of the first act, while Ozzrand is trying to help Dyrkile to rob the inn, he inadvertently wakes Idenberg, and the curtain falls on a picture of crime and terror.

Though the act break leaves the audience in suspense over the outcome of the scene, Fitzball opens the second act informing the audience that Dyrkile stabbed the baron and swore his accomplice to secrecy. To throw suspicion off of himself, he smears Clauson's cloak with blood and plants the innkeeper's dagger at the crime scene. Ozzrand has pangs of conscience, but Dyrkile scoffs, "Conscience! stuff! the rich villain's cant to hang us with."⁸² Charles finds the baron's limp body in the woods, and as it happens, Idenberg is still alive, but Clauson, under the pain of torture, has falsely confessed to the crime. As the pace of the action intensifies, Dyrkile murders Ozzrand and is pursued by Zyrtillo, and Clauson is marched off to the firing squad.

In the spectacular final scene, Dyrkile runs on just as the command is given for the firing squad to shoot. As if guided by Providence, the bullets strike the real killer, sparing the innocent man. Clausen ends the play by entreating everyone to "adore that Being, whose hand rescues the unfortunate—whose vengeance pursues the guilty."⁸³ Whether that being is God or Fitzball, the miraculous ending absolves the audience of any duty to think seriously about the play. Justice will be dispensed whether mere humans work towards it or not.

Fitzball was a religious man himself, and his personal worldview, which tended to divide everyone up into the blessed and the damned, carried over into his plays.⁸⁴ Ozzrand, the only character in *The Innkeeper of Abbeville* who straddles the worlds of good and evil, repents at the

end and gives his life for his role in the crime. While the play questions the justness of using torture to extract confessions, this critique of authority is tempered by the fact that no one is actually put wrongfully to death. In fact, in the moral world presented by Fitzball, it is unclear anyone even *could* be wrongfully put to death. Would not the great Being intervene in that case, as well?

As laughable as plays like *The Innkeeper of Abbeville* might seem today, melodrama provided an important function in society. As Peter Brooks observed in his landmark study, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama arises from "the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue."⁸⁵ In the wake of the French Revolution and Napoleon, melodrama met a clear emotional need of society. This type of drama remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, as the social upheavals brought on by industrialization made the world continue to seem a dangerous and uncertain place. Melodramas of this period packed theatres, though few of these plays continued into the mainstream repertoire past the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Murder of Romantic Drama

Melodrama had little use for sophisticated characters, or for the sophisticated acting required to play them, and many actors bristled at this new theatrical trend. The great Victorian tragedian William Charles Macready, for instance, saw his role as reviving the drama to the splendors of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. To him, this meant the return of verse tragedy, of precisely the types of plays written by Baillie, Coleridge, and Shelley. Not coincidentally, Macready starred in Byron's *Werner*, albeit in a cut version adapted by the actor himself. However, instead of championing the most promising new writer of verse drama, he instead

presided over the debasing of the government-sanctioned theatre into the sensational thrill rides already popular on the "illegitimate" stages beyond London's patent houses.

Macready did make some progress toward reviving the drama with a production of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons* at Covent Garden in 1838, though most critics credited its success to Helen Faucit, who played Pauline, the titular heroine.⁸⁶ The following year, Macready premiered another Bulwer-Lytton play, *Richelieu*, with a title role written expressly for himself. Unfortunately, Macready quarreled with the owners of Covent Garden, and he ended up at the Haymarket Theatre during the summer of 1839, alternating with Samuel Phelps in the two leading roles in *Othello*. Much to Macready's pain, Phelps received the better reviews.⁸⁷ Macready then set about looking for a new piece and received an offer from Robert Browning, who had recently been impressed by seeing Faucit in *The Lady of Lyons* and wanted to try his hand at playwriting.⁸⁸ Surely, if anyone could revive poetic drama in England, Browning could.

However, Macready did not think highly of the first two plays Browning offered, *King Victor and King Charles* and *The Return of the Druses*. Taking over the management of Drury Lane, Macready looked for other playwrights to produce. He decided to stage Gerald Griffin's tragedy *Gisippus*, but Macready made a bad play even worse, revising it to divide one character into two different parts, just so no one would have a chance to challenge his own preeminence as the lead.⁸⁹ Macready's friend Douglas Jerrold supplied him with a new play, *Prisoner of War*, but Macready gave it scant attention. Unexpectedly, *Prisoner of War* was a success, but with Phelps in the lead, and Macready decided to end Drury Lane's season early that year.⁹⁰

During the summer of 1842, it was not Macready who was championing new playwrights, but his rival, Charles Kean, who had commissioned Sheridan Knowles to write a

piece for the Haymarket. That play, *The Rose of Arragon*, was a success, with the ubiquitous Phelps earning special kudos as the villain Almagro. In October, Drury Lane reopened for the season, and Phelps went back to work for Macready, having to once again accept smaller roles. It was in that October that Macready introduced his famous production of *King John*, and later that year he staged the premiere of another new play, Westland Marston's *The Patrician's Daughter*, with Faucit in the title role. The reviewers praised Faucit, Phelps, everyone but Macready.⁹¹ The play only lasted 11 performances, and Macready turned down another tragedy, William Smith's *Athelwold*, because he felt there was not a sufficient leading role for himself.

It was only then that Macready finally turned to Browning, who more than a year before had given him the script to *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*.⁹² Macready treated the play with contempt, though. In the past, he had invited authors to read their plays aloud to the cast. In this case, he assigned that duty to the prompter and left the room.⁹³ Though he hadn't been present for the reading, Macready told the author that it had been a disaster and demanded a revised second act. Browning complied.

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon is by no means a perfect drama, perhaps in part due to the fact the author reportedly composed it in a mere five days. Relatively short and seemingly straight forward, the play's apparent simplicity serves to make Browning's twists and turns all the more shocking. Set sometime in the eighteenth century, the plot concerns the Tresham Family: Thorold (the earl), Austin (his brother), Guendolen (their cousin), and most importantly Mildred (Thorold and Austin's younger sister), originally played by Faucit. In the opening scene, the audience meets the old servant Gerard and the family's other retainers. Most people are excited because Henry Mertoun, a neighboring earl from a good family with plenty of land, is coming to ask for Mildred's hand in marriage. The old servant Gerard, however, is more concerned with

inspecting hawks. He declines to drink to Lord Tresham and the happy pair, and after he leaves, one retainer observes darkly that the old man "Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away / In cares that this was right, nor that was wrong, / Such point decorous, and such square by rule—" (1.1.90-92).⁹⁴ Clearly, this is a world where small matters are taken far too seriously.

In spite of Mertoun's clear nervousness, Lord Tresham is well disposed to the match, and he gives his blessing, provided the young earl can win Mildred's consent. Mildred appears even more distracted than her suitor. The sharp-tongued cousin Guendolen makes fun of her, joking the marriage will be called off if Thorold discovers one of Mertoun's distant ancestors allowed her garter to slip down during a dance. Browning holds up to ridicule society's obsession with family honor, preparing the audience for some dark secret in the past of the Mertoun family, some potential blot to the hereditary escutcheon of the Tresham clan. Where the play actually goes, however, is far more interesting.

Mildred places a lamp in her window as a signal, and a mysterious figure in a slouched hat and long cloak climbs in, singing a love song. When the figure removes his disguise, the audience sees Mildred's secret lover is none other than Henry Mertoun. Though both young people are concerned about their secret "sin" together, they are doing precisely what family honor requires by contracting a lawful marriage. It seems the only thing that might prevent a happy ending would be a tragic misunderstanding. The play leads in that direction when Gerard confronts Lord Tresham with information that he has seen a stranger sneak into Mildred's bedroom at night. Thorold is understandably upset, and Guendolen does not make things any better when she jokes with her cousin in his library, asking: "Does that huge tome show some blot / In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back / Than Arthur's time?" (2.1.111-13).

Thorold's concern for family honor is not nearly as simplistic as Guendolen believes, though. He questions his sister and demands to know the name of her visitor. Guilt-ridden, Mildred declines to answer, believing this would compound sin with sin. She offers to accept Mertoun's proposal, but this enrages Thorold even more. Thorold is not concerned with the family's honor so much as repulsed by what he perceives as Mildred's double betrayal of both her secret lover and the earl honorably courting her.

In a long passage, Thorold rails against his sister who "fresh from last night's pledge" wants to employ her brother to "betray" a lawful suitor (2.1.289, 294). Thorold makes it clear he could understand if Mildred felt bound to the secret lover, remarking there is often honor among even thieves. His sister's rejection of her lover seems to offend him as much as her willingness to dupe the earl. He curses her, declaring:

But she
That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
Their intercourse the surelier: and, for this,
I curse her to her face before you all.
(2.1.310-14)

While Thorold's curse is expected, the reason he gives for it seems highly unusual. Upon her rejection, Mildred laments her fate, crying: "I—I was so young! / Beside, I loved him Thorold—and I had / No mother: God forgot me: so, I fell" (2.1.360-62).

These lines had a profound impact on Macready's friend, the novelist Charles Dickens. In a letter to John Forster, who had lent Dickens the script, Dickens maintained that *A Blot in the Scutcheon* was just the thing the theatre needed. "I swear it is a tragedy that MUST be played; and must be played, moreover, by Macready," Dickens declared.⁹⁵ He went on to say that if Forster saw Browning, he should tell him, "I believe from my soul there is no man living (and

not many dead) who could produce such a work."⁹⁶ Dickens was a regular devotee of the stage, and he saw that Browning was up to something different than the usual tricks to which the theatre of the time was accustomed.

As the play's third act begins, Lord Tresham lies in wait for the mysterious lover who has promised to come again. The audience is prepared for a horrible case of mistaken identity, in which a nobleman kills his sister's visitor not knowing that the secret lover is a noble himself. Were the play to end this way, Dickens's enthusiasm might seem misplaced. Instead, when Mertoun shows up, he throws off his disguise and asks Lord Tresham to recognize him. As if to eliminate any ambiguity, Browning has Tresham actually call out Mertoun's name. There is no case of mistaken identity here. Instead, Lord Tresham seems all the angrier that a seemingly honest man like Mertoun could live a double life. Drawing his sword, he calls out:

We should join hands in frantic sympathy
 If you once taught me the unteachable,
 Explained how you can live so, and so lie.
 With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
 The old belief—a life like yours is still
 Impossible. Now draw!

(3.1.78-83)

Though the two fight, Mertoun does not have the heart to defend himself, and the younger man falls with a mortal wound. Lord Tresham is genuinely confused by the fact that his opponent made no efforts to resist and did not return sword thrusts. Mertoun says he allowed himself to die so he could expiate his own guilt, but his fall came not from loving Mildred, he confesses, but from loving Lord Tresham:

I dreamed of you—
 You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
 The scholar and the gentleman. I burned

To knit myself to you: but I was young,
 And your surpassing reputation kept me
 So far aloof! Oh, wherefore all that love?
 (3.1.134-39)

Mertoun was not living a double life, pretending to respect the honor of noble families while in fact working to undermine them. Rather, it was his excessive respect for Tresham's nobility, his excessive desire to join in the honor represented by the elder earl that led to his courtship of Mildred. Tresham realizes that it was the pursuit of familial honor—not its rejection—that led to the tragedy. Both men were so caught up in the values of noble reputation that they destroyed their reputations and themselves.

When Tresham goes to Mildred and begs her forgiveness, she more than forgives him, giving him her blessing before she dies of a broken heart. The play could have ended with Tresham realizing his folly and repenting his errors, and in fact Macready proposed just such a new ending.⁹⁷ Browning refused the change. Carrying through with the play's own inexorable logic, Browning has Tresham faithful to family honor to the end. He takes poison, hoping his suicide will expiate the harm he has done the family name. As he dies, he says to Austin and Guendolen:

You're lord and lady now—you're Treshams; name
 And fame are yours: you hold our 'scutcheon up.
 Austin, no blot on it! You see how blood
 Must wash one blot away: the first blot came
 And the first blood came. To the vain world's eye
 All's gules again: no care to the vain world,
 From whence the red was drawn!
 (3.3.145-51)

"Gules" is the heraldic term for the color red, so Tresham's blood covers up the blot on the family's 'scutcheon.

But what is that blot? At the beginning, we are led to believe it will be a flaw in Mertoun's family, and later it seems to be the secret courtship between Mertoun and Mildred. Ultimately, however, Lord Tresham himself is the blot in the 'scutcheon. Obsessed with honor to the end, he destroys himself to eliminate that one blot, washing dishonor away with his own blood. Browning's ending surprises because it departs from the expected tropes of melodrama, instead following the more complex Romantic tradition of earlier writers.

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon is not only poetically ambitious, it presents emotionally sophisticated characters that constantly surprise us by the way they view their honor-obsessed world. These full-bodied characters create a moral ambiguity that challenges the audience to reconsider how we think about the figures in the play. Thorold Tresham is not a simplistic villain, and if his fixation with honor is excessive, he is at least consistent in applying his exacting standards to himself, even if it means self-annihilation. In the final lines, Guendolen and Austin promise to remember Thorold. They do not say whether they will remember him as a paragon of nobility or as a cautionary tale. Ultimately, it might not matter. We in the audience are unable to forget the tragedy, not because it gives us a simplistic moral, but precisely because there is no simplistic moral. We sit in awe of these two noble families, both exalting a set of values already archaic by 1843, but both admirable in their unflinching dedication to their own beliefs.

Dickens wrote in his letter to Forster, "the tragedy I never shall forget, or less vividly remember than I do now."⁹⁸ This is the power of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*. The play sticks vividly in our minds because its resolution does not have the satisfying moral clarity of melodrama. Rather, the play forces us to question whether that moral clarity is desirable at all. If precise certitude of one's values leads to death, how can we be so sure of those values? And if the

established values of the eighteenth century were found wanting, how can audiences be so sure of their values in the nineteenth century—or for that matter in any century?

In spite of Dickens's enthusiasm, Macready eventually divorced himself from having anything to do with *A Blot in the Scutcheon*, instead assigning Phelps to take his place.⁹⁹ Toward the end of the rehearsal process, Macready inserted himself again, suggesting the changed ending, which incidentally would have deprived Phelps of a dramatic death scene. After Browning demurred, Macready called the author "a very disagreeable and offensively mannered person."¹⁰⁰ Browning seems to have seen the suggestion for what it was, a plot to avoid giving Phelps the opportunity of acting in a true tragedy. The play premiered to "tumultuous applause" and when Phelps called for the author to come take a bow, Browning declined, avoiding the spotlight.¹⁰¹ Reviewer after reviewer, even those hostile to Macready, praised the play. Audiences flocked to see it, yet Macready pulled the play at the height of its popularity, never allowing it to be performed again under his management.¹⁰² Writing in his diary after the whole affair was over, Macready called Browning one of the many "wretched insects" that assailed him.¹⁰³

The year 1843 saw not just Browning's debut as a playwright, but also the end of the monopoly Drury Lane and Covent Garden had enjoyed on "legitimate" drama in London. Of course, the Haymarket had presented plays during the summer, and other theatres (like Sadler's Wells, soon to be taken over by Phelps) presented them on the sly, often adding in a song or two in order to call them "melodrama" or "burletta." Macready had always argued that the monopoly was necessary for the revival of the drama, but after a dispute with the owners of Drury Lane in 1843, he drafted a petition to end the monopoly for which he had always fought. Within nine weeks, the monopoly was gone. By Macready's former logic, this should have been the end of

serious drama in England. In fact, as soon as the monopoly was ended, serious dramas found a new home, not at Covent Garden or Drury Lane, but at Sadler's Wells, a sizable theatre in the suburbs of London. As the new manager of Sadler's Wells, Phelps produced not just Shakespeare, but many Romantic verse dramas, including *Bertram* and *Werner*.

The year 1843 marks the end of an era, but as should be readily apparent, the disappearance of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* from the stage did not represent a natural death of Romantic drama in the patent houses so much as it did a cold-blooded murder of a playwright's career by an envious actor. Macready, who was so intent on reviving the drama by bringing in talented new playwrights, not only marred the works of playwrights (as with Griffin), ignored playwrights (as with Jerrold), and insulted playwrights (as with Browning), he seemed not to even know what a playwright was. After suggesting some revisions for Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, which eventually became Knowles's adaptation *The Bridal*, Macready claimed ownership of the piece as if he had written it. When Phelps tried to perform the play 1848, Macready wrote to him, saying, "as I intend to act it *myself* during my present engagement, I do not consider it right to extend the permission for performance at present."¹⁰⁴ Perhaps trying to save face, a few days later Macready then magnanimously granted Phelps a permission he had not asked for nor required.

Fortunately for Browning, becoming a playwright was not his only option. In 1842, the same year he completed his first draft of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, Browning also composed what would become known as his most famous poem: "My Last Duchess." The poem is a dramatic monologue, and even begins with the name of the Duke who is the speaker in the piece. After Macready's banishment of Browning's play from the stage, the author continued to write similar "dramatic poems," the form with which he is now chiefly associated.¹⁰⁵ Later dramatic poems

Browning wrote in this mode included "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Caliban upon Setebos," and in fact nearly every major poem Browning produced after *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*. Browning continued to be a dramatic writer, but through dramatic poems rather than plays.

The Last Romantic

As Macready was chasing serious writers from the stage, one more great Romantic drama was in the process of being written. It was a sprawling piece by Thomas Lovell Beddoes, who while still in his teens had published his first play, *The Bride's Tragedy*. In his dedication of that work, Beddoes had expressed his admiration for contemporary plays and praised "the flourishing condition of dramatic literature" in Britain.¹⁰⁶ In spite of favorable reviews in the press, the theatres did not rush out to produce *The Bride's Tragedy*, and after leaving Oxford, Beddoes went to Germany to study anatomy. It was there, in 1825, that Beddoes began a new play, one he would continually rework and revise until his suicide in 1849. That play, *Death's Jest-Book*, he left not so much unfinished as hopelessly refinished, obsessively rewritten in reaction to the comments of his friends. It is a drama that is dark, brooding, and memorably disturbing.

To recount the plot of the play is merely to recount its numerous absurdities and logical inconsistencies, but absurdity seems to have been Beddoes's point. *Death's Jest-Book* pays homage to Jacobean revenge tragedy, but the play's strange twists and morbid devices go beyond anything in the work of Cyril Tourneur, Thomas Middleton, or John Webster. However, Beddoes's uncompromising portrayal of characters descending into death and madness led the critic Alan Richardson to conclude the play "can be placed as one of the first major responses to

English Romanticism, anticipating a tradition that embraces *The City of Dreadful Night* and *The Waste Land*."¹⁰⁷

Death's Jest-Book is subtitled "The Fool's Tragedy," and much of the action concentrates on the character of the fool, Isbrand. Brother to the knight Sir Wolfram, Isbrand is brought into the service of the Duke of Munsterberg as a jester. The Duke has wronged their family, and Isbrand seeks revenge, but the forgiving Wolfram has reconciled with the duke and is even setting off to the Middle East to rescue him after an ill-fated expedition during the Crusades. In a brilliant prose passage, Isbrand mocks his brother, saying, "O do it, and I shall learn to laugh the dead out of their coffins!"¹⁰⁸ Later, the jester bequeaths his fool's cap to Death, declaring, "Here begins *Death's Jest-book*."¹⁰⁹

The idea that death makes a cosmic joke of all earthly existence pervades the entire play. The knowledge that life is a joke, however, does not prevent Isbrand from getting caught up in his own delusions of grandeur. Though he sometimes speaks in cynical prose, his language also rises into verse, as in Act III, where a ruined church-yard leads him to rhapsodize:

This is a sweet place methinks:
 These arches and their caves, now double-nighted
 With heaven's and that creeping darkness, ivy,
 Delight me strangely. Ruined churches oft,
 As this, are crime's chief haunt, as ruined angels
 Straight become fiends.

(3.3.8-13)

As Isbrand plots, the Roman Mario offers his services to help overthrow the duke and establish a republic. Isbrand plays along, but secretly plots to make himself duke. His ambition rises higher than to be a mere duke, though. At the close of Act IV, Isbrand dreams of mastery over the entire universe:

And man is tired of being merely human;
 And I'll be something more: yet, not by tearing
 This chrysalis of psyche ere its hour,
 Will I break through Elysium. There are sometimes,
 Even here, the means of being more than men:
 And I by wine, and women, and the sceptre,
 Will be, my own way, heavenly in my clay.
 (4.4.192-98)

Even in death, Isbrand tries to remain defiant, but as he lies stabbed and bleeding at the end of the play, he sees that he, too, is nothing but a fool. With his last breath he declares, "now Death makes indeed a fool of me" (5.4.286).

As Richardson comments, "the attempt to rise above others demands a psyche continually at war with itself" and eventually "Isbrand himself perceives the emptiness of his pretended autonomy."¹¹⁰ The complex character of Isbrand, far too complex for the Victorian stage, fails in his overreaching. Similarly, Beddoes's hopelessly complex play fails in its own overreaching. In its attempt to rise above the standard theatrical fare of the day, the drama declares war on drama itself, sprawling out into a brilliant but un-performable mess. Beddoes never wanted to write closet drama, and his dedication to *The Bride's Tragedy* clearly indicates he wanted to be produced. Even in his suicide note, he could not forget his beloved play, entreating a friend to read his manuscript "and print or not as he thinks fit."¹¹¹ Still, unable to garner a single production and driven to despair, Beddoes created what might be the least performable of all Romantic dramas.

The Romantic drama was born of great actors, the Kemble of Wordsworth's youth, the Kean of the new generation that included Maturin and Byron, and as shall be seen, the great actresses Sarah Siddons, Julia Glover, and Eliza O'Neill. That same drama died once it became clear that great actors would no longer be available to it. Serious writers no longer had a place on

the stage. This drove Browning to the page, and Beddoes ultimately to the grave. Perhaps that was a fitting end for a literary movement that had always been obsessed with death and gloom.

However, the texts produced by the Romantic era received new life as the twentieth century was beginning to dawn. A revival of interest in Romantic dramas, particularly Shelley's *The Cenci*, inspired new generations of theatre artists. These plays were not inspiring because they lacked theatricality, but because they had been specifically designed to be acted, and to be acted by performers of extraordinary skill. Baillie inspired by Siddons, Coleridge working with Glover, and Shelley passionately converted to the theatre by O'Neill all helped to build up a new drama of possibilities. Though not all of these possibilities were fulfilled on the Regency stage, they remained to tantalize and inspire the future.

¹ Horace Walpole, *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford, at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex: With an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c.* (Strawberry Hill: Thomas Kirgate, 1784), 78.

² *Ibid.*, 80.

³ Bertrand Evans, *Gothic Drama From Walpole to Shelley* (Berkeley: U California P, 1947), 16.

⁴ Horace Walpole, *A Selection of the Letters of Horace Walpole* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1926), 348.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶ Marta Straznicky, "Closet Drama," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 416.

⁷ Toril Moi, "Ibsen in Exile: 'Peer Gynt', or the Difficulty of Becoming a Poet in Norway," *Field Day Review* 4 (2008): 27.

⁸ Maurice Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961), 1.

⁹ M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Norton, 1958), 64.

¹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 13.

¹¹ Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 18.

-
- ¹² Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), xi.
- ¹³ Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2011), xi.
- ¹⁴ Richard Grave, *The Spiritual Quixote: Or, The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffrey Wildgoose*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1792), 8.
- ¹⁵ Matthew G. Lewis, *The Castle Spectre*, in *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992), 151.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152
- ¹⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, vol. 1, ed. Carl Woodring (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 410.
- ¹⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979), 126.
- ¹⁹ John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, vol. 1, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958), 193.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ²¹ The subcommittee running Drury Lane had appointed Henry Johnstone as stage manager, but Kean loathed Johnstone and refused to perform. His return followed a compromise that allowed Johnstone to continue in his position but gave Kean full authority over the theatre on all nights when he was performing. The details of the dispute are outlined by Raymund FitzSimons in *Edmund Kean: Fire from Heaven* (New York: Dial Press, 1976), 120. Incidentally, Hyder Edward Rollins, editor of *The Letters of John Keats*, was apparently unaware of the cause for the great actor's absence from the stage. In a note, Rollins cites a playbill that disingenuously blamed Kean's retreat from the stage on "continued and severe indisposition," 191.
- ²² Keats, 193.
- ²³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), 16.
- ²⁴ Quoted in Abrams, 145.
- ²⁵ *Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. James Hutton (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), 51.
- ²⁶ Joseph W. Donohue, Jr., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 5.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ²⁸ Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 101.

²⁹ William Wordsworth, "The 1842 Note" in *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), 813.

³⁰ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. 1, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 1967), <http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198114642.book.1/actrade-9780198114642-div2-67>.

³¹ Kenneth R. Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 251.

³² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 358.

³³ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, <http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198114642.book.1/actrade-9780198114642-div2-78>.

³⁴ Johnston, 545.

³⁵ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, <http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198114642.book.1/actrade-9780198114642-div2-80>.

³⁶ Reeve Parker has suggested that Wordsworth was influenced not just by Shakespeare in English, but also by the French translations of Shakespeare he had seen in Paris during the early days of the Revolution. See "'In some sort seeing with my proper eyes': Wordsworth and the spectacles of Paris" in Parker's *Romantic Tragedies: The Dark Employments of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 62-78.

³⁷ All act, scene, and line numbers for the play come from William Wordsworth, "The Early Version (1797-99)," in *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 70-294.

³⁸ Jan Baszkiewicz calls the concept of the new man "as of 1789, one of the most important elements of revolutionary rhetoric" in *New Man, New Nation, New World: The French Revolution in Myth and Reality*, ed. Janusz Adamowski, trans. Alex Shannon (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 11.

³⁹ Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988), 40.

⁴⁰ From 5.3.179 to 5.3.239 of the older version of the play, Wordsworth retained two lines and part of another, all spoken by Rivers (renamed Oswald in the 1842 version). The four lines he added complete the line Rivers speaks at 5.3.232 in the older text.

⁴¹ Compare the passage to Shakespeare's "Howl, howl, howl! O, [you] are men of stones! / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever!" (5.3.258-60) from *King Lear* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974), 1249-1305.

⁴² William Wordsworth, "Essay Prefaced to the Early Version (1797)," in *The Borderers*, ed. Robert Osborn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), 66.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁴ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, <http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198114642.book.1/actrade-9780198114642-div2-80>.

⁴⁵ Gefen Bar-On Santor calls Tate's adaptation, which was performed 293 times between 1701 and 1800, "one of the most notorious instances of the persistence of Restoration tastes and therefore of the gap between reformatory ideas and theatrical practice in the Georgian playhouse" in "Shakespeare in the Georgian Theatre," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre: 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 222.

⁴⁶ Wordsworth, "Essay," 68.

⁴⁷ All line numbers come from Matthew G. Lewis, *The Captive*, in *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992), 223-30.

⁴⁸ *The Life and Correspondence of M.G. Lewis*, vol. 1, ed. Margaret Baron-Wilson (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), 234-35.

⁴⁹ In her note on the incident in *The Life and Correspondence of M.G. Lewis*, Margaret Baron-Wilson claims "not a few were ignorant that the piece had really been performed throughout—a statement to the contrary being erroneously made in some of the papers and magazines of the day," 234.

⁵⁰ Matthew G. Lewis, *Poems* (London: D.N. Shury, 1812), 89.

⁵¹ Scott also provided financial support to Maturin while he was writing, generously lending money and then assuring him "the term of repayment is not of the slightest consequence to me" *The Correspondence of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Robert Maturin*, ed. Fannie E. Ratchford and William H. McCarthy, Jr. (Austin: U of Texas P, 1937), 18.

⁵² Act, scene, and line numbers come from Charles Robert Maturin, *Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand*, in *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992), 315-83.

⁵³ Dale Kramer, *Charles Robert Maturin* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), 58.

⁵⁴ Editor Jeffrey N. Cox includes a selection from the final scene in *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*, 383.

⁵⁵ Charles Robert Maturin, "Preface," in *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992), 317.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ David V. Erdman wrote one of the first and most thorough accounts of Byron's anxiety about staging his dramas in "Byron's Stage Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage," *ELH* 6 (1939): 219-43.

⁵⁹ Henry Denvil first played the title role in *Manfred* in 1834. He was followed by Samuel Phelps, Charles Calvert, Charles Dillon, and Courtney Thorpe. See Peter Cochran's "Manfred: A Stage History," in *Manfred: An Edition of Byron's Manuscripts and a Collection of Essays* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 213-17.

⁶⁰ Act, scene, and line numbers come from *The Complete Poetical Works of Byron*, ed. Paul E. More (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1933), 478-96.

⁶¹ For an account of the staging of *Marino Faliero* and its possible political implications, see John Gardner "The Case of Byron's *Marino Faliero*," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre: 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 479-97.

⁶² Lord Byron, "Preface," in *The Complete Poetical Works of Byron*, ed. Paul E. More (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1933), 499.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Shirley S. Allen, *Samuel Phelps and the Sadler's Wells Theatre* (Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan UP, 1971), 294-95.

⁶⁶ Richard W. Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 159-60.

⁶⁷ Alan S. Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1966), 168.

⁶⁸ Joseph Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 117.

⁶⁹ Since melodramas are written chiefly in prose, I have cited page numbers rather than line numbers for quotations from melodramas, even when quoting lines of verse. This quotation comes from Isaac Pocock, *The Miller and His Men*, in *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century: I. Dramas 1800-1850*, ed Michael R. Booth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 36.

⁷⁰ Pocock, 71.

⁷¹ George Speaight, *The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 52.

⁷² J. Findlay, "The Spirit of Astarte appearing to Manfred in the Hall of Arimanes," undated.

⁷³ Speaight, 12.

-
- ⁷⁴ Pocock, 49.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 55.
- ⁷⁸ Edward Fitzball, *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life*, vol. 1 (London: T.C. Newby, 1859), 60.
- ⁷⁹ Larry Stephen Clifton, *The Terrible Fitzball: The Melodramatist of the Macabre* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1993), 19.
- ⁸⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Memories and Portraits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 222.
- ⁸¹ Edward Fitzball, *The Innkeeper of Abbeville* (New York: R. Hobbs, 1831), 13.
- ⁸² Ibid., 24.
- ⁸³ Ibid., 33.
- ⁸⁴ Clifton, 9.
- ⁸⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 20.
- ⁸⁶ Carol Jones Carlisle, *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000), 59.
- ⁸⁷ Allen, 46.
- ⁸⁸ Richard S. Kennedy and Donald S. Hair, *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life* (Columbia, Mo.: U of Missouri P, 2007), 74.
- ⁸⁹ Allen, 56.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., 57.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 62.
- ⁹² Ibid., 63.
- ⁹³ Kennedy and Hair, 77.
- ⁹⁴ Act, scene, and line numbers come from Robert Browning, *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Browning* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1895), 216-30.
- ⁹⁵ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 3, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 381-82.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 383.

⁹⁷ Kennedy and Hair, 78.

⁹⁸ Dickens, 382.

⁹⁹ Allen, 64.

¹⁰⁰ William Charles Macready, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready*, vol. 2, ed. William Toynbee (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 196.

¹⁰¹ Allen, 65.

¹⁰² Ibid., 67.

¹⁰³ Macready, 198.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Allen, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Kennedy and Hair, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *The Bride's Tragedy* (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1822), iv.

¹⁰⁷ Richardson, 172.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *Death's Jest Book* (London: William Pickering, 1850), 6. All act, scene, and line numbers for verse portions also come from this edition.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁰ Richardson, 171.

¹¹¹ Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. Edmund Gosse (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), 262.

CHAPTER TWO

Summoning Siddons: Joanna Baillie's Play for the Stage

One of the earlier Romantic writers who has been wrongfully labeled a closet dramatist is Joanna Baillie. During her long life from 1762 to 1851, the prolific Scottish playwright earned the admiration of Lord Byron and the friendship of Walter Scott, and as we will see in the next chapter, also influenced Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Despite Baillie's own contention that she wrote for the stage, some critics today continue to identify her with the closet, even when discussing *De Monfort*, Baillie's most successfully produced work. For instance, in discussing the 1800 premiere of *De Monfort*, Jeffrey Kahan claims the play "had been written as a closet drama" and only revised with performance in mind.¹ From the beginning, however, Baillie was writing not just for performance, but for performance by the greatest actress of her day: Sarah Siddons.

Siddons, who lived from 1755 to 1831, had a disastrous premiere at the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane, but after spending years honing her acting skills in Bath, she returned triumphantly to the London stage in 1782 and went on to become the foremost performer of her generation. Her life story was told during the nineteenth century by the biographers Thomas Campbell and James Boaden as well as by a manuscript she wrote providing her own account of her career.² More recent studies of her life and work have been undertaken by Roger Manvell and Judith Pascoe.³ Though no longer a household name, Siddons's memory continued to influence theatre artists long after her death. Writing in the twentieth century, the playwright Thornton Wilder speculated that if William Shakespeare had "lived to see what the genius of Sarah Siddons could

pour into" the sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth* "even he might have exclaimed, 'I never knew I wrote so well!'"⁴ This quote is all the more remarkable when we consider that Wilder was not born until 1897, almost 70 years after Siddons's death. Not only had he never seen her perform, but he is unlikely to have ever even met someone who had seen her perform, yet he still held her up as a paragon of acting.

Today, Sarah Siddons is largely associated with the plays of Shakespeare, mainly because of her triumphs as Lady Macbeth. The Arden Shakespeare series on Great Shakespeareans enshrines her name with those of David Garrick, John Philip Kemble, and Edmund Kean.⁵ Russ McDonald's book *Look to the Lady* sees Siddons as the start of a long line of great Shakespearean actresses, including Ellen Terry and Judi Dench. However, McDonald admits that with the exception of Lady Macbeth, Siddons's "most beloved parts were not Shakespearean, but rather the heroines of contemporary dramas."⁶ He notes her appearances in Garrick's adaptation of Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, as well Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter* and Nicholas Rowe's plays *Jane Shore* and *The Fair Penitent*. Just as important, however, was Siddons's appearances in entirely new works in which she originated roles for the stage.

During the craze for German dramas by August von Kotzebue, Siddons appeared in some of the first English adaptations of Kotzebue's work. At Drury Lane, she appeared in both *The Stranger* and *Pizarro*, inspiring adapters to considerably rewrite the parts she played to suit her particular talents and public image. When Siddons became the first woman in England to play Mrs. Haller, the penitent adulteress in *The Stranger*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan rewrote a good deal of Benjamin Thompson's translation, and it is possible he had a role in softening the character for Siddons, making Mrs. Haller more sympathetic to British audiences.⁷ Whatever Sheridan's role in rewriting *The Stranger*, it is abundantly clear he greatly altered the part of

Elvira that Siddons played in Sheridan's own Kotzebue adaptation *Pizarro*. Knowing the part would be played by a grand and imminently respectable actress, Sheridan changed Elvira from an opportunistic hero-worshipper to a penitent wronged woman who grandly reprimands the Spanish forces.⁸ It was this bold reprimand that the artist and printmaker Robert Dighton chose to portray in a popular print of Siddons issued in 1799, the same year *Pizarro* premiered at Drury Lane.⁹ As a star performer, Siddons left her mark on Kotzebue's plays even if she never suggested a line change to the adapters.

The fact was, Siddons was a valuable commodity, whether a theatre was reviving classics, adapting German dramas, or bringing forth new plays by British authors. She featured prominently in the premieres of Fanny Burney's ill-fated tragedy *Edwy and Elgiva* in 1795 and in Sophia Lee's more successful *Almeyda, Queen of Granada* the following year.¹⁰ As the taste for the Gothic intensified, she appeared in James Boaden's *Aurelio and Miranda* and T.S. Whalley's *The Castle of Montval* in 1799.¹¹ Then in 1800, Siddons starred in the premiere of the new tragedy *Adelaide* by the poet laureate, Henry James Pye.¹² Later that year, she created the role of Helena in William Godwin's *Antonio, or the Soldier's Return*.¹³ Though not all of these new works proved successful, Siddons lent her star power to plays unlikely to be given a fair hearing—or even to be produced at all—were it not for the presence of a prominent actor. Baillie would have known this, and a close examination of *De Monfort* shows that she wrote the play with Siddons specifically in mind, a shrewd strategy for an unknown playwright who needed the aid of a great performer in order to get produced.

Writing about Siddons in his *Reminiscences*, the actor William Charles Macready did not quote Shakespeare or Thomas Otway, but rather Baillie's *De Monfort*. Baillie's description of

Jane De Monfort, the part Siddons originated, seems tailor-made for the actress. Macready, apparently quoting from memory, records these lines:

So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,
I shrank at first in awe; but when she smiled,
For so she did to see me thus abashed,
Methought I could have compassed sea and land
To do her bidding.¹⁴

Macready's recollection of the lines shows the admiration the theatrical world had for Siddons, but also reflects her central role in generating and shaping new work. It was not just fellow actors, but playwrights who sought to "do her bidding" if they wished to have their work staged.

Nor was Macready the only one to see a connection between Siddons and *De Monfort*. In her preface to the play for the Longman series on British drama, the playwright and actress Elizabeth Inchbald noted that Baillie had "bestowed some of her best poetic descriptions" upon the part Siddons ultimately played.¹⁵ Referring to the same passage that Macready quotes, Inchbald, makes the connection between the character and Siddons explicit. She argues that Baillie from the "first account of the 'queenly' stranger, has given such a striking resemblance of both the person and mien of Mrs. Siddons, that it would almost raise a suspicion she was, at the time of writing, designed for the representation of this noble female."¹⁶ As I will argue later, Inchbald understates the case. Baillie carefully tailored the role to craft a part ideally suited to Siddons, even if the author was unsure whether or not she would ever be able to get her favorite actress to play it.

Unfortunately, Siddons's pivotal role in shaping *De Monfort*—inspiring Baillie, bringing the play to the stage, and then reshaping it for performance—gets lost when scholars insist on referring to the piece as a closet drama. True, Baillie tended to publish her plays before they

were performed, but the same could be said of Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, and many other writers rarely referred to as closet dramatists. *De Monfort*, with a major female character so closely aligned with the public persona of Siddons, was a clear attempt by Baillie to "make a play" for the stage, so to speak, to get her own work out of the closet and onto the boards. Moreover, the strategy worked, winning over a prominent actress who had the ability to champion a new work by a fellow woman. The 1800 premiere of *De Monfort* marked a collaboration between the most respected dramatist of her era with the most famous actress of the day.

Unfortunately, the designation of "closet drama" has continued to cling to *De Monfort* and the rest of Baillie's plays. Like a scarlet letter, the closet label might have led future generations of theatre producers to shun Baillie's works. Since the author's death in 1851, there have been no major revivals of her plays. Her works disappeared from the boards in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and it has only been more recently that a few minor stagings have occurred, including a professionally staged reading of *De Monfort* by the Red Bull Theatre Company in 2014. With a lack of interest from theatres, literary historians have stepped in, rescuing Baillie from oblivion by drawing attention to her dramas and seizing upon their alleged closeted nature as proof of Baillie's outsider status. As we shall see, however, this interpretation of Baillie as a radical outsider writing texts coded with closeted messages ("closeted" even in the more modern sexual connotation of the term) flies in the face not only of how the respectable Tory spinster lived her life, but also of what she herself wrote about her work. Only by reclaiming *De Monfort* for what it is, a star vehicle designed to capitalize on the celebrity aura of Siddons, can we truly appreciate what Baillie was trying to accomplish.

Passionate Playwriting

Baillie first began publishing her dramas in 1798 in an anonymous volume titled *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted To Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind, Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*. Over the next 14 years, she published two more volumes of this series, which has come to be known as the *Plays on the Passions*. Even before the publication of the initial volume, however, Baillie expressed concerns over the possibility of production. On 20 December 1796, she sent a copy of her tragedy *De Monfort* to Sir Thomas Lawrence, a painter with connections to the theatre who also had a considerable reputation for literary judgment. In a letter accompanying her script, Baillie asked Lawrence for his opinion, inquiring "how it strikes you as a play intended for representation."¹⁷

Immediately after asking about the play's fitness for the theatre, however, Baillie starts backpedaling, adding in the letter, "I never expect to have any of my Plays produced upon the stage in my lifetime, yet I should like to leave them behind me in a state to be so produced when circumstances may be more favourable for it."¹⁸ Clearly, production was important to Baillie, even if she should be unable to secure the staging of her plays during her lifetime. There might be some false modesty here, since *De Monfort* was indeed produced in 1800 at Drury Lane, featuring two of the finest British actors alive, Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble. Baillie might not have been able to foresee such a production in 1796, but she might have known that Lawrence was on close terms with both Siddons and Kemble, as well as a number of other actors. Not only had Siddons posed for Lawrence, but in the 1790s the artist became emotionally involved with two of Siddons's daughters.¹⁹

Even if Baillie was not up on all the latest gossip, she surely knew that Lawrence was connected to the theatrical world. In fact, the painting that had catapulted the artist to fame in

1790 was his portrait of the actress Elizabeth Farren.²⁰ Though Baillie protested she did not expect to see her play produced, she sent it to a man who traveled in the same celebrity circles as the top performers of the day. The very act of writing *Lawrence* might have been an attempt at getting the piece known by someone who had the power of referring her work to important figures at London's theatres. In any case, she had sent her play to a man at the heart of celebrity image-making, an artist whose very profession involved shaping the public personas of star actors.

Though Baillie does not seem to have met Siddons at the time she wrote *De Monfort*, she knew her work and had developed what Chris Rojek would call a "para-social" relationship with the performer. According to Rojek, a para-social interaction "is a form of second-order intimacy, since it derives from representations of the person rather than actual physical contact."²¹ Rojek is most interested in "mass-media information, including fanzines, press stories, TV documentaries" and other popular forms of communication in recent decades.²² The eighteenth century, though, was saturated with images and publicity focused on London actors, and most especially on the unparalleled phenomenon of Sarah Siddons. The proliferation of images and information became intensified throughout the eighteenth century due to the rise of the "new media" of the era—cheaply available newspapers, pamphlets, cartoons, prints, and even three-dimensional replications of actors in affordable porcelain miniatures.

In the 1790s, Sarah Siddons was a favorite topic of the popular press. David Worrall has observed that as newspapers reported on Siddons with greater frequency, she became a canny handler of her own public relations.²³ She had been ill for a long time (as well as disputing with Drury Lane's management) when she made a return to the stage at the end of 1790, but the papers quickly flocked to her as she appeared again on the boards.²⁴ The *Public Advertiser*

claimed her absence of more than two years only increased the audience's desire for her, as "absence, like a long interval between a meal, serves but to sharpen the appetite."²⁵

Unfortunately, the celebrations were a bit premature, as a relapse kept Siddons off of the stage for much of 1791. However, when she appeared at the Haymarket Theatre as Isabella in *The Fatal Marriage* at the beginning of 1792, another paper found "Mrs. Siddons, though much thinner than when we last saw her, is not a worse figure, and perhaps never acted this part with more exquisite taste, better judgment or greater effect."²⁶

The following year, Siddons appeared in *The Rival Sisters*, a tragedy by Arthur Murphy. Though Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter* had become a staple of the eighteenth-century stage, offering Siddons one of her most famous roles, *The Rival Sisters* had never before been performed, in spite of being published with Murphy's collected works the previous decade. Murphy himself was troubled that the piece might be perceived as a closet drama, and wrote in the preface to the play that publication without performance might "excite a prejudice not easy to be surmounted."²⁷ Fortunately, *The Star* commented that the play "was rendered extremely interesting by the performance, and prepared for exhibition in a manner that induces us to wish for its repetition."²⁸ Siddons's celebrity was able to help overcome prejudice against a published play that could otherwise have been considered a mere closet drama. Baillie might well have taken note.

The Rival Sisters made its premiere at the Haymarket, for the simple reason that the old theatre at Drury Lane had been demolished in 1791. The demolition occurred in part because the old building had been deemed unsafe, and in part to make way for a massive new playhouse capable of holding thousands of spectators.²⁹ When the new building opened in 1794, the critics complained that its cavernous dimensions did not allow Siddons to evoke the full effects of her

acting. *The St. James's Chronicle* railed against the new edifice, claiming Siddons's "countenance had no expression, and the variations of her attitudes had no effect, without the use of a very good Opera-glass."³⁰ The management of the new theatre, the *Chronicle* sarcastically suggested, "should furnish all the parts of it which are most distant from the Stage, with ear-trumpets and telegraphs."³¹ In the eighteenth century, the systems of optical telegraphs then in existence would have been even more ridiculous inside a theatre than the electric telegraphs more commonly envisioned by readers today.³² Clearly, not everyone was favorably impressed by the size of the new theatre.

Baillie took note of the challenges created by larger playhouses. Later, when writing the preface to the third volume of *Plays on the Passions*, she commented on the detrimental effects these larger playhouses had on the drama. She begins her discussion of the present state of the theatre by stating unequivocally that she wanted her plays to be performed, writing that "[t]he Series of Plays was originally published in the hope that some of the pieces it contains, although first given to the Public from the press, might in time make their way to the stage, and there be received and supported with some degree of public favour."³³ However, she goes on to complain that "the present situation of dramatic affairs is greatly against every hope of this kind."³⁴ This is because a playwright's words "are not heard, or heard but imperfectly by two thirds of the audience, while the finer and more pleasing traits of the acting are by a still greater proportion lost altogether."³⁵

Baillie goes to great lengths to defend the public, arguing the contemporary taste for spectacle is merely the result of a physical theatre space more conducive to scenic effect than to subtle acting. Much of the preface to the third volume of *Plays on the Passions* is taken up with an attack on the size of the theatres in London and suggestions for technical improvements in the

future. She claims that while theatres continue to be so large, "it is a vain thing to complain either of want of taste in the Public, or want of inclination in Managers to bring forward new pieces of merit."³⁶ She points out that Siddons and other actors of the era "have been brought up in their youth in small theatres, where they were encouraged to enter thoroughly into the characters they represented."³⁷ Such full embodiment of a character cannot happen in a natural fashion when facial expressions must be legible from the back row of a mammoth theatre, Baillie argues. Actresses, she claims, are even more negatively affected by the large theatres, since "the features and voice of a woman, being naturally more delicate than those of a man," an actress "must suffer in proportion from the defects of a large theatre."³⁸

Though the preface to the third volume of the *Plays on the Passions* did not come out until twelve years after *De Monfort's* premiere, it clearly shows an author fully engaged with the realm of the theatre. Such was Baillie's interest in the practical matters of the stage, that she included a lengthy note at the end of the preface, criticizing current lighting practices and proposing a specific innovation to achieve more natural effects. Rather than lighting actors from footlights, which tend to cast unnatural shadows, Baillie proposed "bringing forward the roof of the stage as far as its boards or floor, and placing a row of lamps with reflectors along the inside of the wooden front-piece."³⁹ This, she suggested, could create a more natural light, coming from above, as it normally does. Baillie's criticism of current lighting practices and defense of the practicality of her own proposed innovation goes on for two and a half pages, hardly something one would expect from a closet dramatist uninterested in the stage.

In the 1790s, audiences were still becoming accustomed to the larger theatres, and in fact Drury Lane did not reach its current size until it was once again rebuilt and reopened in 1812, the same year as Baillie's preface to the third volume. When she wrote *De Monfort*, Baillie had other

concerns in mind, and would have been much more familiar with the earlier, more intimate theatres of the past. Since Baillie sent *De Monfort* to Lawrence at the end of 1796, she likely composed the play earlier that year. In the spring of 1796, Siddons appeared in a play at Drury Lane that could not have escaped Baillie's attention, and may well have influenced the composition of *De Monfort*. The play was Sophia Lee's *Almeyda*, a tragedy written by a woman and containing a powerful female role that attracted the interest of the greatest actress of the day.

Like the eventual production of *De Monfort*, *Almeyda* achieved only mixed success. While it was admired by many critics, it ran for only five nights, three fewer than the original staging of *De Monfort*. Still, *The Morning Post and Fashionable World* thought that Lee had succeeded in the "arduous task" of writing a tragedy, where so many others had failed.⁴⁰ The anonymous reviewer attributed the play's success (such as it was) not to Lee alone, but to Siddons as well. Lee, the reviewer wrote, was not only "exceedingly fortunate in having the assistance of the talents of Mrs. Siddons," but had been wise in crafting a role that made ample use of those talents.⁴¹ The character in which Siddons appeared, the reviewer claimed, "was well calculated to bring forth her varied powers."⁴²

Siddons's Celebrity Image Making

Reading accounts of Siddons's performance, particularly in the works of other female authors with literary ambition like herself, might have inspired Baillie to craft the role of Jane De Monfort specifically for Siddons. However, print culture was not the only factor in spreading the celebrity of Siddons. In recent years, art historians have stressed the role of portraiture in spreading images not just of kings and queens, but of celebrities, including the actors who played kings and queens on stage. Art historian Robyn Asleson has drawn particular attention to the

portraits of Siddons. As Asleson has shown, not only did painters like Thomas Lawrence, Joshua Reynolds, and Thomas Gainsborough use images of Siddons to advance their own careers, Siddons herself used her portraits as a way of "orchestrating her own public image."⁴³

Portraits of Siddons were regularly on view at the Royal Academy, but by the 1790s galleries were not the only way of disseminating images of iconic paintings. Advances in technology had made mezzotints and other forms of printmaking more practical and affordable for the middle classes. It was the mezzotint, in particular, that allowed new levels of shading that could approach the look and feel of a painted work.⁴⁴ Though mezzotints, in their crudest form, go back to the seventeenth century, the process of creating them reached a new degree of excellence in England during the period from 1770 to 1810.⁴⁵ Thus, at precisely the time Siddons was reaching the height of her fame, British printmakers were perfecting their ability to reproduce paintings for a broader market.

Mezzotints were fundamentally different from other types of prints, achieving a quality not previously known.⁴⁶ With this refinement of the printmaking process, shrewd artists could now have mezzotints made of their portraits both to sell and as a form of advertisement. Even if an artist made little or no money off of the mezzotints, these high-quality reproductions could help painters get commissions in the future. Similarly, actors could use mezzotints to promote their own celebrity and secure a reputation. Siddons "took an active interest" in the production of prints based on her portraits, even going so far as to suggest specific printmaking processes and to advocate for individual engravers.⁴⁷ As we shall later see, in some cases she even began discussing the engravings while work on the portrait had scarcely begun.

The proliferation of prints in the late eighteenth century was a part of a growing consumer culture that—in the words of the media theorist Stuart Ewan—tends to "navigate the

world, skin it of its visible images, and market those images inexpensively to people."⁴⁸ Ewan is mainly interested in contemporary consumer culture, but the phenomenon he describes goes back centuries. He borrows the concept of skinning images from an 1859 essay on photography by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Even before the advent of the photograph, however, the proliferation of visual images had already begun. Mezzotints were out of reach for the poorest theatre fans, yet for the middle class they gave an opportunity to mimic oil painting and other luxury goods enjoyed by the aristocracy. As Ewan writes of the middle classes, "the acquisition of *style* represented a symbolic leap from the constraints of mere subsistence."⁴⁹

Like many of her middle-class enthusiasts, Siddons had struggled to achieve a life consisting of more than mere subsistence. After her initial failure at Drury Lane, she was forced to spend years at the provincial theatre in Bath, refining her acting and honing her skills. When she returned to Drury Lane to try to launch her London career a second time in 1782, she knew enough to take full advantage of the burgeoning visual culture industry and decided to pose for a portrait that could reinforce her public image. She turned to Thomas Beach, who had studied with Sir Joshua Reynolds prior to gaining a reputation in Bath.⁵⁰ Beach had already painted a fine portrait of the actress reading when he embarked on a painting of Siddons as the embodiment of Melancholy. The theme of the painting squared perfectly with Siddons's desire to project the image of a tragic actress capable of emotionally moving her audience.

The timing of the portrait was even more fortuitous. On 10 October 1782, Siddons made her first appearance on the London stage since her long sojourn in Bath. The very next day Beach had the mezzotints of his painting published.⁵¹ Fans who saw Siddons's spectacular debut could almost immediately go out and buy an image of the actress who had so impressed them. Not only that, but Beach exhibited the painting in London the following spring at the Society of

Artists. Just as the star actress helped Beach to sell images, the images helped perpetuate the fame of the rising actress.

Ideally, however, performers wanted to disseminate images of themselves not as allegorical figures but in the roles in which they could be seen on stage. The media critic Richard Dyer claims that the performances of film stars are frequently understood to reveal something significant about the actor's personality.⁵² Laura Engel has noted a similar phenomenon in the eighteenth century, when audiences sometimes blurred the lines between characters and actors. With Siddons in particular, audiences "had difficulty making the distinction between her identities on stage and off stage."⁵³ According to Engel, Siddons used this close association between her characters and herself to create a celebrity persona that "was the result of carefully crafted visual strategies on stage, on canvas, and in print."⁵⁴

Siddons had returned to the London stage as Isabella in Garrick's adaptation of *The Fatal Marriage*, a role that she later recalled was "strongly recommended" for her by those who had seen her perform the part in Bath.⁵⁵ The following May, William Hamilton (who was soon to become an associate member of the Royal Academy) completed a painting of Siddons as Isabella and promptly sold it for £150. For weeks after the sale, Hamilton kept the painting in his studio, advertising in the newspapers that the public could come and inspect the portrait, and if they wished, subscribe to a new mezzotint already in the works.⁵⁶ Siddons was now appearing as Isabella not just on stage at Drury Lane, but in the homes of people who bought prints featuring her in the role. With these mezzotints, her image could appear not just in the manor house of a great aristocrat, but in the far humbler dwellings of middle-class theatre goers.

Almost as famous as her Isabella role was Siddons's performance as Euphrasia in Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter*. Hamilton painted her in this role as well, but exhibited the

painting prior to Siddons's return to London and subsequent rise to stardom.⁵⁷ The huge painting, which measures six-by-nine feet, attracted little attention and no prospective buyers. After Siddons returned to London and became famous in the role, however, Hamilton announced that the king and queen themselves had seen the portrait and greatly approved.⁵⁸ The gambit worked, and rather than sell the painting, Hamilton kept it himself to show visitors. Instead, he sold numerous small copies and commissioned two editions of mezzotints.⁵⁹ Again, Siddons's image was circulating widely among the middle class.

Euphrasia was a very different role from Isabella. In *The Fatal Marriage*, Siddons was praised for her display of sorrow, while in *The Grecian Daughter* she made a name for herself with bold heroics.⁶⁰ As Siddons became more famous for Euphrasia, numerous artists requested to paint her in that character. Knowing the value of the publicity such a portrait could bring, she took time out from her increasingly busy schedule to pose for them. One of those artists was Robert Edge Pine, who had an engraving of his portrait of Siddons printed in the newspaper, with an invitation to the public to come see the original painting.⁶¹ Unlike the passive images of Siddons as Melancholy and Isabella, the portraits of Siddons as Euphrasia show her in exciting, active poses, capturing the feel of a theatrical performance. Pine's portrait in particular, with a dagger-wielding Euphrasia having just struck down a vicious tyrant, emphasizes Siddons's versatility as an actress, showing her capable of playing courageous freedom fighters as well as lachrymose widows. As the son of an engraver, Pine was particularly aware of the importance of reproductions, and in fact the painting is no longer extant, known to us today only by the engraving he left behind.⁶²

The most famous portrait of Siddons was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, depicting her as the tragic muse. Soon after Reynolds began the painting, Siddons was already making

suggestions about the eventual engraving, which she later distributed to friends and admirers.⁶³

Thus, her plan to use the publicity from the painting began while the portrait was still in its initial stages of creation. Her involvement with Reynolds's image-making did not end there, either.

According to the actress's own account, Reynolds wanted to add more color to the face of the painting, but she convinced him not to do so, in order to preserve "that tone of complexion so exquisitely accordant with the chilling and deeply concentrated musing of Pale Melancholy."⁶⁴

Siddons was also concerned about the longevity of the painting. Some of the earlier portraits by Reynolds had already begun to deteriorate, so she "was delighted" he had taken pains so "the colours would remain unfaded as long as the Canvass would hold them together."⁶⁵

Siddons records that the painter then added: "And to confirm my opinion, here is my name, for I have resolved to go down to posterity upon the hem of *your* Garment."⁶⁶ Indeed, Reynolds's signature in the painting appears on the border of the costume Siddons is wearing. In a 1789 copy Reynolds made of the painting, he again placed his signature on the same spot near the hem.⁶⁷

When the portrait was completed, Reynolds put it up for sale for the massive price of 1,000 guineas. The ridiculously high price only whetted the public's appetite for copies and engravings, which again circulated widely. These engravings solidified Siddons's reputation as the muse of tragedy. In 1785, in a revival of Garrick's tribute to Shakespeare known as *The Jubilee*, Siddons recreated a live version of the painting as a *tableau vivant* inside the theatre.⁶⁸ Just as prints and paintings imitated performances in the theatre, a theatrical performance was imitating the prints and paintings now so widely known to the public.

Theatre historians have frequently looked at paintings in studying the celebrity status of actors, from Anne Bracegirdle to David Garrick to Siddons's contemporaries like Dorothea

Jordan. However, technological innovations in the eighteenth century made it easier to reproduce more than just paintings. In addition to the advances in printmaking technology, new developments in the manufacture of ceramics enabled the mass production of porcelain miniatures, and middle-class theatre fans could now buy three-dimensional replicas of the performers they saw on stage. By the middle of the century, collectors could purchase miniatures of Kitty Clive and Peg Woffington, and when Siddons made a splash as Lady Macbeth, Staffordshire figurines predictably appeared, showing her in that very role.⁶⁹ These figurines were pieces of art, not mere toys. Young fans could not play with them as they could, say, a twentieth-century plastic action figure of Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia. For that they would need one of the 130 Wedgwood chess sets sold between 1785 and 1795 that featured Sarah Siddons as the queen.⁷⁰ The commodification of celebrity into consumer goods—a phenomenon with which we are so familiar today—had already begun.

As Heather McPherson has effectively argued, the age of mechanical reproduction was well underway long before Walter Benjamin began to theorize about it. Rather than diminishing the aura of a performer, she argues, these reproductions "enhanced and reified the public image of the actor."⁷¹ This certainly seems to be true of Siddons. Images of the actress, whether paintings, prints, or miniatures, did not take away from her celebrity aura. Instead, they reinforced her public persona, reminding viewers of the powerful portrayals she exhibited on the stage.

It should not be surprising that at the dawn of the Romantic era Siddons's art should be the subject of other works of art. One of the hallmarks of the Romantic movement was the use of ekphrasis, the artful description of another piece of art. Ekphrastic poetry, such as John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Percy Shelley's "On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci in the

Florentine Gallery," became an important genre of the early nineteenth century. Siddons, too, inspired ekphrastic poems attempting to convey what her performances looked like and how they impacted their audiences. Most of these poems were relatively short, but one, Thomas Young's *The Siddoniad*, goes on for more than 20 pages.

Young's poem, published in Dublin in 1784, makes frequent use of conventional poetic tropes, such as "Elysium's grove" (7) and "air ambrosial" (9).⁷² Still, it sincerely attempts to recreate for the reader the experience of seeing a live performance by Sarah Siddons. In describing Siddons as Jane Shore, Young notes that "Such lightning flashes from her angry eyes; / Such powerful accents, from her bosom rise; / Warm sympathy asserts in loud applause, / The Actress' merit—and the orphan's cause" (102-105). Evoking the visual image of the performer on stage, Young links together Siddons's skill as an actress with the upstanding righteousness she represents to her audience. In addition to applauding the artistic "merit" of the performer, the audience also applauds the principles she enshrines, including the defense of a wronged orphan. (In the case of *Jane Shore*, this means standing up for the two young princes against the unjust tyrant Gloucester.) Even when she plays characters who are undignified, Young maintains that Siddons "dignifies her state in private sphere, / The wife unblemish'd, and the mother dear" (119-120). For Young, Siddons is beyond reproach, both on the stage and in her private life.

We cannot know for certain if Baillie read *The Siddoniad*, just as we do not know for sure if she owned porcelain miniatures of Siddons or used an image of the actress to checkmate an opponent. We do not know if she decorated her home with prints of Siddons (as Lord Byron did) or if she scanned the newspapers for accounts of the star performer's acting. What should be abundantly clear, however, is that Baillie could not have avoided public images of Siddons, just as a would-be screenwriter today cannot pass a newsstand or ride a New York City subway

without being confronted with images of the latest stars. Furthermore, just as the airbrushed photographs of Hollywood celebrities are carefully constructed to project a desired image, the images of Siddons projected the public persona she so fiercely cultivated. Living in an age of "Siddonsmania," Baillie was quite familiar with the actress's public image, and she knew her audience would be familiar with that image as well.

Sarah Siddons as Jane De Monfort

Understanding that Baillie was inundated with images of Siddons when she wrote her plays, let us now return to the passage Macready quoted when recalling his memories of the great actress. In the opening scene of Act II in *De Monfort*, a page enters, announcing a lady in the hall. When asked what she looks like, he describes her as:

So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,
I shrank at first in awe; but when she smil'd,
For so she did to see me thus abash'd,
Methought I could have compass'd sea and land
To do her bidding.

(2.1.18-22)⁷³

Macready's quotation, while essentially accurate, omits the contractions of "smil'd," "abash'd," and "compass'd." Baillie likely included these contractions following conventions of earlier poets who wanted to make sure an actor (in this case, the boy playing the page) did not throw off the meter by adding an extra syllable. Since Baillie's spelling in this passage remained consistent throughout numerous printings, including the 1851 edition of her complete works, it is reasonable to assume Macready was quoting from memory, but with the accuracy of a performer who knows by heart not only his own lines, but the lines of a minor character like the page as well.

The image presented in the passage of someone "queenly," "commanding," and "noble," corresponds directly with the public persona of Siddons. Also, the page's confession that he "shrank at first in awe" mirrors the numerous accounts of audience members going into hysterics and even fainting at her performances. However, the comparisons do not end there. When the page is asked if the lady is young or old, he responds: "Neither, if right I guess, but she is fair; / For time hath laid his hand so gently on her, / As he too had been aw'd" (2.1.23-25). When Baillie sent this play to Thomas Lawrence (whom it should be remembered was an intimate acquaintance of the actress), Siddons was 41. The play was not published until two years later, and Siddons was 44 by the time she acted the role of Jane De Monfort, the mysterious woman whose arrival is announced by the page. Knowing that Siddons was a mature woman and not some blushing ingénue, Baillie writes a flattering description of the middle-aged actress. Unable to call her young but refusing to call her old, the page describes a woman of Siddons's years, but does so in the most diplomatic manner possible.

However, there was no middle ground when it came to Siddons's height. The actress's imposing stature was well known. As her early biographer James Boaden put it, "The commanding height and powerful action of her figure, though always feminine, seemed to tower beyond her sex."⁷⁴ However, other authorities have pointed out that while Siddons seemed tall, she was in reality not much taller than the average woman.⁷⁵ Consequently, when the page is asked if the lady in question is large in stature, he replies: "So stately and so graceful is her form, / I thought at first her stature was gigantick, / But on a near approach I found, in truth, / She scarcely does surpass the middle size" (2.2.27-30). Again, not only does the physical appearance of the character match Siddons, but the reaction of the page mirrors the reactions audiences had

to that appearance. As Thomas Campbell (another early biographer of the actress) put it, the passage presents "a perfect picture of Mrs. Siddons."⁷⁶

After hearing the description, Count Freberg remarks that the woman must either be "an apparition" (2.2.40) or Jane De Monfort. There is only one person in the world who could have matched that description. In the fictional world, that woman is Jane De Monfort, but in the theatrical world, the description could have been of no one other than Sarah Siddons. The speech prepares the audience for the entrance of a famed actress, and as Macready proved, the speech later became associated not just with the character, but with Siddons herself. Though Baillie had not yet met Siddons at the time she wrote those lines, she was reaching out to her across the gulf that separated the performer from her audience. This para-social relationship, as Rojek would call it, meant Baillie could not directly ask Siddons to be in her play. Instead, she could only make her request through her writing, first sent to one of Siddons's friends and then later published.

The request, however, seems clear. By creating a character in the unmistakable image of Sarah Siddons, Baillie was offering a part to the most prominent actress in the country. Baillie likely did this not just because she admired Siddons's work, but also because she knew the play could not succeed—and probably would not even be staged—without star performers. As we have seen, Siddons's participation was vital for the success of many new plays in the 1790s. By tailoring a major role to match the exact description of Siddons, Baillie was pursuing the most likely avenue available for her to get a production at Drury Lane.

Baillie did not confine her efforts to a single descriptive passage, either. *De Monfort* provides excellent roles both for Siddons and for her brother, John Kemble. Siddons and Kemble had frequently appeared together as a married couple (*Macbeth*), as in-laws (*King John*), as

mother and son (*Coriolanus*), and as rivals for power (*The Grecian Daughter*). Baillie's play provided them with an opportunity to appear in the same relationship they had in real life. Not only might this appeal to the performers, but it might make the play more affecting for the audience as well. Seeing real-life siblings play a sister and brother on stage could give the audience a chance to see both the characters and the actors at the same time. The audience would be "ghosting," as Marvin Carlson puts it, experiencing both perceptions at the same time as a way to enhance the performance.⁷⁷

Long before Carlson described the process of ghosting, however, Siddons was using the technique to affect her audiences. When she made her celebrated return to the London theatre scene in 1782, she famously appeared on stage with her real-life son Henry playing the son of her character, Isabella. This strategy succeeded not just by giving the audience the pleasure of seeing a real-life mother and son, but also by allowing the audience to participate vicariously in the private life of a public figure.⁷⁸ When Henry burst out sobbing during a rehearsal of the piece, Sheridan eagerly passed that information on to the press, increasing public excitement still more.⁷⁹ This theatrical coup of using real-life mother and son was not quickly forgotten, in part because it was memorialized by Hamilton's previously discussed portrait of Siddons as Isabella, which included Henry playing Isabella's son. The official title of that painting, reproduced in numerous prints and disseminated across the country, was *Mrs. Siddons and Her Son in the Tragedy of Isabella*. As the title indicates, viewers were expected to see not just the characters, but the related actors as well. Long after Henry had grown and the performance was but a memory, the widely circulated image reminded audience members of the power Siddons had wielded by bringing her own son on stage.

Thus the idea of having Siddons play opposite another real-life relative, with the same relationship reproduced on stage with fictional characters, was hardly far-fetched. Knowing that Siddons had successfully used this tactic in the past, Baillie presented the actress with a chance for a similar theatrical coup. In her play, when Jane De Monfort at last appears on stage, Count Freberg and his wife apologize for keeping such a distinguished personage (Jane... or perhaps Siddons herself) waiting. The gracious Jane tells them there is no need to apologize, and instead of asking after a lover or child, says she "came in quest of a dear truant friend" (2.1.55). Her lines emphasize the sororal nature of her bond to De Monfort:

I am no doting mistress,
 No fond distracted wife, who must forthwith
 Rush to his arms and weep. I am his sister:
 The eldest daughter of his father's house:
 Calm and unwearied is my love for him;
 And having found him, patiently I'll wait...
 (2.1.83-88)

Like Jane, Sarah was the eldest daughter in the Kemble family. The passage thus goes out of the way to emphasize how the relationship of the characters on stage mirrors the relationship between Siddons and her real-life brother.

Baillie closely prepares the audience for the scene where the two siblings meet, and when that meeting does come, she makes sure to give her characters as dramatic a reunion as possible. Jane, unsure of how to reveal her presence to her brother, wears a thick veil to disguise her features. When she speaks to her brother, she tells him of her estrangement from a brother who was her "cradle's mate" and "infant playfellow" (2.1.207). Her brother, in turn, confesses his own estrangement from a "dear sister" who is of "noble virtuous worth" (2.1.225-26). The two sibling narratives are doubled onstage since they are related by characters who actually are siblings to

one another. Having the parts performed by a real-life sister and brother would add another layer of doubling, providing an ideal situation for Siddons to repeat the same type of sensation she created when appearing onstage with her son.

When Jane De Monfort finally reveals her identity, Baillie provides the audience with a model for their emotional reaction. In the final stage direction of the scene, she describes how Jane, "looking expressively to him, extends her arms, and he, rushing into them, bursts into tears" (after 2.1.249). Just as audiences wept after seeing Siddons play an emotional scene with her son, they should weep after seeing a similarly doubled scene with her brother. The stage direction not only cues the actors to pull out all of the emotional stops, but by specifying that De Monfort sheds tears, it encourages the audience to give vent to their own emotional reaction. Such a reaction might seem premature for a reunion with a character who has only just appeared for the first time at the beginning of the scene, but it makes perfect sense if the audience's sympathies have already been heightened by seeing a real-life sister and brother in the roles.

Once the play scores this dramatic coup, it never lets up in reminding the audience of the siblings' relationship. In the next scene with the two of them together, Jane speaks of:

The eldest of our valiant father's hopes,
 So sadly orphan'd, side by side we stood,
 Like two young trees, whose boughs, in early strength
 Screen the weak saplings of the rising grove,
 And brave the storm together—

(2.2.22-26)

Later in the scene, when Jane kneels before De Monfort, she cries out, "Alas! my brother!" (2.2.75) again emphasizing their bond. No matter what he might do, Jane claims she never can despise her "gentle brother" (2.2.86). Finally convinced by Jane to reconcile with his enemy the

Marquis Rezenvelt, De Monfort calls her "my life, my pride, my sister" (2.2.183). If we are ever in danger of forgetting the relationship between the two characters, Baillie quickly reminds us.

The rest of the play continues to provide Siddons and Kemble with opportunities to exploit their relationship as siblings to maximal effect. The opening scene of Act III begins with Jane's line "Thanks, gentle brother" (3.1.1) and ends with the dramatic stage direction "Jane and De Monfort look expressively to one another, without speaking, and then Exeunt, severally" (after 3.1.243). In Act V, when Jane meets her brother after he has murdered Rezenvelt, the stage directions call for her to faint. In the following scene, De Monfort resolves himself to the fact that he and his beloved sister "must meet no more" (5.2.39). However, this line is immediately followed by Jane rushing onstage crying out, "My brother, O my brother" (5.2.40). Jane brings comfort to her brother by emphasizing their bond as siblings, saying:

De Monfort, hand in hand we have enjoy'd
 The playful term of infancy together;
 And in the rougher path of ripen'd years
 We've been each other's stay. Dark lowers our fate,
 But nothing, till that latest agony
 Which severs thee from nature, shall unloose
 This fix'd and sacred hold.

(5.2.62-69)

After hearing his sister promise to stay with him until death, De Monfort says it is for her sake that he will meet his end bravely. At the end of the scene, he kisses his sister's hand, calling that act his "proudest office" (5.2.156).

Before she ever appeared in the play, Siddons had made an enormous impact on Baillie's script. The author created a character precisely suited to Siddons's talents while also matching her well-known physical attributes. In addition, the part allowed an actress already famous for exploiting her offstage relationships once again to create a doubling effect for the audience, this

time with an emotional sister-brother relationship that mirrored her appearance opposite a sibling co-star. All of these things should prove beyond any doubt that *De Monfort* was never intended to be a closet drama. Baillie appears to have gone to great lengths to make her play the perfect vehicle for Siddons.

Count Basil, Baillie's tragedy on love published in the same volume with *De Monfort*, also contains a part for Siddons, though the actress never played it. The Countess of Albin is older than Basil's beloved Victoria, but provides the ballast for the play, offering a moral framework for the other characters, just as Jane does for her brother in *De Monfort*. Also, like Jane, she is a woman of a certain age who has not lost her power to enchant young men. One character says to her:

On me your slightest word more pow'r will have,
Most honour'd lady, than a conn'd oration.
Thou art the only one of all thy sex,
Who wearest thy years with such a winning grace,
Thou art the more admir'd the more thou fadst.
(3.3.133-37)

Like the lines of the page in *De Monfort*, this passage seems tailor-made for the middle-aged and still striking Siddons. As Siddons's friend Hester Piozzi observed, few authors of the day wrote parts for more mature women. After reading the anonymously published *Plays on the Passions*, Piozzi rightly guessed that the author was a woman, later commenting that the heroines in both *Count Basil* and *De Monfort* "are Dames Passées, and a man has no notion of mentioning a female after she is five and twenty."⁸⁰

Both of Baillie's first tragedies, then, offered parts for Siddons. Albin was probably not a large enough part to attract the attention of the great actress, but Siddons certainly appreciated the role Baillie had created for her in Jane. In fact, the actress later importuned Baillie, "Make

me some more Jane De Monforts."⁸¹ In 1800, with the reputation of the *Plays on the Passions* riding high, Drury Lane decided to mount *De Monfort* with Siddons and Kemble in the starring roles. Critics who view the play as a closet drama dismiss the stage history of *De Monfort* because it came only after the play was published. Any changes made for performance, they maintain, were the work of actor-managers, and not of the writer. However, Baillie incorporated changes made in performance into later published versions of the text, utilizing stage experience to continue to shape and refine her play.

It was Kemble, rather than Siddons, who was the driving force behind bringing *De Monfort* to the stage.⁸² We cannot know for certain whether or not he consulted Baillie in making changes to the script, but the text Kemble submitted to the censor streamlines much of the action. The first two scenes are combined, cutting a total of 165 lines of verse (nearly 40 percent of the text in those scenes) and introducing three new lines.⁸³ This trimming brings on the character of Jane much more quickly than in the original text, perhaps reflecting a desire to get to the star actress sooner in the play. In the scene where Jane first appears, the theatrical version cuts an additional 15 lines of verse before her entrance, including some of the description of her as a tall, mature woman, like Siddons. Possibly, the theatre felt these lines were no longer needed to invoke Siddons, since the actress herself was appearing on stage.

The text submitted to the censor makes numerous other changes as well, which should not be surprising. Cutting and adapting an author's words were standard practices in the Georgian theatre. What is notable, however, is that Baillie herself later incorporated some of these changes when reissuing her work. In the last year of her life, Baillie compiled a mammoth volume of her collected works which she referred to as her "great monster book."⁸⁴ Though this volume does not include all of the changes made for the Drury Lane production, it does show that Baillie was

paying attention to the alterations made for the stage and incorporating what she felt worked best.

Baillie tended to include in her "monster book" the passages deleted for performance, trusting future generations to decide whether to include them or not in production. She departed from her original version at the end of Act II, though. In the script Drury Lane submitted to the censor, the end of the second act is transposed into the middle of the third, moving Countess Freberg's jealous rumor-mongering about Jane De Monfort to later in the play. In her 1851 collected works, Baillie kept the scene in the same place, though she made it the beginning of Act III rather than the end of Act II. She also rewrote much of the scene, altering the dialogue from earlier editions. In a note on the changes, Baillie said that the scene was "very much altered from what it was in the former editions of the play," and that the amendments were "upon the whole, improvements."⁸⁵

In the 1851 version of the scene, Baillie not only cuts some of the lines omitted in the performance text sent to the censor, but she goes further, cutting the character of the page out of the scene entirely. While some lines cut from the performance script are restored, others are completely rewritten. The beginning of the scene, for instance, adds lines about the countess having a painful headache, showing her in a state of distress that might explain why she chooses to spread rumors. More importantly, Baillie brings Count Freberg into the scene, having him ignore his own wife's request for books until he learns they are intended for Jane De Monfort, at which point he promises to search for them immediately. The count and countess argue bitterly, and the countess pretends to faint, at which point her husband admits he has treated her too roughly.

The overall effect of the rewritten scene is to provide the countess with a stronger motivation for her spreading rumors about Jane De Monfort. The changes are, as Baillie suggests, improvements. Moreover, they are the types of improvements an author is likely to make after seeing a less than perfect production. In the rewritten scene, Baillie exercises her own judgment, incorporating some of the cuts made by the theatre, but also retaining lines she thought could still work well. In addition, she supplies completely new material to better explain a character's actions to the audience.

The crux of the changes Drury Lane made to the play come at the end of Act III. The scoundrel Grimbald, renamed Conrad in the performance text, shows up to beg a favor from De Monfort and falsely complain about being a victim of Rezenvelt's revenge. De Monfort is unsympathetic, until he hears the man has allegedly been wronged by his enemy, at which point he takes the side of the stranger against Rezenvelt. To make matters worse, the stranger tells De Monfort that Rezenvelt has become engaged to Jane. De Monfort hides himself, and when he sees Rezenvelt take Jane's hand, he becomes furious.

In the original version, De Monfort draws his sword and fights with Rezenvelt. In a repetition of an earlier duel we hear about at the beginning of the play, Rezenvelt disarms his opponent but spares his life. The version submitted to the censor cuts Rezenvelt from the scene entirely, allowing De Monfort's imagination alone to work him into a frenzy. However, contemporary accounts show that Rezenvelt did appear in the scene on stage at Drury Lane, and a manuscript copy of the play owned by Siddons shows a reworked version of the original where the two men meet but do not fight.⁸⁶ Though this scene omits the exciting duel, it benefits from having Jane onstage during the confrontation between the two men. Baillie's original text has Jane leave before the swordfight, but in the Siddons manuscript, she is onstage, and it is her

presence that prevents the duel from occurring. Even though the reworked scene does not give Jane any lines, it certainly allows the actress portraying her to react in a dramatic fashion.

The version Baillie published in 1851 is closest to her original text, but she makes a number of alterations that might have been inspired by the production at Drury Lane. Dropping her original choice of the name Grimbald, she has the stranger named Conrad, as he was in the production. Moreover, she trims the previous scene, omitting a song and numerous lines she wrote that were not cut for the Drury Lane production. This speeds the action along to get quickly to the stranger, who is the motivation for the crucial confrontation scene. While in her final version Baillie generally kept lines cut for the production, in this instance she cut lines that even Drury Lane kept in the play. Not every line was precious, and the 1851 version seems aimed at future productions rather than at faithfully recording the play as she wrote it.

Baillie restores the swordfight to the stage, but does not blindly follow her original text for the rest of the scene. In the original version of the play, a servant tells the troubled De Monfort at the end of the scene that Rezenvelt will be travelling alone that night. The evocative passage presages Rezenvelt's coming murder:

He was in haste to go, for night comes on,
 And at the ev'ning hour he must take horse,
 To visit some old friend whose lonely mansion
 Stands a short mile beyond the farther wood;
 And, as he loves to wander thro' those wilds.
 Whilst yet the early moon may light his way,
 He sends his horses round the usual road,
 And crosses it alone.
 I would not walk thro' those wild dens alone
 For all his wealth. For there, as I have heard,
 Foul murders have been done, and ravens scream;
 And things unearthly, stalking thro' the night,
 Have scar'd the lonely trav'ller from his wits.

(3.3.220-32)

The script submitted to the censor keeps this passage intact, but in her collected works, Baillie alters it considerably. In the middle of the passage, she adds new lines about a convent "of holy nuns / Who chaunt this night a requiem to the soul / Of a departed sister."⁸⁷

The reference to a "sister" certainly adds to the sibling motif throughout the play, and the fact that she has "departed" could be another goad to De Monfort, who is worried he will lose Jane in a marriage to Rezenvelt. More importantly, however, the additions to the passage set up the procession of nuns that will appear later in the play. This scene proved to be one of the highlights of the performance. William Capon designed an elaborate set "representing a church of the fourteenth century, with its nave, choir, and side aisles, magnificently decorated, and consisting of seven planes in succession."⁸⁸ In addition, the theatre commissioned new music to be sung by a procession of nuns.⁸⁹

Baillie's modification of the passage shows yet another interaction she had with the staged version at Drury Lane. From a plot perspective, there is no real need to include the information about the nuns. However, Baillie well knew that the convent scenes—and the nuns' procession in particular—would be a high point of the play in performance. Were the play a true closet drama, there would be little need to interrupt the servant's eloquent passage for information about the local nuns. Having learned from the production that the procession of nuns would make a strong impact on the audience, though, Baillie chose to insert the reference to the sisters, priming the audience for what they were about to see and hear.

Another scene repeatedly rewritten is Act V, scene iii in the original text. Baillie's 1798 version has two nuns conversing about how De Monfort, now made a prisoner for his murder of Rezenfelt, is overwhelmed by "Remorse and dark despair" (5.3.16). A priest enters and

announces that the prisoner is dying "From violent agitation of the mind" (5.3.24). He also gives a moving description of Jane De Monfort:

She sits and bears his head upon her lap;
 And like a heaven-inspir'd angel, speaks
 The word of comfort to his troubled soul:
 Then does she wipe the cold drops from his brow,
 With such a tender look of wretchedness,
 It wrings the heart to see her.

(5.3.30-35)

Though the audience does not see this particular moment, they are about to witness Jane's mourning for her dead brother. Like the page's description of Jane at the beginning of Act II, the passage sets the stage for a performance by a grand tragic actress at the height of her powers. Yet again, Baillie is pointing out how the role of Jane De Monfort would be a perfect part for someone like Siddons.

The version submitted to the censor is considerably changed. The two generic nuns are replaced by "Ambrose" and "Agatha" who have a quite different conversation, but the speech by the priest is word-for-word the same as it is in Baillie's original version, with only a few changes in spelling and punctuation.⁹⁰ When Baillie revised the scene for her collected works, she altered it again, this time with two monks conversing at the beginning. The revised final version reintroduces lines from the original that were cut for production, but interestingly, Baillie trims back the priest's speech describing Jane. Thus, she keeps lines cut for the production, and eliminates other lines that were performed but that she later considered extraneous. Though Baillie saw a need to alter the scene, she was not about to let Drury Lane tell her what was best for her play. As an author fully in command of her own work, she took the opinions of theatrical professionals into account, but she applied changes as she herself saw fit.⁹¹

Other productions of *De Monfort* followed the initial run at Drury Lane. Most notably, Edmund Kean revived the play in London in 1821, and the following year appeared as De Monfort in both Bath and Birmingham. Though the prompt copies for Kean's revival of the play are lost, we do know that Baillie revised the piece expressly for him.⁹² Other productions were mounted in New York, Edinburgh, and Philadelphia. Far from being a closet drama, the play was performed throughout the English-speaking world.

Closeted (Mis)interpretations

Unfortunately, the "closet drama" label has continued to shape the way critics think and write about *De Monfort*. This is perhaps most evident with Catherine Burroughs's landmark study of Baillie, *Closet Stages*, first published in 1997. Though Burroughs is perfectly aware of the stage history of *De Monfort*, she continually goes back to the image of the closet to justify emotionally and sexually liberating interpretations of Baillie's plays. These readings, while interesting and sometimes even inspiring, are inconsistent with the image of the conservative spinster Baillie projected for herself. As I shall show, they are also inconsistent with the public persona of Sarah Siddons that Baillie meticulously tried to exploit in *De Monfort*.

Burroughs does not ignore the importance of performance styles on Baillie's plays, but she lumps Siddons together with what she identifies as the "Kemble school" of acting.⁹³ In Burroughs's words, this school "emphasized a series of transforming 'poses' and idealized stage 'pictures' over spontaneity and inspiration."⁹⁴ In spite of the fact that Baillie tailored the role of Jane De Monfort to suit Siddons perfectly, Burroughs claims that the author's dramaturgy "distances itself from the actress's style."⁹⁵ Burroughs's argument goes off course in part because she misinterprets Siddons's style as it would have been seen by Baillie. Instead of viewing

Siddons as the very innovative performer she was in the 1790s, Burroughs compares her unfavorably to actors of the following generation, giving a distorted view of how an author would have interpreted Siddons's style at the close of the eighteenth century.

According to Burroughs, after the second London debut of Siddons in 1782, "a public more interested in the conscious performance of artistry was ready to embrace her highly stylized gestures and speech patterns."⁹⁶ This interpretation overlooks the fact that Siddons was in fact famous for *departing* from stylized, conventional gestures. The most famous instance of her rejecting conventional stage business came in *Macbeth*. In her performance of Lady Macbeth's mad scene, "Siddons differed essentially from every other actress," according to her early biographer, James Boaden.⁹⁷ Setting down the candle conventionally held by the character, Siddons "laded the water from the imaginary ewer over her hands."⁹⁸ As Boaden points out, critics attacked Siddons for departing from precedent on this matter.

In 1785, when Siddons first played Macbeth, she was not seen as the classical model of "highly stylized gestures" but rather as a bold revolutionary. As Russ MacDonald puts it, "Mrs. Siddons threw away the book of rules, and her independence generated considerable excitement and anxiety."⁹⁹ Not only did reviewers comment furiously on this innovation, like so many other of Siddons's theatrical coups, this one was memorialized in paintings and distributed to theatre fans in the form of affordable prints. George Henry Harlow's *Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth* depicts the actress ringing her hands during the sleepwalking scene, with the flame of the candle visibly set off to the side. In the 1820s, McQueen and Co. issued numerous engravings based on the painting, proving that even after Siddons's retirement, the pivotal moment in her performance was well known.

In spite of this and other innovations Siddons was well known for at the time, Burroughs claims that Siddons and her brother John Philip Kemble "enshrined conservative practices" rather than representing the Romantic school of Eliza O'Neill and Edmund Kean, who made their London debuts in 1814.¹⁰⁰ While it might be true that Siddons and Kemble were not as emotionally charged or naturally mannered as O'Neill and Kean, Baillie in the 1790s could not have compared Siddons to actors scarcely out of their diapers at the time. A literary critic rather than a theatre historian, Burroughs relies on generalized acting studies, citing such works as Edwin Duerr's *The Length and Depth of Acting* rather than examining what Siddons's contemporaries said about her. Far from being an anti-Romantic performer, Siddons was the personal favorite of many prominent Romantics, including William Hazlitt and Lord Byron, both of whom preferred her to O'Neill. In retrospect, Siddons and her brother were transitional figures, paving the way for later Romantic actors, even if they seemed more restrained than their younger counterparts. As we have seen, however, Siddons's impassioned style was well known to her contemporaries, documented both in print and in iconography.

Burroughs uses her somewhat simplified and rather ahistorical discussion of Siddons's acting style to buttress an argument firmly rooted in the supposedly closeted nature of Baillie's dramas. Transposing the eighteenth-century notion of the closet to a more modern meaning of the word, she claims that "*De Monfort* daringly anatomizes the passion of hatred in order to explore the problem of homoerotic love."¹⁰¹ In order to justify this contention that the play is not really about hatred—as Baillie herself said it was—but rather about a love that dared not speak its name, Burroughs consistently undercuts the playwright's own comments about the piece. For instance, the final scene of *De Monfort*, which she admits "Baillie later suggested might be unnecessary in a future staging," Burroughs calls "indispensable in light of the play's

preoccupation with how styles of acting express concerns about closeting (and uncloseting) gender identity."¹⁰² The scholarly environment of the 1990s, particularly the rise of queer theory, encouraged critics to read between the lines as Burroughs does, but, in this case, the playwright might indeed have been correct about her own play.

A preoccupation with the closet is not only reflected in the title of Burroughs's book on Baillie, *Closet Stages*, but is emphasized throughout her discussion of *De Monfort*. In her preface to the first volume of *Plays on the Passions*, Baillie clearly identifies hatred as the subject of the tragedy. Baillie goes to great lengths to explain that the hatred as she conceives it "is that rooted and settled aversion, which from opposition of character, aided by circumstances of little importance, grows at last into such antipathy and personal disgust as makes him who entertains it, feel, in the presence of him who is the object of it, a degree of torment and restlessness [sic] which is insufferable."¹⁰³ As Baillie makes clear, the cause of the hatred is irrelevant, arising from "circumstances of little importance." For Burroughs, though, the hatred itself is the irrelevant aspect, a mere blind for its root cause of homoerotic desire.

Burroughs maintains that De Monfort's "obsession with the marquis signals a complicated, closeted longing for the knowledge of a (perhaps sexual) experience outside of his own."¹⁰⁴ As she advances her argument, her discussion of the "perhaps" sexual attraction becomes an examination of an explicitly sexual impulse. This sexual reading explains away De Monfort's intense hatred, for which Baillie intentionally provided only slight and insubstantial motives. In spite of a lack of evidence for any type of attraction De Monfort might feel for Rezenvelt, Burroughs writes of the character's "repression of his homoerotically charged hatred."¹⁰⁵ Her reading continually circles back to the closet imagery evoked by the false notion that *De Monfort* is a closet drama. Because she and other scholars have viewed the play as a

closet drama and not as a tailor-made star vehicle for Sarah Siddons, Burroughs goes far afield from the play's intention. In discussing the final scene, in which De Monfort's body lies next to that of his victim, Burroughs suggests that the play "is a 'closet drama' in the contemporary sense—the story of sexual suppression and of the horrific consequences that follow upon it."¹⁰⁶

This was perhaps a bold proclamation to make in 1997 when the AIDS epidemic was a truly horrific consequence of society suppressing certain sexual secrets. Unfortunately for Burroughs's reading of the play, Baillie herself protested against her drama ever being consigned to any closet whatsoever. "It may, perhaps, be supposed," she wrote in the preface to the first volume of the *Plays on the Passions*, that her publication of the plays implied they were intended "for the closet rather than the stage."¹⁰⁷ However, she cautions readers that if her work seems better suited for the closet than the stage, they should "impute it to want of skill in the authour, [sic] and not to any previous design."¹⁰⁸ Baillie goes so far as to mock the very idea of a closet drama. She claims a play "that is suited to strike and interest the spectator, to catch the attention of him who will not, and of him who cannot read, is a more valuable and useful production than one whose elegant and harmonious pages are admired in the libraries of the tasteful and refined."¹⁰⁹ This is not the language of an author who would have us ferret out hidden meanings. These are the words of a playwright who intends a straight-forward hatred to be taken at face value.

Moreover, in misreading *De Monfort* as a secret parable of homosexual love, Burroughs ignores not only Baillie's own statements about the play, but also the play's close alignment with the celebrity public persona of Siddons. Burroughs claims that the play "criticizes the style of acting that Siddons embodied by pitting the histrionics of De Monfort against his sister Jane for the purpose of highlighting her oppressive behavior."¹¹⁰ In Burroughs's view, Jane is actually the

villain of the piece. Returning once again to the closet metaphor, she claims that throughout the play De Monfort battles his sister "in an attempt to uncloset his need to express passionate, socially forbidden, desires for another man."¹¹¹ It is very difficult to reconcile this reading with the evidence for Siddons's morally exalted public persona, lauded in poetry, immortalized in paint, and popularized in prints and engravings.¹¹² The fact that the role of Jane so suits the public image of Siddons and seeks to exploit for sentimental purposes the real-life relationship between her and her brother Kemble argues loudly and forcefully against the notion that Jane is somehow the antagonist and that the play is an implicit critique of Siddons's acting style.

Rather than being an "oppressive" figure, the character of Jane De Monfort is aligned with the celebrity persona Siddons so carefully cultivated. Siddons positioned herself to be seen as eminently respectable, dedicated to her family, and while not inclined to follow the latest fads and fashions, willing to break with tradition for a higher goal. Similarly, Jane De Monfort has a reputation beyond reproach and is completely dedicated to her brother. She does not wear the latest gowns, but when faced with a crisis she acts as an ideal of courageous womanhood. As officers arrive to bind De Monfort in the final act, she stands up to them and their "custom sacred held as law" of shackling prisoners even when they have not yet been judged (5.2.127). Far from being an "oppressive" presence, she stands up for mercy and Christian charity.

The Christian element of the character should not be overlooked, especially given that Baillie went on to write a book on theology later in life.¹¹³ Burroughs considers Jane's entreaties to her brother to be driven by a desire to constrain his passions within a socially acceptable performance of masculinity. However, in the scene where Jane tries to convince De Monfort to reconcile with the marquis, she urges him to "peace and concord and forgiving love" (3.1.4). Using explicitly Christian language, she asks him "that noble precept learn, / To love thine

enemy" (3.1.15-16) and urges his forgiveness "for love of heaven" (3.1.30). After De Monfort has committed murder, she still fights for the salvation of his soul, telling him, "The God who made thee is a God of mercy" (5.2.92). De Monfort's secret is not repressed homosexuality, but rather a vengeful hatred, which Jane tries to counter not with oppression, but with mercy, forgiveness, and love. Baillie aligns Jane with the positive values of Siddons, whose onstage and offstage personas "reinforced and promoted popular ideas of virtue, piety, and women's role in society."¹⁴

Few modern scholars paid attention to Baillie prior to Burroughs's remarkable work bringing her plays to the attention of literary critics. Unfortunately, Burroughs's criticism is far too literary. Though she attempts to read Baillie's plays within the context of theories of acting, she interprets Siddons's acting from the point of view of future generations, not the generation of Siddons and Baillie. Moreover, she ignores the popular iconography of Siddons that was well known throughout the 1790s when Baillie wrote the first volume of her *Plays on the Passions*. Too isolated from the fields of theatre studies and art history, she fails to understand the popular public persona of Siddons and how Baillie uses that persona in *De Monfort*.

Even more importantly, Burroughs perpetuates the notion that Baillie wrote closet dramas, and this inaccurate label allows her to reinterpret her plays in ways the author probably never imagined. This misreading is achieved not just by ignoring what Baillie wrote, but by ignoring her intention in writing in the first place, which was to have her work staged. For many people, Burroughs's misinterpretation of Baillie is merely a venial sin. After all, few people cared about Baillie before Burroughs salvaged her reputation (an act for which we should all be extraordinarily grateful). The average theatre historian is unlikely to be familiar with Baillie, and

the average person on the street is even less likely to know of her. A misreading of her work might seem insignificant.

However, the long-standing attitude of considering performance texts as closet dramas affects more than just the *Plays on the Passions*. Baillie's success reaching the stage with morally serious, poetically ambitious, character-driven plays inspired numerous writers to attempt to follow in her footsteps. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's tragedy *Remorse* was the natural heir to the *Plays of the Passions*, and Coleridge's critical and financial success in staging that play led many Romantics of the following generation to write plays of their own. These, too, have often been mislabeled as closet dramas, and have sometimes been subject to equally egregious critical misinterpretation. By reclaiming for the stage not just canonical male authors, but also less well known figures like Baillie, we can begin to reconstruct a history of the British theatre that accurately appreciates all the figures that helped to shape it. As we shall see in the following case studies of *Remorse* and *The Cenci*, Baillie was not alone in crafting plays for specific performers. We owe the great works of the Romantic era not just to the poets who wrote them, but to the performers who inspired and shaped them, as well.

¹ Jeffrey Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), 55.

² See Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834); James Boaden, *Memoires of Mrs. Siddons* (London: Gibbings and Co., 1896); Sarah Siddons, *The Reminiscences of Sarah Kemble Siddons*, ed. William Van Lennep (Cambridge: Widener Library, 1942).

³ See Roger Manvell, *Sarah Siddons: Portrait of an Actress* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971) and Judith Pascoe, *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2011).

⁴ Thornton Wilder, "Afterword" in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, ed. Tappan Wilder (New York: Perennial Classics, 2003), 145.

⁵ See Peter Holland, ed., *Garrick Kemble, Siddons, Kean: Great Shakespeareans, Vol. II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

⁶ Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P, 2005), 34.

⁷ Campbell, 198.

⁸ Jane Moody, "Suicide and translation: Inchbald and Plumptre," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 270.

⁹ "Hold!—Pizarro—hear me!—if not always justly, at least act always greatly" (London: Robert Dighton, 1799), British Museum Collection Online, Museum number 1931,0509.223. Web. 21 March 2017.

¹⁰ John Fyvie, *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 247-49.

¹¹ Campbell, 201.

¹² *Ibid.*, 207.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁴ The lines appear in Act II, scene i of Ballie's *De Monfort*. Macready quotes them (with variations from Baillie's spelling) in *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections From His Diaries and Letters*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 40.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Inchbald, "Remarks" in Joanna Baillie, *De Monfort; A Tragedy, In Five Acts* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1808), 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Quoted in George Somes Layard, ed., *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Shearer West, "The Public and Private Roles of Sarah Siddons," in *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 16.

²⁰ Elizabeth E. Gardner, "Portrait of an Actress," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 9, no. 8 (1951): 197.

²¹ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 52.

²² Ibid., 52-53.

²³ David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 111.

²⁴ Manvell attributes her absence during the 1789-90 season to the actress "in effect going on strike... because of Sheridan's unwillingness or inability to pay her according to her contract" (168). However, the dispute with Sheridan did not change "the fact that Sarah's health was poor" (172).

²⁵ "Theatrical Intelligence," *Public Advertiser*, 8 December 1790, 2.

²⁶ "Theatrical Intelligence," *The Diary; or Woodfall's Register*, 23 January 1792, 3.

²⁷ Arthur Murphy, *The Rival Sisters*, in *The Works of Arthur Murphy, Esq.*, vol. 7 (London: T. Cadell, 1786), 244.

²⁸ "Theatres," *The Star*, 20 March 1793, 3.

²⁹ Manvell, 174.

³⁰ "Theatre,—Nov. 18," *The St. James's Chronicle; Or, British Evening Post*, 18 November 1794, 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² For a brief history of Claude Chappe's optical telegraph, which the French military began using in 1794 (the same year Drury Lane reopened), see Christopher H. Sterling, *Military Communications: From Ancient Times to the 21st Century* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 76-77.

³³ Joanna Baillie, *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812), xv.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., xvi.

³⁶ Ibid., xviii.

³⁷ Ibid., xix.

³⁸ Ibid., xxii.

³⁹ Ibid., xxx.

⁴⁰ "Theatre. Drury-Lane," *The Morning Post and Fashionable World*, 21 April 1796, 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Robyn Asleson, "'She Was Tragedy Personified': Crafting the Siddons Legend in Art and Life," in *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 45.

⁴⁴ Arthur Mayger Hind, *A History of Engraving & Etching, From the 15th Century to the Year 1914* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), 257.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 275.

⁴⁶ Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 44.

⁴⁷ Asleson, 47.

⁴⁸ Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Perseus Books, 1999), 26.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Asleson, 48.

⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

⁵² Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 20.

⁵³ Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: 18th-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State UP, 2011), 34.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

⁵⁵ Siddons, 9.

⁵⁶ Asleson, 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Boaden, 186.

⁶¹ Asleson, 61.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁴ Siddons, 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Shelley Bennett and Mark Leonard with Narayan Khandekar, "'A Sublime and Masterly Performance': The Making of Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*," in *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists*, ed. Robyn Asleson (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 110.

⁶⁸ Asleson, 73.

⁶⁹ Felicity Nussbaum, "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800," in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 159.

⁷⁰ Ian Mackintosh with Geoffrey Ashton, *The Georgian Playhouse: Actors, Artists, Audiences and Architecture, 1730-1830* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975), 112.

⁷¹ Heather McPherson, "Theatrical Celebrity and the Commodification of the Actor," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, ed. Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 193.

⁷² All line numbers come from Thomas Young, *The Siddoniad: A Characteristic Poem* (Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1784).

⁷³ Unless otherwise indicated, all act, scene, and line numbers of Baillie's plays come from *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind, Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy* (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798).

⁷⁴ Boaden, 186.

⁷⁵ McDonald, 22.

⁷⁶ Campbell, 210.

⁷⁷ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001), 7.

⁷⁸ Ellen Malenas Ledoux, "Working Mothers on the Romantic Stage: Sarah Siddons and Mary Robinson," in *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theater, 1660-1830*, ed. Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell UP, 2014), 87.

⁷⁹ Linda Kelly, *The Kemble Era: John Philip Kemble, Sarah Siddons and the London Stage* (London: The Bodley Head, 1980), 19.

⁸⁰ *The Intimate Letters of Hester Piozzi and Penelope Pennington 1788-1821*, ed. Oswald G. Knapp (London: John Lane, 1914), 173.

⁸¹ Margaret S. Carhart, *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970), 119.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸³ For the cuts and additions to *De Monfort* see the critical edition of the play in *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992), 231-314.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Cox's introduction to *De Monfort* in *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 231.

⁸⁵ Joanna Baillie, *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), 87.

⁸⁶ See *De Monfort* in *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 287.

⁸⁷ Act, scene, and line numbers of the 1851 edition come from Baillie, *Dramatic and Poetical Works*, 94.

⁸⁸ Campbell, 209.

⁸⁹ Carhart, 114.

⁹⁰ See *De Monfort* in *Seven Gothic Dramas*, 306-7.

⁹¹ It is also possible that Baillie did not have access to the performance text when she was revising her plays at the end of her life. Though the Longman edition with Inchbald's preface claims to be "printed under the authority of the managers from the prompt book," it actually reprints the 1798 text from the first volume of the *Plays on the Passions*.

⁹² Kahan, 57.

⁹³ Catherine B. Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997), 111.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Boaden, 314.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ MacDonald, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Burroughs, 111.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 116.

¹⁰² Ibid., 119.

¹⁰³ Baillie, *A Series of Plays* (1798), 64.

¹⁰⁴ Burroughs, 125-26.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Baillie, *A Series of Plays* (1798), 65.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Burroughs, 127.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 129.

¹¹² Burroughs's closet-obsessed reading is not confined to *De Monfort*. She writes that "homoerotic desire" (141) is central to *Basil* as well. Baillie herself considered *Basil* to be a tragedy of heterosexual love, in which Count Basil is unmanned by his love for the beautiful Victoria, yet Burroughs cites "Basil's repressed desire for other male characters" (142) without ever specifying who those characters might be. Once again, this misreading of the play takes a cue from a misinterpretation of the nature of the work itself. Continuing to perpetuate the myth that Baillie did not write for performance, Burroughs claims that the author's "closet drama stemmed from her curiosity about 'closet issues'" (142).

¹¹³ Baillie's theology was so conservative, she turned back to the Arian heresy of the 4th century, using a literalist interpretation of scripture to argue in favor of strict hierarchy, even among the Three Persons of the Godhead. See Donald Carswell, *Sir Walter: A Four-Part Study in Biography: Scott, Hogg, Lockhart, Joanna Baillie* (London, John Murray, 1930), 282.

¹¹⁴ West, 5.

CHAPTER THREE

Without *Remorse*: Coleridge's Unapologetic Dramatics

The previous chapter examined Joanna Baillie's para-social relationship with Sarah Siddons and how it shaped the writing of *De Monfort*, a play very much intended for the stage in spite of its reputation for being a closet drama. As the preeminent actress of her age, Siddons inspired more playwrights than just Baillie. As we have seen, a number of British writers penned vehicles for Siddons, including Sophia Lee, who in the eyes of contemporary reviewers had crafted a role specifically to make use of Siddons's talents. Another writer who in the 1790s had a para-social relationship with Siddons was an obscure young poet and political activist named Samuel Taylor Coleridge. When Coleridge wrote his drama *Osorio* in 1797, it was with Siddons in mind, and it was for her that he had originally crafted the role of Alhadra.¹ Like Baillie, he was writing not just for the stage, but for the particular talents of one performer.

However, by the time his play made it to the stage, retitled *Remorse* and considerably rewritten, Siddons had gone into retirement. What concerns us now is not the para-social relationship between a writer and a performer, but an actual relationship, developed during rehearsals at the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane and coming to fruition with a stunning performance that captivated audiences. Unlike Baillie, Coleridge attended rehearsals and actively worked on rewrites throughout the rehearsal process. Even after the play opened, he continued to work on the text, refining it to suit the needs of his actors. He became a professional dramatist in every sense of the word, and profited considerably from his efforts.

Unfortunately, biographers of Coleridge frequently underrate his achievements as a dramatist. In his *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*, Coleridge's friend and publisher John Cottle made no mention of *Remorse* and only brought up *Osorio* to reprint a selection from the play that worked its way into *Lyrical Ballads*, the landmark book of poetry Coleridge wrote together with William Wordsworth.² Being a publisher rather than a man of the theatre, Cottle's bias is perhaps understandable, but it has been perpetuated by later writers. More than a hundred years later when Walter Jackson Bate published his biography of Coleridge, he scarcely mentioned *Remorse*, in spite of the fact that the play was an enormous success, and as Bate noted, "ran for twenty nights and reached three editions when published."³ Even Coleridge's most recent biographers, Rosemary Ashton, Richard Holmes, and William Christie, have given scant attention to the author's dramas.

Yet Coleridge wrote the most successfully staged tragedy of the Romantic era. He was well acquainted with the theatre and its actors, and continuously reworked the text of *Remorse* to suit his performers. His first challenge, though, was to find a new actress for whom he could write. Siddons, his previous muse, was no longer available. Where could he find an actress of comparable talent to bring his play to life? Perhaps just as importantly, where could he find a star of such public acclaim that she could draw audiences to come see the show in the first place? The answer was not readily apparent, and when he did find someone, she seemed the least likely person to shine in a great tragedy. To understand how Coleridge came to form such an unlikely partnership, it is first necessary to examine the end of the career of Sarah Siddons and the widely followed quest by the theatrical world to find a suitable replacement for the queen of tragedy.

The Search for the New Siddons

At the beginning of 1812, Siddons gave a series of farewell performances in preparation for her announced retirement later that year. These performances gave observers a chance to comment upon the legacy of the great actress, as well as to express concern over the fact that no leading tragedienne seemed poised to take her place. The celebration of Siddons could not help but be tinged with an anxiety about the future of the stage. In appreciating the accomplishments of the actress, observers noted the absence they foresaw after her departure. How could anyone hope to take her place? Without Siddons, whatever would become of the drama?

Seeing Siddons in Edward Moore's *The Gamester* on 21 April 1812, Henry Crabb Robinson wrote in his diary:

Her voice appeared to have lost its brilliancy (like a beautiful face through a veil); in other respects, however, her acting is as good as ever.... Her smile was enchantingly beautiful; and her transitions of countenance had all the ease and freedom of youth. If she persist in not playing Mrs. Beverley again, that character will, I am confident, never be played with anything like equal attractions. And without some great attraction in the performers, such a play ought not to be represented.⁴

Robinson uses the coming absence of Siddons as a way to appreciate what he has just seen. Still, it is striking that the disappearance of the star should necessitate for him the loss of the play from the repertoire if a suitable successor were not found. For those who did wish to see another Mrs. Beverly—not to mention another Belvidera or Lady Macbeth—the loss of Siddons would be keenly felt.

Siddons gave what was officially her last performance before retirement on 29 June 1812, performing the role of Lady Macbeth. After her sleepwalking scene, the audience erupted into applause and demanded that the play end then and there. She then reappeared onstage, dressed in white, and recited a farewell address composed for her by her nephew, Horace Twiss. "Who has

not sigh'd, when doom'd to leave at last" she said, "The hopes of youth, the habits of the past"?⁵ The sighs came from the audience as well as the performer.

The great Siddons's retirement left a noticeable absence on the Regency stage. Audiences longed for a new tragic actress capable of illuminating their favorite plays. Theatre managers, both in London and in the provinces, longed for a popular performer who could fill seats. Perhaps most importantly, dramatists longed for an inspiring muse who would be both willing and able to perform new plays that had never before been tested. After her retirement, *The Theatrical Inquisitor* claimed that even the close of Garrick's career had not generated as much "public interest and curiosity" as the retirement of Siddons.⁶ The characters she excelled in portraying "may be represented: by abilities inferior to those of Mrs. Siddons, though not with the same fulness of effect," the anonymous author wrote.⁷ In this environment, the Irish actress Sarah Smith attempted to step into Siddons's extraordinarily large shoes. The public, while fascinated by Smith at first, ultimately rejected her, and when she appeared in *Remorse* in 1813, it was a different and altogether unexpected actress who rescued the play from failure.

The name Sarah Smith is about as unknown to theatre historians as one would expect from its commonplace sound. However, Smith (who later married the comic actor George Bartley) deserves a place in the annals of British drama, even if it is not for a very flattering reason. Sometimes, great actors obscure the faults in plays, blinding audiences and dramatists alike to flaws that would prove fatal when enacted by anyone else. The great David Garrick triumphed in Shakespeare, but he also appeared in a succession of forgettable comedies which he made palatable by his performance. Similarly, Sarah Bernhardt appeared in some melodramas that are almost unreadable today, but that succeeded wholly due to her own masterful delivery. Such actors might inadvertently cripple playwrights, preventing them from seeing the avoidable

excesses or deficiencies in their work. Smith, it seems, never did dramatists this particular disservice.

When Drury Lane finally accepted *Remorse* for production, Coleridge could no longer count on Siddons, the actress who had inspired him when he was writing the earlier version of the play. The London theatre scene instead presented him with another tragic actress: Smith. Though Smith turned out to be a mere flash in the pan, in 1812 she appeared to be the theatre's new rising star. She, it seemed, would be the towering performer who could carry Coleridge's verse from literary merit on the page to commercial success on the stage. Things did not turn out as planned.

Very quickly, Coleridge saw that he could not simply hand his script to Smith and wait for the money to roll into his account. Smith declined the role he initially offered her and then proved unsuited to the role she took. He was forced to continually overhaul the play, rewriting draft after draft to suit a cast of talented but not exceptional performers. It was only late in the process that he found a tragic actress capable of carrying the show, and she was most certainly not Sarah Smith. The history of *Remorse* is one of constant revision and re-imagination, of the continual shaping and reshaping of a play to make it at last suit the stage of the newly rebuilt Theatre Royal at Drury Lane.

This stage history, in which Coleridge actively collaborated with actors and crafted the tragic hit of the season, has been lost on literary historians who view the author as a playwright largely divorced from the stage (if they view him as a playwright at all). In his 1938 biography of Coleridge, E.K. Chambers skips over the author's extensive revisions of the play, simply stating that "*Remorse* was produced on 23 January 1813, and was well received."⁸ To his credit, Chambers notes that Coleridge cut some of the text after the first night, and that he later assisted

a subsequent cast producing the play in Bristol, a fact frequently omitted by later biographers.⁹ In fact, *Remorse* remained in the English-speaking repertoire long after it ceased performances at Drury Lane. Chambers only hints at this phenomenon, noting that Coleridge saw a traveling production of the play with his son Hartley while the latter was on summer vacation from college.¹⁰ In fact, following the play's successful London premiere, *Remorse* received productions in Hull, Exeter, Portsmouth, Bath, Bristol, Manchester, Boston, Edinburgh, York, Perth, Birmingham, Glasgow, Ipswich, Liverpool, Norwich, Calne, Cambridge, Doncaster, Whitby, Sunderland, and Durham in the United Kingdom, as well as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston in the United States.¹¹

Subsequent biographers have also overlooked the importance of *Remorse* and the time and effort Coleridge put into revising the play. Walter Jackson Bate's two brief mentions of *Remorse* are both mainly concerned with the money the piece brought its author.¹² The financial rewards were considerable, dwarfing those of Coleridge's other literary efforts. Katharine Cooke takes note of this fact, and in her study of Coleridge includes an entire chapter dedicated to the author's plays. Most notably, Cooke observes that *Remorse* had a profound effect on the British stage, and led to an increase not just in the number of new tragedies written, but also to the length of the runs new tragedies received in the patent theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden.¹³

Unfortunately, Cooke is the exception, not the rule. Recent biographers, rather than correcting earlier scholars who ignored Coleridge's work as a dramatist, have woefully misinterpreted the author's close working relationship with the theatre. As is the case with Baillie, this misinterpretation seems rooted in the false notion that Coleridge was a closet dramatist. Rosemary Ashton does acknowledge that Coleridge had Siddons in mind when he

wrote *Osorio*.¹⁴ However, she seems to fail to realize that playwrights still have a job to do after they have finished writing the script. Observing Coleridge's "keen interest in rehearsals" Ashton claims the author "rather meanly used them as an excuse not to visit the Wordsworths, who were in despair following the death from measles of their six-year-old son."¹⁵ One does not need to be insensitive to grieving parents to recognize that a family friend cannot always drop an entire career to run off and comfort someone. For Ashton, it seems, crafting plays was not Coleridge's career (though it earned him far more money than his poetry ever did). Rather, she seems to regard playwriting as an exercise in versification that need not require the writer's presence at rehearsals. This notion would be perfectly true of a closet dramatist, but it is at odds with what we know about Coleridge's extensive rewrites of *Remorse* both during the rehearsal process and after the show opened.

Biographers since Ashton have taken even less notice of Coleridge's work as a dramatist. In the first volume of his two-part biography of the writer, Richard Holmes does mention *Osorio*, but mainly to discuss its similarities with the poem "Kubla Khan."¹⁶ In the second volume of his study (published after Ashton's biography), Holmes fails to pick up on the fact that *Osorio* was written with performance in mind, writing that "Coleridge's 1797 version had really been a cabinet play designed for reading."¹⁷ This flies in the face of fact, as Coleridge not only wrote the play with individual actors in mind, but he also sent it to Richard Brinsley Sheridan at Drury Lane in hopes of having it produced. Holmes recognizes the superiority of *Remorse* to *Osorio* but does not speculate on what might have caused that improvement. He notes that in the latter version of the play, "the forceful Moorish woman, Alhadra, who has some of the finest speeches in the play, inexplicably came to life."¹⁸ In stating this, though, he does not mention the talented performer who played Alhadra, with whom Coleridge worked intimately during rehearsals.

Perhaps if he had delved into the history of that famed actress—who was roundly praised by contemporary reviewers—the vibrancy of that character might have been less inexplicable. Curiously, Holmes later identifies the actress as "Mrs Glover" but does not identify her role in the success of the play, nor does he even give her first name.¹⁹

More recent than the work of either Ashton or Holmes is William Christie's award-winning 2006 biography *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Literary Life*. Christie recognizes that theatre "is often omitted from accounts of the literary life of the Romantic period."²⁰ However, he then goes on to repeat misconceptions of previous scholars, referring to Joanna Baillie's plays as "closet dramas" despite Baillie's own claims to have written for the stage.²¹ Christie also criticizes the "limited theatricality of dramatic writings by major authors" overlooking not only the enormous success of Coleridge's *Remorse* during the author's lifetime but also the posthumous success on stage of plays by Lord Byron and Percy Shelley.²² While Christie seems acutely aware of the lack of attention given to Romantic drama, his own position as an English professor and literary critic leaves him unprepared to fill in the gap he has the good sense to perceive.

In order to come to a more complete view of Coleridge, we must examine him as a practical playwright, not as a writer of poetic closet drama. Only by doing so can we correct the misunderstanding that sees *Remorse* as a minor, forgettable effort by an otherwise canonical writer. The fact is, *Remorse* was both a critical and a popular success. It bolstered the author's finances and proved a model for later Romantic poets who would try their own hands at writing tragedy. The idea of Coleridge as a tinkering dramatist, constantly rewriting his work to achieve an effective spectacle, would seem to run counter to impressions of the Lake District poet as an ethereal bard of nature or as an obscure metaphysician. Yet the evidence suggests that Coleridge

embraced his role as working dramatist. In his revisions of *Remorse*—both made and intended—he worked closely with his actors and even volunteered to sacrifice some of his most poetic writing in order to achieve dramatic success.

Coleridge's ambitions as a dramatist go back at least to 1794 with his joint composition of the play *The Fall of Robespierre* together with Robert Southey. In spite of his long-held desire to be a playwright, most people who came to the premiere of *Remorse* in 1813 saw Coleridge as a poet, as they still do today. The review of the play in the *Times*, for instance, declared flatly, "Mr. Coleridge is a poet."²³ This was not entirely a compliment, as the review went on to take the author to task for excessive descriptions of the picturesque. Exaggerating more than a little, the reviewer claimed that characters stopped the action of the play to talk about "how the sun smiled, how its light fell upon the vallies, and the sheep, and the vineyards."²⁴ As we shall see, Coleridge actually fought for the removal of such passages, even over the objections of certain actors.

Though Coleridge conceived the play as a vehicle for Siddons and her brother John Philip Kemble, by the time *Remorse* went into production at Drury Lane, neither of those performers were available. Not only had Siddons retired, but Kemble had left Drury Lane in 1802, taking over the rival Theatre Royal at Covent Garden. Instead of the magnificent Kemble and the incomparable Siddons, Coleridge had to make do with Alexander Rae and Sarah Smith. These less than stellar leads might not have harmed the play, though. Rather, having actors incapable of covering up un-dramatic elements in the piece seems to have forced Coleridge to revise *Remorse* into a more streamlined, stage-worthy drama.

At the time Drury Lane accepted *Remorse* for production, Coleridge did not know just how deficient the play's leading actors would be. In fact, Smith was still largely being hailed as a

worthy successor for Siddons. The young actress was not the only performer to be brought forth as a possible Siddons replacement. In 1813, a certain "Miss Douglas" made her London debut with much fanfare as Alicia in Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore*, but *The Theatrical Inquisitor* wrote that to "deem her worthy of a place as the long looked for successor of Mrs. Siddons, is an insult on the good taste of the public, and a severe satire on the object of their praise."²⁵ Smith showed more promise, and the same article went on to urge those who "have felt the merits of Miss Smith" to no longer be "reluctant to acknowledge them."²⁶ The author called Smith "an assiduous pupil in the school of Mrs. Siddons" and found that "the general principle and outline of her acting is founded on accurate observation of her predecessor."²⁷ When Smith read from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* at a performance of Joseph Haydn's *Creation* oratorio at Drury Lane, the generally skeptical *Theatrical Inquisitor* said her performance "never could have been surpassed even by her great prototype, Mrs. Siddons."²⁸ The general agreement was that if anyone could take the place of the last great Sarah, it was Sarah Smith.

Even before Siddons's retirement, in fact, Smith had won admirers, including the poet and novelist Walter Scott. When Smith acted together with Siddons in 1808, Scott told the young actress, "you sustained the comparison as triumphantly as your warmest friends could wish."²⁹ He later wrote a series of complimentary letters to her in 1811, saying he was "delighted" she had played the role of Ellen in an adaptation of Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, adding that Smith playing the role was "paying Ellen a very high compliment."³⁰ After Siddons's retirement, a number of prominent individuals tried to induce the great actress to return to the stage, but Scott refused to join their ranks. Writing to Smith, Scott said he hoped Siddons would "not be cajoled into returning, for she can never repeat the same impressive parting" nor again receive "such testimonies of regret and esteem."³¹ It was Smith who was to be the new Siddons.

Still under the sway of the elder actress, William Charles Macready was not so generous. He wrote in his memoirs that instead of the "grand simplicity" of Siddons, "Miss Smith's attempts at effect were as manifest as they were injudicious."³² In spite of her having "a good voice" and "a good stage face" according to Macready, "of the soul that goes to the making of an artist, there was none."³³ Macready's opinion would soon be put to the test when Smith was chosen to take the lead in the most important new play of the Regency era. After the newly rebuilt Theatre Royal in Drury Lane opened with a production of an old standby, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the management planned a grand premiere by one of the most widely known and regarded authors in Britain. That man was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the play was *Remorse*. The theatrical stakes could not have been higher.

Since Smith was the new rising star at Drury Lane, Coleridge revised the play with the young actress specifically in mind. He encountered a snag when rather than playing Alhadra, the passionate agent of righteous vengeance, Smith wanted to play the ingénue role of Teresa. Coleridge complained that Smith had declined "a part that would have suited her admirably."³⁴ Still, he obliged her by enlarging the role of Teresa, making it more suitable for a performer of Smith's stature. Unfortunately, his difficulties had only begun.

Revising *Remorse*

Coleridge was forced to revise his play numerous times to meet the needs of the stage, and in particular to meet the needs of the motley group of actors assembled at Drury Lane. With each revision of the piece, he stripped away much of what was un-dramatic about the play. Though he cut some brilliant passages that contained striking poetry, he ended up with a sleeker, moreactable drama. Much of the play, Smith's lines in particular, became simpler, more

straightforward, and easier to convey to an audience. The less than ideal cast might have been a blessing in disguise.

Often, the revision process of an author can remain a mystery, but in Coleridge's case, we possess various versions of his play. Scholars can compare his 1797 manuscript entitled *Osorio* to the text of *Remorse* that Drury Lane submitted to the censor during rehearsals. We can in turn compare this version of the play with the one presented to the audience at the beginning of the run, and compare that version to revisions Coleridge made after the show had already opened. What emerges is a portrait of Coleridge as a practical playwright writing not just poetry, but performable drama. The drama that did finally emerge was stronger, in some cases because of the skill of his actors, but more often due to their inadequacies, which compelled him to simplify the play's action and dialogue, making it both clear and exciting.

In a letter to Josiah Wedgwood on 1 December 1812, Coleridge proclaimed that the play would "come out at Christmas."³⁵ As the piece did not open until well after Twelfth Night, Coleridge appears to have underestimated the time it would take to rehearse and revise the play. In a letter to Daniel Stuart on 22 December 1812, he complained that he found "the alterations & alterations rather a tedious business."³⁶ Still, with the notable exception of Smith, all of the performers were "pleased & gratified with their Parts."³⁷ Having a good working relationship with his actors, Coleridge began to make his revisions.

One noticeable change right at the top of the play is Coleridge's addition of a new opening scene for *Remorse* that does not appear in his earlier *Osorio*. In the new scene, the vanished Alvar appears after having just landed in Granada. He lays out his plan to test the faithfulness of his beloved and to inspire his murderous brother (Ordonio, played by Alexander Rae) with remorse for having ordered his assassination. In addition to providing this exposition,

the scene allows Coleridge to explain why Alvar's closest friends and family members will not be able to recognize him. In a speech that remained practically unchanged from when the theatre first submitted it to the censor, Alvar claims he has little need for disguise as:

This Scar, and toil beneath a burning sun
 Hath done already half the business for us.
 Add too my youth, when last we saw each other
 Manhood has swoln my chest, and taught my voice
 A hoarser note—Besides—they think me dead—
 And what the mind believes impossible
 The bodily sense is slow to recognize.³⁸

Rather than relying solely on a willing suspension of disbelief (a term Coleridge himself would coin a few years later), *Remorse* gives a credible explanation for why putting on a Moorish costume would provide Alvar with a sufficient disguise. While a similar passage appears in *Osorio*, it comes later in the play, during the second act, and only after the disguised character has already appeared to his former lover. The new opening scene fully orients the audience and answers likely questions before they are even asked. Immediately, we understand why Alvar will not be recognized, either by his face or his voice.

Coleridge introduced a number of small adjustments to the first scene of *Osorio* when it became the second scene of *Remorse*, but the major change is that the audience clearly knows the identity of Alvar from the very beginning. While someone reading *Osorio* would know who the man in Moorish clothing was from the character name in the script, an audience in the theatre would have no such advantage. The addition of the new opening scene would not be necessary in a closet drama, but it is crucial if the play is to be performed on stage. It brings clarity to subsequent events, making them easier to follow, so instead of struggling to unravel the plot, the audience can concentrate on the reactions of the characters to their new situation. The new first

scene greatly improves the old opening without Coleridge having to rewrite a line of what is now scene two.

Indeed, in the version of the text Drury Lane sent to the censor at the beginning of January 1813, there are only minor changes to that scene as it exists in *Osorio*. In between the censor's version and the texts used in performance, however, Coleridge made a number of changes. Many of these revisions abbreviated speeches by Teresa, the ingénue role played by Smith. Coleridge liked Smith well enough to write the play's epilogue for her, so he seems not to have been bitter that she was unsuited for the role. Still, the general consensus was that Smith had been woefully miscast.

The critics were not kind. *The Theatrical Inquisitor* lamented: "Of all the females who could have been selected to fill the part of Teresa, Miss Smith was in all probability the worst calculated for the task."³⁹ Other reviews largely pass over her performance, but one piece in the *Examiner* attributed to Thomas Barnes pointedly remarks: "Of Miss Smith we would rather say nothing."⁴⁰ Coleridge seems to have recognized Smith's insufficiency, since in rehearsal he trimmed back many of her lines. The cuts begin in the very first scene in which her character appears. In the version submitted to the censor, Teresa cries out:

O pardon me, my father! pardon me!
 It was a foolish and ungrateful speech
 A most ungrateful speech! But I am hurry'd
 Beyond myself, if I but dream of one
 Who aims to rival Alvar—were we not
 Born in one day, like twins of the same parent?
 Nurs'd in one cradle? pardon me, my father!
 (1.2.82-88)

This version closely parallels what Coleridge wrote in *Osorio*. The version used in performance, however, cuts two lines, moving directly from "Oh pardon me, my father!" to "But I am hurried"

(1.2.70).⁴¹ It also cuts the half line "Nurs'd in one cradle" even though the minor cut throws off the verse's meter.

Later in the scene, the censor's copy has Teresa saying, "I do not, cannot, love him—Is my heart hard? / Is my heart hard? That even now the thought / Should force itself upon me—yet I feel it" (1.2.137-39). In the performance version this becomes simply, "I do not, can not, love him" (1.2.116). In Teresa's last speech of the scene, the performance texts omit another three lines included in the censor's copy.⁴² None of these lines add anything significant to the play, and their elimination speeds up the action and focuses attention on the lines that remain. Coleridge cut dialogue belonging to other characters as well, yet Teresa's lines seem particularly truncated. Whether or not this pleased Smith, the result was a cleaner, more succinct, better play.

Coleridge tinkered considerably with the second act as well. Some of his changes seem judicious, such as eliminating references in *Osorio* to the heroine having "no faith in holy Church" because "Her Lover school'd her in some newer nonsense" (2.1.29-30). Coleridge might have intended to imply a proto-Protestant or even proto-Enlightenment viewpoint among his Spanish characters, but this thread leads nowhere and would likely only confuse an audience. In some cases, Coleridge kept long passages from *Osorio* in the initial version of *Remorse*, but then trimmed them back in rehearsal. For instance, he cut seven and a half lines of Ordonio's ravings that exist in the censor's copy (2.1.118-25), leaving only a few lines to indicate the character's mental instability. Such changes probably suited Rae, who was known more for his facial expressions than for the qualities of his voice.⁴³ The *Examiner* review highlights this fact, noting, "his face was capable of expressing the most complex workings of the soul."⁴⁴ His notoriously weak voice, however, receives no comment.

In other cases, Coleridge expanded the text from *Osorio* when a simpler passage would have sufficed. The censor's copy of *Remorse* replaces a brief passage in *Osorio* (2.1.135-40) with a 13-line speech by the Moorish character Isidore (2.1.143-55). In the staged version, Coleridge cut four of these lines, leading it back toward the simplicity of the original version. The comic actor Vincent De Camp played Isidore in the Drury Lane production. Given the lack of enthusiasm for the actor in reviews of the play, De Camp's less than satisfactory performance might have led Coleridge to make this rather wise cut.

The author had wished to cut even more of Isidore's lines. In a letter to John Rickman on 25 January 1813, Coleridge wrote that he "could not persuade either actor or Manager to give up Isidore's Description of Alvar's Cottage & the Dell."⁴⁵ The passage, still present in the performance text, is a picturesque description of precisely the kind we would expect from a Romantic poet like Coleridge:

You cannot err. It is a small green dell
 Built all around with high off-sloping hills,
 And from its shape our peasants aptly call it
 The Giant's Cradle. There's a lake in the midst,
 And round its banks tall wood that branches over,
 And makes a kind of faery forest grow
 Down in the water. At the further end
 A puny cataract falls on the lake:
 And there, a curious sight! you see its shadow
 For ever curling, like a wreath of smoke,
 Up thro' the foliage of those faery trees.
 His cot stands opposite.
 (2.1.140-51)

The passage takes the audience on a roundabout path to observe some picturesque landscape before finally arriving at the point of the speech: the location of the cottage. This description of

cottage and dell digresses from the plot in order to indulge in a classic Coleridgean contemplation of the picturesque.

In the aptly titled book *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*, Raimonda Modiano argues that an ever-evolving engagement with the natural world had a central place in the works of Coleridge. She observes that the writer frequently "was attentive to the most minute and rapidly changing phenomena in a landscape, patiently describing the diverse appearances of objects both far and near and nervously straining his eyes to encompass the perpetually varying activity of nature."⁴⁶ That is precisely what we see Coleridge doing in this passage, which guides the audience's imagination from one sight to the next, emphasizing the diversity of the rustic landscape. The mind's eye moves from the dell, to the lake, to the falls, to the trees, before finally settling on the cottage. This fascination with a constantly changing landscape was certainly not unique to Coleridge, but placed him squarely amid other proponents of the picturesque.

Though his friend William Wordsworth expressed distaste for a faddish fascination with the picturesque, Coleridge did not. Modiano notes Coleridge was quite familiar with works by the picturesque's various aesthetic theorists, including Sir Uvedale Price.⁴⁷ According to Price, the picturesque combined Edmund Burke's ideas of the sublime and the beautiful. For Burke, the sublime was inherently dramatic, and he associated the sublime specifically with tragedy.⁴⁸ The most powerful passion caused by the sublime is astonishment, a "state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror."⁴⁹ Astonishment, then, is the goal of all good tragedy, since Burke explicitly links tragedy with the sublime. In order to achieve its intended effect, the sublime must remain pure and unmixed. Burke rails against "an inordinate thirst for variety, which, whenever it prevails, is sure to leave very little true taste."⁵⁰

Price, on the other hand, advocates a mixing of the sublime and beautiful, arguing the picturesque can correct the languor of beauty and the tension of the sublime.⁵¹ Astonishment, so necessary to tragic drama in Burke, becomes the enemy. Price describes the picturesque in direct opposition to astonishment, claiming "by its variety, its partial concealments, it excites that active curiosity which gives play to the mind, loosening those iron bonds with which astonishment chains up its faculties."⁵² Rather than capturing the audience with "iron bonds" the picturesque frees the audience's faculties, allowing the mind to "play" rather than fixate on the action of the stage. Such variety, while anathema to Burke, is precisely Price's goal with the picturesque.

The descriptive passage so offensive to Coleridge, which he could not persuade actor nor manager to relinquish, precisely fits Price's definition of the picturesque, and goes directly against Burke's concept of the astonishment-producing sublime. Even the name of the dell, the Giant's Cradle, signals a mixing of effects by conjuring up the idea both of a giant and of an infant. Similarly, the "puny cataract" (2.1.147) undercuts any awe caused by the cataract by stressing how diminutive it is. While Burke's sublime produces astonishment, Price's picturesque excites curiosity. Not surprisingly, the character of Isidore describes the scene not as an awesome wonder but as "a curious sight" (2.1.148).

Not only is Isidore's description unnecessary for the plot, it actively goes against the drama Coleridge is trying to achieve. The play is building up to a confrontation between the two brothers in the very cottage Isidore describes. Instead of creating tension and working the audience up into a condition of astonishment, the passage slows down the action of the narrative, distracting the audience from the issues at hand to contemplate the picturesque scenery. While excellent poetry, it is poor drama, and Coleridge's own familiarity with the theories of the

picturesque would have told him so. From the perspectives of aesthetic theorists of the day, the passage is not merely un-dramatic, it is anti-dramatic, since it sacrifices the tragic sublime for the merely picturesque. Fortunately, reviewers overlooked the offending passage, and the *Morning Post* declared the play "truly sublime" as the author intended.⁵³

The fact that Coleridge wanted to cut the passage while even the theatrical professionals wanted to keep it in shows to what a tremendous extent Coleridge the poet had become Coleridge the practical dramatist. The passage is an excellent piece of picturesque poetry, and it is precisely because of this that it had to go. Coleridge understood this, even when others did not. As he himself remarked to Rickman, "it was somewhat odd, as the world goes, to have the Writer pleading strenuously for more and more excisions, and the Actors (& in one or two instances the Manager) arguing for their retention."⁵⁴ His willingness—and indeed enthusiasm—to cut poetical passages for the sake of dramatic action shows that Coleridge had by that point completely shed his poetic skin and taken on the role of playwright with considerable gusto.

Nor did revisions stop there. Proceeding through the script, one uncovers numerous incidents where Coleridge made changes for practical rather than poetic reasons. For instance, while re-crafting *Osorio* as *Remorse*, Coleridge added the character of Isidore's wife Alhadra to Act II. While she appears earlier in the play, Alhadra is absent from the corresponding act in *Osorio*. The addition of a new scene for the character is not surprising, as in many ways she, not Teresa, is the true female lead.

Since Smith refused the role, that part instead fell to Julia Glover. Though Glover was known primarily as a comic actress, she did upon occasion appear in tragic roles.⁵⁵ In the opinion of many reviewers, Glover as Alhadra was able to far outshine Smith as Teresa. The review in the *Times* claimed that "she exhibited some of the most subduing and striking powers of the

art."⁵⁶ The *Times* was not alone. The *Examiner* declared that "Mrs. Glover, indeed, surprised us" as in spite of her "face comic in every feature" and unpleasing voice, "she contrived to present to us one of the most impressive portraiture of the strong passion that we ever recollect to have seen."⁵⁷ The *Satirist* raved that "Of the performance of Mrs. Glover we cannot say too much in praise."⁵⁸ Yet that same reviewer lambasted Smith, claiming that she recited the play's epilogue "as if to show how many of that lady's deficiencies can be exposed in one night."⁵⁹ Such opinions of the two actresses corresponded with critics' impressions of the roles themselves. The reviewer for the *Morning Post* commented that the character "of *Teresa* does not rise to much above mediocrity; but the conception of the part of the Moorish woman is as full of poetic imagination as it is bold and masterly."⁶⁰

Julia WHO?

Who exactly was this Julia Glover, and what did she bring to the role of Alhadra that stole the thunder of the previously applauded Smith? According to her anonymous memoir published in *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes* in 1826, Glover was born Julia Betterton on 8 January 1781.⁶¹ Allegedly a direct descendent of the great Restoration actor Thomas Betterton (though this was likely just the puffery of her father), she appeared on stage "as soon as she could walk" and "tottered on as a cupid, or tripped as a fairy."⁶² When the great Romantic actor George Frederick Cooke played Richard III, the girl appeared as the young Duke of York, one of the princes destined to be murdered in the Tower. Later she took on the role of Tom Thumb, and as she grew, she appeared in Bath as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Imogen in *Cymbeline*.⁶³ Thomas Harris offered her a contract at Covent Garden, but her father refused it, demanding more pay. The next season, Harris increased the offer to £12 a week, which he

claimed "was the highest salary any one then at his theatre enjoyed."⁶⁴ Whether that was true or not, her father demanded even more money, and eventually got Harris to agree to pay £15 a week for the first year, gradually raising her salary to £20 a week after five years.

The young Miss Betterton made her Covent Garden debut on 12 October 1797 as Elwina in Hannah More's tragedy *Percy*.⁶⁵ Though her first appearance in London was starring in a tragedy, a new tragic actress was soon to take Betterton's place for reasons of theatrical politics. The popular actor Alexander Pope had recently taken a new wife, Maria Ann Campion, and he naturally wanted her to be the new tragedienne at Covent Garden. The matter was complicated by the fact that while Harris had engaged Betterton at a handsome rate, the company's stage manager, William Lewis, had hired Campion at a modest salary without consulting his superior.⁶⁶ Since the new Mrs. Pope had to appear in tragedies if the theatre was to placate her husband, and since Harris had promised Betterton a handsome salary whether she acted or not, the logical solution was to give Betterton a try in a comedic role.

It was for this reason that Julia Betterton went on as Charlotte Rusport in Richard Cumberland's comedy *The West Indian*. To everyone's delight, she was a hit with the audience. Cumberland himself saw her in the role and asked her to play the heroine in his new play, *False Impressions*, which she did, also reciting the play's epilogue.⁶⁷ The great comic actress Frances Abington, who had originated the role of Charlotte, then returned to the stage in Colley Cibber's *The Double Gallant*, but instead of detracting from Betterton's comic triumph, the younger actress "gained rather than lost by comparisons."⁶⁸ Abington herself is said to have complimented Betterton and encouraged her in her acting.

In spite of her comic triumphs, Julia Betterton continued to act tragic roles as well, appearing in *Richard III* (this time as a queen rather than a young prince) and as Lady Randolph

in John Home's tragedy *Douglas*, a part more frequently associated with Sarah Siddons.⁶⁹ In 1797, she appears to have become embroiled in a love triangle with Vincent De Camp (who would later play her character's husband in *Remorse*) and an actor at Drury Lane known as James Biggs. Much to De Camp's dismay, she chose Biggs, who unfortunately died at the end of the following year.⁷⁰ If De Camp continued to harbor romantic interests in her when the two played husband and wife in Coleridge's play years later, there is no evidence that the actors behaved in any way but professionally toward each other. (The same could be said of De Camp and Robert William Elliston, who played Alvar, in spite of the fact the two had fought a bloodless duel mere months before *Remorse*'s opening.⁷¹)

The death of her sweetheart was not the only indignity Betterton had to face. According to the gossip of the time, her father took every shilling she earned and in gratitude horsewhipped her when he imagined she had affronted him.⁷² As if that were not bad enough, he then arranged for his daughter to marry Samuel Glover, the feckless son of a wealthy Birmingham industrialist, allegedly in return for a thousand-pound bond written out to Mr. Betterton. The two were married on 20 March 1800, but the union did not prove to be a happy one.⁷³ The actress was saddled with a useless husband, and her father never received the money he was promised.

In 1803, following the expiration of her contract with Covent Garden, Julia—now Glover—attempted to defect to the rival Theatre Royal at Drury Lane.⁷⁴ After much back and forth, John Philip Kemble (who had recently left Drury Lane for Covent Garden) induced her to stay.⁷⁵ A few years later, however, Glover at last broke away to join the Drury Lane company. By then, the company was performing at the Lyceum Theatre, due to the fact that their own building on Drury Lane had burned down in 1809. As stated earlier, the rebuilt theatre opened with *Hamlet* in 1812, and then in 1813 performed *Remorse* as its first new full-length play.

Thus, when *Remorse* opened, Glover was a popular and highly regarded actress. She was best known for her comedy, but had acted extensively in tragedy as well. Her gravitation toward comedy seems to have been as much a matter of chance as it was of natural ability or inclination. To audiences, she might have seemed an odd choice to play Alhadra, but she was singularly dedicated to the role. Coleridge noted in the margin of his own personal copy of the play: "Mrs. Glover's eldest child was buried on the Thursday; two others were ill, and... she was forced to act Alhadra on the Saturday."⁷⁶ Such a situation might seem unthinkable today, but Glover was a professional who would carry on no matter what. Though usually a comic actress, she proved remarkably well suited for her role.

Smith was another matter. In his letter to Stuart in late December, Coleridge claimed he was "labouring with much vexation & little success" to improve the part of Teresa.⁷⁷ Yet in revising the role, he did not always add lines. In Act III, Coleridge replaced a lengthy exchange between the lovers lasting 25 lines in *Osorio* (3.1.122-146) with a mere eight-line exchange in the censor's copy of *Remorse* (3.2.99-106). Smith might have had trouble getting even this shorter exchange to work. The performance version of the script has Teresa run offstage without uttering a word.

At the end of the act, Coleridge added a whole new scene, enhancing the role of Teresa considerably. The new Act III, Scene 3, which does not appear in the version submitted to the censor, incorporates many of the lines Coleridge had already written for the father and son, Valdez and Ordonio. However, all of Teresa's lines and partial lines of verse in the scene, 45 in all, are new. Coleridge seems to have gone out of his way to give Smith more to say and do. Tellingly, though, Teresa has no long speeches in this episode, as Ordonio has. Her longest stretch of speaking in the scene lasts only eight and a half lines of verse (3.3.34-42). Even this

brief speech is broken apart by a lengthy stage direction indicating that Valdez appears to be conversing with Ordonio during Teresa's final lines. It is as if Coleridge couldn't trust Smith as Teresa to interest even the other characters on stage, much less the audience.

In Act IV, Coleridge cut two of the most famous (or perhaps notorious) passages from *Osorio*. The first was the opening lines of the act, in which a character declaims: "Drip! drip! drip! drip!—in such a place as this / It has nothing else to do but, drip! drip! drip! / I wish it had not dripp'd upon my Torch" (4.1.1-3). Coleridge wrote in the preface to the published version of *Remorse* that after Sheridan had rejected *Osorio* for performance at Drury Lane, the famed playwright and theatre manager had singled out these lines for ridicule, lampooning them with the comment, "Drip! drip! drip! there's nothing here but dripping!"⁷⁸ After Sheridan's remark, Coleridge "instantly and thankfully struck out the line."⁷⁹ This cut was probably the first alteration Coleridge made in response to coming into contact with the world of professional theatre.

The other famous cut from Act IV was the removal of the character of the Foster-Mother. After the rejection of *Osorio*, Coleridge had used two passages from the play in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. He published a monologue from Act V as "The Dungeon" and subsequently brought back that piece (in a modified form) in the printed version of *Remorse*, though it does not appear in the texts used for production. Another sequence from *Osorio* printed in *Lyrical Ballads* as "The Foster-Mother's Tale" could not be reintroduced into the play at all, given that Coleridge had cut the character of the Foster-Mother entirely. Coleridge had the poem reprinted as an appendix to the published version of *Remorse*, an act Deven Parker has identified as "remediation," blurring the lines between print and performance.⁸⁰ In spite of this blurring of

media, Coleridge declared in the printed version of *Remorse* that the passage was unfit for the stage, and with good reason. The passage, while poetic, does not advance the action of the play.

While the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* describes "The Foster-Mother's Tale" as "A Dramatic Fragment" there is actually very little dramatic about the narrative. It consists of the Foster-Mother telling an old family legend about an orphan who came to no good. The only need for the tale from a plot perspective is to establish that there is a secret entrance to the castle's dungeon. The story of the orphan is moving enough, but the Foster-Mother has no apparent motive in telling it other than that the heroine has asked about the secret entrance, an entrance that does not even come into the tale until its end. Though the passage succeeds as poetry, it fails on every level to advance the dramatic action.

This contrasts with the story Ordonio tells in the previous scene. That tale, purportedly also a bit of family lore, directly parallels the treachery Ordonio is about to commit against Isidore, and his motive for telling it is to alert the listener to impending doom. In the performance script, Ordonio is speaking directly to Isidore—the man he is about to murder—when he describes a past member of his own family:

All men seem'd mad to him!
Nature had made him for some other planet,
And press'd his soul into a human shape
By accident or malice. In this world
He found no fit companion.

(4.1.67-71)

The description could serve just as well for the speaker as for the distant relative described. In the case of Ordonio's tale, the past narrative serves as present action, rendering it dramatically interesting rather than just an old fireside story that could be told at any time.

Coleridge grasped that if they are to succeed, descriptions of the past must function as present action. Unlike "The Foster-Mother's Tale" which Coleridge cut, Ordonio's story in Act IV of *Remorse* remains active, so much so that Isidore constantly interrupts it, not allowing the speaker to get out more than seven lines of verse at a time. Coleridge was acutely aware of what he was doing, as his stage directions indicate. Before Ordonio begins his tale, Coleridge notes that the character "darkly, and in the feeling of selfjustification [sic], tells what he conceives of his own character and actions, speaking of himself in the third person."⁸¹ Though the tale takes place nominally in the past, Coleridge makes clear it is much more about the scene and characters before the audience than about any distant ancestor.

The removal of the Foster-Mother's character from the scene that followed this necessitated the deletion not only of the tale published in *Lyrical Ballads*, but also of a number of other lines belonging to both the Foster-Mother and to the ingénue role destined to be played by Smith. With Smith now playing Teresa, Coleridge added new lines in the scene for her part. The new version of the scene not only eliminated an unnecessary performer, it also made Teresa far more active, as the revised version plays up her initiative in gaining the secret to the dungeon's access. Yet what the playwright giveth, the playwright can taketh away. A number of Teresa's new lines present in the rehearsal version from early January disappeared from the performance text. Most noticeably, Coleridge truncated a 26-line speech he added to material from *Osorio* down to a mere thirteen and a half lines (4.2.38-51) in the performance text. Perhaps as compensation, he then added seven and a half lines to Teresa's final speech in the scene. The scene apparently was just not working with the actors Coleridge had, otherwise the extensive rewrites would not have been necessary.

Once again, tinkering caused by difficulties with an actor led to a superior text. The material Coleridge cut from Teresa earlier in the scene could hardly be missed. The new material added for the performance text, on the other hand, is quite effective:

And this majestic Moor, seems he not one
 Who oft and long communing with my Alvar,
 Hath drunk in kindred luster from his presence,
 And guides me to him with reflected light?
 What if in yon dark dungeon coward treachery
 Be groping for him with envenom'd poignard—
 Hence womanish fears, traitors to love and duty—
 I'll free him.

(4.2.85-92)

This little passage does a lot of work. First of all, it connects Alvar with the Moor in Teresa's mind, paving the way for her to realize in Act V that the Moor is actually Alvar in disguise. Secondly, it foreshadows the violent and treacherous acts threatened—and later performed—in the final scene. Finally, it helps to build up the character of Teresa, showing her resolve even in the face of fear. The play is better for the passage's inclusion, not just for one of these reasons, but for all three of them. Coleridge was learning how to be a better dramatist.

Revising Act V gave Coleridge a chance to further boost the character of Teresa, though again he trimmed back some of what he wrote for her as the play transferred to the stage. Coleridge cut the whole first scene of Act V of *Osorio* where the Moors plan their assault on the castle. Then, instead of beginning the climactic dungeon scene with a confrontation between the brothers, he opened the act with Teresa coming in and meeting her lost love, Alvar. This allows Teresa to hide herself when she hears someone approaching and come out again when Alvar is nearly killed by his brother Ordonio. The new structure to the scene not only makes Teresa more active and gives her more to say, it also prevents the somewhat ridiculous situation in *Osorio*

where the murderous brother hides himself for a few lines only to leap out again when he sees the two lovers embrace. A reader might have overlooked the brief hiding game, but it would have appeared ridiculous in performance.

Perhaps the most important change Coleridge made to *Osorio* was a new ending in which the repentant murderer not only comes to feel remorse, but also dies on stage. This final scene appears to have given the author particular trouble, as he continued to revise it even after the play had opened. Scholars can track some of the changes Coleridge made after the play opened by comparing subsequent versions of the printed text, which continued to come out in multiple printings while the play was still running. Most of the changes are relatively minor, but adjustments made to the ending are significant. The rehearsal text given to the censor has the character of Naomi, rather than Alhadra, kill Ordonio. Most scholars consider this to be a mere error, and subsequent versions make it clear that Alhadra is the killer, having her call out, "The deed is mine" (5.1.196).⁸²

Embodying Revolution

Here we must return to Julia Glover, the actress who played Alhadra. Though in 1813 she was mainly known as a comic actress, she had previously excelled in tragedy, and her successful performance in *Remorse* added to her acclaim as a multi-faceted performer. When John Fyvie later compiled his *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era* in 1908, he had no problem including a chapter on Julia Glover, as by the end of her life her acclaim as a tragic actress had somewhat increased. By the close of her career, she had played tragic roles opposite both Edmund Kean and William Charles Macready.⁸³ Though still viewed as a comic actress, she had proven she was able to succeed in tragedy as well.

Unlike Siddons, Glover was not adept at manipulating her public image. Nonetheless, she was reproduced in cardboard as Alhadra in a toy theatre version of *Remorse* by Jameson's Theatrical Characters in 1813.⁸⁴ More common were prints of Glover as Mrs. Candour in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*⁸⁵, Mrs. Oakley in *The Jealous Wife* by George Coleman the Elder⁸⁶, and Roxalana in Isaac Bickerstaffe's farce *The Sultan*.⁸⁷ Her real legacy, though, was not in the creation of visual images, but in the creation of an emotional impact. That she had a profound influence on audiences of *Remorse* is clear from the reviews she received.

The *Examiner* placed Alhadra on the same level as the lead, Ordonio. The reviewer declared that both "were developed with a force of thinking, and a power of beauty, which have been long strangers to the stage," even going so far as to hail the pair as "the omen of better days" for British drama.⁸⁸ The *Theatrical Inquisitor* singled out Glover alone, claiming the only character who "does credit to the talents of the author, is the wife of Isidore."⁸⁹ Noticeably lacking were comments on Smith. In spite of her reputation as a comedienne, Glover took home the tragic crown.

After opening night, Coleridge continued to revise the play. Knowing that Glover had been able to capitalize on the character of Alhadra, he gave new lines to her, elevating the role even further. Printed editions take a 15-line speech Alhadra has at the end of *Osorio*—a speech cut from earlier versions of *Remorse*—and restore it to her, albeit earlier in the scene. These lines do not appear in the earliest copy of the printed text (possibly a proof version) currently at Indiana University, Bloomington. The general consensus of scholars is that the changes made to the printed text after the early proof are based on improvements Coleridge made to the play following opening night.⁹⁰ The passage in the later printed copies has some beautiful writing that any tragic actress might long to recite:

Knew I an hundred men
 Despairing, but not palsied by despair,
 This arm should shake the Kingdoms of the World;
 The deep foundations of iniquity
 Should sink away, earth groaning from beneath them;
 The strong-holds of the cruel men should fall,
 Their Temples and their mountainous Towers should fall;
 Till Desolation seem'd a beautiful thing,
 And all that were and had the Spirit of Life,
 Sang a new song to her who had gone forth,
 Conquering and still to conquer!
 (5.1.269-79)

If Coleridge added this speech to *Remorse* later in the run—as its addition to the printed text seems to indicate—the passage must have given Glover even more of an opportunity to shine. The comedienne known primarily for ridiculous roles like Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan's *The Rivals* had proven her worth as a tragic actress. What better reward could she have than the chance to deliver such stirring poetry?

Yet critics who view *Remorse* as a literary work rather than as a performance text seem not to have picked up on Coleridge's addition. In his chapter on drama in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, George Erving writes that perhaps the most significant change from *Osorio* to *Remorse* is that Coleridge "eliminates Alhadra's curtain-closing soliloquy that calls for apocalyptic vengeance."⁹¹ While it is true that the rehearsal script given to the censor does not contain this passage, the audiences who flocked to see the play saw Glover perform it. Erving argues that the removal of this and other passages from *Osorio* make the play "less religiously heterodox, less politically radical and altogether less complex" than Coleridge's original version of the play written in 1797.⁹² The fact that the author re-introduced this passage to the play (and incidentally included in the printed version the two other major passages Erving cites⁹³) considerably weakens this argument.

If anything, the changes made to Alhadra's speech when re-written with Julia Glover in mind make the play more heterodox, radical, and complex. Though the passage is mostly identical in *Osorio*, Coleridge introduced one crucial change. In the 1797 version, Alhadra envisions "all that were and had the Spirit of Life, / Sang a new song to him who had gone forth, / Conquering and still to conquer!" (5.2.213-15). Note that in the printed text Coleridge published after seeing Glover in the role, he changed "him" to "her" making the conquering Spirit of Life a woman. Though this change of a single word might seem small, its gender politics should not be lost on us. The first version envisions a masculine reordering of the world, while the post-Glover text sees a woman as the agent of change.

It is only natural that Coleridge should have made the change after seeing Glover embody the character of Alhadra. If the play were a closet drama meant only to be read, Alhadra's lines need not be attached to any gender, and as a man Coleridge might have defaulted to the male pronoun without thinking about it. However, audiences at Drury Lane saw Glover rush on stage, saw Glover stab the actor playing Ordonio, and saw Glover delivering the rousing call to arms. It is Alhadra who goes forth, conquering and still to conquer. After Coleridge saw that spectacle enacted on the stage, using a pronoun other than "her" would have seemed incongruous.

Many commentators see Alhadra as associated with the spirit of the French Revolution. Julie A. Carlson in her book *In the Theatre of Romanticism* considers Alhadra and the Moors to display "Coleridge's change of heart regarding France."⁹⁴ Likewise, Erving writes that the character "reflects Coleridge's own ambivalence about the course of the Revolution."⁹⁵ Alhadra herself is a woman, but she leads a mob of (presumably male) Moors and in *Osorio* speaks in male terms. However, by masculinizing the Spirit of Life (which is a spirit of Revolution) *Osorio*

participates in the erasure of women and women's bodies from the narrative of recent events in France.

Burke famously attacked the mobs in Paris for being men without manliness. In his discussion of the capture of the French King and Queen in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he goes into near hysterics over the fate of Marie Antoinette. He writes: "little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers."⁹⁶ Burke writes of the French people in masculine terms, and chastises the men who took part in "the atrocious spectacle of the sixth of October 1789."⁹⁷ Theatricalizing the French Revolution, he even compares his own tears to the tears "that Siddons not long since" drew from him.⁹⁸ The unwomanly treatment of the queen by an unmanly crowd has reduced him to tears.

In a sense, Burke was right. The mobs responsible for the "atrocious" events of 6 October 1789 did lack manliness, for the simple reason that they were composed largely of women. Thomas Carlyle tried to correct the historical narrative in his history of the Revolution when he named the section discussing the capture of the King and Queen on 6 October "The Insurrection of Women." Carlyle was aware of historians' prejudice against discussing the dominance of women in the mobs of the Revolution, and even called them out for their suspicious silence on the matter. "How many wearisome bloody Battles does History strive to represent; or even, in a husky way, to sing," Carlyle asked, "and she would omit or carelessly slur-over this one Insurrection of Women?"⁹⁹

Coleridge's slip in *Osorio* is one more careless slur-over erasing the presence of women in revolutionary movements. If modern critics are correct in associating Alhadra with France, the play erases women from the French Revolution in particular. Carlyle did not publish his magnum

opus until 1837, so Coleridge did not have the advantage of his corrective history. Whether he agreed with their politics or not, Coleridge had to rely on depictions of the Revolution in Burke's 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and similar works that obscured the role of women. As author of *Osorio*, he glided right over the sex of his character Alhadra, and had a woman describe the Revolutionary spirit as male.

Once Julia Glover was embodying his character, however, he rewrote the speech to make that spirit feminine. Her embodiment of the character seems to have been crucial to his making the change. Women's bodies can be erased in a reader's imagination, but cannot be erased from a stage where they are physically present. Thus, the physical presence of Glover was necessary to help Coleridge fully achieve *Remorse*. This is a far cry from being a closet drama divorced from the stage.

Julie A. Carlson even suggests that it was the physical presence of stars like Sarah Siddons embodying Shakespeare and the English dramatic canon on stage that sent critics like William Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb into a panic. Shakespeare must be read to be truly appreciated, they claimed, just at the moment when women were becoming the most highly regarded interpreters of Shakespeare on stage. Carlson speculates that "misogyny shapes their antitheatrical impulses" because they are unwilling to see the plays they dreamed about on the page embodied by a woman who can act just as well if not better than any man.¹⁰⁰ These critics "take their leave of the stage when its women, particularly in their impersonation of Shakespeare's women, refuse to know their place."¹⁰¹ It is as if they feel their childhood enjoyment of Shakespeare is being ruined if they have to watch women perform it so competently.

Though Carlson is highly critical of Coleridge's gender politics, the author's revisions of *Remorse* reveal he was amenable to changing a text based on his collaboration with female performers. After Smith's performance proved disappointing, he repeatedly reworked her part, adding lines or taking them away as seemed best, and the result was a better, more streamlined play. Glover's triumph as Alhadra, on the other hand, was followed not just by an increase in her role, but by an adjustment in his previous writing that more fully recognized the importance of women on all stages, whether theatrical or political. In the cases of both Smith and Glover, the play was improved as a result of their participation. The cast was not the one Coleridge originally had in mind, but it did serve him well.

Julia Glover's influence on the play did not end with her impact on the text, though. Unlike Smith, she contributed to the play's popular success, both critical and financial. She not only helped to save *Remorse* in its premiere at Drury Lane, but also created a vibrant excitement around the play that helped lead to future productions. According to the review of the piece in the *Times*, if *Remorse* were to have a further life as a play, Glover "has a most important share in the merit of keeping it in existence."¹⁰² As the reviewer in the *Times* acknowledged, performers can be a decisive factor in winning audiences over to plays, and their influence can resonate far beyond opening night. Julia Glover did not travel with the show as it moved from London, to Edinburgh, to New York, Philadelphia, and beyond. Still, she left her mark upon a play that would travel throughout the English-speaking world and inspire dramatists to come.

Jibon Krishna Banerjee, one of the few modern critics to take British Romantic drama seriously, claims that one of the chief problems of tragedies of the period is the tendency of characters to become symbols rather than individuals. Coleridge's characters, however, "are never two-dimensional," he says.¹⁰³ Unlike Wordsworth (whose play *The Borderers* he so

admired), Coleridge had the chance to work together with a team of actors. The positive reviews, Banerjee suggests, came not just from the writing, but from the acting of Glover and the rest of the cast. He notes that what most of the reviews "found laudable were poetical passages that owed their force and beauty to both Coleridge and his theatre colleagues."¹⁰⁴

Banerjee hits upon the collaborative nature of drama, important in all cases, but particularly crucial during the Romantic era when performers occupied a key role in the success or failure of a play. Just as Sarah Siddons had a crucial part in shaping Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*, Julia Glover helped steer *Remorse* into becoming the most successful new English tragedy in decades. Coleridge's *Remorse* no doubt owed a considerable debt to Baillie. In fact, in the preface to the third volume of her *Plays on the Passions*, Baillie stated her intention "to add to this work the passions of Remorse, Jealousy, and Revenge."¹⁰⁵ Of those three, she finds *Remorse* and *Jealousy* "the best fitted for representation."¹⁰⁶ As Baillie's preface to a much anticipated third volume of plays came out the year before the premiere of *Remorse*, it is difficult to imagine Coleridge was not influenced by ambitions to write a tragedy on just such a passion. However, to only connect Coleridge with earlier playwrights is to fall into the same trap as critics who insist on treating even successfully performed plays like *De Monfort* and *Remorse* as closet drama. Coleridge also owes a debt to Siddons, for whom he initially crafted the role of Alhadra, and even more importantly to Glover, who if the reviewer of *The Times* is to be believed, helped to ensure the success of *Remorse* on stage.

Such an appreciation for performers was not alien to Romantic writers, and most certainly not to Coleridge. While Coleridge only translated the latter two plays of Friedrich Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy, he was familiar with the complete cycle in German. In the prologue to the trilogy, Schiller writes:

For swiftly flits the actor's wondrous art
 Before our senses, leaving not a trace,
 While mark of sculptor's chisel and the song
 Of poets live a thousand years and more.
 Here, when the artist dies, his spell dies with him,
 And as the echoes fade within our ear,
 The moment's swift creation is dissolved,
 No lasting monument preserves its fame.
 That art is hard, inconstant its reward,
 The future winds no garlands for the actor;
 So he must seize the present greedily,
 Fulfil the moment that is his alone,
 Win recognition from the world he lives in,
 And in the best and noblest minds erect
 Himself a living monument, that here
 And now he may enjoy his fame immortal.¹⁰⁷

Fame immortal seems to have passed by poor Julia Glover. Still, Coleridge appreciated the ephemeral art she and other actors brought to his play. It was their skill that helped to wind his garlands, making *Remorse* such an unprecedented success for its era.

In the wake of that success, many literary critics tried to apologize for the more sensationalistic characteristics of Coleridge's Gothic drama. Henry Crabb Robinson had "no hesitation in saying that its poetical is far greater than its dramatic merit" and even attributed the play's popularity on stage "to its faults rather than to its beauties."¹⁰⁸ A review published in *La Belle Assemblée* declared the play's merit "consists in its proper union of the leading requisites of the Tragic Drama, combined by nature and reason, invigorated by passion, and embellished by the graces of poetry."¹⁰⁹ It criticized the poetry, however, as "rather vigorous than elegant."¹¹⁰ That vigor, however, might have been precisely what allowed the play to succeed on the stage.

Unlike his critics, Coleridge was singularly unapologetic about his pursuit of dramatic action even at the expense of poetry. As noted earlier, Coleridge tried to cut one of the most picturesque passages in the play, even over the objections of actors. Poetic narratives like "The

"Foster-Mother's Tale" were good enough to publish in *Lyrical Ballads*, but if they did not serve the dramatic action of the scene, he eliminated them. Other passages, like Alhadra's triumphant speech at the end of the play, Coleridge appears to have removed and reinserted based on the quality of the actor he had available, and also improved based on the same. The dramatic aspects looked askance at by critics of the time were the very ones Coleridge embraced through his rewriting process.

What is more, Coleridge himself acknowledged this in his letters. Writing to Robert Southey on 9 February 1813, Coleridge said the first of the best qualities possessed by *Remorse* was "the simplicity and Unity of the Plot."¹¹¹ He credited his work foremost with "the presence of a one all-pervading, all-combining, Principle."¹¹² This focus on the principle of *Remorse* (which the letter goes on at length to explain), is what drives the action of the play. Though Coleridge cut much of his elegant verse, he did it to create a more intense dramatic experience.

As any good, practical playwright, Coleridge worked with what he had. Though collaborating with some second-rate actors, he reshaped *Remorse* into a simpler, clearer, moreactable play. Literary critics might lament the loss of some of the piece's best poetry—including "The Foster-Mother's Tale" and "The Dungeon"—but the revisions to *Remorse* gave Coleridge something he never managed to achieve with *Lyrical Ballads* or any of his other books of poetry: financial and popular success. The production at Drury Lane netted Coleridge about £400, which the author estimated to be "more than all my literary Labors put together, nay, thrice as much."¹¹³ Even if this was a slight exaggeration, it is clear the Drury Lane production rewarded Coleridge's efforts as a dramatist far more than his poetry ever lined his pocketbook.

The extraordinary run at Drury Lane was followed by performances all over England and abroad, helping to bring Coleridge's literary vision to a multitude of people who might never

have read a line of his poetry. It also showed that modern verse drama could indeed be successful. More was riding on *Remorse* than just one writer's ambitions, and while the play was still early in its run, Coleridge wrote, "if I succeed, I succeed for others as well as myself."¹¹⁴ The success of *Remorse* was not lost on the likes of Lord Byron, John Keats, and Percy Shelley, all of whom went on to write plays of their own. Of those three writers, only Byron saw his plays performed during his lifetime, but a hundred years later Shelley's *The Cenci* had an extraordinary afterlife, attracting theatre artists as diverse as Aurélien Lugné-Poë, Karel Čapek, and Antonin Artaud.¹¹⁵ Even though interest in Coleridge's play peaked in the early nineteenth century, the impact of its success continued to reverberate for years to come.

Biographers have long noted the importance of *Remorse* to Coleridge from a practical and financial perspective, but they often dismiss its importance to him as an artist. He worked furiously rewriting the play, even continuing to revise it after it had opened. More importantly, he worked on it not strictly as a poet, but as a practical dramatist, successfully providing his audience with a finely tuned stage play. Coleridge deserves to be remembered as a poet, philosopher, and theorist—but also as a playwright. His levelheaded revisions, designed to craft a stage-worthy piece of drama, show another side to the writer, and Coleridge scholars do a disservice to the diversity of his talents when they ignore this important aspect of his career.

¹ Ve-Yin Tee, *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism: After the Revolution, 1793-1818* (London: Continuum, 2009), 127.

² Joseph Cottle, *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey* (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1847), 134.

³ Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 126.

⁴ Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-Law, F.S.A.*, ed. Thomas Sadler, vol. 1 (New York, AMS Press, 1967), 198.

⁵ Horace Twiss, "Farewell Address," lines 3-4. The poem is included in Thomas Campbell's *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), 239-40.

⁶ *The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror*, vol. 2 (London: William Molineux, 1813), 392.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 393-94.

⁸ E.K. Chambers, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), 255.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

¹¹ See J.C.C. Mays's introduction to the stage version of *Remorse* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays: Part 2*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 1044-48.

¹² Bate, 126 and 139.

¹³ Katharine Cooke, *Coleridge* (London: Routledge, 1979), 38.

¹⁴ Rosemary Ashton *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 100.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁶ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 162-66.

¹⁷ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 324.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 331.

²⁰ William Christie, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 191.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "Unsigned review, *The Times*, 25 January 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 119.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁵ *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, 125.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁹ Sir Walter Scott, *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

³² William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections From His Diaries and Letters*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock (New York: Harper & Bros., 1875), 44.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 3, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 426.

³⁵ Coleridge, *Letters*, 421.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 426.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ All citations to Coleridge's play texts refer to *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001). Lines of plays are indicated by act, scene, and line number. This passage occurs at 1.1.102-08. In this case, I have used the punctuation in the version submitted to the inspector of plays, John Larpent. This manuscript, commonly known as the Larpent Version, is dated both 4 January and 5 January 1813, when the play was still in its rehearsal period.

³⁹ *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, 116.

⁴⁰ Thomas Barnes, "Examiner, 31 January 1813, 73-74," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 124.

⁴¹ Coleridge continued to revise the play after opening night. J.C.C. Mays dates the stage version of *Remorse* included in *The Collected Works* to mid-February, 1813, and states there is not enough evidence to conclude which changes were made when, though differences between the

performance text and the version submitted to the censors must have been made after the creation of the Larpent Version in early January.

⁴² 1.2.313-15 in the Larpent Version.

⁴³ According to Coleridge, nature had denied Rae "all volume & depth of Voice." *Letters*, 436.

⁴⁴ Barnes, 124.

⁴⁵ Coleridge, *Letters*, 427.

⁴⁶ Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature* (Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1985), 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 2004), 91.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵¹ W.J. Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois UP, 1957), 204.

⁵² Sir Uvedale Price, *On the Picturesque* (Edinburgh: Caldwell, Lloyd, and Co., 1842), 98.

⁵³ "Unsigned review, *Morning Post*, 25 January 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 118.

⁵⁴ Coleridge, *Letters*, 427.

⁵⁵ John Fyvie, *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 290.

⁵⁶ "Unsigned review, *The Times*," 120.

⁵⁷ Barnes, 122.

⁵⁸ "Unsigned review, *Satirist*, February 1813, xii, 187-92," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 130.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "Unsigned review, *Morning Post*, 25 January 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 118.

⁶¹ "Memoir of Mrs. Julia Glover," in *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes*, vol. 4 (London: G. Virtue, 1826), 19.

⁶² "Memoir of Mrs. Julia Glover," 20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷¹ For an account of the duel, see "Memoir of Robert W. Elliston," in *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes*, vol. 3 (London: G. Virtue, 1825), 80.

⁷² "Memoir of Mrs. Julia Glover," 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Remorse (Quotation)," in *A Sentimental Library: Comprising Books Formerly Owned by Famous Writers, Presentation Copies, Manuscripts, and Drawings*, ed. Harry B. Smith, (Privately Printed, 1914), 57.

⁷⁷ Coleridge, *Letters*, 426.

⁷⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Preface," in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays: Part 2*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 1065.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1066.

⁸⁰ Deven Parker, "Media Networks of Performance and Print in 'The Foster-Mother's Tale,'" unpublished.

⁸¹ The direction occurs at 4.1.60 of the stage version.

⁸² That line was apparently not given in the first public performance of the play, as Coleridge refers in a letter to "Alhadra's *Sneak-exit*" which occurred on opening night, and of which he greatly disapproved. *Letters*, 428.

⁸³ Fyvie, 284.

⁸⁴ J.H. Jameson, "Remorse," 1813. This and the other images discussed can all be found in the collection of the British Museum.

⁸⁵ John Rogers, "Mrs Glover, as Mrs Candour," circa 1820.

⁸⁶ John Alais, "Mr Pope & Mrs Glover as Mr & Mrs Oakley," 1807.

⁸⁷ Luigi Schiavonetti, "Portrait of Julia Glover, as Roxalana, in Bickerstaffe's 'The Sultan'," 1806.

⁸⁸ Barnes, 124.

⁸⁹ "Unsigned review, *Theatrical Inquisitor*, February 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 132.

⁹⁰ See J.C.C. Mays's introduction to the print version of *Remorse* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays: Part 2*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 1232.

⁹¹ George Erving, "Coleridge as Playwright" in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 405.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 405.

⁹³ The two other passages Erving cites are "The Dungeon" and "The Foster-Mother's Tale," which were first published in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge has Alvar recite the lines from "The Dungeon" at the opening of Act V in the printed version, though there is no evidence Elliston performed these lines on stage when he appeared as Alvar. As previously discussed, Coleridge included "The Foster-Mother's Tale" in an appendix to the published play.

⁹⁴ Julie A. Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 102.

⁹⁵ Erving, 405.

⁹⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 89.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 251.

¹⁰⁰ J. Carlson, 134.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰² "Unsigned review, *The Times*," 120.

¹⁰³ Jibon Krishna Banerjee, *The Dramatic Works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1994), 116.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁵ Joanna Baillie, *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812), xiv.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xv.

¹⁰⁷ Friedrich Schiller, *The Robbers and Wallenstein*, trans. F.J. Lamport (New York: Penguin, 1979), 166.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, 212.

¹⁰⁹ "From an unsigned review, *La Belle Assemblée*, February 1813," in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London: Routledge, 1970), 137.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Coleridge, *Letters*, 433.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 437.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 431.

¹¹⁵ Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 277.

CHAPTER FOUR

Succeeding Siddons: Shelley's Unsung Muse

Sarah Siddons inspired Joanna Baillie, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and other dramatists, but Sarah Smith could not compare to the great actress, and Julia Glover was fated to be linked to more comedic roles. It was not until Eliza O'Neill made her London debut at Covent Garden that an actress appeared who finally rivaled the great Siddons. Over the course of her brief career in London, O'Neill even came to eclipse her famous predecessor. She exhibited a new style of acting that focused on dramatic emotional shifts and psychological transformation. Famous for playing sinful yet sympathetic heroines, O'Neill came to represent a new sensibility on the Regency stage, attracting the admiration of many people, including some of the most celebrated writers of her era. Jane Austen, for instance, praised O'Neill, but also noted when her acting did not produce its intended effects. After seeing O'Neill in a tragedy, Austen complained that she "took two Pocket handkerchiefs, but had very little occasion for either."¹ Though audience expectations were not always met, O'Neill consistently made an impression. Like Siddons before her, she was a valuable asset for any new play to have.

Just as Siddons influenced Baillie and Coleridge, O'Neill inspired a new generation of Romantics. Chief among those impacted by O'Neill's acting was Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley the poet had little use for the stage before he encountered O'Neill. After he saw her, though, he became Shelley the dramatist, penning *The Cenci*, the most powerful and stage-worthy tragedy to come out of the British Romantic period. Just as previous authors had written specifically for

Siddons, Shelley wrote specifically for O'Neill, and the experience of doing so changed his writing forever.

Even before she made her London debut on 6 October 1814, people were already making comparisons between O'Neill and Siddons, noting the striking originality of the younger actress. When John Philip Kemble discovered her acting in Dublin, he reportedly wrote back to Covent Garden that the theatre should consider O'Neill and not her rival, a certain Miss Walstein known as the "Hibernian Siddons." Kemble wrote that Walstein was "only a Siddons diluted, and would be only tolerated when Siddons is forgotten."² He recruited the more interesting O'Neill to come to London, where she made her debut in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The young actress instantly became a sensation.

William Charles Macready was in the audience at Covent Garden when O'Neill performed Juliet. He later recalled how the young actress had emerged from the shadow of Siddons. "The noble pathos of Siddons's transcendent genius no longer served as the grand commentary and living exponent of Shakespeare's text," Macready wrote, "but in the native elegance, the feminine sweetness, the unaffected earnestness and gushing passion of Miss O'Neill the stage had received a worthy successor to her."³ Macready's language compares O'Neill with Siddons, but also specifies in what respects they were different. While Siddons excelled at "noble pathos" O'Neill possessed a "gushing passion" that was "unaffected" and appeared natural.

After her enormous success as Juliet, Covent Garden increased O'Neill's salary to £30 a week.⁴ She followed her triumph as Juliet with playing Belvidera in Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* and Isabella in Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, both roles in which Siddons had excelled. Writing in 1816, while O'Neill was approaching the height of her popularity,

Charles Inigo Jones noted how O'Neill and Siddons differed in their performances of Isabella. Jones claimed that the play's climactic scene "is perhaps too long for the powers of any one to sustain" but that "in this Mrs. Siddons particularly excelled" with a death scene including hysterics "so appalling as to produce a similar agitation in a great part of the female audience."⁵ O'Neill, on the other hand, while not as extreme, according to Jones "gives more real pathos to the character of Isabella than any actress we have seen."⁶ In role after role, Jones wrote, O'Neill's acting tended to "exhibit finished specimens of fine and natural acting, not carried so far as the storm of Mrs. Siddons, but sufficient to give full effect to the situation and sentiments."⁷

Jones constantly compares O'Neill to Siddons, and even suggests that it was because Siddons excelled as Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger* that O'Neill decided to play the same part.⁸ Though Siddons had originated the role on the English stage, O'Neill made it very much her own. Ironically, it was in this role, Jones tells us, that "the Critics gave a full and unqualified admission of Miss O'Neill's merits, and laid aside the rather too invidious comparisons constantly kept up between her and Mrs. Siddons."⁹ O'Neill followed this up with another fallen yet sympathetic heroine, the title character from Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore*. In this, she showed "a fine mixture of penitence and dignity" displaying an "outraged feeling sensible of injury" while also "overpowered by shame."¹⁰

Embodying Romanticism

O'Neill embodied a number of early-nineteenth-century aesthetic principles that came to be associated with Romanticism. She became the face of the artistic movement both for its practitioners and its detractors. As her acting gained favor over the poised, classical manner of Siddons, she came to represent the new style, which—in the words of Jones—was "suited

equally to the deep thrill of horror, as to the soft swell of sensibility and feeling."¹¹ O'Neill created a focal point for a diverse and heterogeneous Romantic movement, inspiring a variety of artists both inside and outside the theatre who tried to establish a new, more passionate aesthetic in opposition to what they saw as the staid, classical style represented by Siddons. Key to this debate was the word that was probably most commonly used when describing O'Neill's acting: natural.

While O'Neill's partisans admitted that Siddons could go further in her display of passion and fury, they held that she was superior to Siddons in her resemblance to nature. Critics of O'Neill picked up on this same dichotomy. William Hazlitt, who had mixed feelings about O'Neill taking the place of his beloved Siddons, openly mocked the tendency of the younger actress to appear natural instead of grand or refined. Rather than the heightened tragedy of Siddons, Hazlitt found the distress O'Neill displayed "in a great measure physical and natural: that is—such as is common to every sensible woman in similar circumstances."¹² In reviewing O'Neill's performance in Hannah More's *Percy*, a play also graced by Siddons, Hazlitt said the quality "ascribed to Miss O'Neill (indeed over every other actress) is that of *faultless nature*," but he personally found in this nature "a considerable degree of manner and monotony."¹³ Hazlitt found O'Neill's voice "nearer the common standard of level speaking, as her person is nearer the common size."¹⁴ This seems far from being a compliment.

The valorization of the natural and the ordinary, however, was an important tenet of Romantic aesthetics. In the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth called for poetry describing "incidents and situations from common life... in a selection of language really used by men."¹⁵ According to Wordsworth, "there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature."¹⁶ Nature itself is sufficient, though a poet can of course choose not to show its more

painful or disgusting aspects. This stance, while primarily aesthetic, was moral as well. The new kind of poetry Wordsworth advocated could—according to him—be "well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations."¹⁷

Wordsworth's aesthetic approach dealt with nature in a profoundly different way from the aesthetics of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who not coincidentally painted Sarah Siddons as the tragic muse. In his famous Third Discourse, Reynolds maintains that the efforts of a young artist should at first be "confined to the mere imitation" of the natural world.¹⁸ However, a true artist quickly moves beyond this stage to create something that is more elevated and refined. "Nature herself is not to be too closely copied," Reynolds warns, as "a mere copier of nature can never produce any thing great; can never raise and enlarge the conceptions, or warm the heart of the spectator."¹⁹ A true artist, according to Reynolds, must improve upon nature "by the grandeur of his ideas."²⁰

By identifying O'Neill's acting as natural and close to nature, critics placed O'Neill at the center of one of the most important aesthetic controversies of the Romantic era. For the partisans of O'Neill, nothing could be greater praise than that she acted naturally. As Hazlitt's comments make clear, however, being natural could also mean being nothing more than common, in the pejorative sense of the word. For the partisans of Siddons, the elder actress had not simply been painted by Reynolds—she represented his entire aesthetic theory. Reynolds identified "The Ideal Beauty" as "*divine*."²¹ Thus, replacing the ideal Siddons with the natural O'Neill must have felt a bit like blasphemy.

And yet replacing Siddons as the tragic muse was something O'Neill was doing quite literally. Just as Reynolds had painted Siddons as the tragic muse in 1784, in 1815 George Francis Joseph painted a similar portrait of O'Neill as the muse of tragedy.²² To mark the

Shakespeare bicentennial on 23 April 1816, Covent Garden chose O'Neill to physically embody the tragic muse in a production of Garrick's *The Jubilee*. Ann Barry had played the tragic muse in the original production of *The Jubilee* in 1769 (five years too late to celebrate the actual bicentennial of Shakespeare's birth). The poster advertising the 1816 revival of *The Jubilee* at Covent Garden gives top billing in the production to "Miss O'Neill" as the tragic muse and "Mrs. Gibbs" as the comic muse.²³ If there were any doubt which of these two performers was more popular, the playbill resolves it by advertising O'Neill's name in even larger letters at the bottom, as performing later in the week.

In the following months, O'Neill caused a sensation while on tour. She appeared at the Birmingham Theatre Royal in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Jealous Wife*, *Venice Preserved*, *The Stranger*, and Edward Moore's *The Gamester*, but in spite of her numerous appearances, hundreds of people had to be turned away, and many "settled for a glimpse of the adored actress coming or going at the Royal Hotel."²⁴ Other stories of O'Neill's reception while on tour show equal enthusiasm. According to rumor, when Edmund Kean appeared for three nights in Portsmouth, he was given the princely sum of £50, but O'Neill refused to make the same journey to act in Portsmouth for less than £75.²⁵ Though the rumor cannot be substantiated, the very fact that people believed O'Neill was making more money than Kean shows her incredible popularity.

Also in 1816, a year that seems to have been a tipping point in O'Neill's career, the engraver J. Sidebotham came out with a satiric print entitled "Theatrical Jealousy—or—The Rival Queens of Covent Garden." This print shows a fresh-faced O'Neill triumphing over a grotesque, elderly Siddons. It includes modified dialogue from Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens*, replacing names with the easily decoded "O'N—l and S—d—s!"²⁶ O'Neill recites some

stirring lines from Lee's tragedy, while one of her fans in the audience expresses his fidelity to "Ireland Forever" by calling out, "Erin go Bragh!" The print reinforces Jones's claim that O'Neill had surpassed Siddons. Those who doubted this could now compare the two themselves, since Siddons had in fact returned to the stage in a series of performances.

Between 1813 and 1819, Siddons acted around twenty times in London and Edinburgh.²⁷ This included acting ten nights in Edinburgh in 1815 to benefit the family of her deceased son Henry, an experience she found exceedingly painful. According to one biographer, "nervous agitation perceptibly affected her on the first night of her appearance, and now and then interrupted her voice; but after the first scene, she subdued this sensation."²⁸ The emotional distress did not stop her, however, from performing a few nights in London in 1816 at the command of Princess Charlotte.²⁹ Russ McDonald has speculated that these appearances might have been motivated in part by jealousy of O'Neill.³⁰ If so, returning to the stage was the worst thing she could have done.

"Players should be immortal, if their own wishes or ours could make them so; but they are not," William Hazlitt lamented after seeing Siddons at one of the command performances for the princess.³¹ "They not only die like other people, but like other people they cease to be young, and are no longer themselves, even while living."³² According to Hazlitt, Princess Charlotte could no more command Siddons to perform as she did in her prime than she could command David Garrick to rise from the grave and perform as he did while living. Siddons's great acting days were over, whether she wanted to admit it or not. As Sidebotham's print makes it abundantly clear, her appearances on stage only served to heighten the attractions of O'Neill and confirm her place as the new muse of tragedy.

One hold-out for Siddons was Lord Byron, who left England in 1816 while O'Neill was at the height of her fame. Byron claimed that he had never seen O'Neill, and had in fact deliberately avoided seeing her "in order to guard himself against the risk of becoming a convert."³³ His determination not to see her, however, did not prevent O'Neill from creeping into his writing. In a satirical poem he sent to John Murray in 1817, Byron poked fun at the mania over the young actress, writing: "Thus run our time and tongues away— / But to return Sir—to your play— / Sorry—Sir—but I can not deal— / Unless 'twere acted by O'Neill—" ³⁴ Byron's joke is that a new play could not be successfully performed unless the popular O'Neill appeared in it. This was not far from the truth.

In 1816, Richard Lalor Sheil's play *Adelaide, or the Emigrants*, which had originated at the Crow Street Theatre in Dublin, made its London premiere with O'Neill in the leading role. The piece likely would never have made it to London were it not for O'Neill, who also starred in the play when it was in Dublin. Sheil claimed he wrote the play specifically for her, and he attributed the success of the piece to her acting.³⁵ He also made "alterations and curtailments" at her suggestion.³⁶ The London critics praised O'Neill's acting even as they panned the script. "Miss O'Neill fills better than any one else the part assigned her by the author," Hazlitt wrote.³⁷ The play's language, though, he called "nonsense and indecency."³⁸

In spite of Hazlitt's opinion that O'Neill's acting was "thrown away" on Sheil's writing, she continued to appear in the author's plays.³⁹ In 1817, she starred in Sheil's *The Apostate*, based loosely on Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *Amar después de la muerte*. The play was a success, but again reviewers attributed its popularity to O'Neill's acting rather than the writing. *The London Quarterly Review* damned the published version of the play (which incidentally, Sheil dedicated to O'Neill), but noted it had benefited onstage from an unnamed "popular tragedian" who was "a

beautiful and interesting actress."⁴⁰ The fact that O'Neill goes unnamed in the review could be an indication that readers were assumed to already know who that actress was.

O'Neill later starred in Sheil's *Bellamira, or the Siege of Tunis*, using what one Sheil biographer called "her all-powerful aid in bringing it before the public."⁴¹ According to *The Literary Gazette*, "O'Neill produced a strong effect, and in general her personation of the part was powerful."⁴² However, the same reviewer went on to claim the play itself "does not approach that mastery which is wanted to redeem the stage and dramatic literature of our time from the imputation of mediocrity."⁴³ In 1819, O'Neill appeared in Sheil's *Evadne, or the Statue*, based loosely on James Shirley's play *The Traitor*. Again, critics derided the play while praising O'Neill. *The Theatrical Inquisitor* claimed the title character "possesses no nice distinguishing traits of character, nevertheless afforded much scope for the exquisite performance of Miss O'Neil [sic]."⁴⁴ *Evadne* was yet one more new play that had met with success because of O'Neill, but critics still felt it was beneath her powers. They longed to see her star in a new play equal to her merits.

More promising than the string of star vehicles penned by Sheil was Henry Hart Milman's tragedy *Fazio*. The piece was well received when it was first published in 1815 and went through several editions, in spite of the fact that it was written by a young student at Oxford. According to Milman, the play was first performed at the Surrey Theatre under the title *The Italian Wife* and then at Bath and finally Covent Garden, all without his permission.⁴⁵ Though it was originally published without being performed, Milman said he wrote the play with production in mind "and could not but be pleased and flattered by its success."⁴⁶ O'Neill was at first hesitant about the piece, but audiences and critics alike hailed her performance in the play at Covent Garden.

Inspiring Shelley

One audience member in particular went on to be profoundly influenced by O'Neill's star turn in *Fazio*. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley saw O'Neill multiple times in *Fazio*, and according to his friend Thomas Love Peacock, Shelley sat in "absorbed attention to Miss O'Neill's performance."⁴⁷ The following year, Shelley composed his own play *The Cenci*, a piece that bears strong resemblances to *Fazio*. His wife further confirmed the importance of O'Neill's acting on Shelley's drama. In her note on the published version of *The Cenci*, Mary Shelley wrote that O'Neill was often in her husband's thoughts as he wrote the play, and that "when he had finished, he became anxious that his tragedy should be acted, and receive the advantage of having this accomplished actress to fill the part of the heroine."⁴⁸

Scholars have long known that O'Neill was a significant factor in Shelley's decision to compose *The Cenci* as a performable, stage-worthy drama. Shelley's previous attempt at writing a play, *Prometheus Unbound*, was a true closet drama that defied any attempt at staging. Within months after composing the bulk of that piece, however, Shelley had penned a completely different work.⁴⁹ Unlike *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci* has been acted with great success on numerous occasions, including commercial productions in London West End theatres.⁵⁰ The play has also inspired theatre artists as diverse as Aurélien Lugné-Poë, Karel Čapek, and Antonin Artaud.⁵¹ What scholars have been slow to recognize is exactly how performances by a single Irish actress convinced Shelley to put aside closet drama and attempt a work so different from his previous writing. How was it that O'Neill came to have such an impact on a major writer like Shelley?

Mary Shelley made it clear in her note on *The Cenci* that her late husband wished to have the tragedy acted. Though her husband was "easily disgusted" by the acting of his day, the Shelleys had seen O'Neill "several times" while preparing for their departure to Italy, Mary claimed.⁵² According to her, O'Neill filled her husband's imagination as he wrote *The Cenci*, and he wanted O'Neill to act the leading role of Beatrice, a claim supported by the fact that the first place Shelley had the play sent was to Covent Garden, where O'Neill had been performing. Playwrights commonly create roles with specific performers in mind, even if those performers never come to act the roles they inspire. As Marvin Carlson notes in his book *The Haunted Stage*, all audiences are continually "ghosting" past performances and past performers onto the plays that they watch, seeing both the current play and their own recollections of past performances at the same time.⁵³ This process of ghosting also takes place when writers conceive new parts in their minds. Past performances of individual actors "haunt" the playwright as he or she composes a new dramatic text. Carlson points out not just obvious examples of this, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller writing to the strengths of Weimar actors, but also more unexpected examples, such as Henrik Ibsen, a playwright with tenuous ties to the theatres that produced his work, being constantly concerned with the qualities certain actors might bring to a role.

Though Shelley's ties to the theatres of his day were likewise tenuous at best, he seems to have done the same thing with Eliza O'Neill, ghosting her in his mind into the role of Beatrice Cenci. In a letter to Peacock, Shelley himself stated that O'Neill was "precisely fitted" for the role of Beatrice, and "it might even seem to have been written for her."⁵⁴ The letter confirms Mary Shelley's statements about O'Neill often being in her husband's thoughts as he wrote the play. The testimonies of both the author and his wife credit O'Neill with a significant impact on

Shelley's writing, yet few people even know who she was. One of Shelley's most important muses remains largely unrecognized.

Eliza O'Neill, later Lady Wrixon-Becher, is not completely unknown today. Her brief entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* mentions some of her more famous roles, including Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*, and the title role in *Jane Shore*.⁵⁵ The Garrick Club has two portraits of O'Neill, including the one by George Francis Joseph depicting O'Neill as Melpomene, the muse of tragedy.⁵⁶ O'Neill's contemporaries knew her far better than we do, though, and would frequently use her name as a byword for sympathetic emotional qualities, as opposed to the older Siddons's comparatively stoic classicism. For instance, in a letter to her niece, Jane Austen wrote that a certain acquaintance "does not shine in the tender feelings" and thus "will never be a Miss O'neal; [sic] —more in the Mrs. Siddons line."⁵⁷

Today, theatre historians revere Siddons and mostly forget O'Neill, whose career was far shorter. O'Neill's Covent Garden debut was on 6 October 1814, and her final performance in London was on 19 July 1819. Thus her entire career upon the London stage lasted fewer than five years. Siddons made her first inauspicious appearance on the London stage on 29 December 1775. After honing her skills in Bath, she reappeared with far greater acclaim on 10 October 1782 and officially retired on 29 June 1812, though she continued to give benefit performances until 1819. Dominating the London stage for 30 years and appearing intermittently for even longer, Siddons burned her name into the collective theatrical memory, while O'Neill made an intense impression for a short time but was largely forgotten after the close of her brief career.

One of the most extensive comparisons between the two performers appears in Jones's memoir of O'Neill, written while the younger actress was still at the height of her reputation. In

his brief work, he described her as "the eldest daughter of John O'Neill, Esq. a gentleman descended from a well known family of that name in Ireland."⁵⁸ There is likely some whitewashing in this account, as the family made a meager living as itinerant actors. According to her entry in *The Autographic Mirror*, O'Neill was raised in indigence and as a girl could be seen "running barefoot about the streets."⁵⁹ In the early twentieth century, John Fyvie identified O'Neill as the model for the social-climbing actress Miss Fotheringay in William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Pendennis*. Both had a striking physical appearance, an offstage Irish brogue, an eccentric father, and both left the stage after marrying a Baronet who was also an amateur actor.⁶⁰ Whether the depiction of her as a social climber is accurate or not, she did indeed marry well, becoming the wife of an Irish member of the U.K. parliament in 1819 and retiring from the stage.

Her return to Ireland was the occasion for a celebratory poem *Miss O'Neil's* [sic] *Welcome to Kilkenny*. The anonymous author emphasizes the importance of O'Neill's "native isle" (25), calling her a "Daughter of Erin" (29).⁶¹ He also depicts her as an enchantress casting a spell over the audience. Though O'Neill acted comic parts as well as tragic roles, the poem focuses solely on the latter. A typical passage entreats: "Down—down—in shuddering horror go— / And we will follow, till the chill / Of fainting soul and sense doth shew, / Thou art our feeling's mistress still!" (49-52). At one point, the poem's speaker even asks if O'Neill has experienced terrors personally, including the terror of death, such is the realism the piece attributes to her acting.

Such invocations of terrors were particularly suited for the role of Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*. In writing about O'Neill's performance in the role, Jones singles out in his memoir the scene in the first act where Belvidera tells her husband, "Oh I will love thee, even in madness

love thee" (1.1.370)⁶². This line proves to be prophetic for the character, as she does in fact go mad near the end of the play. However, Belvidera is no weak-minded woman who falls apart simply because she loses her man. Quite to the contrary, after Belvidera finds out that her husband Jaffeir is involved in a conspiracy against the state, she convinces him to reveal the treachery to the Senate. While Jaffeir vacillates, it is Belvidera who remains resolved. This juxtaposition of a strong young woman with a well-meaning but unreliable family member would later find echoes in *The Cenci*.

O'Neill had another opportunity to display heroic resolve as the title character of Rowe's *Jane Shore*. Though guilty of a serious crime (adultery with the past king), Jane Shore boldly stands up to the unjust Gloucester, whom audiences immediately recognized as the future King Richard III. One contemporary account of O'Neill's performance in the play noted her stoicism in the face of the tyrant. As he passes sentence upon her, "She stands in solemn attention; unmoved by Expression either of terror or grief; her eyes elevated, and steadfastly fixed."⁶³ Again, the character's strength has echoes in *The Cenci*. At the same time that certain parts of *Jane Shore* highlighted the main character's stoicism, there were also ample opportunities for the actress to display her famous emotional sensibilities. Later in the play, as Jane is dying, O'Neill had to call out ecstatic lines such as: "Fall, then, ye mountains, on my guilty head; / Hide me, ye rocks, within your secret caverns" (5.1.316-17).⁶⁴

Of course, not all of O'Neill's roles were successes. As her entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* points out, she was generally regarded as a failure as Lady Randolph in *Douglas* by John Home. This should not be surprising, as the part required O'Neill, a beautiful young woman in her twenties, to believably fret over a long-lost son who is now a young man. The scene where she reveals herself to him must have seemed particularly ridiculous, as it

required the still blossoming O'Neill to lament "The poor remains of beauty once admired" and declare "The autumn of my days is come already" (4.190-91).⁶⁵ Her appearances in comedies were also considered to lack the power of her dramatic roles. Fyvie's assessment of O'Neill's comic talents was that "with the common weakness of most tragedians, she wished to shine in comedy also; and this she could never do."⁶⁶

O'Neill was particularly famous for her portrayal of sympathetic fallen women who display psychological transformation. According to one anonymous contemporary, some critics found fault with these portrayals because they were simply too moving. They suggested that in playing Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger* "she interested the compassion of the spectator too much in favour of an adulteress."⁶⁷ Still, audiences praised O'Neill for her Belvidera, her Jane Shore, and in particular for her Juliet.

It is unclear in how many of these roles Shelley saw O'Neill perform, as he rarely recorded theatre outings in his letters. Mary Shelley kept a journal in which she frequently listed trips to the theatre, during many of which Percy Shelley likely accompanied her. However, Mary Shelley did not write in her journal every day, and numerous pages are missing. She records that at the beginning of 1817 she saw the comedy *The Jealous Wife* by George Colman the Elder, in which O'Neill performed the role of Mrs. Oakley.⁶⁸ As fascinating as this fact might be, Percy Shelley never remarked upon seeing O'Neill in this part, though he responded enthusiastically to seeing her in a very different role the following year.

In the months leading up to their departure for Italy, Mary and Percy Shelley saw at least two performances in which O'Neill acted, one on 16 February 1818, and the other on 5 March that same year.⁶⁹ Both performances were in the same role, that of Bianca in Milman's *Fazio*. The play's verse cannot compare to that of Shelley. The dramatic structure of *Fazio*, however,

gave O'Neill opportunities to shine. It offered a role especially suited to her talents, allowing her to capture Shelley's imagination with her acting.

Shelley's Sea Change

Before examining O'Neill's performance in *Fazio*, it is important to observe the sea change in Shelley's writing from *Prometheus Unbound* to *The Cenci*, a subject I will return to later in this chapter. Although Aeschylus supplied the subject for *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley's preface makes clear that his real model was John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Shelley compares Prometheus with his own conception of Milton's Satan. Though nominally composed in the form of a drama, *Prometheus Unbound* probably has more in common with Milton's epic than with any play, including the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus. Like Milton's epic, Shelley's poem moves from place to place, constantly shifting focus away from the protagonist. Like Milton, Shelley employs allegorical characters to give voice to ideas rather than demonstrating those ideas through action.

Prometheus Unbound begins with a seventy-three-line monologue by Prometheus, followed by the songs of disembodied voices. Prometheus then proceeds to have a conversation with the Earth and then with a Phantasm of Jupiter (which is merely the god's image, not Jupiter himself). Only after all this does anything dramatic happen in the play, as the appearance of Furies (after 337 lines) allows the protagonist to at last come into conflict with something more substantial than a shadow. Mercury enters asking Prometheus to repent. The Titan, of course, declines, so the Furies plague him until some unnamed benevolent Spirits arrive to bring relief at the end of the first act.

The rest of the play continues this un-dramatic structure in which conflict between onstage characters is kept to an absolute minimum. Allegorical figures dominate the text, and even when action breaks through the philosophizing, as with the fall of Jupiter in Act III, the characters do not change. Prometheus himself notes that while "the world ebbs and flows," the gods remain "ourselves unchanged" (3.3.24).⁷⁰ The play works around to an Aristotelian *peripeteia*, as the situations of Prometheus and Jupiter are reversed, but neither seems to have learned anything from the experience. Any tragic recognition, any *anagnorisis* that occurs, is purely superficial. After composing *The Cenci*, Shelley tacked a fourth act onto *Prometheus Unbound*, but it consists entirely of celebratory verses, and the main characters of Prometheus and Jupiter do not even appear.

The Cenci, on the other hand, is firmly rooted in the realm of drama, and Shelley seems acutely aware of this. Instead of citing *Paradise Lost* in his preface to the play, he draws parallels with *King Lear* and the Oedipus dramas of Sophocles. Shelley also openly acknowledges his debt to Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *El Purgatorio de san Patricio* for the description of a chasm appointed for Count Cenci's murder. He intended that passage to be spoken by O'Neill, who already had experience with adaptations of Calderón. It was O'Neill, after all, who originated the role of Florinda in Sheil's *The Apostate*, itself based on Calderón's *Amar después de la muerte*.⁷¹

The text of *The Cenci* is far more influenced by the stage than is the abstract poetry of *Prometheus Unbound*. Gone are the amorphous allegorical figures and speeches extending for pages at a time. *The Cenci* is set in a specific time and place, but more importantly, specific characters enact the drama. In contrast to the static gods of *Prometheus Unbound*, the characters in *The Cenci* evolve over the course of the play. Beatrice, in particular, grows in tragic stature, exhibiting a wide range of emotions as she works her way to the play's conclusion. What led to

this massive shift in Shelley's writing? The answer would seem to be not something Shelley read, but something he heard and saw: the acting of Eliza O'Neill.

Shelley himself linked the role of Beatrice to O'Neill, so it should not be surprising that the part offers numerous opportunities for a tragic actress to display her talent. The audience first meets Beatrice as she speaks with her former suitor Orsino, who is now a priest. Shelley presents Beatrice as cool and controlled, though not dispassionate. In a typical passage, she tells Orsino:

Ours was a youthful contract, which you first
 Broke, by assuming vows no Pope will loose.
 And thus I love you still, but holily,
 Even as a sister or a spirit might;
 And so I swear a cold fidelity.

(1.2.22-26)

Beatrice's fixedness of purpose might be reminiscent of the stoicism shown by Prometheus, but unlike the Titan, Beatrice will evolve as a character.

When Count Cenci gleefully announces at a banquet that two of his sons that he loathes are now dead, Beatrice becomes distraught. She pleads with the guests to take her and her stepmother Lucretia away from her violent and tyrannical father, but to no avail. Like Prometheus who has challenged Jupiter, Beatrice has challenged her father in begging for release from his domination, and she must now be punished. While Shelley portrays Prometheus as unemotional about his fate, he gives Beatrice stage directions such as "*wildly, staggering towards the door*" (2.1.111). Such behavior would seem utterly out of place in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the protagonist lacks wildness just as the play lacks concrete doors toward which a character might stagger.

Beatrice next appears after her rape by her father, and Shelley provides a mad scene in which the actress can again display her skill. Beatrice mistakes her stepmother for a madhouse

nurse. She even fails to recognize herself, saying, "I thought I was that wretched Beatrice / Men speak of, whom her father sometimes hales / From hall to hall by the entangled hair" (3.1.43-45). Beatrice regains her sanity, however, declaring, "This is the Cenci Palace; / Thou art Lucretia; I am Beatrice" (3.1.64-65). With this realization, she also comes to grips with her situation—that her father has raped her and that society offers no recourse.

Beatrice then becomes the driving force in the family's plot for revenge. While Prometheus endures his suffering, Beatrice decides to fight back against the tyrant. She could have resolved, like Prometheus, to forbear and endure, but this would not have been very dramatic. Shelley admits as much in his preface. He states that a person who avoided revenge might have been wiser and better, but could never have interested an audience "for a dramatic purpose."⁷²

Shelley presents Beatrice as more steadfast than the hired murderers who actually do the deed. She chastises them for being afraid of a creaking iron gate, and when they hesitate to kill the count, she snatches a dagger from one of them and offers to murder Count Cenci herself. After her father is dead, she claims she will be able to "sleep / Fearless and calm" (4.3.64-65). Authorities from Rome arrive and uncover the murder, but Beatrice remains resolute, keeping her wits about her as her stepmother and brother fall to pieces. Though she knows she is legally culpable of a crime, in her own mind she is morally innocent, given the horrors (including incestuous rape) her father committed against her and planned to commit again.

The final act provides the actress playing Beatrice with her greatest chance to shine, and it deserves special attention. Here the character's mind is constantly at work. Beatrice is transformed by her thoughts as she comes to a growing revelation about her condition. When she is first dragged before the court, she displays the same steely resolve she had in Act IV. The

murderer Marzio has confessed under torture, and the judge calls upon Beatrice to confess as well. Instead, she turns to Marzio and urges him to recant his confession. Marzio is overcome with guilt not for the murder of Count Cenci, but for his betrayal of Beatrice. He calls out that her "stern yet piteous look" is "worse than torture" (5.2.109-10).

Marzio declares Beatrice's innocence and dies before he can be tortured again. The judge then secures the Pope's permission to torture the rest of the Cenci family, and Beatrice's stepmother and brother both break under the pressure. Beatrice envisions the crowds thronging to her execution, but she remains firm. Her family urges her to confess in order to avoid torture, but Beatrice claims she is beyond physical pain. Defiantly, she tells the judge, "My pangs are of my mind, and of the heart" (5.3.65).

The judge asks Beatrice again if she is guilty of her father's death, and she responds that he should instead ask God why He permitted the crimes she suffered. Now that her death is assured, Beatrice shifts from outright denials of culpability to simply professing her moral innocence. She proclaims to the judge: "Say what ye will. I shall deny no more" (5.3.86). Beatrice is convicted, though she has not confessed, and the judge sentences her to death.

One hope remains. A cardinal has sought the Pope's pardon, but when Beatrice sees the cardinal, she correctly guesses that no pardon has been granted. Here Shelley again uses the stage direction "*wildly*" to describe Beatrice's speech. She has what amounts to a second mad scene as the full enormity of her impending death becomes apparent:

My God! Can it be possible I have
 To die so suddenly? So young to go
 Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!
 To be nailed down into a narrow place;
 To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more
 Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again
 Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost—

How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be . . .
 What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go mad!
 (5.4.48-56)

Beatrice imagines what it might be like if there is no God, or worse yet, if the spirit of her father should be as omnipotent in the next world as he seemed to be in this one. The once resolute Beatrice is driven to despair as she realizes the afterlife could be as unjust as the world she leaves behind.

After a moment, the fear is gone. Though Lucretia urges Beatrice to think of Christ, Shelley makes it clear his heroine's consolation is not of a Christian nature. It is not the warmth of God's love that she feels, but rather a coldness of certain death. When the others entertain the hope of a last-minute reprieve, Beatrice urges them to give up that thought so they too can become cold. She begins a rhapsody to Death, calling out: "Come, obscure Death, / And wind me in thine all-embracing arms" (5.4.115-16).

In this peace of certain death Beatrice can say her final composed farewells to her family. Over the course of the fifth act, she has moved psychologically from stone-like resolve, to mental suffering, to a partial relenting, to passionate ravings of despair. Finally, she discovers peace. The process can be seen as mirroring modern ideas about dying, which break the process down into denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventual acceptance.⁷³ Regardless of which terms we ascribe to the stages Beatrice goes through, there is a dramatic and psychologically believable shift in her consciousness as she approaches her execution.

This depiction of psychological change marks a turning point in Shelley's writing, not just in drama but in poetry as well. Consider first a very good poem Shelley wrote prior to *The Cenci*, the 1817 sonnet "Ozymandias":

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 And on the pedestal these words appear:
 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
 Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.'⁷⁴

The poem is undoubtedly powerful, just as *Prometheus Unbound* is at moments powerful, but like Prometheus, the speaker in the poem does not change. The reader's perception of Ozymandias might evolve, in the same way a reader of *Prometheus Unbound* might shift in the way he or she responds to Jupiter. The speaker, however, is the same person at the end of the poem as he was at the beginning. Even if he grew at some point in the past after hearing the story of Ozymandias, he does not grow or learn anything about himself over the course of recounting that story in the poem.

This lack of change could be attributed to the brevity of the poem, but the sonnet is a form famous for showing a change of mind in the speaker. This happens frequently in the sonnets of Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and John Donne, not to mention those of Shakespeare. A change in mental states is rare in the early poetry of Shelley. "Ozymandias" and *Prometheus Bound* are not outliers, but typical of Shelley's pre-*Cenci* poetry. The reader's mind might shift, but the speaker remains largely unmoved.

Shelley's later poetry, on the other hand, is famous for the fact that the speaker evolves over the course of the poem. The classic example is "Ode to the West Wind" which Shelley composed around the time he finished writing *The Cenci*. The speaker's mood shifts over the

course of the poem, and each canto provides a slightly different view of the West Wind and of the speaker's psychological state. Tellingly, the five cantos even roughly correspond with the mental shifts Beatrice undergoes in *The Cenci*. Like Beatrice, the speaker moves from resolve, to suffering, to partial truce, to terror and ravings, to eventual peace.

The poem begins with resolve, firmly countering the deathly West Wind with a coming spring that "shall blow / Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth" (9-10).⁷⁵ The second canto introduces new suffering as the approaching storm threatens to break. In the third canto, the speaker attempts a partial truce with the West Wind, beginning with thoughts of the Mediterranean's "summer dreams" (29), but terror gradually overpowers him, and he ends with the image of a submarine forest that turns "gray with fear" (41). In the fourth canto the speaker gives himself over to passionate ravings, calling out, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" (54). Finally, in the last canto, the speaker makes peace with the wind, becoming one with it, and by extension, with death.

Parallels between Beatrice Cenci and the unnamed speaker in "Ode to the West Wind" only go so far. However, the poem deftly displays mental shifts. The shifts take place in the same way that they do in the fifth act of *The Cenci* and in a way entirely different from Shelley's pre-*Cenci* poetry. This shifting of poetic consciousness became the basis for many of Shelley's later poems. It is particularly present in his most famous pieces, including "To a Skylark," "Adonais," and "Mutability." Indeed, it is what we think of when we think of Shelley.

Nothing in Shelley's earlier work (and certainly nothing in *Prometheus Bound*) approaches this complexity. Over the past 200 years, the motivation for this major change has remained obscured. If *The Cenci* were a closet drama, we would have to look to other writers to determine how Shelley made his breakthrough in writing, perhaps crediting Milman as the author

of *Fazio*. Shelley's real inspiration, however, seems not to have been Milman, but O'Neill. Yet while both Percy and Mary Shelley credited O'Neill with being a major impact on the *The Cenci* (and thus on the rest of Shelley's career as well), many commentators tried to downplay the importance of the actress. Shelley's cousin Thomas Medwin openly doubted Mary Shelley's testimony that O'Neill was in the author's thoughts as he worked out the character of Beatrice. Though Medwin was not present at the play's composition, he confidently proclaimed in his biography of his famous cousin that Shelley must have been too absorbed in his subject to have contemplated an actress.⁷⁶

In spite of its limitations (including numerous factual errors corrected by later editors), Medwin's 1847 biography of Shelley has been hugely influential, and his opinions on the composition of *The Cenci* have been echoed by later scholars. In his 1927 study *Shelley: His Life and Work*, Walter Edwin Peck essentially repeats Medwin's claim that *The Cenci* arose purely out of the author's genius, suggesting the play might have been inspired not by an actress but by the poet's grief over the death of his three-year-old son.⁷⁷ In 1960, Desmond King-Hele noted that "some unusual stimulus was acting" on Shelley when he wrote *The Cenci*, but he attributed that to the play's source material.⁷⁸ Even as criticism advanced beyond the hero worship of genius to take into account outside forces, scholars continued to overlook O'Neill. In her book *Shelley's Dream Women*, Margaret Crompton chronicles the numerous muses that inspired Shelley throughout his career, but she does not even mention O'Neill. The same is true of Ann Wroe's 2007 study *Being Shelley*, which delves deeply into the poet's artistic and spiritual development but leaves O'Neill completely out of the story.

Even some of the most recent work on Shelley continues to view the character of Beatrice as entirely the author's own, essentially unconnected with performances given by a mere

actress. For instance, James Bieri's 2008 biography briefly mentions O'Neill in a single paragraph. While discussing Shelley's letter to Peacock, Bieri claims the author wanted O'Neill to play Beatrice "but expressed little hope Edmund Kean would be available to play Count Cenci."⁷⁹ Perhaps due to a lack of familiarity with the relative positions of these two actors, Bieri seems to misunderstand the letter here. This was not a matter of mere availability. O'Neill acted at Covent Garden and Kean was the prized possession of Drury Lane, so they simply *could not* have performed on the same stage under normal circumstances. In sending the script to Covent Garden before sending it to Drury Lane, Shelley seems to have decided that it would be better to have O'Neill perform the part of Beatrice than to have Kean in the role of Count Cenci. Given the status of Kean at the time, this shows yet again how important Shelley felt O'Neill was to the play.

The Importance of *Fazio*

A close examination of O'Neill's role in *Fazio*—the play we know Shelley watched at least twice before his departure for Italy—reinforces the importance of the actress in the creation of *The Cenci*. As Bianca in *Fazio*, O'Neill would have displayed some of the same characteristics Shelley bestowed on Beatrice. In spite of the views of Medwin and others who have tried to relegate *The Cenci* to the domain of closet drama, the play is quite suited for the stage, as numerous productions can attest.⁸⁰ Shelley himself had little experience writing plays and confessed in his Preface that he had "but newly been awakened to the study of dramatic literature."⁸¹ His sudden change in writing style suggests that O'Neill's performance in *Fazio* was a conversational experience, convincing Shelley to abandon closet drama and create full-bodied characters that talented performers can act onstage. To understand how Shelley came to write a

brilliant play like *The Cenci*, we must first take a look at *Fazio*, a mediocre work that nonetheless gave O'Neill a chance to shine.

Like *The Cenci*, *Fazio* takes place in Italy and is allegedly inspired by actual historical events. The title character is an alchemist who takes the gold of a dead traveler and passes it off as the fruits of his own experiments. Though Fazio is happily married, an old flame, Marchesa Aldabella, suddenly starts taking an interest in him once he is rich. Fazio gives in to temptation, and his wife Bianca (the role played by O'Neill) becomes intensely jealous. At that point, the play starts to get interesting.

Like Beatrice in *The Cenci*, Bianca is full of righteous indignation. She has been wronged, and like Beatrice, she turns on the one to whom she lawfully owes love and respect.

Imagining her husband with Aldabella, she cries:

Fazio, thou settest a fever in my brain;
My very lips burn, Fazio, at the thought:
I had rather thou wert in thy winding-sheet
Than that bad woman's arms; I had rather grave-worms
Were on thy lips than that bad woman's kisses.
(2.3.56-60)⁸²

The sentiment of the speech is striking, even if it is odd that "bad woman" is the worst insult Bianca can conjure for her rival. Though the poetry is lacking, the play would have allowed O'Neill to convey the intense emotions for which she was famous.

Bianca knows her husband's secret, and after he spurns her, she resolutely goes to the Duke and exposes the crime. She gives Fazio's location as being with Aldabella and asks that he be brought away without time for even a parting kiss. Both her ruthlessness and her profound sense of being wronged are reminiscent of Beatrice in *The Cenci*. Though the verse never soars, the appeal of such actions for Shelley is easily seen. Bianca appears to be an embryonic version

of Shelley's own great heroine. Both characters display an unwavering resolve before authority. With Beatrice, this takes the form of her repeating her innocence in court. In Bianca's case, she repeats her husband's name three times before the Duke, the final time pitifully revealing herself as the denounced man's wife. After Fazio is captured, Bianca comes to regret her actions. This is something Beatrice never does, though like Bianca, she does change in her attitude toward the betrayal.

Following the scene with the Duke, *Fazio* becomes overly sentimental. Bianca forgives her husband and strives in vain to save his life. She even offers to give him up to Aldabella if the marchesa can do something to help. This complete reversal after Bianca has gone to such lengths to denounce her husband weakens the character. The dramatist portrays Bianca as not realizing that her denunciation will bring about a sentence of death. Such extreme naïveté might be conventional for heroines of the early-nineteenth-century stage, but it hardly helps to create a believable character, and the psychological believability of Beatrice is what makes *The Cenci* such a compelling play.

Beatrice passes from one mental state to another with a certain logic and coherence. Her changes might not be as great as Bianca's, but they are more grounded in believability. She remains a plausibly unified character throughout the play, even as her mind shifts toward the end. Huge vacillations in character were not unusual on the early nineteenth-century stage, and they might have been one of the reasons for Shelley's aversion to much of the theatre of his time. Peacock remarked that the poet "had a prejudice against theatres" that he himself "took some pains to overcome" before Shelley's encounter with O'Neill in *Fazio*.⁸³ Unlike the previous actors Shelley had seen, O'Neill had the ability to navigate shifts in her characters with great success, as was noted by her contemporaries. Seeing such a skilled actress might have helped convince

Shelley to move beyond the unchanging characters of *Prometheus Bound* and experiment with a heroine capable of transformation.

O'Neill was also famous for her mad scenes, and *Fazio* gave her a chance to shine in this respect as well. At one point, Bianca cries out, "Mad! mad!—aye, that it is!—aye, that it is! / Is't to be mad to speak, to move, to gaze, / But not know how, or why, or whence, or where" (3.2.187-89). The idea of a madwoman not knowing where she is gets repeated in Beatrice's mad scenes in *The Cenci*. Such scenes were of course a staple of the nineteenth-century stage. However, seeing O'Neill successfully sustain lengthy mad scenes in *Fazio* might have emboldened Shelley to write the remarkable mad scene in Act III of *The Cenci*.

That scene goes on for 273 lines before Beatrice's exit, far outlasting the mad scenes of O'Neill's previous roles. For instance, Belvidera in *Venice Preserved* has a brief mad scene lasting twenty-two lines. She then comes back on for the final scene, dying on the twenty-ninth line. O'Neill also appeared as Ophelia in *Hamlet*, but that character is only on stage for about 50 lines in her mad scene before Shakespeare ushers her off, bringing her back on again for an even briefer mad scene and then sending her off to drown. The last scene of *Jane Shore* offered O'Neill a greater opportunity for displaying mental distress, in which she was onstage for about 300 lines, slowly descending into despair and death. However, the character is fairly coherent for most of that time and only starts to lose her grip on reality due to her slow death by starvation. Shore's insanity, if one is to consider the poor woman mad at all, lasts at the very most from the recovery from her swoon until her death, a period of about 120 lines. As Bianca in *Fazio*, O'Neill got to play mad in four different scenes. She is on stage displaying her madness for about 225 lines, almost as long as the extended mad scene in *The Cenci*.

In *Fazio*, Bianca ultimately dies of a broken heart. The ending disappoints, because Bianca fails to live up to the full potential of her character as displayed in her rebellion against her husband. However, the play was not what filled Shelley's mind in Italy. Rather, his recollection of O'Neill's *performance* in the play was the image constantly in his thoughts. *Fazio* is unsatisfying as a work of art, but Shelley raved about the play to Peacock, and it was after a performance of *Fazio* that Peacock was struck by Shelley's "absorbed attention to Miss O'Neill's performance."⁸⁴

What Peacock missed was that Shelley was looking beyond the text of the play. He was responding to an actor who was capable of rising to momentary heights in an otherwise flawed work. Moreover, O'Neill's effect on Shelley appears to have been unique in his theatre-going experience. Peacock later remarked, "With the exception of *Fazio*, I do not remember his having been pleased with any performance at an English theatre."⁸⁵ This was not a case of numerous performances converting an author to write for the stage. Rather, if Peacock is to be believed, seeing O'Neill's Bianca was a peerless experience for Shelley.

Of course, Shelley began *Prometheus Unbound* in the autumn of 1818, after he had already seen O'Neill in *Fazio*, so seeing her onstage did not immediately change his mind about writing closet dramas. Still, her performance was memorable enough that she remained in his thoughts as he set about writing *The Cenci* during the summer of 1819. In Italy, Shelley attended numerous Italian operas, but no English-language plays, before completing *The Cenci*.⁸⁶ Without more recent productions crowding out his memory of O'Neill, Shelley was able to reflect upon her performance—perhaps even idealize it in his mind—and allow his image of her to come to life in his theatrical imagination. Given that the Shelleys were now isolated from the English stage, it seems only natural they might turn to recollections of performances they had seen back

home. Seen in this light, Mary Shelley's comments in her notes to *The Cenci* make perfect sense. O'Neill was often in Shelley's thoughts in part because there were no other English actresses clamoring for his attention.

Critical Resistance

Still, numerous critics have attempted to come up with alternate reasons why Shelley might have made his artistic leap with *The Cenci*. In his study of Shelley's major verse, Stuart Sperry suggests that Mary Shelley nagged her husband into writing a performable play to "win him popular acclaim and financial reward."⁸⁷ Yet it is clear from Shelley's correspondence that he was convinced the play could not be performed under his own name. This leaves only financial reward as a possible motivation, and it seems highly unlikely that Shelley could have been naïve enough to think he would get rich from writing *The Cenci*. Why have critics been so willing to come up with any explanation they can for Shelley's great tragedy other than that it was written for an actress?

Our collective blind spot probably comes from more than just over-relying on early biographers like Medwin. After all, other periods in theatre history have often undervalued performers, especially when those performers have been women. In her book *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage*, Gay Gibson Cima writes that the prime movers in the shift to Realism in the second half of the nineteenth century "were female actors and actor-managers, tired of the predictable women's roles offered by even the most sophisticated nineteenth-century melodramas."⁸⁸ Cima credits such late-nineteenth-century British and American actors as Elizabeth Robins, Marion Lea, and Janet Achurch with creating a

modern theatre through acting just as Henrik Ibsen was helping to forge a new theatre through writing. For Cima, Ibsen and his actors cannot be disentangled. Female actors first produced and starred in many of Ibsen's plays and—together with the Norwegian writer's revolutionary dramaturgy—were able to invent a new method of performance. Cima observes that the new acting style came to be associated with Ibsen rather than with the actors who first developed it. She further notes that critics gave the playwright credit for these breakthrough productions at a time when the theatre was finally promoting "a certain amount of power for the women who staged them."⁸⁹ The actors were robbed of their credit, she implies, because they were women.

Certainly, sexism could be one reason why early commentators passed over the importance of O'Neill, just as theatre historians later neglected Robins, Lea, and Achurch. Medwin's memoir of Shelley, for instance, not only disparages the possibility of O'Neill influencing *The Cenci*, it also goes out of its way to discredit the testimony of Mary Shelley, who likely knew her husband's mind better than Medwin did. Even modern accounts of Shelley's creative process are often tinged with (perhaps unintentional) sexism. A subtle sexism, for instance, might be at work in simple omission. Newman Ivey White's massive two-volume biography of Shelley stretches on for nearly 1,400 pages, yet it only manages to give two passing mentions to O'Neill.⁹⁰

Beyond sexism, there is a definite bias against the importance of the actor in general. An actor's performance is necessarily fleeting. It is lost to time unless recorded—in some incomplete way—by a writer, painter, or illustrator. A scholar can compare the texts of *Fazio* and *The Cenci* to try to detect any influence Milman might have had on Shelley. However, we cannot read, at least not directly, a performance that O'Neill gave in 1818.

Yet anyone who has ever seen a powerful performer understands what a profound impact an actor can have. A performance can haunt a spectator for months, even years after it takes place. This was apparently true for Shelley, who after seeing a couple performances of *Fazio*, still had O'Neill in his thoughts more than a year later. According to Mary Shelley, her husband was "greatly moved" by O'Neill's "intense pathos, and sublime vehemence of passion."⁹¹ He was so moved that his reflection on her performance greatly altered his writing. What was it that spoke to him so deeply?

In his book *It*, Joseph Roach attempts to theorize about the quality that is "possessed by abnormally interesting people."⁹² This ineffable charm, which Roach calls "It," has to do with sex, entails glamour, and is incredibly rare—to the point of seeming magical. Contemporaries clearly attached this mystical quality to O'Neill. She had sexual attraction, certainly was seen as a glamorous figure, and was regarded as one of a kind. When contemporaries compared O'Neill to anyone, it was to the retired actress Sarah Siddons, the former reigning tragedienne.

Even this constant recollection of a previous figure, or "ghosting" as Carlson calls it, is something Roach associates intimately with "It." In linking O'Neill with Siddons, her contemporaries connected her not just to the most recent great tragic actress to play at Covent Garden, but to a long line of tragic actresses reaching all the way back to the Restoration. O'Neill became not just herself, but everything the theatre was or should be. For Shelley, she seems to have also been everything the theatre *could* be. She represented the stage not as it was, but how it might be with powerful tragedies properly acted.

Contemporaries described O'Neill's acting in ways that demonstrate the capacity for psychological evolution which the role of Beatrice demands. The fawning Jones wrote in his memoir of the actress, "Miss O'Neill's voice possesses a just melody, with sufficient strength to

give utterance to the most violent bursts of stormy action, and sinking again, soft and sweet."⁹³ He goes on to write that inferior performers were apt to become mechanical, playing a character with the same movements night after night. O'Neill, by contrast, varied her performances, so "that the representation of the passions, in imitation of nature, admits that latitude which individual feeling every day displays."⁹⁴ Each night was a new creation, a bravura presentation of "It."

Perhaps the most reliable depiction of the actress comes from the anonymous author of *A Descriptive Portrait of Miss O'Neill*. Many descriptions of nineteenth-century actors are sheer puffery, often composed by a theatre's promoters. The author of *A Descriptive Portrait*, however, seems legitimately interested in recording O'Neill's attributes for posterity so she can be compared with the actors of other eras, whether favorably or not. The author is well aware of O'Neill's shortcomings, including her tendency to shriek in a manner that seems "too much the exhibition of a stage trick."⁹⁵ However, the *Descriptive Portrait* holds O'Neill superior to other actors "in the exhibition of private and domestic distress."⁹⁶

The character of Beatrice displays that passionate distress while her forerunners in the works of Shelley, including Prometheus, remain unmoved and unchanged (even if ultimately unchained). The accounts of O'Neill's acting, whether from Mary Shelley, or from Jones, or from the anonymous author of *A Descriptive Portrait*, sometimes seem vague and generalized. That is partly because all of them are reaching to grasp that intangible quality of "It" which she undoubtedly possessed. Though we cannot reproduce the performances of *Fazio* in 1818 that so moved Shelley, we do know their result. They motivated Shelley to abandon one style of poetry for another, to reject closet drama and create a dramatic role suited for the Regency's "It girl" Eliza O'Neill.

Shelley did not get his wish, and O'Neill never performed the role of Beatrice. In 1819, the same year Shelley composed his tragedy, O'Neill retired from the stage. Her final performance, as Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*, was announced simply as "her last performance before Christmas."⁹⁷ Her fans were later distraught to find an announcement in a newspaper that she had married Becher. She never returned to the stage, and the brevity of her career probably explains why O'Neill never entered the collective memory the way Siddons did.

Still, she influenced not only *The Cenci*, but the rest of Shelley's career as well. As we have seen, following the writing of *The Cenci*, Shelley's style exhibited a marked change, depicting dramatic emotional shifts by the speaker, and this change is vital to what made him important as a poet. The author's reputation as a poet saved *The Cenci* from obscurity. The amateur Shelley Society first staged the play in 1886. A French production followed in 1891, and the play received its German premiere in 1919, the same year *The Cenci* began a long run in Moscow. A hundred years after its composition, the play was finally receiving its due with numerous high-profile professional productions. *The Cenci*, once considered un-producible due to its subject matter, was being performed all over the world.

In his book *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire*, Stuart Curran identifies a long list of theatre artists influenced by the play. In addition to obvious examples like Artaud, Curran cites Robert Edmond Jones, George Bernard Shaw, Laurence Olivier, Hugh Griffith, William Butler Yeats, and others, including modern playwrights like Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Peter Weiss, Edward Albee, and Harold Pinter. Through *The Cenci*, Eliza O'Neill casts a long shadow that reaches us even in the twenty-first century. Her fleeting performances in *Fazio* had a permanent impact on the theatre, even though she had no way of knowing it at the time. As *The Cenci*

continues to be performed throughout the world, O'Neill's voice, so adaptable for changes in emotion, echoes through theatres she never saw, nor dreamed of seeing.

¹ Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 287.

² Quoted by Frances A. Gerard in *Some Fair Hibernians* (London: Ward & Downey, 1897), 249.

³ William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections From His Diaries and Letters*, ed. Sir Frederick Pollock (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 63.

⁴ E. Ownes Blackburne, *Illustrious Irishwomen: Being Memoirs of some of the Most Noted Irishwomen From the Earliest Ages to the Present Century*, vol. 1 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1877), 372.

⁵ Charles Inigo Jones, *Memoirs of Miss O'Neill: Her Public Character, Private Life, and Dramatic Progress From Her Entrance Upon the Stage* (London: Cox, 1816), 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹² William Hazlitt, "Mr. Kean's Romeo. December, 1814," in *A View of the English Stage; Or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: John Warren, 1821), 73.

¹³ William Hazlitt, "Miss O'Neill's Elwina. Nov. 18, 1815," in *A View of the English Stage; Or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: John Warren 1821), 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)," in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 596-97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 604.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 615.

¹⁸ Joshua Reynolds, *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Edmund Gosse (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884), 31.

-
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 32.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid., 36.
- ²² The painting is currently owned by The Garrick Club in London.
- ²³ Poster for Theatre Royal Covent Garden, advertising a performance of *Coriolanus*, with Caius to be performed by Kemble, and a revival of Garrick's Jubilee, on April 23, 1816. British Museum Collection Online, Museum number 1980,U.679. Web. 30 December 2016.
- ²⁴ Christopher Murray, *Robert William Elliston: Manager* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975), 78.
- ²⁵ John Fyvie, *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 312.
- ²⁶ "Theatrical Jealousy—or—The Rival Queens of Covent Garden" (London: J Sidebotham, 1816), British Museum Collection Online, Museum number 1931,0509.216. Web. 1 March 2014.
- ²⁷ Brander Matthews, "Sarah Siddons," in *Actors and Actresses: The Kembles and Their Contemporaries*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton (New York: Cassell & Co., 1886), 31.
- ²⁸ Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), 247.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 248.
- ³⁰ Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P, 2005), 48.
- ³¹ William Hazlitt, "Mrs. Siddons. June 15, 1816," in *A View of the English Stage; Or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: John Warren 1821), 304.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ William Pitt Lennox, *Celebrities I Have Known; With Episodes, Political, Social, Sporting, and Theatrical*, vol. 1 (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1876), 208.
- ³⁴ Lord Byron, 'So late into the night': *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 5, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1976), 260-61.
- ³⁵ *The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror*, vol. 8 (London: C. Chapple, 1816), 249.
- ³⁶ W. Torrens McCullagh, *Memoirs of the Right Honorable Richard Lalor Sheil*, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1855), 74.

³⁷ William Hazlitt, "Adelaide, or the Emigrants. Covent-Garden, May 25, 1816," in *A View of the English Stage; Or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms* (London: John Warren 1821), 299.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁰ *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 17 (New York: Reprinted for Kirk and Mercein, 1817), 259.

⁴¹ McCullagh, 106.

⁴² "The Drama" in *The Literary Gazette, and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Politics, etc.*, No. 66, 25 April 1818, 270.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror*, vol. 14 (London: C. Chapple, 1819), 159.

⁴⁵ H.H. Milman, "Prefatory Observations" in *The Poetical Works of the Rev. H.H. Milman*, vol. 3 (London: John Murray, 1840), 118.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁷ Thomas Love Peacock, *Memoirs of Shelley*, in *Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, vol. 8 (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 81.

⁴⁸ Mary Shelley, "Note on *The Cenci*," in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1967), 336.

⁴⁹ Though scholars cannot pinpoint the exact dates of composition for these two works, they can get reasonably close. Shelley's correspondence with Thomas Love Peacock indicates the poet had finished the first three acts of *Prometheus Unbound* shortly before 6 April 1819, according to Newman Ivey White's *Shelley* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), II: 115. Shelley added the final fourth act, which consists of a series of victorious hymns, considerably later, according to White sometime after the death of his son William on 7 June 1819 (II: 136). White places the composition of *The Cenci* between 14 May and 8 August 1819 (II: 138). The two plays were published separately the following year.

⁵⁰ Sybil Thorndike played Beatrice Cenci at the New Theatre in 1922, and then in a revival four years later at the Empire Theatre. Barbara Jefford played the heroine at the Old Vic in 1959.

⁵¹ Stuart Curran, *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 277.

⁵² M. Shelley, 336.

⁵³ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001), 7.

⁵⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 504.

⁵⁵ K.D. Reynolds, "O'Neill, Elizabeth [Eliza; married name Elizabeth Wrixon-Becher, Lady Wrixon-Becher] (1791-1872)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford UP, 2004), Web. 8 August 2013.

⁵⁶ The other O'Neill portrait at the Garrick Club is a chalk study by Samuel De Wilde. Quite a number of other portraits of O'Neill exist as well, including an Arthur William Devis oil painting with the actress as Belvidera (currently owned by the Wolverhampton Art Gallery outside of Birmingham, England) a Samuel Lover watercolor of O'Neill as Juliet (now at the National Gallery of Ireland), and a full-length portrait of O'Neill as Juliet painted by George Dawe (owned by a private collector). The Jones memoir of O'Neill also included a color plate with her portrait.

⁵⁷ Austen, 287.

⁵⁸ Jones, 3.

⁵⁹ "Eliza O'Neill, afterwards Lady Wrixon Beecher," *The Autographic Mirror* 3, no. 20 (1865): 29.

⁶⁰ Fyvie, 298.

⁶¹ Line numbers come from *Miss O'Neil's Welcome to Kilkenny* (Dublin: Richard Milliken, 1819).

⁶² The act, scene, and line numbers come from Thomas Otway, *Venice Preserved*, ed. Malcomn Kelsall (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1969).

⁶³ *A Descriptive Portrait of Miss O'Neill, In a Critique on her exhibition of the characters of Mrs. Haller, and Jane Shore* (London: E. Williams, 1815), 91.

⁶⁴ The act, scene, and line numbers come from Nicholas Rowe, *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, ed. Harry William Pedicord (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1974).

⁶⁵ The act, scene, and line numbers come from John Home, *Douglas*, in *Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931), 646-72.

⁶⁶ Fyvie, 311.

⁶⁷ *Descriptive Portrait*, 4.

⁶⁸ Jacqueline Mulhallen, *The Theatre of Shelley* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 248.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 249-50.

⁷⁰ All act, scene, and line numbers of Shelley's plays come from *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1967).

⁷¹ For O'Neill's importance to *The Apostate*, and the play's place in the history of British Romantic drama, see Diego Saglia, "'The Illegitimate Assistance of Political Allusion': Politics and the Hybridization of Romantic Tragedy in the Drama of Richard Lalor Sheil," *Theatre Journal* 58 (2006): 249-67.

⁷² P.B. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 276.

⁷³ This model was first outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

⁷⁴ P.B. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 550.

⁷⁵ All line numbers for "Ode to the West Wind" come from *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford UP, 1967), 577-579.

⁷⁶ Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford UP, 1913), 219.

⁷⁷ Walter Edwin Peck, *Shelley: His Life and Work* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), II, 122.

⁷⁸ Desmond King-Hele, *Shelley: The Man and the Poet* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 120.

⁷⁹ James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 468.

⁸⁰ Curran highlights some of the more prominent productions of the play, including its 1886 London premiere (183), a Parisian production by Paul Fort's Theatre d'Art which included Aurélien Lugné-Poë in the cast (197-199), and a Russian production with a lengthy run at Moscow's Korsch Theater after the Bolshevik Revolution (207). The 1920s proved particularly fruitful for productions of *The Cenci*. Karel and Josef Čapek staged a Prague production in 1922 (210), and there were major productions in Rome in 1923 (214-215) and Frankfurt, Germany in 1924 (218). A 1922 London production starred Sybil Thorndike (225), and when that production was revived in 1926, it included a young Laurence Olivier in the cast (233). Antonin Artaud staged his revolutionary adaptation of *The Cenci* in 1935 (237). A much more traditional production at London's Old Vic in 1959 starred Hugh Griffith as Count Cenci and Barbara Jefford as Beatrice (249).

⁸¹ P.B. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 278.

⁸² All act, scene, and line numbers for the play come from Henry Hart Milman, *Fazio: A Tragedy* (London: John Murray, 1818).

⁸³ Peacock, 81.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁶ Mulhallen, 250-51.

⁸⁷ Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), 127.

⁸⁸ Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁰ White, I: 521 and II: 101.

⁹¹ M. Shelley, 336.

⁹² Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007), 1.

⁹³ Jones, 89.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁵ *Descriptive Portrait*, 44.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁷ Fyvie, 312.

CONCLUSION

Canonical authors like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Shelley have long interested scholars. However, the plays by these authors have not always generated the critical attention of some of their other works. The Romantic dramas of the Regency era were long neglected, even as the poetry and fiction of the period was lauded both in academia and in popular culture. During the 1990s, interest grew in popular forms of entertainment, but more serious plays did not always receive the same attention as the forerunners to melodrama. Even theatre historians examining the high culture on display at Covent Garden and Drury Lane gravitated toward those theatres' more sensationalistic spectacles. Paul Ranger, for instance, deftly discussed the arrival of populist drama in the temples of culture in his 1991 book on Gothic drama.¹

Though Ranger discussed popular spectacles together with ambitious plays like Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*, not everyone followed his lead. Scholars have tended either to look exclusively at popular forms of entertainment in the Romantic era or to view Romantic dramas as detached from the stage. Jeffrey N. Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* includes interesting speculations about Romantic experiments with genre, but the book remains focused on poetry, not theatre.² There have been a few short pieces touching on the role of actors in the creation Romantic plays, such as Diego Saglia's 2006 *Theatre Journal* article on Richard Lalor Sheil, which at least mentions Eliza O'Neill, but such articles have been few and far between.³ Reeve Parker's *Romantic Tragedies* does show how writers like Wordsworth engaged with the theatre around them, but more for the insight this gives into the authors' psyches than into the

plays themselves.⁴ Most scholars remain unsure about how to place Romantic dramas—which are of great literary merit—within the context of the theatre that produced and then rejected them.

By reading Romantic dramas as performer-centric texts, we can resolve this quandary, showing how British Romantic plays are integrally related to the performers of their era. *De Monfort* becomes a different play from the closet-obsessed reading of Catherine Borroughs once we understand the public persona of Sarah Siddons. Similarly, by identifying performers in the original cast of *Remorse* and applying what is known about them to the various waves of rewrites Coleridge engaged in while revising the play, we come to understand Coleridge not just as a poet and critic, but as a practicing playwright—a man of the theatre. Investigating Eliza O'Neill and her reputation among her contemporaries, as well as examining the other roles she performed, helps to better illuminate certain aspects of *The Cenci*. As we come to know these texts as performance vehicles rather than closet dramas, they seem less like strange outliers and more a part of the overall history of the British theatre.

The methodology of performer-centric readings of play texts, while it has rarely been employed for dramas of the Romantic era, has been used successfully to explore the plays of numerous other eras. Scholars have long accepted the importance of individual actors in the shaping of works by William Shakespeare, Aphra Behn, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. More recently, Jesse M. Hellman has shown how George Bernard Shaw used the previous parts played by Mrs. Patrick Campbell when shaping a new role for her in *Pygmalion*.⁵ While this methodology is certainly not new to theatre research, it is more common in film and media studies. As we have seen, though, theories about para-social interactions that originated to

discuss television and other forms of electronic mass media apply just as well to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Joseph Roach has already done much to bring celebrity studies to the long eighteenth century, but more can still be done to apply theories of popular culture today to the popular culture of the past.⁶ As technological changes allowed for the mechanical reproduction of images, state-of-the-art prints and figurines—the "new media" of the eighteenth century—helped to shape the discourse around actors and the roles they played. These images did not merely document how people perceived performers; they helped to shape those perceptions as well. As such, they are crucial to understanding how audiences (including playwrights in those audiences) viewed performers. Thus, we need a holistic approach to the theatre, both in the Romantic era and in other periods as well.

Of all the periods of British theatre, though, the Romantic era seems to have suffered the most from an inability to recognize the connection between text and performance. The notion that Romantic plays were not meant for performance has persisted even among critics who really ought to know better. Lord Byron's famous pronouncement that he wished to write for "a mental theatre" supplied the title for Alan Richardson's study of Romantic drama, which has continued to shape how many scholars think of canonical plays of the period.⁷ Fortunately, Richardson at least tries to resist the assumption that Romantic plays were not meant for performance, but that key image of "a mental theatre" remains. Perhaps it is time for a new paradigm when thinking about these plays.

The one I have proposed is to identify Romantic drama by three chief characteristics: poetic ambition, moral complexity, and a focus on character rather than plot. These are all qualities that necessarily require strong performers if they are to be brought to life on stage. The

ambitious poetry of *De Monfort*, *Remorse*, and *The Cenci* has to have powerful actors if it is to soar on stage. Moral complexity requires what Joseph Donohue has identified as the subjective turn in characterization that was driven by Romantic actors.⁸ Most importantly, a drama based on character, as opposed to the plot-based drama of melodrama, necessitates great acting. The fact that the Regency era was a time of great acting enabled the flourishing of Romantic drama, and indeed might have driven the very qualities that made Romantic drama great.

Had it not been for Sarah Siddons, would Baillie have ever written *De Monfort*? Without that same actress, would Coleridge have authored *Osorio*, which later became a dramatic hit as *Remorse*? Perhaps those authors would have written tragedies anyway, but their plays likely would have been quite different, since Siddons left her unmistakable stamp on those plays' strong female characters. If contemporary reviews are to be believed, without Julia Glover *Remorse* would not have had the long afterlife it enjoyed, inspiring other Romantic poets to try their hands at drama. In the case of Shelley (an outspoken critic of British drama before his encounter with Eliza O'Neill), we would not have *The Cenci* or indeed any other performable drama from his pen had he not seen O'Neill in *Fazio*. It was the magnificent actors of the Regency era that gave rise to its most memorable plays.

Yet the star system of the period cuts like a double-edged sword. Siddons brought to the stage dramas that otherwise would have been overlooked, but her retirement left playwrights without an advocate in a theatre all too content to perform the old warhorses rather than experiment with new plays. Glover aided Coleridge, but being type-cast as a comedic performer, she never had the power of Siddons to bring forth new tragedies. O'Neill possessed this power briefly, but her abandoning the aristocracy of the stage to become the real-life Lady Becher effectively put an end to an era, forcing Shelley's work to wait decades before it would be

performed. The actor-centric theatre of the Regency inspired great drama, but made those dramas dependent upon the caprice of individual performers.

Siddons, Glover, and O'Neill were magnanimous toward playwrights when we compare them to some of their male contemporaries. To his credit, John Philip Kemble took charge of the first production of *De Monfort*, supplying it with a magnificent set and lavish production values, but he also considerably rewrote the play, seemingly without input from Baillie. Her experience with the production allowed her to improve the tragedy, but only with rewrites to the printed text, as she did not have access to rehearsals. Coleridge did have such access, but Alexander Rae hardly provided him with a strong leading man. Other than Kemble, the Regency stage had few male actors of quality before 1814.

It was at the beginning of that year that Edmund Kean's lightning set fire to the London stage. Kean not only originated the title role in Charles Maturin's *Bertram*, but he inspired John Keats to write his tragedy *Otho the Great* together with Charles Brown. Kean expressed in 1819 that one of his ambitions was "to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting."⁹ Unfortunately, as soon as Keats had finished *Otho*, he got word that Kean planned to tour America. Keats considered this to be the worst possible news, as he believed "no actor can do the principal character besides Kean."¹⁰ Luckily, at the end of 1819, *Otho* was "accepted at Drury Lane with a promise of coming out next season."¹¹ That was before Kean had his way.

As Jeffrey Kahan notes in *The Cult of Kean*, the main character in *Otho* was tailor-made for Kean.¹² Yet in spite of the play's suitability for the actor, Kean crushed its chances. It is still not clear why he decided against performing the play, but his rejection of the script effectively ended Keats's career as a playwright on the grounds that the leading actor of the time simply did

not care for his writing.¹³ Keats and Brown tried to send the play on to the rival theatre at Covent Garden, but it was returned unread. Kean, meanwhile, went on to treat Baillie rather shabbily when he revived *De Monfort*, withdrawing the piece after a mere five performances.¹⁴ This was in spite of the fact that no less a figure than Lord Byron had begged Kean "a hundred times" to appear in the play.¹⁵

As capricious as Kean could be, William Charles Macready proved even worse. One by one, he smashed the hopes of potential playwrights. Of those writing for the early Victorian stage, perhaps no dramatist had as much potential as Robert Browning. Had Browning's *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* been allowed to continue to play to enthusiastic houses, it is possible Browning might have developed further as a playwright. Instead, he turned his attentions elsewhere, and the theatre was impoverished as a result.

Thus, the system of star actors both nourished grand drama and nipped it in the bud before it had a chance to fully mature. British Romanticism, with its focus on the sublime individual, brought forth great tragedies in response to the rise of great actors. At the same time, its dependence on great actors doomed British Romantic drama to a premature death. In both the rise and fall of drama in the Regency era, the role of the actor was essential. Not only can the plays of the period not be fully understood without taking performers into account, but the history of the era's dramatic literature in general can only be properly discussed within the context of star actors.

Again, modern theorists of media studies can help in appreciating the double nature of the star system. Richard Dyer has remarked that since "stars are always appearing in different stories and settings, *they* must stay broadly the same in order to permit recognition and identification."¹⁶ The star must always hover above the character, whether that means Siddons

being recognizable in Jane De Monfort, or Glover embodying Alhadra, or O'Neill lending her unique talents to sustain a spectacularly long mad scene. Problems arise when the star begins to feel subsumed by the character. Kean chafed at the possibility of being upstaged by the lauded dramatist of *De Monfort*, and Macready couldn't allow *A Blot in the Scutcheon* to continue without himself in the leading role.

For better or for worse, the fates of British Romantic dramas were inextricably bound to British Romantic actors. The body of work left behind by Regency-era playwrights has not always been appreciated. In 1975, Joseph Donohue complained that "the plays of the major Romantic poets have been widely read, but largely out of duty."¹⁷ In his opinion, though, Romantic drama "not only illuminates the dramatic art of this period but elucidates moral values and philosophical ideas characteristic of the age."¹⁸ Decades later, some critics are starting to come around to his point of view. In addition to Reeve Parker, Jibon Krishna Banerjee and Julie A. Carlson have also written interesting surveys of dramas by English Romantic poets (though sadly they all give Baillie short shrift).¹⁹

What these works lack, however, is a central focus on the actor as a dominant force in shaping dramatic texts. If we truly want to understand the art, values, and ideas of the Romantic period, we have to study its performers as well as its writers. It was not writers alone, but dramatists working in conjunction with actors that forged the great plays of the era. Though those plays did not always achieve immediate recognition, they were never completely forgotten, and by the close of the nineteenth century they were influencing a new generation of theatre artists. Names of performers like Julia Glover and Eliza O'Neill faded over time, but their legacy continued to live on in new waves of drama influenced and inspired by the Romantic plays in which they once so brightly shown.

-
- ¹ Paul Ranger, *"Terror and pity reign in every breast": Gothic drama in the London patent theatres, 1750-1820* (London: Society for Theatre Research: 1991).
- ² Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).
- ³ Diego Saglia, "The Illegitimate Assistance of Political Allusion: Politics and the Hybridization of Romantic Tragedy in the Drama of Richard Lalor Sheil," *Theatre Journal* 58 (2006): 249-67.
- ⁴ Reeve Parker, *Romantic Tragedies: The Dark Employments of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).
- ⁵ Jesse M. Hellman, "Lady Hamilton, *Nelson's Enchantress*, and the Creation of *Pygmalion*," *Shaw: The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies* 35 (2015): 213-37.
- ⁶ See Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007).
- ⁷ Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1988).
- ⁸ Joseph W. Donohue, Jr., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 5.
- ⁹ John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, vol. 2, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958), 139.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 237.
- ¹² Jeffrey Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), 52.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ¹⁵ Lord Byron, *'Born for opposition': Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. 8, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978), 208.
- ¹⁶ Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 98.
- ¹⁷ Joseph Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 167.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ See Jibon Krishna Banerjee, *The Dramatic Works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1994) and Julie A. Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New York: Norton, 1958.
- Allen, Shirley. *Samuel Phelps and Sadler's Wells Theatre*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1971.
- Appleton, W.W. *Madame Vestris and the London Stage*. New York: Columbia UP, 1974.
- Aristotle's Poetics*. Translated by James Hutton. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982.
- Ashton, Rosemary. *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Asleson, Robyn, ed. *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999.
- Austen, Jane. *Jane Austen's Letters*. Edited by Deirdre Le Faye. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Baillie, Joanna. *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie*. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851.
- *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*. Vol. 1. London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798.
- *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind*. Vol. 3. London: Longman, Hurst Rees Orme, and Brown, 1812.
- Banerjee, Jibon Krishna. *The Dramatic Works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1994.
- Baszkiewicz, Jan. *New Man, New Nation, New World: The French Revolution in Myth and Reality*. Edited by Janusz Adamowski. Translated by Alex Shannon. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Bate, Walter Jackson. *Coleridge*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.
- Beddoes, Thomas Lovell. *The Bride's Tragedy*. London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1822.
- *Death's Jest Book*. London: William Pickering, 1850.
- *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. Edited by Edmund Gosse. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971.
- Behn, Aphra. *The Rover and Other Plays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.

- Benson, Richard. *The Printed Picture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.
- Bieri, James. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2008.
- Blackburne, E. Ownes. *Illustrious Irishwomen: Being Memoirs of some of the Most Noted Irishwomen From the Earliest Ages to the Present Century*. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1877.
- Blanning, Tim. *The Romantic Revolution: A History*. New York: Modern Library, 2011.
- Boaden, James. *Memoires of Mrs. Siddons*. London: Gibbings and Co., 1896.
- Bowra, Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.
- Browning, Robert. *The Complete Poetical Works of Browning*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1895.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*. Edited by David Womersley. London: Penguin, 2004.
- . *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961.
- Burroughs, Catherine. *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997.
- , ed. *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Burwick, Frederick, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
- Byron, George Gordon. *'Born for opposition': Byron's Letters and Journals*. Vol. 8. Edited by Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978.
- . *The Complete Poetical Works of Byron*. Edited by Paul E. More. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1933.
- . *Manfred: An Edition of Byron's Manuscripts and a Collection of Essays*. Edited by Peter Cochran. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.

- '. *'So late into the night': Byron's Letters and Journals*. Vol. 5. Edited by Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1976.
- Cameron, Kenneth N. and Horst Frenz. "The Stage History of Shelley's *The Cenci*," *PMLA* 60, no. 4 (1945): 1080-1105.
- Campbell, Thomas. *Life of Mrs. Siddons*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834.
- Carhart, Margaret S. *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1970.
- Carlisle, Carol Jones. *Helen Faucit: Fire and Ice on the Victorian Stage*. London: Society for Theatre Research, 2000.
- Carlson, Julie A. *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Carlson, Marvin. *The French Stage in the Nineteenth Century*. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1972.
- '. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2001.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution: A History*. New York: AMS Press, 1969.
- Carswell, Donald. *Sir Walter: A Four-Part Study in Biography: Scott, Hogg, Lockhart, Joanna Baillie*. London, John Murray, 1930.
- Chambers, E.K. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1938.
- Christie, William. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Cima, Gay Gibson. *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.
- Clifton, Larry Stephen. *The Terrible Fitzball: The Melodramatist of the Macabre*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1993.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Edited by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.
- '. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edited by Earl Leslie Griggs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- '. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays*. Edited by J.C.C. Mays. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

- , *Table Talk*. Edited by Carl Woodring. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.
- Cooke, Katharine. *Coleridge*. London: Routledge, 1979.
- Cottle, Joseph. *Reminiscences of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey*. London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1847.
- Cox, Jeffrey N. *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
- , ed. *Seven Gothic Dramas: 1789-1825*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1992.
- Curran, Stuart. *Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- Deelman, Christian. "The Original Cast of *The School for Scandal*," *The Review of English Studies* 13 (1962): 257-266.
- A Descriptive Portrait of Miss O'Neill, In a Critique on her exhibition of the characters of Mrs. Haller, and Jane Shore*. London: E. Williams, 1815.
- Dickens, Charles. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*. Edited by Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- Donohue, Joseph. *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.
- , *Theatre in the Age of Kean*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.
- Downer, Alan. *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1966.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. 2nd ed. London: British Film Institute, 1998.
- Engel, Laura. *Fashioning Celebrity: 18th-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State UP, 2011.
- Erdman, David V. "Byron's Stage Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage," *ELH* 6 (1939): 219-43.
- Evans, Betrand. *Gothic Drama From Walpole to Shelley*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1947.
- Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. 2nd ed. New York: Perseus Books, 1999.
- Fitzball, Edward. *The Innkeeper of Abbeville*. New York: R. Hobbs, 1831.

- . *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life*. London: T.C. Newby, 1859.
- FitzSimons, Raymund. *Edmund Kean: Fire from Heaven*. New York: Dial Press, 1976.
- Fyvie, John. *Tragedy Queens of the Georgian Era*. London: Methuen & Co., 1908.
- Gardner, Elizabeth E. "Portrait of an Actress," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 9, no. 8 (1951): 197-200.
- Gerard, Frances A. *Some Fair Hibernians*. London: Ward & Downey, 1897.
- Grave, Richard. *The Spiritual Quixote: Or, The Summer's Ramble of Mr. Geoffry Wildgoose*. 2nd ed. London: J. Dodsley, 1792.
- Hare, Arnold. *George Frederick Cooke: The Actor and the Man*. London: Society for Theatre Research, 1981.
- Hellman, Jesse M. "Lady Hamilton, Nelson's Enchantress, and the Creation of Pygmalion," *Shaw: The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies* 35 (2015): 213-37.
- Hazlitt, William. *A View of the English Stage; Or, A Series of Dramatic Criticisms*. London: John Warren, 1821.
- Hind, Arthur Mayger. *A History of Engraving & Etching, From the 15th Century to the Year 1914*. New York: Dover Publications, 1963.
- Hipple, W.J., Jr. *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-century British Aesthetic Theory*. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois UP, 1957.
- Holland, Peter, ed. *Garrick Kemble, Siddons, Kean: Great Shakespeareans, Vol. II*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Holmes, Richard. *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- . *Coleridge: Early Visions*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1990.
- Home, John. *Douglas*. In *Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, edited by Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones, 646-72. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931.
- Horton, Donald and R. Richard Wohl. "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 19, no. 3 (1956): 215-29.
- Inchbald, Elizabeth. "Remarks." In *De Monfort; A Tragedy, In Five Acts*, by Joanna Baillie, 3-6. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1808.

- Jack, Belinda. *Beatrice's Spell: The Enduring Legend of Beatrice Cenci*. New York: Other Press, 2005.
- Jackson, J.R. de J., ed. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1968.
- Johnston, Kenneth R. *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.
- Jones, Charles Inigo. *Memoirs of Miss O'Neill: Her Public Character, Private Life, and Dramatic Progress From Her Entrance Upon the Stage*. London: Cox, 1816.
- Kahan, Jeffrey. *The Cult of Kean*. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006.
- Keats, John. *The Letters of John Keats*. Edited by Hyder Edward Rollins. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958.
- Kelly, Linda. *The Kemble Era: John Philip Kemble, Sarah Siddons and the London Stage*. London: The Bodley Head, 1980.
- Kennedy, Richard S. and Donald S. Hair. *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life*. Columbia, Mo.: U of Missouri P, 2007.
- King-Hele, Desmond. *Shelley: The Man and the Poet*. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1960.
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan, 1969.
- Kramer, Dale. *Charles Robert Maturin*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973.
- Layard, George Somes, ed. *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906.
- Ledoux, Ellen Malenas. "Working Mothers on the Romantic Stage: Sarah Siddons and Mary Robinson." In *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theater, 1660-1830*, edited by Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr, 79-101. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell UP, 2014.
- Lennox, William Pitt. *Celebrities I Have Known; With Episodes, Political, Social, Sporting, and Theatrical*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1876.
- Lewis, Matthew G. *The Life and Correspondence of M.G. Lewis*. Edited by Margaret Baron-Wilson. London: Henry Colburn, 1839.
- . *Poems*. London: D.N. Shury, 1812.

- Löwy, Michael and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.
- Luckhurst, Mary and Jane Moody, eds. *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Mackintosh, Ian, with Geoffrey Ashton. *The Georgian Playhouse: Actors, Artists, Audiences and Architecture, 1730-1830*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975.
- Macready, William Charles. *The Diaries of William Charles Macready*. Edited by William Toynebee. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912.
- *Macready's Reminiscences, and Selections From His Diaries and Letters*. Edited by Sir Frederick Pollock. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875.
- Makdisi, Saree. *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Manvell, Roger. *Sarah Siddons: Portrait of an Actress*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971.
- Matthews, Brander and Laurence Hutton, eds. *Actors and Actresses: The Kembles and Their Contemporaries*. New York: Cassell & Co., 1886.
- McCullagh, W. Torrens. *Memoirs of the Right Honorable Richard Lalor Sheil*. London: Henry Colburn, 1855.
- McDonald, Russ. *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage*. Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P, 2005.
- Medwin, Thomas. *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by H. Buxton Forman. London: Oxford UP, 1913.
- "Memoir of Mrs. Julia Glover." In *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes*. Vol. 4, 19-35. London: G. Virtue, 1826.
- "Memoir of Robert W. Elliston," In *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes*. Vol. 3, 73-90. London: G. Virtue, 1825.
- Milman, Henry Hart. *Fazio: A Tragedy*. London: John Murray, 1818
- *The Poetical Works of the Rev. H.H. Milman*. London: John Murray, 1840.
- Miss O'Neil's Welcome to Kilkenny*. Dublin: Richard Milliken, 1819.
- Modiano, Raimonda. *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1985.

- Moi, Toril. "Ibsen in Exile: 'Peer Gynt', or the Difficulty of Becoming a Poet in Norway." *Field Day Review* 4 (2008): 24-39.
- Morwood, James. *The Life and Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985.
- Mulhallen, Jacqueline. *The Theatre of Shelley*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010.
- Murphy, Arthur. *The Works of Arthur Murphy, Esq.* London: T. Cadell, 1786.
- Murray, Christopher. *Robert William Elliston: Manager*. London: Society for Theatre Research, 1975.
- Otway, Thomas. *Venice Preserved*. Edited by Malcomn Kelsall. Lincoln: U. of Nebraska P, 1969.
- Parker, Deven. "Media Networks of Performance and Print in 'The Foster-Mother's Tale.'" Unpublished.
- Parker, Reeve. *Romantic Tragedies: The Dark Employments of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Pascoe, Judith. *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files: Romanticism and the Lost Voice*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2011.
- Peacock, Thomas Love. *Memoirs of Shelley*. In *Works of Thomas Love Peacock*. Vol. 8. New York: AMS Press, 1967.
- Peck, Walter Edwin. *Shelley: His Life and Work*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969.
- Piozzi, Hester. *The Intimate Letters of Hester Piozzi and Penelope Pennington 1788-1821*. Edited by Oswald G. Knapp. London: John Lane, 1914.
- Playfair, Giles. *Flash of Lightning: Portrait of Edmund Kean*. London: William Kimber, 1983.
- Pocock, Isaac. *The Miller and His Men*. In *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century: I. Dramas 1800-1850*. Edited by Michael R. Booth. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.
- Price, Uvedale. *On the Picturesque*. Edinburgh: Caldwell, Lloyd, and Co., 1842.
- Ranger, Paul. *"Terror and pity reign in every breast": Gothic drama in the London patent theatres, 1750-1820*. London: Society for Theatre Research: 1991.
- Reynolds, Joshua. *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. Edited by Edmund Gosse. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884.

- Reynolds, K.D. "O'Neill, Elizabeth [Eliza; married name Elizabeth Wrixon-Becher, Lady Wrixon-Becher] (1791-1872)" In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford UP, 2004. Web.
- Richardson, Alan. *A Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.
- Roach, Joseph. *It*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007.
- Robinson, Henry Crabb. *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-Law, F.S.A.* Edited by Thomas Sadler. New York, AMS Press, 1967.
- Rojek, Chris. *Celebrity*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001.
- Rowe, Nicholas. *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*. Edited by Harry William Pedicord. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1974.
- Saglia, Diego. "'The Illegitimate Assistance of Political Allusion': Politics and the Hybridization of Romantic Tragedy in the Drama of Richard Lalor Sheil," *Theatre Journal* 58 (2006): 249-67.
- Schoch, Richard W. *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Scott, Walter. *The Correspondence of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Robert Maturin*. Edited by Fannie E. Ratchford and William H. McCarthy, Jr. Austin: U of Texas P, 1937.
- *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Edited by G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Shaw, George Bernard. *Collected Letters: 1874-1897*. Edited by Dan H. Laurence. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965.
- *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*. New York: Brentano's, 1909.
- *Early Texts: The Philanderer, A Facsimile of the Holograph Manuscript*. New York: Garland, 1981.
- *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant, The First Volume Containing the Three Unpleasant Plays*. Chicago and New York: Herbert S. Stone and Co., 1898.
- Schiller, Friedrich. *The Robbers and Wallenstein*. Translated by F.J. Lamport. New York: Penguin, 1979.

- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by Frederick L. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.
- *Shelley: Poetical Works*. Edited by Thomas Hutchinson. London: Oxford UP, 1967.
- Siddons, Sarah. *The Reminiscences of Sarah Kemble Siddons*. Edited by William Van Lennep. Cambridge: Widener Library, 1942.
- Smith, Harry B., ed. *A Sentimental Library: Comprising Books Formerly Owned by Famous Writers, Presentation Copies, Manuscripts, and Drawings*. Privately Printed, 1914.
- Speaight, George. *The History of the English Toy Theatre*. London: Studio Vista, 1969.
- Sperry, Stuart M. *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988.
- Sterling, Christopher H. *Military Communications: From Ancient Times to the 21st Century*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2008.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Memories and Portraits*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904.
- Straznicky, Marta. "Closet Drama." In *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, edited by Arthur F. Kinney. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
- Stopes, Charlotte Carmichael. *Burbage and Shakespeare's Stage*. London: De la More Press, 1913.
- Swindells, Julia and David Francis Taylor, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014.
- Tee, Ve-Yin. *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism: After the Revolution, 1793-1818*. London: Continuum, 2009.
- Walpole, Horace. *A Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole, Youngest Son of Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford, at Strawberry-Hill near Twickenham, Middlesex: With an Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Curiosities, &c.* Strawberry Hill: Thomas Kirgate, 1784.
- *A Selection of the Letters of Horace Walpole*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1926.
- White, Newman Ivey. *Shelley*. New York: Octagon Books, 1972.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. New York: Wm. H. Wise, 1927.
- Wilder, Thornton. "Afterword." In *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Edited by Tappan Wilder. New York: Perennial Classics, 2003.

Wordsworth, William. *The Borderers*. Edited by Robert Osborn. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

----- . *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*. Edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Chester L. Shaver. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford Scholarly Editions Online, 1967. Web.

----- . *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*. Edited by Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

Worrall, David. *Celebrity, Performance, Reception: British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Edited by Ralph M. Wardle. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979.

Young, Thomas. *The Siddoniad: A Characteristic Poem*. Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1784.