

An Apology for the Life of  
Mr Colley Cibber,  
Comedian and Late Patentee  
of the Theatre Royal

Colley Cibber was one of the most derided men in eighteenth-century London. Mocked for his work in the theatre and as Poet Laureate, he was nevertheless a successful actor and playwright, and co-managed the Theatre Royal Drury Lane for twenty-four years. His response to his critics, *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber*, is often described as the first theatrical autobiography, and even as the first secular autobiography in English. But what kind of text is it? Intimate confession or cunning pose? History of the stage or political polemic? Rambling or purposeful? Or perhaps, even, the first celebrity memoir? Including comprehensive notes and a detailed scholarly introduction, this modernized text makes Cibber's enigmatic literary landmark accessible to a wide readership for the first time and allows both specialists and general readers to explore Cibber's extraordinary career against the rich, turbulent background of London theatre in the eighteenth century.

DAVID ROBERTS is Professor of English at Birmingham City University. His book *Thomas Betterton* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) was a finalist for the Freedley Award. His other scholarly editions include *Lord Chesterfield's Letters* (1992) and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (2019). His essay on Beethoven and Shakespeare was Editor's Choice in the June 2019 issue of *The Cambridge Quarterly*.



FRONTISPIECE. Engraving of Colley Cibber and a young woman by Edward Fisher of the portrait by Jean Baptiste van Loo, from the first edition of the *Apology*.

AN  
APOLOGY  
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Mr COLLEY CIBBER,  
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THEATRE ROYAL

*A Modernized Text*



Edited with an Introduction by  
DAVID ROBERTS  
*Birmingham City University*



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I am very grateful to my editor at Cambridge, Bethany Thomas, for her faith and guidance, and to George Laver, Liz Davey, Dr Chris Jackson, Mr Denesh Shankar, and the production team for their characteristically expert support. The advice of the Press’s two anonymous readers was impeccably thorough as well as instrumental in the decision to produce a modernized text, which it is to be hoped will open up this landmark work to a wider readership. One day, perhaps, it may even be read by the latest addition to my ever-loving family, who by happy chance was delivered in the same month as the revised manuscript for this edition: a first grandchild, Evelyn Rose, to whom this book is fondly dedicated.

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## INTRODUCTION

### A Theatrical Life

One hundred and forty-eight roles, at least; many thousands of stage appearances spanning the six decades from his debut in 1690; twenty-six dramatic entertainments with more eighteenth-century outings than any playwright other than Shakespeare;<sup>1</sup> nearly a quarter of a century co-managing London's leading playhouse: the theatrical career of Colley Cibber (1671–1757) was in variety and volume a match for any before or since. The same may be said for the vitriol Cibber attracted, whether as actor, writer, or manager. Yet none of his achievement would be quite as significant, or criticism of him quite so bruising, had he not become more than a subject of theatre history – had he not, that is, become a pioneering author of it.

*An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber* (1740) is often described as the first theatrical autobiography; one recent critic goes so far as to label it 'the first secular autobiography in English'.<sup>2</sup> Landmark text it certainly is, but precisely what kind of text, and why Cibber wrote it, remain contested. Confession or crafted pose? History or polemic? Ramblingly digressive or purposefully organized? The memoir of a 'peacock strutting on the public stage', the 'impudently titled' work of a 'publicity hound'?<sup>3</sup> Or a 'sober history' of London theatre by an 'opinionated' but 'remarkably accurate' reporter who, against the odds, wrote a work of 'something like genius'?<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps an attempt at self-definition that presents the 'illusion of interiority only to expose it as an illusion'?<sup>5</sup> The full title of the work poses many possibilities. *An Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber, Comedian and late Patentee of the Theatre-Royal. With an Historical View of the Stage during his Own Time. Written by Himself*: the promise of autobiography, self-justification, objective history, and eye-witness memoir is complemented by the diverse guises in which the author appears, at once actor ('comedian'), owner-manager ('patentee'), and historian. Even that is an underestimate. No mention is made on the title page of Cibber as playwright or even Poet Laureate, the post he occupied from 1730 to his death twenty-seven years later.

- 1 Based on the estimates of Robert D. Hume, 'Reevaluating Colley Cibber and Some Problems in Documentation of Performance, 1690–1800', *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 43, no. 3 (September 2019), 101–14.
- 2 Fawcett, p.2. 3 Schoch, p.230. 4 Hume, 'Aims', 687, 690, 695. 5 Fawcett, p.3.

In its abundance and elusiveness, the *Apology* is a fitting counterpart to the disconcertingly lifelike bust of its author in London's National Portrait Gallery (cover illustration), probably crafted to celebrate the book's instant notoriety.<sup>6</sup> Brightly coloured, smoothly self-assured: the thin-lipped smile suggests an amused thought withheld, the piercing blue eyes averted so that the viewer has to lean and bend to catch their gaze. At first, it seems as though the man is really there, but that shock dissolves into an unsettling puzzle, the decoding of an ironic wink frozen in time. Unmistakably it is the image of a man comfortably retired in his black turban cap, the gold embroidered waistcoat announcing membership of the *beau monde*. Who made it is aptly enigmatic. It used to be thought the work of Louis-François Roubiliac, sculptor of Shakespeare and Handel; now it is tentatively attributed to the less celebrated Sir Henry Cheere and his brother John, sculptor and plasterer respectively.<sup>7</sup>

If the form of Cibber's *Apology* and his reasons for writing it resist easy definition, its distinctiveness is not in doubt. No previous work had offered such insight into the daily business of acting and theatre management; none had attempted to chart in such detail the relationships between licensed companies and the agencies of state; none had featured a mere actor placing himself so comprehensively in the sightlines of readers. Without the *Apology*, our knowledge of London theatre from 1690 to 1732 would be drastically diminished. Recalling the great actors of his time, Cibber developed a critical language of performance of unprecedented vividness and subtlety. Rather than setting forth the gestural and rhetorical conventions thought by some to underpin good acting as they did other kinds of public speaking, the *Apology* examines the individual qualities of actors and their impact on audiences, allowing readers a glimpse of what it was like to witness first-hand the greats of the Restoration stage.<sup>8</sup> This, the first theatrical autobiography, therefore also ranks as the first body of theatre criticism.<sup>9</sup> Not content with observation, Cibber asks us to re-evaluate his profession,

6 Notes published by the National Portrait Gallery give the date of the bust as 'circa 1740'. See [www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01301/Colley-Cibber](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01301/Colley-Cibber) (last accessed 12 October 2021).

7 See John Kerslake, *Early Georgian Portraits* (London: HMSO, 1977), p.54.

8 Compare, for example, John Downes's *Roscious Anglicanus* (1708), which had represented great acting as an imitation of predecessors' practice, while Charles Gildon's *The Life of Mr Thomas Betterton* (1710) included a lengthy treatise on the rhetorical and gestural language of acting, said to be useful for actors, lawyers, and clergymen alike. See Wanko, pp.38–48.

9 See, for example, Stanley Wells, ed., *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.18, which includes Cibber's appreciation of Thomas Betterton as the first piece of theatre criticism in the language.

identifying in the best performers an art equal to any playwright's, composer's, or painter's.

### A Life in Brief

Colley Cibber lived through part or all of the reigns of six monarchs: Charles II, James II, William III (with Mary II), Anne, George I, and George II. Unlike most of the major playwrights to emerge in the Restoration period (depending on definitions, 1660–1714), he was a Londoner by birth and, when it came to representing city life, less disposed to satire than many of his contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> His heritage was European and artistic. Born in 1671, he was the son of the distinguished Danish sculptor Caius Gabriel Cibber and his second wife Jane, née Colley.

Caius Gabriel's commissions meant an itinerant childhood; young Colley attended school in Lincolnshire. He missed out on scholarships to Winchester College and therefore Oxford University, episodes he describes in the *Apology*. After a brief spell in military service, in 1690 he joined what was at the time London's only licensed theatre company, playing minor roles and seeing his name recorded in the cast lists of printed editions as, variously, 'Sibber', 'Zibber', 'Colly' and 'Zybars':<sup>11</sup> as if he needed reminding, clumsy signals that he was the child of an immigrant father, bearing a foreign-sounding name that attracted derision throughout his career.<sup>12</sup> It is little wonder that he offered his credentials as a self-made man ('the weight of my pedigree will not add an ounce to my intrinsic value'),<sup>13</sup> that he craved respectability, and settled for integration when others preferred rebellion.

- 10 Of the more prolific dramatists to emerge in the period, only Cibber and John Crowne (1641–1712) were Londoners. William Congreve (1670–1729) was from a Shropshire family and attended Trinity College Dublin. John Dryden (1631–1700) was a Northamptonshire boy who went to Cambridge; Thomas Duffey (1653–1723) was from Devon, while Sir George Etherege (1636–92) grew up in Berkshire and came to London to study law. George Farquhar (1677–1707), of Scots planter heritage, went to school in Londonderry and university in Dublin (like Cibber, he was apt to see his unfamiliar name gratuitously misspelled). Thomas Otway (1652–85) was born in Sussex and failed to complete his degree at Oxford; Thomas Shadwell (1641–92) grew up in Norfolk and went to school in Bury St Edmunds. Like Congreve and Farquhar, Thomas Southerne (1660–1746) and Nahum Tate (1652–1715) attended Trinity College Dublin. Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726) spent most of his childhood in Chester; William Wycherley (1641–1715) was baptized in Hampshire but had family roots in Shropshire. Little is known of the early life of Aphra Behn (1640–89) other than that she probably spent some time in Surinam.
- 11 See lists of dramatis personae for Thomas Duffey, *Bussy d'Ambois* (1691, 'Sibber') and *The Marriage-Hater Matched* (1692, 'Colly'); Nicholas Brady, *The Rape* (1692, 'Zibber'); and Elkanah Settle, *The Ambitious Slave* (1694, 'Zybars').
- 12 For example, *Apology*, pp.328–9 n.51. 13 *Apology*, p.14.

Initially he worked under the penny-pinching, bullying management of the lawyer and theatre-owner Christopher Rich. In 1695, when a group of senior actors left with Thomas Betterton to form a new company at Lincoln's Inn Fields, Cibber remained behind and ended up assisting Rich. The two men evidently socialized, but in the *Apology* Cibber distances himself from the relationship; it did not fit a narrative that promotes the union of art and lucre, Rich's interests having embraced only the latter.<sup>14</sup> Doubtless for the same reason, Cibber skates over the many later occasions when he proved himself, in turn, a managerial penny-pincher.<sup>15</sup>

The 1695 division of companies created opportunities for Rich's younger actors, but to achieve his breakthrough Cibber had to take a first step in the project of self-authoring whose peak is the *Apology*. He created the fop-pish Sir Novelty Fashion in his own *Love's Last Shift* (January 1696), itself a landmark in the evolution of comedy, showing a penitent hero who learns to entertain generous feeling at the expense of aggressive lust and wit.<sup>16</sup> The following November he repeated the role, now ennobled as Lord Foppington, in Sir John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*, and then again in his own play, *The Careless Husband*, in 1704. The association of actor and role stuck. In a series of post-retirement benefit performances during the 1740s Cibber was still playing it, serving up living relics of his career to a nostalgic audience. He was even painted in the role by Giuseppe Grisoni (Figure 7). It is arguable whether he plays up to it in the *Apology*.<sup>17</sup> What is clear is that he devotes little space to discussing it. If he knew the association would be taken for granted, he also had more important, less obvious, and less personal topics to write about.

While other fop roles featured prominently in his repertoire (Osric in *Hamlet*, Tattle in Congreve's *Love for Love*, Sparkish in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, and Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*), he was a highly versatile performer, with character roles including Captain Brazen in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, Ben the Sailor in Congreve's *Love for Love*, and Justice Shallow in *2 Henry IV*. Middling classical roles such as Gloucester in *King Lear*, Syphax in Addison's *Cato*, and Worcester in *1 Henry IV* were staples. Villains are almost as conspicuous in his career as fops: he played Richard III, Iago, and Volpone; in more recent work, Renault in Otway's *Venice Preserved* and Young Woudbe in Farquhar's *The Twin Rivals*, a role that drew on the success of both his Richard III and

<sup>14</sup> *Apology*, p.171. <sup>15</sup> *Apology*, p.285 n.30.

<sup>16</sup> For an account of the different comic elements in *Love's Last Shift*, see Hume, *Development*, pp.411–12.

<sup>17</sup> See below, pp.lvii–lviii.

his Lord Foppington. Still, he was accused of disliking villain roles because audiences came to believe he was really playing himself – a charge he rebuts in the *Apology*.<sup>18</sup> Tragic heroes and romantic leads were, he admits, beyond him; he was very much the ‘comedian’ of the title page rather than a tragedian.<sup>19</sup> Relishing the chance to send himself up (in *The Egoist* he admits to an ‘utter insensibility of being ridiculous’), he played the hapless playwright Bayes in Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* and the unfunny Witwoud in Congreve’s *The Way of the World*, a role he may well have inspired: the essence of that character is captured in Congreve’s devastating summary that *Love’s Last Shift* ‘had only in it a great many things that were like wit, that in reality were not wit’.<sup>20</sup>

That put-down was a further instance of Cibber’s being felt not quite to belong, while his cheerful recycling of Congreve’s verdict suggests that, like Witwoud, he was happy to play along with occasional humiliation if it kept him near the centre of things (on more than one occasion, it might be added, Congreve’s words are no less true of the *Apology* than of *Love’s Last Shift*). He was as critical as anyone of his own plays, which were as diverse as his portfolio of roles. Tragedy, comedy, burlesque, Shakespearian adaptation, Molière imitation, masque, pastoral interlude, ballad opera: he attempted them all between 1696 and 1730. When he came to publish a collected two-volume edition in 1721, only half of his existing dramatic output featured. He knew he was not a great originator but largely retained an instinct for what would work in the theatre with a particular company of actors. His best plays – particularly *Love’s Last Shift* and *The Careless Husband* – were repertory standards long after his death, and his modern editors aptly summarize his dramaturgic strengths: ‘plots that involved the standard formulas of his day’ and ‘the presentation of memorable characters’.<sup>21</sup> Just as importantly, he understood the relationship between commercial viability and political loyalty.

As a manager – a period lasting formally from 1708 to 1732 – Cibber was at pains to portray himself as a cautious, mollifying intermediary. He gained his managerial apprenticeship in the late 1690s and early 1700s, as buffer between the financially driven Christopher Rich and his discontent-

18 As reported by Steele in *Town-Talk*, no.2; see *Document Register* no.2638. In the *Apology*, Cibber states that some actors declined villain roles for the same reason, a practice he mocks as ‘theatrical prudery’ (*Apology*, p.99).

19 *Apology*, p.127. Compare the title of Charles Gildon’s 1710 *Life of Mr Thomas Betterton, the Late Eminent Tragedian*.

20 *Apology*, p.150; *Egotist*, p.34.

21 *The Plays of Colley Cibber, Volume I*, ed. Timothy J. Viator and William J. Burling (Cranbury, NJ, and London: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.12.

ed actors. As one of the Drury Lane triumvirate with Robert Wilks and Barton Booth – the latter from 1713 – he was apparently the umpire, caught between contrasting talents and temperaments; in the *Apology* he misses no opportunity to mention Wilks's short fuse. Cibber's diplomatic skills were further tested in contractual disputes with other partners such as Thomas Doggett and Sir Richard Steele.<sup>22</sup> Whether they were tested beyond their limit is an open question. During his years in management he was involved in at least eight significant legal disputes relating to theatre governance; a further case pursued him for years after.<sup>23</sup> His retirement was calculating but messy. In July 1731 a patent was drafted to enable Cibber, Wilks, and Booth to run Drury Lane for a further twenty-one years, effective from September the following year.<sup>24</sup> Before it could come into effect, Booth sold half his interest to John Highmore; soon after, Wilks died.<sup>25</sup> Cibber assigned his own share to his son Theophilus for the duration of the 1732–3 season in return for a one-off rental reported to be worth £442, plus a further 12 guineas a week for acting.<sup>26</sup> Theophilus proved a disastrous manager, and in March 1733 Cibber sold his entire interest to Highmore for a reported 3,000 guineas.<sup>27</sup>

An appetite for reasonable accommodation served him well enough during his lifetime but has hardly helped his reputation since. A loyal supporter of Sir Robert Walpole's Whig government (1721–42), he became Poet Laureate partly on the strength of his Molière adaptation, *The Non-Juror*, which transformed the hypocritical priest Tartuffe into the rapacious Jacobite Dr Wolf, another role he wrote for himself. The *Apology* occasionally disguises his partisanship, attributing the success of Addison's *Cato* to its pleasing rival Whig and Tory factions equally, but for his detractors his name continued to give the game away: like the Hanoverian dynasty

22 For Cibber's account, *Apology*, pp.303–7 (Doggett) and 333–41 (Steele).

23 As recorded in *Document Register* nos.2026 (Christopher Rich), 2120 (Owen Swiney), 2228 (Thomas Doggett), 2526 (William Collier), 2831 (John and Christopher Mosyer Rich), 3283 (Richard Steele), 3298 (Francis Henry Lee, Master of the Revels), 3525 (Josias Miller). In 1736, along with other parties with a current or former interest in Drury Lane, Cibber was pursued for money owed to James Calthorpe (C11/1268/13, in *Document Register* no.4008).

24 LC 5/202, pp.407–9, in *Document Register* no.3568, and C66/3586, no.5, in *Document Register* no.3623.

25 *Daily Courant*, 13 July 1732, in *Document Register* no.3639.

26 Barker, p.167.

27 *Daily Post*, 27 March 1733, in *Document Register* no.3695; for alternative figures, see *Apology*, p.197 n.73. For 3,000 guineas, the Bank of England inflation calculator suggests an equivalent current value of £760,073. For an account of Theophilus's brief period in charge, including a dispute with Highmore, see Barker, pp.169–73.



he supported or his own Tarfuffian incarnation, he was an intruder in the house who had snatched the keys.<sup>28</sup>

When the *Apology* covers the foremost regulatory controversies affecting the theatre, Cibber advertises his moderation. Jeremy Collier's 1698 diatribe, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, led to a pamphlet war and the prosecution of actors and playwrights; Cibber himself was tried but acquitted.<sup>29</sup> In his plays he observed standards of moral decency appropriate for the post-Collier age, while the *Apology* stresses the need for performers to live unimpeachable private lives – an assertion some early readers found questionable given Cibber's reputation (how far warranted it is hard to tell) for gambling and womanizing.<sup>30</sup> When Walpole's government introduced a Licensing Act in 1737, the culmination of several years when anti-Whig satire (much of it from the pen of Henry Fielding) had proliferated alongside a growth in theatre buildings, Cibber was robust in his defence of new measures that restricted the number of licensed theatres to two. The arguments about artistic quality he advances in the *Apology* were underwritten by seasoned understanding of the commercial advantage that accrued to managers of theatrical monopolies or (at worst) duopolies, the system in which he gained his own stage apprenticeship. But where money was involved, compliance had its limits. He was evidently proud of refusing to pay the Master of the Revels a licensing fee demanded merely by convention rather than statute, although the *Apology* conveniently fails to mention the adverse consequences.<sup>31</sup> Even so, it is easy to characterize Cibber as a classically dislikeable establishment figure: an upholder of bourgeois morality who welcomed state censorship as long as he did not incur it; who gained office by deference; who sat in judgment on the work of playwrights and actors more talented than himself; who drew handsome profits from the theatre while squeezing pennies owed to dress-makers and scene-painters.

Family matters are thinly represented in the *Apology*, but the youngest of Cibber's six children to survive infancy stretched his capacity for harmonious co-existence well past breaking-point. Charlotte – actress, baker, sausage merchant, playwright, transvestite, and autobiographer – outraged her father by mocking him in performance and by her convention-defying

<sup>28</sup> *Apology*, pp.327–8.

<sup>29</sup> Report in *The Post Boy*, 24–6 February 1702, of Drury Lane actors summoned for 'some immoral expressions contained in the plays acted by them' (*Document Register* no.1683).

<sup>30</sup> As documented and challenged by McGirr, pp.145–80.

<sup>31</sup> *Apology*, pp.185 and 332 n.2.

lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> Her *Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Charke* was published in 1755, two years before her father's death. It reflects on the difficulties of their relationship and appears to ask for forgiveness, which duly came in insultingly small measure via Cibber's will. His granddaughters, Jenny and Betty, received £1,000 each; Charlotte, a mere £5. Even her wayward brother Theophilus was allowed £50. Neither child is mentioned by name in the *Apology*, but two awkward children do not necessarily make a bad parent. In Elaine M. McGirr's recent study, Cibber is painted as the man depicted by Jean Baptiste van Loo (see frontispiece) to coincide with plans for the *Apology*: at ease over his writing desk, attended to by a young woman McGirr argues is one of his granddaughters. Cibber's forty-one-year marriage to Katherine Shore, McGirr claims, 'seems to have stepped from the boards of one his comedies: genteel, affectionate and productive'.<sup>33</sup> If only we could be sure.

The pursuit of gentility characterized Cibber's life after the *Apology* and the critical furore it provoked. He was 68 when the book appeared but, in Richard Hindry Barker's words, continued to behave 'like a much younger man' with a social life and an interest in much younger women to match, Katherine having died in 1734.<sup>34</sup> He befriended the actress Peg Woffington, the author Laetitia Pilkington, and the society belle Elizabeth Chudleigh. The Laureateship opened doors that might have been closed to a mere retired actor, but reports of his behaviour are at odds with the more pious protestations of the *Apology*. He did not impress Samuel Johnson, who thought it 'wonderful that a man who for forty years had lived with the great and the witty should have acquired so ill the talents of conversation', adding that 'one half of what he said was oaths'.<sup>35</sup> Cibber continued to write. *The Character and Conduct of Cicero* was published in 1747 and *The Lady's Lecture* the year after. In 1751 he published *A Rhapsody upon the Marvellous, Arising from the First Odes of Horace and Pindar*. The title pages of all three works identify him either as 'Servant to His Majesty' or 'P.L.' (i.e. Poet Laureate), so reminding the public that he was no mere actor, playwright, manager, or theatrical apologist.

Among his literary acquaintance the foremost was Samuel Richardson, who in 1740 had also published a groundbreaking book. Fielding skewered both the *Apology* and Richardson's *Pamela* in his 1741 spoof, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews*, advertising it as the work of 'Conny Keyber' and 'necessary to be had in all families'. Both *Pamela* and *Colley*, he alleged, were attention-seeking upstarts who drew readers into a taw-

32 See below, pp.lviii–lix n.201. 33 McGirr, p.150. 34 Barker, p.233.

35 Boswell, I.542.

dry, linguistically inept world of obsessive selfhood. Cibber took a close interest in the evolution of Richardson's subsequent masterpiece, *Clarissa*; according to Laetitia Pilkington he was horrified when he learned of the dire fate that awaited its heroine. His reaction ('he shuddered – nay, the tears stood in his eyes') was that of the ideal sentimental reader; he concluded that 'he should no longer believe Providence, or eternal wisdom, or goodness governed the world, if merit, innocence, and beauty were to be so destroyed'.<sup>36</sup> Cibber's relationship with Richardson and his circle ran into greater difficulties when he proposed that the pure-hearted hero of *Sir Charles Grandison* should prove his moral worth by first taking a mistress and then forsaking her, as though reborn into virtue like the hero of *Love's Last Shift*. Richardson's correspondent, Rachel, Lady Bradshaigh, was horrified, complaining that Cibber was 'the most finished coxcomb that ever humanity produced' and asked never again to hear the name of 'that irreclaimable sinner of seventy-nine'.<sup>37</sup>

By then, Cibber had identified an unlikely successor for the Laureateship. Henry Jones was an Irish bricklayer and poet who had been brought to London by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Chesterfield, whom Cibber describes admiringly in the *Apology*.<sup>38</sup> Warming to the idea of another self-made man rising to literary celebrity, Cibber encouraged Jones and in 1753 assisted him with what turned out to be a popular play, *The Earl of Essex*. Falling dangerously ill, Cibber sent a message to Charles Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton and Lord Chamberlain, proposing that Jones become the new Laureate. But Cibber recovered; Jones offended Chesterfield, took to drink, and died in a workhouse.<sup>39</sup> Without showing any more sign of being equipped for the task than he had in 1730, Cibber continued to write the celebratory odes required of a Laureate up to his death on 11 December 1757. Soon after, his troublesome son Theophilus, disappointed in the provisions of Cibber's will, accepted an engagement in Dublin but drowned en route, shipwrecked off the Scottish coast. The Laureateship went to the Cambridge-educated playwright and poet William Whitehead, whose poetic gifts were, it is fair to say, not far removed from Cibber's.

### Apologies, Lives, Memorials

*Apology*: 'the pleading off from a charge or imputation, whether expressed, implied, or only conceived as possible; defence of a person, or vindication

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Pilkington to Richardson of 1745, cited in Barker, p.251.

<sup>37</sup> Rachel, Lady Bradshaigh, Letter to Richardson of 1750, cited in Barker, p.255.

<sup>38</sup> *Apology*, pp.20–22 and n.25. <sup>39</sup> For further details see Barker, pp.255–7.

of an institution, etc., from accusation or aspersion'; thus the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as it was used from the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. As a literary genre, the Apology has a much older history, beginning with Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*, which records a defence mounted in 399 BC against charges of corruption. Cibber's basic classical education may have introduced him to the work; he twice refers to Socrates in the *Apology*.<sup>40</sup> If he also knew the two foremost examples of English Apologies, Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* (1595, also known as *A Defence of Poetry*) and Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors* (1612), both would have appealed to his sense of the moral and civic role of the arts.

The hundreds of Apologies published between 1612 and 1740 embraced a far wider group of people, institutions, trades, books, ideas, and belief systems. Often the subjects were religious: witness two works published in the year of *The Non-Juror* (1717), *A Brief Apology in behalf of the people in derision called Quakers*, and *An Apology for the foreign Protestant churches having no episcopacy*. Such appeals on behalf of the underdog or the socially marginal were common: Catholics and Baptists, debtors and usurers, younger brothers, and those disgraced in office were all the subjects of Apologies. The promise was a defence of conduct undertaken in the public realm, or such as to raise questions about the public realm's assumptions, conventions, and expectations. It follows that a 1740 Apology for a *Life* did not quite herald what today would be classed as an autobiography. Instead, it pointed to what was already in the public domain: a defence less of a life than of a career.

Cibber goes out of his way to declare personal matters off limits, but with inconsistent results. Of his fellow managers, he writes, 'whatever might be our personal errors, I shall think I have no right to speak of them farther than where the public entertainment was affected by them'.<sup>41</sup> When it comes to actors, he is just as forthright:

If therefore, among so many, some particular actors were remarkable in any part of their private lives that might sometimes make the world merry without doors, I hope my laughing friends will excuse me if I do not so far comply with their desires or curiosity as to give them a place in my history.<sup>42</sup>

Considered in that light, the *Apology's* aims might seem clear enough. It is plainly the self-justification of one of the most frequently and virulently derided men in early eighteenth-century London: a man who stood up

<sup>40</sup> *Apology*, pp.24 and 35. <sup>41</sup> *Apology*, p.288. <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

staunchly for what was still a widely maligned species (he refers to ‘that disgrace and prejudice which custom has thrown upon the profession of an actor’).<sup>43</sup> It is unquestionably an account of a career in which acting, writing, and theatrical management were for four decades so all-consuming an obsession as to make private life a luxury. So emphatic is Cibber’s search for professional as opposed to private justification that he is prone to lapse into smugness, or digression, or simply an excess of optimism. Making his own work the centre of his narrative, he is inclined to be a little catty about former associates, but only as long as they are dead; the book concludes at the point he fears depicting ‘some persons living in a light they possibly might not choose to be seen in’.<sup>44</sup> Conscious of his own longevity, he is sombre in marking the passing of his former colleagues, and by so honouring their memory he seeks to exonerate himself from being thought a mere gossip.

Beyond his fractious relationships with Theophilus and Charlotte, family miseries such as his father’s intermittent periods in the Marshalsea prison, a feud with an uncle, an arrest for assault, and what appears to be an accusation of rape, are entirely omitted.<sup>45</sup> Robert D. Hume’s rough statistical analysis lays bare the gaps: a mere 17 per cent of the text is ‘personal’, of which less than one-third might be described as ‘strictly autobiographical’.<sup>46</sup> It is, Hume concedes, not quite that simple for a work significantly made up of eye-witness testimony, but the conclusion is hard to dispute: Cibber had no intention of laying bare his emotions or personal relationships. Whether there were precedents for doing so is debatable. Hume cites studies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writing about the self by Paul Delany and Meredith Skura that give priority to the organization of worldly experience over any exploration of inner life.<sup>47</sup> A more recent study by Kathleen Lynch offers an alternative perspective, albeit in the context of religious narratives largely alien to Cibber’s purpose, whatever his occasional nods towards ‘Providence’.<sup>48</sup>

43 *Apology*, p.56. 44 *Apology*, p.370.

45 For Caius Gabriel Cibber, his debts, and his feud with his brother-in-law, Edward Colley, see Faber, pp.17–21; for Cibber’s brief detention in prison during April 1697 at the suit of Jane Lucas, see *Document Register* no.1553; for allegations against him by Mary Osborne, see McGirr, pp.154 and 182 n.24; for his relationships with Theophilus Cibber and Charlotte Charke, see McGirr, pp.160–73.

46 Hume, ‘Aims’, 662.

47 Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Meredith Skura, *Tudor Biography: Listening for Inwardness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). See also Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

48 Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Those who have visited the *Apology* hoping for prolonged introspection have therefore tended to leave disappointed, while some prefer to find its gaps psychologically significant. According to Donald A. Stauffer, the book reveals the enigmatic emptiness of its author.<sup>49</sup> Leonard R. N. Ashley bemoans its want of existential despair or even self-doubt.<sup>50</sup> J. Paul Hunter claims the *Apology* for the tradition of Puritan confessional literature in which ‘no secrets [are] wilfully kept [and] no flaws unmentioned’, only to blame Cibber for failing to shape up: he was not, Hunter concludes, ‘an especially perceptive viewer of himself’.<sup>51</sup> In recent criticism, performance has often taken the place of introspection. If the text reveals little of Cibber the private man, it must be because the *Apology* is a studiously contrived pose, or perhaps catalogue of poses: either an outsize version of Lord Foppington or a series of performances depending on the topic, like roles selected from an actor’s repertoire. Cibber himself tantalized his readers with the idea that the book might excite ‘the curiosity of his spectators to know what he really was when in nobody’s shape but his own’, only to insist that it is his ‘theatrical character’ that is on display (leaving open the question of whether that was the same thing as his managerial character).<sup>52</sup> At the start of the final chapter, he invites us to imagine him in another persona entirely, that of a plaintiff in Chancery: ‘let the scene open, and at once discover your comedian at the Bar!’<sup>53</sup>

Although the *Apology* is silent on many aspects of Cibber’s private life, its opening chapters give an account of his childhood which explains, in classic autobiographical fashion, how the child was father to the man: ‘I remember I was the same inconsistent creature I have been ever since.’<sup>54</sup> Typically, self-deprecation is a route to self-celebration. He recalls how he was whipped by his teacher for writing poorly but in the same instant told that ‘what was good of it was better than any boy’s in the form’, an anticipation of what he later admits are the sunny uplands and muddy swamps of his playwriting.<sup>55</sup> Professing a naivety that makes him still, at the age of 68, incredulous that anyone could be ‘capable of envy, malice, or ingratitude’, he admits that a loose tongue and a habit of joking at others’ expense continue to land him in trouble.<sup>56</sup> If those are diversionary tactics designed to show that no criticism of him can be as accurate as his own, they are

49 Donald A. Stauffer, *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), p.38.

50 Leonard R. N. Ashley, *Colley Cibber* (New York: Twayne, 1965).

51 J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York: Norton, 1990), p.330.

52 *Apology*, p.12. 53 *Apology*, p.333. 54 *Apology*, p.17. 55 *Apology*, pp.17–18.

56 *Apology*, p.18.



folded into a scheme of reflection typically characterized in literary history as ‘sentimental’. *Love’s Last Shift* is often described as the first sentimental comedy, and the *Apology* bathes in its warm principles. ‘Wit is not always a sign of intrinsic merit’, pleads Cibber, partly in self-reproach, and partly as a defence against those who doubted he had any wit at all; ‘so the want of that readiness is no reproach to a man of plain sense and civility’.<sup>57</sup>

This notably non-confessional *Life* nonetheless invites reading as an instance of what Jacques Derrida described as ‘circumfession’: a life reconstructed not from introspection but from circles of friendship and professional acquaintance.<sup>58</sup> Here, it is male relationships and their vicissitudes that preoccupy Cibber, from a school friend who turned against him, to his father; from Lord Chesterfield, to the patentees Christopher Rich and Henry Brett; from Master of the Revels Charles Killigrew, to the actor-managers Robert Wilks, Thomas Doggett, and Barton Booth; and finally to Sir Richard Steele, a legal dispute with whom, following a long period of ‘agreeable amity’, is described as ‘painful’.<sup>59</sup> One brief mention of his marriage aside, Cibber is silent on relationships with women, a charitable explanation of which is that he paid actresses the compliment of treating them purely as professionals (even as he admits to having been somewhat unprofessionally dismissive of the young Anne Oldfield).<sup>60</sup> His focus is on his ability to reconcile his fellow managers and to please or occasionally defy men in positions of greater influence. Reference is made to the institutions of male society that lay beyond the theatre: to coffee houses and the less salubrious establishments apparently enjoyed by Christopher Rich.<sup>61</sup> In particular, Cibber is drawn to anecdotes, personal and otherwise, that blur hierarchies between men. The composer Corelli elegantly corrects a patron and, in an episode remarkable only for blending schoolboy japes with suppressed eroticism, Cibber swaps shirts with his soon-to-be-master, Henry Brett.<sup>62</sup> His dedication of the *Apology* to a man believed to be the politician Henry Pelham is rapturous to a degree unusual even in that overheated genre. ‘When I see you lay aside the advantages of superiority’, he writes, ‘then ’tis I taste you! Then, life runs high! I desire! I possess you!’<sup>63</sup> As will be seen, the *Apology* may owe its very existence to evenings that combined friendship with patronage in a way that crystallized Cibber’s craving for respectability.

<sup>57</sup> *Apology*, p.19.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Circumfession’, in Derrida and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp.3–315.

<sup>59</sup> *Apology*, p.333. <sup>60</sup> *Apology*, p.202. <sup>61</sup> *Apology*, p.171.

<sup>62</sup> *Apology*, pp.365 and 245. <sup>63</sup> *Apology*, p.5.

So much for the *Life* of its title: what sort of *Historical View* does the *Apology* offer? Richard Schoch argues that its roots lie in Gilbert Burnet's *History of his own time* (1724–34), a text Cibber quotes, the 'key advantage' of which was Burnet's 'privileged access to great people and...important events'.<sup>64</sup> Burnet's plain style communicated the vividness of personal experience. His highly individual perspective meant he felt no obligation to write about what immediate observation did not tell him: 'Where I was in the dark, I passed over all', he wrote.<sup>65</sup> With Burnet as Cibber's model, the *Apology* becomes 'history [understood] as coterminous with the historian', but with a catch: the Cibberian historian is 'a figure so outsized that it risks eclipsing the very knowledge to which he claims privileged access'.<sup>66</sup>

Hume extends the field of reference (as well as diminishing the risk of Schoch's 'eclipsing') by referring to the many 'secret histories' published between 1660 and 1750. He counts no fewer than 448 of them: some devoted to unsubstantiated and occasionally smutty rumours, but all concerned with opening up to a reading public forbidden spaces, whether personal or institutional.<sup>67</sup> It is an appealing context for a book that charts the jealousies and machinations of off-stage life. Nevertheless, when it comes to detailing some of his more sensitive transactions, such as multiple series of legal actions involving patentees and fellow managers, or adverse orders from the Lord Chamberlain that might have ended his career altogether, Cibber is no more forthcoming than he is about his family life.<sup>68</sup> If this is a secret history of the theatrical state, the author maintains tight control over which state secrets to leak, often according to whether they show him in a good light.

How well Cibber organized his history is no less debatable. He confesses he is inclined to favour the 'mere effect of chance or humour' over 'policy' even as he aspires to 'the fidelity of an historian'.<sup>69</sup> That preference finds voice in digressions that recall the asides when actor confides in audience; at one point Cibber even compares his digressions to a dance between the acts of a play.<sup>70</sup> For Schoch, as for most critics, the effect is to create a 'rambling', poorly structured narrative thrown together from the three ingredients of autobiography, stage history, and 'a gathering of anecdotes

64 Schoch, p.228; also *Apology*, pp.14 n.8, 26 n.41, 52 n.33, 342–3 ns.29 and 31.

65 Burnet, I: B IV, cited in Schoch, p.228. 66 Schoch, pp.247–8.

67 Hume, 'Aims', 682–3.

68 See, for example, the lawsuits involving Christopher Rich in 1709 (*Document Register* no.2026) and Owen Swiney in 1711 (*Document Register* no.2120), and his suspension from acting and managing by Lord Chamberlain Newcastle in 1719 (*Document Register* no.2957).

69 *Apology*, pp.248 and 318. 70 *Apology*, p.326.



and comments upon actors and acting'. Sometimes, Schoch adds, the three 'follow sequentially but other times they are jumbled and frequently overlap'.<sup>71</sup> The digressions are there, Schoch argues, to satisfy readers' yearning for familiar, foppish Colley. In the *Apology* Cibber agrees with the need for such a leavening, foreseeing a mixed audience of 'the wise and learned' as well as 'readers of no more judgment than some of my *quondam* auditors'.<sup>72</sup>

However, the summary of chapters that appears at the beginning of the *Apology* does not immediately suggest disorganization. In fact, reading the book in its entirety supports the idea that Cibber set out with a plan. For the first three chapters, he describes his aims and method, and charts his life before he became an actor in 1690. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the London stage and its performers between 1660 and 1690, while Chapter 6 moves on to Cibber's first years as an actor and playwright, describing the breaking up of the United Company in 1695. Chapter 7 is largely concerned with growing indiscipline in the breakaway company, with a digression on Cibber's failed attempt to imitate the much later success of *The Beggar's Opera*. In Chapter 8, he turns back to his own company and to the impact of Jeremy Collier's *A Short View*. The opening of the Haymarket Theatre in 1704, and the vicissitudes of ownership, regulation, and technology that followed, dominate Chapters 9 to 11, with Chapter 10 featuring a series of reflections on censorship. Since the Haymarket became the prime venue for performing opera, Cibber's mistrust of that genre looms large in Chapter 12, alongside a review of further changes in management and personnel, including Cibber's rise to leadership. Christopher Rich's acquisition of the old Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1709 introduces further observations about competition and regulation in Chapter 13, while the final three chapters are devoted largely to Cibber's experience of co-managing the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, including an account of a dispute in the mid 1720s with Richard Steele, who had been awarded a patent in 1715. If that falling out of friends propels the narrative forward at speed in its final chapter, it is only a sign that Cibber felt he had important business to settle for both professional and personal reasons. The same may be said for his concluding reflections on his managerial colleagues, Booth and Wilks.

Cibber's basic chronological plan is not, of course, either exhaustive or consistent. He can glide forwards from the reopening of Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1714 to attacks on him in *Mist's Journal* from 1717, and occasionally – whether knowingly or not – he reverses the order of events.<sup>73</sup> 'About this time' is a preferred, conveniently non-committal linking device. There is

71 Schoch, p.237. 72 *Apology*, p.326. 73 *Apology*, pp.280–1, n.16.

only so much autobiographical material as is needed to fill the gap between his birth and the point at which he began his theatrical career; it made sense to deal with his early life first before tracking back to explain how his first theatre company came into being eight years before he joined it as an 18-year-old. From start to finish he is clear about the scope of his history, his penultimate sentence referring us back to what was advertised on the title page:

What commotions the stage fell into the year following, or from what provocations the greatest part of the actors revolted and set up for themselves in the little house in the Haymarket, lies not within the promise of my title page to relate.<sup>74</sup>

Hume goes a step further in defending the book's structure: while the *Apology* 'seems like rambling free association', it is really 'a focused discussion of regulatory issues' and a 'seriously thought-out attempt to tell theatre history and draw conclusions from it'.<sup>75</sup> Cibber's digressions are better understood as moments where key concerns are reviewed: the civic and moral role of theatre, the most and least favourable styles of management, the ideal regulatory environment, questions about his own conduct as a manager and performer, and what it is that counts as excellence in acting. Those are Schoch's 'overlapping and interwoven purposes' of the *Apology* as Hume construes them. The result: not a rambling series of reminiscences, but a more or less linear history of theatre that constitutes 'an utterly astonishing and unprecedented enterprise for its time'.<sup>76</sup> Cibber's own statements about his method, self-indulgent as they may seem, do not necessarily contradict that verdict. He declares that he can 'no more put off [his] follies, than [his] skin'; he admits that his 'frequent digressions may have entangled [the reader's] memory' and makes no claim to a 'regular method'; variants of the word 'digress' appear throughout the book.<sup>77</sup> We might expect a 'focused discussion of regulatory issues' to show more development and less repetition than Cibber bestows on the principles of theatre regulation and management: 'I believe I may have said something like this in a former chapter' he admits at one point; half-way through he fears he has bitten off more than he can chew.<sup>78</sup> Yet the very use of such language suggests, paradoxically, that Cibber was confident of his material, that he knew when he needed to move from core narrative to topic-based reflection and back again, but wanted (as any actor might) to re-create the atmosphere of a live audience.

<sup>74</sup> *Apology*, p.370. <sup>75</sup> Hume, 'Aims', 680–1. <sup>76</sup> Hume, 'Aims', 684 and 681.  
<sup>77</sup> *Apology*, pp.13 and 198. <sup>78</sup> *Apology*, pp.284 and 198.

Hume further defends Cibber's historical method by speculating that he may have been allowed access to the records of Drury Lane and Covent Garden by their respective managers, Charles Fleetwood and John Rich.<sup>79</sup> On that question Cibber is clear: he states that he relied on memory. From that 'repository alone', he declares, 'every article of what I write is collected'.<sup>80</sup> Like many people advanced in years, he remembered distant events more sharply than some more recent ones. His errors are explained in the footnotes to this edition. Depending on what is counted, there are approximately fifty of them. Sometimes he gives the wrong year; sometimes he conflates separate events or reverses the order in which they happened; sometimes he misquotes. But the error count includes secondhand reports, such as stories about the early Restoration period relayed to him by senior members of the United Company. He evidently did pay attention to the 'veracity' or otherwise of his sources.<sup>81</sup> In short, there is nothing in the *Apology's* history of the stage to suggest Cibber ventured an idle boast in claiming to have relied on memory (a faculty which, after all, he had honed during five decades of acting), or indeed to undermine the view that the book is, when all is said, the astonishing, deceptively coherent, and accurate feat celebrated by Hume.

### Occasions of Writing

So why did he write it? It is easy to imagine that the *Apology* was conceived from Cibber's desire once and for all to answer those who had attacked him for being either an undeserving Poet Laureate, an indifferent actor, an unsympathetic manager, a preemptory judge of new scripts, a toady of the Walpole government, a supporter of the Licensing Act, a social climber, a plagiarist, a defacer of Shakespeare, or all of the above. His appointment to the Laureateship in 1730, from a list that included only those loyal to the government, sparked widespread mockery. One newspaper declared after the announcement, 'there is a report the renowned Keyber is learning to spell', the reference to foreign provenance compounding the indignation.<sup>82</sup> His acting was not universally praised. A hostile witness to one of his signature roles, Richard III, recalled that 'when he was killed by Richmond, one might plainly perceive that the good people were not better pleased that so execrable a tyrant was destroyed than that so execrable an actor was

79 Hume, 'Aims', 690. 80 *Apology*, p.294. 81 *Apology*, p.351.

82 *Fog's Weekly Journal*, 12 December 1730. For Cibber and the Laureateship, *Apology*, pp.39–42.

silent', and went on to claim that 'the general taste was against him'.<sup>83</sup> Cibber incurred the wrath of playwrights whose work he judged flawed or too subversive, while his eye for popular success deserted him when for reasons of political sensitivity he rejected the single most transformative play of the eighteenth century, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*; the error was compounded by Cibber's botched attempt to mimic its success with his own rather less impressive *Love in a Riddle*.<sup>84</sup> *The Non-Juror* annoyed opponents of the government and, to make things worse, earned him royal favour.<sup>85</sup> Throughout his twenty-four years of theatre management he retained a vested interest in securing the highly controlled environment that would come into being with the Licensing Act (even 'two sets of actors, tolerated in the same place, have constantly ended in the corruption of the theatre', he claims).<sup>86</sup> As a playwright he was often accused of plagiarism, and the new connections opened up by the Laureateship made others despise the pretensions of this mere actor (even those who, like Alexander Pope, had admired Thomas Betterton). On top of all that, Cibber had been the butt of Pope's withering irony in the 1728 *Dunciad Variorum*, classed among those with '[l]ess human genius than God gives an ape'; in the 1743 version of the same poem, he would be installed as the sleeping epitome of dullness.<sup>87</sup>

The text of the *Apology* contains warrant for all those motives for self-justification. Sometimes the defence is indirect. Cibber's reflections on the Licensing Act and the principles of good acting and management suggest he thought of this as both a topical book, useful for future generations, and one that would make readers yearn for times past. In the event, it was times past that formed the best education for the future; he had considered writing 'a select dissertation upon theatrical action', but found that describing Betterton's performances did the job for him.<sup>88</sup> Whatever the initial motive, impetus for the project as it eventually turned out was, as befits a work of circumfession, supplied by friendship. The dedication tells us Cibber had stayed with a man believed to be Henry Pelham, former Secretary to Lord

83 McGirr, pp.118–20, assesses this often-quoted extract from *The Laureate* and concludes it may have been prompted by one of Cibber's comeback performances in the 1730s rather than when he was in his prime as an actor.

84 The antagonism with Fielding may date from Cibber's rejection of his *Don Quixote in England* (1729) and/or *The Temple Beau* (1730). See also below, p.190 n.49. For a comprehensive account see Fielding, *Plays*, I.101–4. John Dennis accused Cibber of obstructing the hoped-for success of *The Invader of his Country* (1720); *Apology*, p.146 n.76. On Cibber judging new scripts, see Stern, pp.207–11.

85 *Apology*, pp.327–9. 86 *Apology*, p.324.

87 Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad Variorum*, I.236, and *The Dunciad* (1743), IV.20, in Pope, *Poems*, pp.368 and 767.

88 *Apology*, p.88.

Chamberlain Newcastle, and reminisced to him for three days about his career in the theatre. Pelham exercised ‘several hours of patience’ in listening to Cibber reading the manuscript aloud and commenting on it as ‘a lover of the stage (and one of those few good judges who know the use and value of it)’.<sup>89</sup> The text of the *Apology* bears the mark of this genial origin, with ‘sir’ used as a term of address several times, but with diminishing frequency as patron morphs gradually into reader, the latter addressed sometimes proprietorially (‘my reader’), sometimes in a more cautionary manner (‘a good-natured reader’ or ‘a sensible reader’), and always, as befits this survey of male friendships, as a man. Throughout, Cibber attempts to re-create the feeling of a live exchange: ‘now I have shot my bolt, I shall descend to talk more like a man of the age’; ‘you may naturally suspect that I am all this while leading my own theatrical character into your favour’; ‘if there you are not as fond of seeing, as I am of showing myself in all my lights, you may turn over two leaves together, and leave what follows to those who have more curiosity and less to do with their time than you have’.<sup>90</sup> He even stages momentary lapses of memory: ‘Let me see – ay, it was in that memorable year ...’.<sup>91</sup> Those and a host of other moments of feigned intimacy mimic the presence of a living voice while seeking to pre-empt, manipulate, or provoke the reader’s response. His hesitations and digressions anticipate the meanderings of Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759–67); partly the accident of a written style lacking in formal elegance, they are also key to his project of self-defence. We may be reassured that in the course of this exchange between celebrity author and curious reader we are at our ‘own liberty of charging the whole impertinence of it either to the weakness of my judgment or the strength of [Cibber’s] vanity’, but we are constantly made to feel our debt.<sup>92</sup> The *Apology* ushers us to the Pelham fireside, inviting us to eavesdrop. Opening the door to the green room of the theatre, it simultaneously invites us into a community of refined taste, with its vision of what an appreciation of theatre might look like in times when ‘the general taste’ is not ‘vulgar’ or ‘insulted by the noise and clamour of ... savage spectators’.<sup>93</sup> Cibber’s snobbery can be excruciating (no more so than when he reflects without irony on the honour of being the butt of Lord Chesterfield’s jokes),<sup>94</sup> but it is a component of the genre which the *Apology* foreshadows: the *bildungsroman*, in this case a story of unpromising beginnings followed by self-improvement to a life of fame, connections, and ultimately leisure. *Otium cum dignitate* – leisure with honour – was one

89 See *Apology*, pp.3–4. In 1754 Cibber would publish ‘Verses to the Memory of Mr Pelham’. For Pelham’s country home, Esher Place, see Figure 1.

90 *Apology*, pp.239, 144, and 26. 91 *Apology*, p.199. 92 *Apology*, p.340.

93 *Apology*, pp.302 and 158. 94 *Apology*, p.21.



1 Sketch of Esher Palace, Surrey, by Luke Sullivan; home of Henry Pelham and birthplace of the *Apology*.

of Chesterfield's own catchphrases, imparted many times to his son as the object of life, and apparently imbibed by Cibber.

What is the relationship between the familiar conversational mode of Cibber's readings to Pelham and the idea that the *Apology* is a sustained pose, perhaps contrived to distract us from the living being who was the author? Unlike many recent critics, Hume finds Cibber's command of facts a more fruitful topic than his alleged posturing. Still, he argues that the *Apology* is 'written to seem as though a chatty and digressive old raconteur were just rambling on to a friend, allowing others to overhear', suggesting that the 'humble, bumbling' result is 'radically at variance with the smart, tough-minded, and highly political administrator we see at work' elsewhere in the *Apology*.<sup>95</sup> Unless the book's dedication lays a false trail, it originated precisely as the intimate recollections of an 'old raconteur'. The introductory chapters (1–3), with their deliberations on method, childhood, and adolescence, may not have featured in Cibber's evenings with Pelham; the latter occasions are described in the dedication as 'lecture[s]', the kind of 'carefully considered history' Hume finds in the finished product.<sup>96</sup> Nev-

<sup>95</sup> Hume, 'Aims', 688 and 675.

<sup>96</sup> *Apology*, p.4; Hume, 'Aims', 688.



ertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the bulk of the *Apology* took shape in distinct phases, from a chronologically structured draft, to the live delivery from Cibber to Pelham, to a more considered manuscript (at one point Cibber refers to writing during a stay at Bath), to the first edition, each stage strongly marked with traces of its predecessor(s), the outcome self-consciously poised between talking and writing, between the lived moment and the professional self crafted for posterity.<sup>97</sup>

Since Paul de Man's celebrated essay, 'Autobiography as De-facement', it has been commonplace to argue that 'life writing' does not represent its subject but, via conventions of narrative prose, constructs it, so rendering the concept of a true self somewhat elusive, if not fictional.<sup>98</sup> At least one early reader agreed, protesting that the *Apology* is a calculated performance, a distraction from the acquisitive, self-serving manager, actor, and playwright: 'Colley Cibber is not the character he pretends to be in this book', *The Laureate* protested, 'but a mere charlatan, a persona dramatis, a mountebank, a counterfeit Colley.'<sup>99</sup> That bruising charge has it both ways: if the narrator of the *Apology* is 'a counterfeit Colley', the real 'Colley Cibber' is also 'a mere charlatan' – perhaps a more productive insight than to argue that the book is simply a sustained reprise of Cibber's signature role. He had, certainly, acted Lord Foppington so often that the line between self and role must sometimes have been hard to discern (the two men are undoubtedly linguistic cousins), and it is true that the *Apology* bears witness to a literary culture of impersonation.<sup>100</sup> But it stretches credibility that Foppington could have been thought an ideal vehicle for narrating

97 On the draft, *Apology*, pp.3–4; on talking and writing, p.29; on Bath, p.204.

98 Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Comparative Literature* vol. 94, no. 5 (December 1979), 919–30.

99 *Laureate*, p.15.

100 For Foppington, *Love's Last Shift*, V.iii.469–78, in *The Plays of Colley Cibber*, I.110:

Why this, sir – You must know, she being still possessed with a brace of implacable devils called revenge and jealousy, dogged me this morning to the chocolate-house, where I was obliged to leave a letter for a young foolish girl, that – (you'll excuse me, sir) which I had no sooner delivered to the maid of the house, but whip! she snatches it out of her hand, flew at her like a dragon, tore off her headcloths, flung down three or four sets of lemonade glasses, dashed my Lord Whiffle's chocolate in his face, cut him over the nose, and had like to have strangled me in my own steinkirk.

For suggestions that Cibber wrote spoof letters about himself, *Apology*, p.40 ns.46 & 47. *The Egotist* suggests that Cibber had been 'so used to play the fool in comedy' that he became 'quite as easy in the same character in real life', and that the success of the 'coxcomb' Lord Foppington was explained by Cibber himself having 'a good deal of the same stuff' (*Egotist*, pp.35 and 38).

the pressures of theatre management; or, for that matter, that such a performance could have been sustained for the 488 pages of the early editions.

When Cibber refers to the ‘part I have acted in real life’ and states that it ‘shall be all of a piece’, he means not a particular role, but the social persona he had cultivated for decades. He will not attempt ‘to be wiser than I can be, or by being more affectedly pensive than I need be’, or even to assume a ‘new character’ when the one he has inhabited for so long has served him well.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, ‘if vanity be one of my natural features, the portrait would not be like me without it’; this is, he writes, a portrait like most others, painted to cast the sitter in a favourable light, a work of knowing impudence.<sup>102</sup> To the extent that he has engaged in ‘honest examination of [his] heart’, the result is merely an affirmation of his right to be selective, a picture created not in full daylight but ‘chiaroscuro’, a conscious mingling of light and dark.<sup>103</sup> The result, he hopes, is consistency, but that of the lifetime performer: a consistent reflection of the part he has always acted in real life, whether on stage or off it.<sup>104</sup> Three years after the *Apology* he maintained the image of a man confessedly self-obsessed, acknowledging Henry Cheere’s painted bust with an octavo volume called *The Egotist, or Colley upon Cibber. Being his own face retouched to so plain a likeness that no one now would have the face to own it but himself*.<sup>105</sup> The book takes the form of a dialogue between a sceptical reader of the *Apology* called Frankly, and an ‘Author’ (Cibber), who is caught surveying the ‘parcel of rubbish’ that is his literary output.<sup>106</sup>

Cibber’s posturing and selective reporting, in other words, do not necessarily make the *Apology* a less authentic representation of Pelham’s fire-side companion (who presumably gave something of a performance at the time), or of the cajoling, simpering, passive-aggressive manner that probably served him well as a manager in tiptoeing round the interests and egos of his fellow managers. There is therefore merit in Patricia Meyer Spacks’s conclusion that Cibber ‘recognized an identity between story and self’, even if that relationship is fraught with contradictions (as such relationships generally are).<sup>107</sup> The book’s origins in oral narrative invite slippage and inconsistency but also serve to bring story and self closer together. To argue that the *Apology* is nothing more than a pose is to risk assuming what

<sup>101</sup> *Apology*, p.23. <sup>102</sup> *Apology*, p.13. <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>104</sup> *Apology*, p.153.

<sup>105</sup> While the title may suggest another author, this does appear to be Cibber’s work; see DeWitt C. Croissant, ‘A Note on the *Egotist, or Colley upon Cibber*’, *Philological Quarterly* vol. 3 (1924), 76–7.

<sup>106</sup> *Egotist*, p.5.

<sup>107</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.195.



Cibber and the author of *The Laureate* knew to be false: that somewhere in London there was a pure Colley uncontaminated by his long history of acting and of dodging the bullets that came the way of theatre managers. A habit of studious omission does not make a persona; it may equally characterize a person, not least someone seeking vindication from memory alone. In de Man's terms, the persona may be a construct, but not alone for the purposes of the *Apology*.

Cibber had reason to present his self-portrait in chiaroscuro. The consequences of an actor biography over-indulging on private business were all too familiar. He refers disapprovingly to the biographies of his former colleagues Anne Oldfield, Barton Booth, and Robert Wilks that had been published 'in less time after their deaths than one could suppose it cost to transcribe them'.<sup>108</sup> Benjamin Victor's 1733 biography of Booth contains a stomach-turning account of the actor's post-mortem, while the publishing war that broke out after Wilks's death was alarming.<sup>109</sup> Cibber's co-manager for more than two decades, the recently deceased Wilks, was accused of bigamy in a colourful memoir by a man claiming to be an old schoolmate. A counterblast from the house of Edmund Curll, purporting to represent the views of Wilks's brother-in-law, did nothing to dampen the controversy, adding a suggestion of military desertion to the list of charges.<sup>110</sup> Promoting the status of acting was, as far as Cibber was concerned, continuous with promoting the good name of actors. To be author of his own life – to listen to the prompting of 'something inwardly inciting' – was far preferable to leaving the job to a coffin-chasing hack.<sup>111</sup>

He cannot but have sensed a commercial opportunity honed by years of scheduling plays that tapped more or less successfully into the mood of their times. When actor biographies were emerging into the market, he was uniquely placed to give the public an inside view of the country's most successful theatre. Keen to see his work enjoy an after-life on terms strictly designed to enhance his reputation, the collection of his plays published by subscription in 1721 omitted those that had flopped in the theatre or seemed of lesser merit. *Love's Last Shift*, *The Careless Husband*, and eight others made the cut; those he valued less did not.<sup>112</sup> If the *Apology* is reticent

108 *Apology*, p.12.

109 For commentary on Victor's biography, see Fawcett, p.12.

110 *Apology*, p.13 n.4. 111 *Apology*, p.12.

112 Besides the two titles mentioned, the two-volume quarto *Plays Written by Mr. Cibber* (1721) includes *The Tragical History of Richard III*, *Love Makes a Man*, *She Would and She Would Not*, *The Lady's Last Stake*, *The Rival Fools*, *Ximena*, *The Non-Juror*, and *The Refusal*. It excludes *Woman's Wit* (1697), *Xerxes* (1699), *The Rival Queens* (1703), *Perolla and Izadora* (1705), *Venus and Adonis* (1715), and *Myrtillo* (1715).

when it comes to Cibber's plays, it is because he knew some of them had little value artistically or commercially. The *Apology* itself was another matter. At a time when, in spite of the 1710 Copyright Act (8 Anne c.21), many authors were still handing over rights in their work to booksellers, Cibber elected to claim his life story for himself. The decision would pay off, if not quite as handsomely as his detractors would claim.

### *Publishing the Apology*

He did not have to look far for a publisher who shared his appreciation of the *Apology's* commercial potential, not to mention the need to present it as though it were a proper object of interest for people of taste. Early in his career, he had worked with a variety of booksellers, some of them undistinguished operators who probably paid him no more than £10 for the copyright to a play.<sup>113</sup> For the *Apology*, however, there was one who for prestige, quality, and trust was the obvious choice.

Born in 1682 and baptized at St Martin-in-the-Fields, John Watts was apprenticed to the bookseller Robert Everingham on 3 October 1698. He became a Freeman of the Stationers' Company on 9 June 1707 and ran a business at Little Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Watts began printing under his own name from 1715, sometimes in partnership with Jonas Brown and John Pemberton, but some of his most distinguished work was produced in partnership with Jacob Tonson the Younger, such as the duodecimo editions of Greek classics prepared by Michel Maittaire between 1713 and 1719 (Maittaire, incidentally, was known to Cibber's acquaintance Lord Chesterfield as tutor to his illegitimate son, Philip). Watts published a number of prestigious editions, including *The Architecture of A. Palladio*, 4 vols. (1715–20) and *The Works of Molière, in French and English*, 10 vols. (1739 and 1748). He was also active in publishing plays, including the first seven editions of the runaway success Cibber did not take, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728–54).

Before the *Apology*, Watts had published a number of works by Cibber, often reissues of older plays: *Love in a Riddle* (1719, 1729, and 1736); *Caesar in Egypt* (1725 and 1736); *The Careless Husband* (1725); *The Provoked Husband* (1728 and 1735), Cibber's completion of an unfinished Vanbrugh play; *Damon and Phillida* (1729 and 1737); *An Ode for His Majesty's Birthday* (1731), which was Cibber's inaugural and much-maligned outing as Poet Laureate;

113 An exception was his first play, *Love's Last Shift*, which because of its success in the theatre attracted the interest of the better-known partnership of Richard Parker and Samuel Briscoe. For some of his more 'offbrand outlets', see Milhous and Hume, *Publication*, pp.72–3.

*She Would and She Would Not* (1734); *Love Makes a Man* (1735); *The Refusal* (1735 and 1736); *Ximena* (1735); and *The Tragical History of King Richard III* (1736). Watts's final Cibber project was a 1753 edition of *The Refusal*. If the deal Cibber struck for *The Provoked Husband* is any guide, Watts offered relatively generous terms; it is equally true that the same deal suggests Cibber could be shameless in his appropriation of others' work. Three-quarters of the play had been completed by Vanbrugh under the title *A Journey to London*, before his death in 1726. Cibber completed the piece and on 15 September 1727 received from Watts no less than £105 for the rights.<sup>114</sup> He appears to have regarded that sum as par. In 1724 the Drury Lane prompter, William Rufus Chetwood, had paid Cibber £105 for the rights to *Caesar in Egypt*, a moderate success at Drury Lane that December. Probably as a kindness to Chetwood, Cibber agreed to the immediate onward sale of copyright to Watts for £110.<sup>115</sup>

Watts's most celebrated compositor, between 1724 and 1726, was Benjamin Franklin (1706–90), whose autobiography includes a remarkable account of life in the Watts workshop, where it was usual for employees to drink liberally.<sup>116</sup> It is a matter for speculation whether those habits explain the existence of a curious, perhaps discarded, copy of the second edition of the *Apology* that recently came into the present editor's hands.<sup>117</sup> Instead of sitting between the dedication and Chapter 1, the Contents page may be found nestling by some accident in the middle of Chapter 2. Someone – presumably Cibber himself – could not resist using the purely functional genre of the Contents page as a vehicle for the *Apology*'s characteristic irony: '*The author's distress in being thought a worse actor than a poet*', he records for Chapter 6.

The first edition was published on 7 April 1740, handsomely presented in leather-bound quarto format with a full-page frontispiece engraving of the author, re-presented as the frontispiece to this edition. Unlike the title page, the engraving advertises Cibber's position as Poet Laureate. This quarto first edition is fully the equal in material quality of Watts's editions of Maittaire and Molière, so offering a further source of potential irritation to Cibber's critics. The steep price of 1 guinea (a probability, it must be said, since there is no authoritative record) reflected the exclusive market value Watts placed on the inside story of Drury Lane Theatre. That it was 'Printed by John Watts for the Author' suggests Cibber may have contributed to production costs: an act of vanity publishing in dual respects. The following month, on 14 May,

114 BL Add.MS 38,728, fol.43, in *Document Register* no.3377 (current value c.£23,000).

115 *Document Register* no.3250.

116 *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin* (London: J. Parsons, 1793), pp.31–2.

117 Thanks to the kindness of Professor David Hopkins, University of Bristol.

a second and much cheaper octavo edition appeared, but not because the first edition had sold well; the respective markets were quite different. Cibber made a number of amendments to the text – some in response to readers who had mocked his occasional errors – and Watts sold it at 5 shillings a copy (still, Hume estimates, equivalent to somewhere between £50 and £75 in current values).<sup>118</sup> Doubtless for economy's sake, the grand frontispiece was dropped. Cibber defended his rights in the work, going to court to block a pirate edition; ten years later, the book retained sufficient market value for him to dispose of the copyright to Robert and John Dodsley for a further 50 guineas.<sup>119</sup> The Dodsleys reissued the book in 1750, 1756, and 1761.

However exquisite the material appearance of the first edition, in other ways it was a jumble. Faced with Cibber's stylistic exuberance and occasionally erratic grasp of sentence structure, the compositor (perhaps partaking liberally of the regime noted by Benjamin Franklin) scattered commas and other punctuation marks with an abandoned disregard for – or possibly bafflement at – the text's meaning, a problem exacerbated in the octavo edition. The consequences for future editions, including this one, are explored in the last section of this Introduction.

### On Acting

Defending his own career, Cibber goes to great pains to defend his profession. In the *Apology*, good actors demonstrate 'industry', like careful members of any other profession; they are, besides, required to be 'sober' in every sense of the word. Mindful of those who accused him of social climbing, Cibber argues that for an actor who 'excels on the stage, and is irreproachable in his personal morals and behaviour, his profession is so far from being an impediment that it will be oftener a just reason for his being received among people of condition with favour'.<sup>120</sup> Chapter 7 of the *Apology* concludes with the more drastic assessment that 'the briskest loose liver or intemperate man ... can never arrive at the necessary excellencies of a good or useful actor'.<sup>121</sup> As Cibber antagonized some theatrical associates with his defence of the Licensing Act, so he risked being thought to align himself with another canonical enemy of free speech, the Reverend Jeremy Collier, whose 1698

<sup>118</sup> Hume, 'Aims', 664.

<sup>119</sup> Document of assignment dated 24 March 1750 and quoted by Lowe as being in the possession of his acquaintance, Julian Marshall. For the piracy action, Cibber v Walker in the National Archive, C11/1559/15 (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C10512890>; accessed 30 July 2021). 50 guineas is equivalent to £13,000 in current values.

<sup>120</sup> *Apology*, p.62. <sup>121</sup> *Apology*, p.175.

*Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* had led to actors and playwrights facing prosecution for blasphemy.<sup>122</sup> The outrage that characterized Collier's response to the rakish comedy of the Restoration period is echoed in the *Apology*: 'It has often given me amazement', Cibber writes, 'that our best authors of that time could think the wit and spirit of their scenes could be an excuse for making the looseness of them public'; such plays, he maintains, 'are sometimes too gross to be recited'.<sup>123</sup>

When it came to the business of writing about acting, Cibber had scant models to work from. What is now called theatre criticism – that is to say, concerning performance rather than dramaturgy – did not emerge in periodical form until the late eighteenth century. Lewis Theobald's *The Censor*, published between 1715 and 1717, claimed to 'entertain the town with the beauties or defects in writing, as well as the graces or imperfections in action', but went through dozens of editions without so much as mentioning the theatre.<sup>124</sup> The *Universal Spectator* and the *Grub-Street Journal* promised similar fare but frequently descended to character assassination (sometimes of Cibber's).<sup>125</sup> Not until Aaron Hill's *The Prompter*, which ran from 1734 to 1736, did performance criticism start to emerge in a recognizable form. Hill found plenty of other topics to write about, including bad management, bad playwrights, bad proposals for regulating the stage, bad behaviour by audiences, and bad preparation by actors, whom he accused of 'relax[ing] themselves, as soon as any speech in their own part is over, into an absent unattentiveness'.<sup>126</sup> Many of his barbs were directed against Cibber, whose managerial legacy he lamented and in whose *Richard III* he saw merely 'a succession of comic shruggings' that resembled 'the distorted heavings of an unjointed caterpillar'.<sup>127</sup> Contemplating Hill's own brief and utterly disastrous record of theatre management, Cibber could afford to consign him to the *Apology*'s ranks of the scarcely mentioned.<sup>128</sup> Hill's reflections on Robert Wilks's *Hamlet* may have encouraged Cibber not just to proclaim the superiority of Thomas Betterton's, but to adopt a language of critical mediation that mirrored the balancing forces of the actor's performance. 'When he grieves, he is never sullen: when he trifles, he is never light', wrote Hill of Wilks's *Danish Prince*; '[w]hen alone, he is seriously solid; when in company, designedly flexible'.<sup>129</sup> To such summary appreciation

<sup>122</sup> *Apology*, pp.182–3. <sup>123</sup> *Apology*, p.178.

<sup>124</sup> Cited in C. Harold Gray, *Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p.53.

<sup>125</sup> Gray, *Theatrical Criticism*, pp.76–7.

<sup>126</sup> Aaron Hill, *The Prompter* (London, 1734–6), no.62, 13 June 1735.

<sup>127</sup> Hill, *The Prompter*, no.3, 19 November 1734. <sup>128</sup> *Apology*, p.280.

<sup>129</sup> Hill, *The Prompter*, no.100.

Cibber added a fellow professional's eye for individual inflection and impact, so that the performances seem to live in the moment of reading, resisting reduction to Hill's formulaic summaries.

Aware of the pitfalls of writing about acting, Cibber moved between textual quotation and description as though the words of Shakespeare were self-explanatory, when what he strove to do was show how actors inflected them. He was equally conscious of the reviewer's classic pitfall: that 'the common foible of us old fellows' is to show 'a tedious partiality for the pleasures we have formerly tasted'.<sup>130</sup> Yet in reminiscing about the performances of the past, he elevates acting above painting because it is, more than his memorial writing, a full-blown resurrection. Van Dyck may 'make his portraits of great persons seem to think', but an actor such as Betterton 'calls them from the grave to breathe and be themselves again'.<sup>131</sup> Doing so, he proposes a bold reconfiguration of the traditional hierarchy of the arts imparted by classical literature while borrowing the language of painting to describe acting ('master strokes' is one of his favourite idioms).<sup>132</sup> A quality comparable to what is now called 'verse speaking' is one of the facets of the best acting that places it on a par with music, one of the original 'sister arts':

The voice of a singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune than that of an actor in theatrical elocution. The least syllable too long, or too slightly dwelt upon in a period, it depreciates to nothing; which very syllable, if rightly touched, shall, like the heightening stroke of light from a master's pencil, give life and spirit to the whole.<sup>133</sup>

In the very power of presence Cibber finds danger, both emotional and political. Casting an eye towards Fielding's attacks on Walpole's ministry, he asserts that the damage inflicted by satire in the theatre is 'ten times more severe' than anything imparted in print, since '[r]eading is but hearing at the secondhand'.<sup>134</sup> The result risks stirring rebellion: such satire 'may unite and warm a whole body of the malicious or ignorant into a plaudit'.<sup>135</sup> Underwriting such threats is the abiding consciousness of Jacobite opposition to the Crown and government that surfaces in occasional references to James II, who 'lost his crown by too arbitrary a use of his power', a fault Cibber repeatedly attributes to his former manager, Christopher Rich.<sup>136</sup>

At the peak of Cibber's evaluation of acting stands 'Nature', the touchstone prized, among many others at the time, by Pope in his *Essay on*

<sup>130</sup> *Apology*, p.112. <sup>131</sup> *Apology*, p.79.

<sup>132</sup> In Greek mythology (as recorded in Hesiod's *Theogony*), poetry, music, and dance are the original 'sister arts', with painting and architecture coming after, and acting nowhere. Cibber goes on to claim, partly with Italian opera in mind, that 'a good play is certainly the most rational and the highest entertainment that human invention can produce' (*Apology*, p.124).

<sup>133</sup> *Apology*, p.83. <sup>134</sup> *Apology*, p.192. <sup>135</sup> *Apology*, p.195. <sup>136</sup> *Apology*, p.154.



*Criticism*.<sup>137</sup> Betterton's performance as Hamlet stood out not because it conformed to a theory of acting or gesture, or went out of its way to seek applause, but because it embodied the conflicted reactions of a young man alarmingly reunited with his father, and in so doing provided a model of classical restraint opposed to the rabble-rousing (and implicitly Jacobite) style of lesser actors. When Cibber, to the disgust of his critics, took to task the acting of his erstwhile colleague Barton Booth, he at least did so from a credible critical standpoint.<sup>138</sup> The greatest acting, Cibber argues, takes account of the blend of tragedy and comedy Samuel Johnson so praised in the work of Shakespeare;<sup>139</sup> Booth, it is argued, 'carried his reverence for the buskin too far', flattening Shakespeare's 'familiar strokes ... so highly natural to each particular disposition' into monotonous declamation.<sup>140</sup>

The value Cibber places on 'Nature' is related to his absorption in the ethics of sentimentalism, and indeed that of social ambition. As Henry IV confronting wayward Prince Hal, Edward Kynaston performed 'that sort of grief which only majesty could feel'; his 'paternal concern for the errors of the son made the monarch much more revered and dreaded', even though his reproaches were 'unmixed with anger ... opening as it were the arms of Nature'. So doing, Kynaston expressed 'all the various motions of the heart'.<sup>141</sup> If Kynaston succeeded in realizing the part 'with the same force, dignity and feeling' with which it was written, William Mountfort's gentlemanly ease effected a transformation of libertine comedy similar to the one Cibber achieved with *Love's Last Shift*. As Willmore in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, 'he seemed to wash off the guilt from vice, and gave it charms and merit' to a degree that 'Queen Mary was pleased to make in favour of [him], notwithstanding her disapprobation of the play'.<sup>142</sup> The instinct for balance Cibber displays in such passages, for preserving the *status quo*, is also a convenient means of self-defence. He objects to satire (so often deployed against him) because it lacks a rounded, established feeling for justice: 'Are defects and disproportions', he asks, 'to be the only laboured features in a portrait?'<sup>143</sup> The simple question sets out to secure Cibber's own position while, in its very naivety, highlighting a fundamental limitation in his opponents' work.

In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Samuel Johnson would propose that Shakespeare was at his most free in writing comedy, and a forerunner of that view lies in Cibber's argument that actors best express their individuality in comic roles. Where the 'decency ... that must be observed in tragedy'

137 See, for example, lines 68–9: 'First follow NATURE, and your judgment frame / By her just standard, which is still the same'; in Pope, *Poems*, p.146.

138 For *The Laureate* on Cibber's critique of Booth, *Apology*, p.91 n.10.

139 In his *Preface to Shakespeare* (London, 1765). See *Apology*, p.92 n.13.

140 *Apology*, p.91.

141 *Apology*, p.93. 142 *Apology*, pp.94–5. 143 *Apology*, p.313.

makes actors conform to a single ‘manner of speaking’, comedy gives a performer ‘such free, and almost unlimited liberties, to play and wanton with Nature’, with the result that ‘the voice, look, and gesture of a comedian may be as various as the manners and faces of the whole of mankind’.<sup>144</sup> Here, the epitome of skill was James Nokes, whose ‘palpable simplicity of nature’ made his stage presence indistinguishable from his private manner.<sup>145</sup> Describing Nokes’s performance as Dryden’s Sir Martin Mar-all, Cibber ventures to conclude that no tragedy or tragedian could exhibit ‘such a tumult of passions rising at once in one bosom’. Moreover, the effect was achieved without words, only a ‘silent eloquence and piteous plight of his features’.<sup>146</sup> In framing a language to describe such moments Cibber again anticipates Sterne, this time not in his chatty digressions and asides, but in his slow-motion, defamiliarizing narration of gesture, movement, and facial expression.<sup>147</sup> It is a method he uses to describe off-stage behaviour too, describing Wilks’s imminent outburst at a perceived slight as though scripting stage directions.<sup>148</sup> Evoking Susannah Mountfort as the *précieuse* Melantha in Dryden’s *Marriage à la Mode*, he writes,

she is too much a court lady to be under so vulgar a confusion. She reads the letter, therefore, with a careless, dropping lip and an erected brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to outgo her father’s commands by making a complete conquest of him at once; and, that the letter might not embarrass her attack, crack! – she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours upon him her whole artillery of airs, eyes and motion.<sup>149</sup>

Such passages raise an important point about Cibber’s command of language, so clearly of interest to critics who thought of it as, like his name, a manifestation of his not-quite-Englishness. His sentences are inclined to run beyond their natural life; his intended witticisms often stay rooted to the page; he has an almost Malapropian liking for polysyllabic words. His trademark spellings of ‘manager’ as ‘menager’ and ‘contemporaries’ as ‘co-temporaries’ (both corrected in this edition) may have been part-affectation and part-imitation of his father’s accent; his struggles with language accentuate an air of pomposity driven by his over-riding determination to prove the importance of his profession. Cibber was the first to acknowledge his linguistic struggles: ‘I know too that I have too bold a disregard for that

144 *Apology*, p.101. 145 *Ibid* p.102. 146 *Apology*, p.104.

147 See, for example, Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. Graham Petrie with an Introduction by Christopher Ricks (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp.126, 202, *passim*.

148 *Apology*, p.357. 149 *Apology*, p.120.



correctness which others set so just a value upon', he admits.<sup>150</sup> But there is a relationship between his fluid, sometimes improvised grammar and his extraordinary knack of observing and re-creating live performance with such a vivid awareness of the interplay of text, gesture, facial expression, and audience response. The improvised, serpentine quality of his English mimics the fluctuations of the great performances he witnessed.

Where embodying 'Nature' is the prime objective of the actor, it is not surprising that Cibber should see such skill as largely in-born rather than achieved 'from the bare imitation of another's genius'.<sup>151</sup> That does not mean he diminishes the value of meticulous preparation in crafting a performance. Thomas Doggett was in some ways a comedian in the mould of James Nokes, but while 'his manner was his own', he was accomplished 'in dressing a character to the great exactness' so that 'the least article of whatever habit he wore seemed in some degree to speak and mark the different humour he presented'. Such care was exercised in more than costume: 'His greatest success was in characters of lower life, which he improved from the delight he took in his observations of that kind in the real world.'<sup>152</sup> Cibber does not go so far in assessing what qualifies an actor to lead a company, but he is emphatic on the value of a relationship of trust between owners and actor-managers. No one – not even Pope or Fielding – incurred his mistrust as much as his former manager, Christopher Rich: the man he once served, but who is referred to throughout simply as 'the manager' or, more often, 'the patentee', an act of distancing designed, perhaps, to obscure the ways in which Cibber came to resemble him.

When it comes to acting, Cibber makes no attempt to disguise his own strengths and weaknesses. Apparently, he could learn lines very quickly (witness his claim to have mastered the 200 and more lines of Lord Touchwood in Congreve's *The Double Dealer* during an afternoon), while admitting that some writers made the task easier than others. Vanbrugh, he recalls, was so valued 'by all the actors of my time' that 'no author whatsoever gave their memory less trouble'.<sup>153</sup> Still, he concedes that his own facility for remembering parts gave way to Wilks's. Vocally he was, he further admits, very much in the second rank: his 'want of a strong and full voice soon cut short [his] hopes of making any valuable figure in tragedy'.<sup>154</sup> In this he mirrored his modest claims to success as a playwright who sometimes turned out a mere 'bauble'.<sup>155</sup> He wrote for money, to support his family, and was unashamed to admit it.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>150</sup> *Apology*, p.42. <sup>151</sup> *Apology*, p.108. <sup>152</sup> *Apology*, pp.312–13. <sup>153</sup> *Apology*, pp.129 and 149.

<sup>154</sup> *Apology*, p.150. <sup>155</sup> *Apology*, p.167. <sup>156</sup> *Apology*, p.177.

## Reception and Reaction

Watts's second, cheaper edition indicates that he always foresaw a wide and enthusiastic market for the *Apology*. According to Thomas Davies, Swift borrowed a copy from his friend the bookseller George Faulkner and read it in one sitting; Davies adds that Cibber cried when he heard the story.<sup>157</sup> Even Samuel Johnson found the book 'very entertaining'.<sup>158</sup> Their enjoyment seems to have been widely shared, and the commercial success of the *Apology* was, inevitably, as aggravating to Cibber's critics as its alleged looseness of style and vanity. In *The Laureate* a profit is estimated which, if accurate, is up to half what Cibber earned from the sale of his interest in Drury Lane: '[i]ngenious indeed, who from such a pile of indigested incoherent ideas huddled together by the misnomer of a history, could raise a contribution on the town (if fame says true) of fifteen hundred pounds'.<sup>159</sup>

But fame probably did not say true. Hume's analysis of print runs and production costs proposes instead that fame exaggerated wildly. A normal run for a quarto (first edition) did not exceed 500 copies; for an octavo, 1,500 was the upper limit. That would mean gross receipts for the first edition of no more than £435 (assuming the sale price of a guinea is correct), and for the second edition £300. Deduct normal production costs and Cibber may have been left with something like £250 rather than the rumoured £1,500. It is hard to imagine that a gift from the dedicatee, Pelham, could have made up the difference, although a successful play dedicated to royalty might attract a substantial sum.<sup>160</sup> Nevertheless, Hume calculates that Cibber did well enough from the book, his profit yielding the purchasing power of between £50,000 and £75,000 in today's money.<sup>161</sup> It is worth adding that the 50 guineas later gained from selling the copyright to the *Apology* was not as spectacular as it might appear, amounting to only half what he had gained from selling the rights to *The Provoked Husband* and *Caesar in Egypt*.<sup>162</sup>

If it was in his critics' interests to exaggerate Cibber's gains, it was not in Cibber's to correct them. Imaginary profits were, like real ones, good social capital. He had already played along with every other game his critics offered. He foresaw objections to his written style:

<sup>157</sup> Davies, III.477. <sup>158</sup> Boswell, I.368.

<sup>159</sup> *The Laureate*, p.96. The same figure is given in Davies, III.506, but possibly on the authority of *The Laureate*. Cibber earned either £3,000 or 3,000 guineas from his sale to John Highmore in 1733 (*Apology*, p.197 n.73). See also above, p.xxiv n.27.

<sup>160</sup> Richard Steele dedicated *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) to George I and was rewarded with £500 (see *Document Register* no.3144); c.£118,000 in current value.

<sup>161</sup> Hume, 'Aims', 665–6. <sup>162</sup> See above, p.xliii.

I presume the terms of ‘doting trifler’, ‘old fool’, or ‘conceited coxcomb’ will carry contempt enough for an impartial censor to bestow on me: that my style is unequal, pert and frothy, patched and parti-coloured like the coat of a Harlequin; low and pompous, crammed with epithets, strewed with scraps of secondhand Latin from common quotations, frequently aiming at wit without ever hitting the mark, a mere ragout, tossed up from the offals of other authors.<sup>163</sup>

Repeated comparisons between statecraft and the affairs of the theatre emphasize his role as an instrument of the political establishment, while also suggesting he had no sense of the mock-heroic; he dares us not to take his grandiose comparisons seriously. Implicitly aligning his own long career in leadership with Walpole’s (not to mention an impressive array of other leaders from world history), he provoked the wrath of Walpole’s many enemies. He did so in the name of an allegedly impartial patriotism that was, of course, deeply partisan: ‘you may see what sort of an English subject I am ... I still flatter myself that I have kept a simple, honest head above water.’<sup>164</sup> His final chapter begins with the statement that it was all in the name of a project aligned to national politics: to bring ‘the government of the stage through such various changes and revolutions to this settled state’.<sup>165</sup> Hume characterizes the *Apology*’s initial appearance of autobiography as ‘a diversionary tactic’, the equivalent of ‘waving red flags at a bull’, but that tactic is not limited to the early chapters.<sup>166</sup> Throughout the book, Cibber’s defence is a calculated provocation that dares his enemies to disclose their true colours. Typically, he wanted it both ways; his lofty comparisons did not prevent him objecting to the journalist Nathaniel Mist for criticizing him and his fellow managers ‘with the same freedom and severity as if we had been so many ministers of state’.<sup>167</sup>

His provocations are key to an attempt to situate his own conception of theatre at the centre of national life and to cast opponents in the light of subversives, both of the theatre and the state: a form of satire that uses self-mockery to draw out the enemy. The first salvoes were not long in coming. In *The Champion* of 6 May 1740, Fielding derided ‘our author’s comparisons of himself to King James, the Prince of Orange, Alexander the Great, Charles the XIIth, and Harry IV of France’, and sought to show that Cibber’s political principles were muddled. Angered by thinly veiled references to him in the *Apology*, he had already published a withering assessment of Cibber’s English. Objecting to a report ‘that whatever language [the *Apology*] was writ in, it certainly could not be English’, Fielding quips

<sup>163</sup> *Apology*, p.38. <sup>164</sup> *Apology*, p.52. <sup>165</sup> *Apology*, p.332. <sup>166</sup> Hume, ‘Aims’, 685.

<sup>167</sup> *Apology*, p.317.

that the only way to determine that it was written in English was its lack of resemblance to any other known language.<sup>168</sup> Three weeks later he composed a mock trial, alleging that,

with a certain weapon called a goosequill, value one farthing, which you in your left hand then held, several very broad wounds (but of no depth at all) on the said English Language did make, and so you, the said Col. Apol., the said English Language did murder.<sup>169</sup>

In July 1740, a writer sometimes thought to be Fielding produced a book purporting to be the work of Cibber's son Theophilus, the doomed actor, playwright, and drunkard who at one stage looked set to inherit the management of Drury Lane.<sup>170</sup> Its very title was an act of mimicry: *An Apology for the Life of Mr T...C..., Comedian. Being a Proper Sequel to the Apology for the Life of Mr Colley Cibber, Comedian. With an Historical View of the Stage to the Present Year. Supposed to Be Written by Himself. In the Style and Manner of the Poet Laureate*. Its attack turned out to be multi-pronged. Beginning as an outright pastiche of the *Apology*, it proceeds to give a more straightforward account of London theatre during the 1730s, offering readers an insight into the many unsavoury episodes Cibber neglects to mention, including the actors' rebellion of 1733 which was led by Theophilus himself.<sup>171</sup> The final cut was its price: 2 shillings compared to the more extravagant sums charged by Watts, and all for the kind of salacious material Cibber declined to touch upon. His father may have been the intended target, but no one could have been more disappointed than Theophilus himself, who had been planning such a book but failed to get it out in time.<sup>172</sup>

Fielding probably did not write *The Laureate*, published on 29 November 1740, but he would certainly have enjoyed a work offering *Explanations, Amendments, and Observations* on the *Apology* in a tone charitably described as 'less genial, less amusing, and less accurate' than Theophilus's supposed memoir.<sup>173</sup> *The Laureate* casts Cibber as a species of religious obscurantist who had risen from nowhere, belying any claim to social

168 Henry Fielding, *Contributions to the Champion, and Related Writings*, ed. William B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 29 April 1740. For Fielding on Cibber's politics, *Apology*, p.51 n.28.

169 Fielding, *The Champion*, 17 May 1740.

170 *St James's Evening Post* for 28–31 October 1732 reported that 'Mr Cibber, jun. succeeds his father [at Drury Lane], who has resigned to him.'

171 *Apology*, p.370 n.101.

172 See his 'Life of Booth', in Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives and Characters of the Most Eminent Actors* (London, 1753), p.xiii. Theophilus states that he tried and failed to identify the author of the second *Apology* but only obtained an apology from the publisher.

173 Barker, p.202.

distinction: he is, as an author and a person, 'obscure, unconnected, and wrapped up and concealed in the clinquant tinsel of metaphor', intent on leading 'you continually out of the way, by long, tedious and unnecessary digressions'. Future editors of the *Apology* be warned: to 'unravel the meaning' of such an author is 'not only groping in the dark, but it is an unpleasant and a tedious labour'.<sup>174</sup> When Fielding came to write *Joseph Andrews* (1742) he paid ironic tribute to a man who, 'by insinuating that he escaped being promoted to the highest stations in church and state, teach[es] us a contempt of worldly grandeur' and 'inculcate[s] an absolute submission to our superiors'.<sup>175</sup>

To anger one canonical author is, as far as reputations are concerned, unfortunate; to anger two may prove fatal. Cibber's feud with Alexander Pope went back twenty-three years, to a performance of *The Rehearsal* in 1717 which had mocked Pope's jointly authored farce, *Three Hours after Marriage*.<sup>176</sup> It continued later that year with an attack on the politics and language of *The Non-Juror*, published anonymously as *The Plot Discovered*, but advertised in 1718 as Pope's work. From 1728 onwards Pope's enmity had been channelled into some of his finest poetry: the first version of *The Dunciad*, *The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace*, and the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*. Yet 'feud' is not the right term for an enmity that initially, at any rate, seemed remarkably one-sided. Cibber's attitude to Pope's attacks was, in Barker's words, 'apparently one of complete indifference';<sup>177</sup> when it came to reflecting on the poet in the *Apology* he seems, as we might expect from a champion of sentimentalism, decidedly forgiving (bar, perhaps, a reference to Pope as an 'imitator' rather than a poet, and pointed remarks about the limitations of satire).<sup>178</sup> That is not to deny he had demonstrated considerable pique when attacked by other writers, in particular John Dennis.<sup>179</sup>

In response to the *Apology*, Pope chose to turn up the temperature, doubtless irritated by Cibber's high-minded reflections on satire. The 1743 version of *The Dunciad* has Cibber lying stupefied in the lap of the Goddess Dullness, his name chiming with that of the Cimmerians, dwellers in perpetual night. Having seen a draft, Cibber chose to respond, calling on the capacity for 'jeering and making a jest' which the *Apology* states had

<sup>174</sup> *The Laureate*, p.1.

<sup>175</sup> Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. Douglas Brooks-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.16.

<sup>176</sup> As described in full by Barker, pp.204–5.

<sup>177</sup> Barker, p.207. In *Egotist*, p.31, Cibber maintains his indifference, stating that for all the criticism of his 'egotism', he has 'not yet arrived at the pain of repenting it'.

<sup>178</sup> *Apology*, p.25. <sup>179</sup> *Apology*, p.318 n.18. For Pope as 'imitator', p.25.

characterized his behaviour from school onwards.<sup>180</sup> He published his *Letter from Mr Cibber to Mr Pope*: friends, he claims, encouraged him; if he did not respond to Pope, it would be thought ‘a plain confession’ that he was indeed ‘bankrupt in wit’. He added that ‘[a]fter near twenty years having been libelled by our daily-paper scribblers, I never was so hurt as to give them one single answer’.<sup>181</sup> For the majority of the *Letter*, he sticks to the high ground he had claimed in the *Apology*. Satire, he continues to argue, is a genre for noble rather than spiteful minds, yet even he is forced to admit that some of Pope’s attacks on him are authentically witty. But the more he writes, the more Cibber exhibits spite of his own, referencing his rival’s physical stature in comparing him to ‘a little angry bee’, and recounting a scandalous tale of how Pope’s ‘little-tiny manhood’ failed to cope on encountering a generously proportioned prostitute.<sup>182</sup> The minor pamphlet war that followed further skewered Pope as an anti-establishment imp, a freak of nature whose thirst for satire was hypocritical.<sup>183</sup> Worst of all, a series of prints set out in graphic detail what was alleged to have happened that day in, to use Cibber’s phrase, ‘a house of carnal recreation’ (Figure 2).<sup>184</sup> Even so, hearing of Pope’s illness in 1744, Cibber is said to have exercised the compassion of the best sentimental hero and asked the author of another anti-Pope pamphlet not to publish, because it would have made his adversary’s health worse.<sup>185</sup>

Cibber’s treatment at the hands of Pope, in particular, handed him an unfortunate role in narratives of the traditional English literary canon. He became the epitome of the non-canonical: the man so evidently lacking in talent as to prove the validity of the canon, the definitive literary-historical fall guy. The reception of the *Apology* has become an inalienable part of the work itself. Approximately half Cibber’s entry in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* is devoted to the criticism he incurred.<sup>186</sup> ‘The vain and blandly ingenuous Cibber’, writes Roger Lonsdale in another well-known reference work, ‘precisely embodied the process in the *Dunciad* by which

180 *Apology*, p.18. 181 Cibber, *Letter*, p.7. 182 Cibber, *Letter*, pp.30 and 46–9.

183 See, for example, the following works, all published in August 1742: Lord John Hervey, *The Difference between Verbal and Practical Virtue, with a Prefatory Epistle from Mr C-b-r to Mr P*; Anon., *Blast upon Blast and Lick for Lick, or a New Lesson for P-pe*; Anon., *Sawney and Colley*; Anon., *A Letter to Mr C-b-r on His Letter to Mr P*.

184 Alternative versions of the scene, ‘The Poetical Tom-Tit perched upon the Mount of Love’, and ‘An Essay on Woman’, are reproduced in McGirr, pp.86–7. Cibber, *Letter*, p.46.

185 Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces, and Poems*, 3 vols. (London: 1776), I.95. A full account of Cibber’s exchanges with Pope following the *Apology* is in Barker, pp.210–20.

186 Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.198–9.





2. The Poetical Tom-Tit: Alexander Pope in a brothel.

Pope believed debased literary taste had spread upwards through a degenerating society.<sup>187</sup> That was an attractive theme for students of English literature encouraged to find in Pope's satire qualities of what F. R. Leavis called a 'complex harmony', an exercise of 'urbane speech' to set against (or rather, some distance above) the clatter of commercialism, whether heard in the eighteenth century or since.<sup>188</sup> Such judgments may betray a preference for literary over theatre studies; yet in the *Apology*, Cibber goes out of his way to distinguish what is merely commercial from the higher species of entertainment the theatre has to offer. His literary-historical misfortune has been compounded by recent attention to Charlotte Charke's *Narrative*, with its portrayal of an unforgiving patriarch by a marginalized, convention-defying daughter, so that the apologist who set out to secure his good name has constantly been found in need of further apology.

187 Roger Lonsdale, 'Alexander Pope', in *The Sphere History of Literature in the English Language, Volume IV: Dryden to Johnson* (London: Sphere Books, 1971), p.132.

188 F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pp.96 and 89.

### Themes in Modern Criticism

Cibber scholarship over the last century has approached his rehabilitation from a variety of angles, and with varying attention to the *Apology*. The two major biographies differ markedly in method, focus, and reliability. In Richard Hindry Barker's *Mr Cibber of Drury Lane* (1939), the chapter devoted to the *Apology* is the shortest of fourteen. Barker writes admiringly about Cibber's skill in evoking live performance and praises his occasional 'neat turns of wit'. For a study completed without the benefit of modern research resources, it is a substantial and largely reliable achievement.<sup>189</sup> But Barker is also unduly preoccupied by the 'inflated paragraphs' and 'uncertain style' that drew mockery in 1740, and he takes as read the idea that the *Apology* is fundamentally disorganized.<sup>190</sup> Rather than focusing on structure or themes, Barker highlights characters. As though drafting a treatment for a film, he describes the *Apology* as a 'narrative of prolonged disaster and final triumph', a contest between Cibber and Christopher Rich, the latter standing for 'everything that is undesirable and disorderly in the theatre'.<sup>191</sup> Variants of the word 'master' lend strength to such a reading; in Cibber's lexicon, the 'masterly' performances of great actors are often set against the oppressive ways of their 'masters' (except when the latter are themselves actors, of course). But the *Apology* has other significant antagonists, not least the also unnamed Charles Killigrew, long-serving Master of the Revels, who charged Cibber's company for licensing and sometimes mutilating their plays.<sup>192</sup>

Helene Koon's 1986 biography, *Colley Cibber*, draws upon the wealth of reference and critical material that had appeared since Barker's book. The result is atmospheric, if somewhat hazily so. Koon succeeds in knitting together episodes narrated in the *Apology* with some of those conveniently or diplomatically excluded from it. A transcription of Cibber's will, a partial list of his roles, and an extensive bibliography form useful resources. As a text in its own right, however, the *Apology* blends almost invisibly into the texture of Koon's prose. Discussion of the work is confined to a few pages in the middle of a chapter entitled 'Misfortunes', but the *Apology* resurfaces everywhere else, transformed through Koon's creative way with narrative (witness the first sentence of her 'Prologue': 'Late on a chill January afternoon in 1696, Colley Cibber stood in the wings of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, shivering with excitement').<sup>193</sup> In finding Cibber a 'charming, delightful and worthwhile companion', Koon pays tribute to the effect of

189 The same may be said of F. Dorothy Senior's *The Life and Times of Colley Cibber* (London: Constable & Co., 1928).

190 Barker, pp.200–1. 191 Barker, p.198. 192 *Apology*, pp.184–5. 193 Koon, p.1.



easy familiarity promised by the dedication to the *Apology*, but leaves aside the question of whether readers should succumb to it.

In a study of the plays published in 1912, DeWitt C. Croissant showed how the effect of Cibber's style was embedded in the ethics and practice of sentimentalism, whose moral purpose is reflected in the *Apology*. The idea of a normative, benevolent masculinity is shown to be key to social and spiritual welfare, and that benevolence entails a proper regard for women. It is no accident that Cibber befriended Samuel Richardson, whose novels feature what John Mullan has described as 'a decorous yet guilelessly tremulous language of feeling'.<sup>194</sup> It is a language that, like the quasi-oral narrative of the *Apology*, creates a vivid sense of the here and now, and Mullan's phrase might describe how Cibber builds a relationship with readers of the *Apology* no less than it does Clarissa Harlowe's own way with words. So often described as the work of a vain man, the *Apology* is distinctive – or, subject to preference, irritating – partly for its constant enquiries after its readers' comfort. 'I must therefore a little make bold with your patience', Cibber declares at the outset, setting the tone for an exchange in which we receive regular reassurance that our feelings are being considered.<sup>195</sup> 'Patience' and its variants embody a core value for Cibber (there are fifty-four occurrences in the *Apology*, about one every six pages), either in his transactions with the reader or his evaluations of others' behaviour. Exhibiting or asking for it is to extend a rational courtesy; 'rational', 'polite', 'agreeable', 'sincere', 'pleasing', and other weapons in the armoury of sentimentalism also feature frequently.

When he encountered it in Richardson, Fielding judged such language the expression of an over-heated effeminacy. In Kristina Straub's influential book, *Sexual Suspects*, it stretches the boundaries of conventional masculinity.<sup>196</sup> According to Straub, the *Apology* is a lengthy reprise of Lord Foppington, who departs from normal standards of masculinity while shadowing them. We are not to understand this fop's sexuality as 'deviant', still less effeminate (contemporary directors of Restoration Comedy take note). In Straub's reading, the rupture of foppishness and manliness occurs in the

194 John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.63. For Cibber's friendship with Richardson, see Barker, pp.250–5.

195 *Apology*, p.12.

196 Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). Straub develops an argument advanced by Lois Potter in 'Colley Cibber: The Fop as Hero', in J. C. Hilson, M. M. B. Jones, and J. R. Watson, eds., *Augustan Worlds: Essays in Honour of A. R. Humphreys* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978).

later eighteenth century; it is worth remembering that another signature Cibber role, Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, is a threat to the alpha male hero, Dorimant, rather than his antithesis. Both Fopling and Sir Novelty are, for all their shows of flamboyant self-confidence, *ar-rivistes*, men fundamentally uncertain of their place in society. The *Apology* is certainly rich in foppish features: a narrator eager to talk up his social standing, to review the way he has made a career of parading himself in public, careful to keep his family well behind the scenes, and appearing casually dismissive of the children who survived and the ones who did not; a narrator nervous of being on the outside whose most treasured memories of adolescence include nothing more momentous than waiting at table for a duchess.<sup>197</sup>

As Elaine M. McGirr points out, however, by 1740 Cibber was no mincing parvenu but a 'middle-aged and corpulent' public figure, 'exuding the confidence, ease and arrogance earned after forty years of theatrical and social success'; he did, after all, tender his *Apology* principally as a manager rather than as an actor, expecting to be held accountable for his 'share of administration in the state of the theatre'.<sup>198</sup> Straub's reading of the *Apology* as a foppish text, McGirr argues, filters out 'the many masculinities, both marginal and dominant, that Cibber popularized on the stage and the page'. A survey of the characters he played reveals, after all, 'a dutiful son, a few successful lovers, some wise men, some devious men, a handful of old men and many tyrants'; to that list we may add what appear to be a number of brown-face roles.<sup>199</sup> McGirr's book is as much an apology as the *Apology* itself, and inclined to be no less partial in its familiarity as it reviews Cibber's performing, managerial, writing, and domestic lives. On the latter, Cibber himself had least to say, yet lived with accusations that he gambled, treated his children poorly, and kept a prostitute. Of those sins McGirr seeks to absolve him. Recent interest in the work of his alienated daughter Charlotte has confirmed a caricature of Cibber as an unfeeling father whose approach to parenting is summed up in his alleged response to Charlotte's plea for help: 'I am sorry I am not in a position to assist you further. You have made your own bed, and thereon you must lie.'<sup>200</sup> Since the bed in question was almost certainly Henry Fielding's, and since Charlotte had recently mimicked her father in a performance of Fielding's *Pasquin* with Cibber in the

<sup>197</sup> *Apology*, p.53. <sup>198</sup> *Apology*, p.13.

<sup>199</sup> McGirr, p.38. For brown-face roles, *Apology*, pp.90 n.7 and 91 n.11.

<sup>200</sup> The letter is quoted by Koon, p.143. However, as McGirr notes, p.185, its authenticity is questionable.

audience, he was entitled to be unimpressed.<sup>201</sup> However, when McGirr refers to ‘the unusual warmth’ of his marriage and his ‘close relations with his real and theatrical families’, her defence lapses into sentimentality.<sup>202</sup> Contrary to his own claims, Cibber was as capable as Christopher Rich of working against the financial interests of actors and ancillary workers; and if the *Apology* leaves out plenty of facts that are hardly to Cibber’s credit, even the ones it includes demonstrate that the companies he served were rarely harmonious.<sup>203</sup> It is, moreover, possible to have long ceased to be a parvenu without shedding the anxiety that comes with it.

A broad focus on Cibber’s life and work, however well intentioned in its desire to correct Cibberian myths, risks underestimating the liminal, experimental nature of the *Apology* itself. Such is the focus of Cheryl Wanko’s history of the emergence of theatrical biography.<sup>204</sup> In her account, Cibber attempted to put paid to a prejudice not just against actors, but in particular against actors who had the temerity to write. ‘The players have all got the itching leprosy of scribbling, as Ben Jonson calls it; ’twill in time descend to the scene-keepers and candle-snuffers’, complained one writer in 1702.<sup>205</sup> The prophecy proved true: six years later, the former Duke’s Company prompter, John Downes, published his memoir of the stage, *Roscius Anglicanus*. Wanko shows Cibber seizing the opportunity of print as a project of ‘commercial self-fashioning’ that is more threatening to established social hierarchies than stage performance. His habit of ‘caress[ing] and cajol[ing]’ his readers opens their eyes to the possibility that actors are, after all, central to civil society.<sup>206</sup> To do so, he must find a middle ground between those scandalizing, ‘low’ biographies of Wilks and others, and high-minded treatises on theatrical action that justified their social purpose by proposing that clergymen and barristers might equally profit from them. Cibber’s is, Wanko argues, a new kind of authority that derives from close observation of performers and their individual traits. Even as it is conceived, however, that authority withers in the face of two stark facts: the ‘monstrous presentations’ he complains have begun to fill the stage, sacrificing art to the

201 McGirr, p.164. During the performance, Charke spoke lines that made fun of her father’s official post: ‘Faith, sir, I can’t tell well what [odes] are; but I know you may be qualified for the place without being a poet.’ In *Egotist*, pp.27–8, Cibber claims to have laughed with the rest of the audience.

202 McGirr, p.19.

203 On Cibber deducting sums from ancillary workers, see *Apology* p.285 n.30; on his agreement effectively to limit actors’ salaries, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, ‘The London Theatre Cartel of the 1720s: British Library Additional Charters 9306 and 9308’, *Theatre Survey* vol. 26 (1985), 21–37.

204 Wanko, esp. pp.120–35. 205 *Comparison*, p.16. 206 Wanko, p.113.

counting of bums on seats; and the stark truth that all the actors Cibber held up as role models were either retired or dead (a poignant fact of timing is that the book was published just before the emergence of David Garrick, who did not especially impress Cibber).<sup>207</sup> The *Apology's* place in a long-running print controversy underlines the fragility of its authority: a definitive word on the functioning of a theatre that merely sparked new kinds of antagonism and partiality. Nevertheless, Wanko concludes, it is manifestly a landmark text, deserving more attention in its own right than it tends to be given. Part of a moment in the specialization of historical knowledge, it offers proof of its own concept that actors might write their own lives and, less loftily, encouragement for 'a type of textual paparazzi who attempt to create a celebrity aura for themselves'.<sup>208</sup>

The place of the *Apology* in a literary market increasingly inclined towards celebrity persuades Brian Glover that Cibber set out to graft a pseudo-aristocratic persona onto the more mundane reality of his humbler, industrious self, part of a Habermasian project to understand private selves in the context of the public domain.<sup>209</sup> Noelle Gallagher goes further: the *Apology* was Cibber's bid to be remembered as a great man alongside the global worthies he cites.<sup>210</sup> In Julia Fawcett's 2016 study, *Spectacular Disappearances*, the book's 'overexpression' of gender invites and proceeds to disrupt the public gaze, as does Charlotte Charke's *Narrative* (in her case, by mimicking her father in his vast Foppington wig). Emphasizing the 'illusion of interiority', Fawcett offers a riposte to those who lament the absence of an authentic self in the *Apology*; such absences are, she argues, endemic to the literature of celebrity.<sup>211</sup> It is hard to resist finding a parallel here with the disappointment felt by J. Paul Hunter;<sup>212</sup> since it is not clear why anyone should expect to find an abundance of 'interiority' in the *Apology*, celebrating its absence is arguably beside the point. Where there is celebrity in recent criticism, anxiety invariably follows, but whether Cibber's book discloses 'anxieties about publicity' remains debatable, so overwhelming is the *Apology's* many-sided confidence:<sup>213</sup> a quality born of the approval of its

207 Davies, III.470: in 1742, seeing Garrick as Bayes in *The Rehearsal*, Cibber thought him 'well enough, but ... not superior to my boy Theophilus'. He modified his opinion slightly following Garrick's play, *Miss in her Teens* (1747), in which the author played Fribble. For further discussion see Barker, pp.235–6.

208 Wanko, p.134.

209 Brian Glover, 'Nobility, Visibility, and Publicity in Colley Cibber's *Apology*', *Studies in English Literature* vol. 42 (2002), 523–39.

210 Noelle Gallagher, *Historical Literatures: Writing about the Past in England, 1660–1740* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.34.

211 Fawcett, pp.3 and 6. 212 See above, p.xxx. 213 Fawcett, p.10.

patron and manifested in its familiar tone, its pre-empting of criticism, and in the certainty of the eye-witness observation that shaped its unique inside history of the early eighteenth-century London stage.

### *Editions of the Apology*

Thanks to the labours of four editors over a period of two centuries – not to mention the creation of extraordinary resources such as *The London Stage*, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors*, and *A Register of Theatrical Documents* – the idea that to ‘unravel the meaning’ of a text such as the *Apology* is ‘not only groping in the dark, but ... an unpleasant and a tedious labour’ is less intimidating than it once was.<sup>214</sup> Yet the warning issued in *The Laureate* is still pertinent. The task of editing and annotating the *Apology* may be less arduous than it has ever been and the debt to previous scholars greater, but it remains far from straightforward.

In 1822 the first annotated version appeared from the house of Simpkin and Marshall. It was the work of Edmund Bellchambers, who at the time was amassing material for five substantial titles published between 1834 and 1837, including *A General Biographical Dictionary* (1835), *The Scripture Cabinet, comprehending the principal events of the Old and New Testaments* (1837), and *The British Tourist* (1834). Bellchambers’s preface begins with the optimistic assessment that the *Apology* is ‘very clearly explained’<sup>215</sup> (that is, self-explanatory) but ends with an admission that ‘[i]t was thought necessary by the booksellers that some notes should be attached to the present edition’.<sup>216</sup> It is characteristic of Bellchambers’s approach that the blame for that necessity is placed squarely at Cibber’s door: the notes would be ‘for the purpose of elucidating various points that Cibber has not thoroughly handled’.<sup>217</sup> Not quite: at frequent intervals, Bellchambers intervenes not to elucidate Cibber’s ‘various points’ but to dispute them. To Cibber’s assertion that acting requires ‘as ample endowments of Nature as any one profession’, Bellchambers retorts, ‘And what value is intrinsically attached to the most “ample endowments of nature”? ... if [acting’s] highest excellence lie beyond the grasp of science ... we may pronounce it to be a profession which no being can embrace with any solid claims to intellectual consideration.’<sup>218</sup>

Bellchambers’s preface sets the tone for his intermittently truculent footnotes, some of which are essays in themselves. From the outset he gives a strong impression of having fallen under the sway of Fielding and Pope.

<sup>214</sup> *The Laureate*, p.1. <sup>215</sup> Bellchambers, p.iv.

<sup>216</sup> Bellchambers, p.xv. <sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>218</sup> Bellchambers, p.60.

‘The frivolity of Cibber was highly contemptible’, he writes; ‘inordinate vanity alone’, he adds, ‘induced him to apologize for a life over which neither his notions nor his talents allowed him to affect the slightest superiority’.<sup>219</sup> Yet he applauds Cibber’s defence of the theatre as both ‘dignified and useful’ and finds in the *Apology* the ‘frank and cordial vivacity’ that reflects the book’s origins as a series of fireside lectures in a country house.<sup>220</sup>

When Robert W. Lowe set to work on his edition of 1889, he aimed to correct errors and misapprehensions in Bellchambers and to make the *Apology* newly navigable. With often extensive footnotes listing (for example) entire casts, a supplementary chapter by the editor himself, occasional digressions on Victorian theatre, biographies of the major actors discussed by Cibber, and a valuable reprint of Anthony Aston’s *A Brief Supplement*, Lowe’s edition stretches to two fat volumes and stands as a kind of variorum *Apology*, often cited by scholars in preference to those that have appeared since. In its approach it recalls the Dodsley editions, which reprinted James Wright’s 1699 *Historia Histriionica* as a way of covering the period before Cibber joined the United Company. Lowe’s actor biographies testify to the difficulty of finding a convenient format for all Cibber’s references to his contemporaries, and they clear space for lengthy quotations from those infuriated by the *Apology*. The result is an edition as much about the reception of Cibber’s work as its origins and design. Lowe can be robust with both Cibber and Bellchambers: on the reference to Addison’s *Cato*, ‘which was first acted in 1712’, Lowe comments, ‘This is a blunder, which, by the way, Bellchambers does not correct.’<sup>221</sup> His severity is turned up a notch seventy pages on. To Cibber’s dating his legal case against Richard Steele at 1726, Lowe remarks, ‘This is one of Cibber’s bad blunders. The case was heard in 1728.’<sup>222</sup> In general, Lowe’s annotation is inconsistent by modern standards: sometimes encyclopaedic, if not always for clear reasons, but frequently passing over allusions for which readers plainly need a gloss.

B. R. S. Fone’s edition of 1968 has the advantage of being contained in a single volume with an attractively presented text, reproduced almost as it appears in the first edition, and a textual collation that lists a good proportion of variants among the imprints of 1740 (two), 1750, and 1756. Fone provides a pithy introduction and a brief list of changes in the regulatory environment of the theatre from 1660, but – puzzlingly – only as far as 1715. He also glosses the summaries that appear at the head of each chapter, anchoring their loose descriptions in firm dates. His lightness of touch

219 Bellchambers, pp.vii and ix. 220 Bellchambers, p.xiv. 221 Lowe, II.120.

222 Lowe, II.198.



with annotation, frustrating in itself, skews understanding of the *Apology's* distinctiveness. With blunt statements of contradiction that echo Lowe's reproving manner, Fone exaggerates the fallibility of Cibber's memory, whereas a more extensive enquiry into the *Apology's* field of reference suggests that he was indeed, as Hume argues, 'remarkably accurate'.<sup>223</sup> Fone's edition also underestimates the problems caused by Cibber's evidently high opinion of his readers' memories. The *Apology* is awash with cross-references and – whatever view is taken of its organization – its style can be hypnotic. Lowe recognized that readers are entitled to extra help with navigating Cibber's back-and-forth style, but Fone is reluctant to give it (the price both in this new edition and in Lowe's is, inevitably, an element of see-sawing between notes). Fone also recycles errors made by Bellchambers and Lowe, and, like them, he identifies few of the people indirectly associated with theatre who crossed Cibber's line of vision.

In his 'Critical Edition' of 1987, John Maurice Evans provides a step up in annotation from his predecessors, drawing amply on *The London Stage*. He takes a cautious view of the status of the second edition of the *Apology*, arguing that in all but four cases the changes were carried out by one of Watts's compositors rather than Cibber himself. The result is a version based on the first edition. Which passages to annotate can, Evans notes, 'be debated', and it is undeniably true that 'how much expansion and background are required' for this text 'can be argued indefinitely'.<sup>224</sup> Every one of Cibber's sentences might be annotated with ten more; one has to stop somewhere. Drawing a distinction between 'historical' and 'illustrative' annotation, Evans is generally thorough and accurate when it comes to the theatre, but less so in charting Cibber's references to the world beyond. Perhaps for reasons of series protocols, the presentation of his edition severely compromises the experience of reading it. With an austere typewriter font for Cibber's text and facing pages of notes that sometimes stray backwards onto otherwise blank paper, Evans's is not, therefore, an edition designed to carry the *Apology* to anything more than a highly restricted audience.

The current edition is annotated more consistently and fully than its predecessors, with previously untraced allusions explained for the first time. Notes generally focus on the topics Cibber wrote about rather than documenting in detail the controversy he provoked; the latter has been described in this Introduction. However, in some cases I have followed Lowe and Evans in citing material that sheds light on responses to the

223 Hume, 'Aims', 662. 224 Evans, p.vii.

*Apology*. The introductory timeline is an attempt to anchor the reader in an undeviatingly linear history and to indicate landmarks in historical and cultural context. Full use has been made of *A Register of Theatrical Documents* and *The London Stage* with a view to indicating the accuracy or otherwise of Cibber's recollections, and the extent to which his observations were made first hand. In the case of *The London Stage*, references are given to the print editions, with the proviso that page numbers for the period 1700–11 generally refer to Milhous and Hume's ongoing revision of Part 2 (here marked as LS2a). There is a caveat. Indispensable though it is, *The London Stage* captures only a small fraction of all the performances that took place in Cibber's lifetime, and for some of those the *Apology* is a key source.

The text presented here is based on the second edition of 1740. Approximately one hundred alterations were made to the text of the first edition; where those were made in error, the first edition has been followed. Cibber was evidently responsible for some of the changes, and the reasons were various. Sometimes he addressed errors pointed out by his critics; on other occasions he wondered if he had been a little harsh on particular actors, or too grandiose in claims about his own actions, or had implied through choice of the wrong tense the breakdown of a relationship. He also considered whether he had been historically accurate, either in reviewing whether 'agreement' was the right term to express the arrangement whereby the Duke's and King's Companies avoided each other's repertoire, or misdating the award of titles to the Duke of Devonshire. The fact that those corrections were published within weeks of the first edition shows Cibber's eagerness to get as many of his facts right as he could, as well as to mollify particular readers. The corrections also justify the choice of the second edition as the basis for this new undertaking. Lowe provides a composite of both 1740 texts, while Fone prefers the first: 'It is the first, not the second, edition which is ... historically important', he argues, but on the questionable premiss that Cibber's corrections were, unlike the redrafting he undertook for the 1721 edition of his plays, 'not rewritings', but merely 'corrections and grammatical changes'.<sup>225</sup> Each text, surely, is 'historically important', but the second represents a degree of reflection and accommodation to the interests of readers and subjects.

The current edition differs from its predecessors in no respect more significantly than in its modernization of spelling and punctuation, an editorial principle that also applies to quotations by other authors in the

225 Fone, p.xxvii.



footnotes and in this Introduction, as well as to the titles of plays. The latter decision may be seen as controversial, but play titles of the period were spelled in different ways (*City Politiques*, *City Politicks*, etc.), and there seems no reason to invoke authorial authority in an otherwise modernized edition. Colloquial abbreviations (*t'other*, *'em*), and those designed to preserve verse metre, are exceptions to the general rule. In a small handful of instances, a word or letter has been inserted in square brackets where Cibber's meaning would be unclear without it, or where the second edition is clearly wrong; in one instance the order of two words has been reversed for the same reasons.<sup>226</sup> The early editions make occasional use of italics where a particular emphasis was sought; those have largely been retained in the interest of retaining the appearance of a speaking voice. Decisions have had to be made in instances where it is not clear whether Cibber is referring to the title of a play or its eponymous hero (like most of his contemporaries, he would write of being 'in' rather than 'as' a particular character).

For an example of the difficulty of reading the *Apology* as originally set by Watts's compositors, take this single 198-word sentence from the second edition of 1740:

Now, whether we might certainly have acted without any License at all, I shall not pretend to determine; but this I have, of my own Knowledge, to say, That in Queen Anne's Reign, the Stage was in such Confusion, and its Affairs in such Distress, that Sir John Vanbrugh, and Mr. Congreve, after they had held it about one Year, threw up the Menagement of it, as an unprofitable Post, after which, a License for Acting was not thought worth any Gentleman's asking for, and almost seem'd to go a begging, 'till some time after, by the Care, Application, and Industry of three Actors, it became so prosperous, and the Profits so considerable, that it created a new Place, and a *Sine-cure* of a Thousand Pounds a Year, which the Labour of those Actors constantly paid, to such Persons as had from time to time, Merit or Interest enough, to get their Names inserted as Fourth Menagers in a License with them, for acting Plays, &c. a Preferment, that many a Sir *Francis Wronghead* would have jump'd at.<sup>227</sup>

Such presentation, much as is found in existing editions, guarantees that a landmark text for both biography and theatre studies will be read only by the most determined specialist. The work of modernizing involves difficult choices. In 1740 punctuation was still in transition from the rhetorical to the grammatical tradition: from a representation of speech patterns to an exercise in parsing that was frequently undertaken by printers rather than

<sup>226</sup> *Apology*, p.95: the early editions have 'he had not been an entire master', whereas the sense clearly indicates 'had he not been an entire master'.

<sup>227</sup> *Apology*, p.188–9, where the sentence is annotated.

authors.<sup>228</sup> An influential printer's manual of the period, John Smith's *A Printer's Grammar* (1755), complains about 'high-pointing gentlemen' who 'propose to increase the number of points [i.e. punctuation marks] now in use', and suggests that printers should mount a resistance.<sup>229</sup> Smith also observed that 'most authors expect the printer to spell, point and digest their copy, that it may be intelligible and significant to the reader'.<sup>230</sup>

Might the busily punctuated 1740 editions of the *Apology* indicate that Cibber was one those high-pointing gentlemen, an author who – unusually for the time, according to John Smith – took responsibility for punctuating his own text? In other aspects of the project he showed a marked diligence: by holding onto his copyright until he could extract maximum value from it, and by making changes during the short space of time between the first and second editions. Then there is the matter of his having read aloud the manuscript to Pelham, presumably with the aid of markings to signal moments where it was necessary to draw breath, point a contrast, or create an emphasis. It is hard to believe the manuscript version of the 198-word sentence cited above did not give him some help. In its unwieldy expanse, the sentence is a typically Cibberian (or, perhaps, Foppingtonian) performance: an exercise in floor-holding that celebrates his own success with a show of false modesty (he was, of course, one of those three actors who showed such care, application, and industry).

But it is hard to reconcile the presentation of that and many other passages in the *Apology* either with the rhetorical or the grammatical tradition: too many of those commas make little sense either as breathing points or indices of grammatical relationships. Faced with the task of taming to intelligibility the beast that was Cibber's manuscript, Watts's compositors appear simply to have littered it with punctuation in the hope that some of their 'points' would stick. In doing so, they no doubt (albeit intermittently) retained a feeling of Cibber's voice, so helping create precisely the effect described by Hume, of 'a chatty and digressive old raconteur ... just rambling on to a friend'; but they equally drew a veil between reader and text.<sup>231</sup>

Since the *Apology* is a landmark in the history of life writing as well as theatre studies, and since it deserves a wider audience, Cibber's extraordinary 'theatrical character' is more likely to emerge for a modern reader

228 See M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), and David Crystal, *Making a Point: The Pernickety Story of English Punctuation* (London: Profile Books, 2015).

229 Cited in Crystal, *Making a Point*, p.71. 230 Cited in Crystal, *Making a Point*, p.70.

231 Hume, 'Aims', 688.

## INTRODUCTION

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if his meaning is consistently clear. There are many passages in editions going back to 1740 where busy punctuation places an unnecessary obstacle in the way of understanding, let alone enjoyment. It may even be argued that the fussy markings of the early editions were partly responsible for the work's hostile reception among those who took issue with Cibber's command of English. Measured use has been made here of features that appear in the two editions of 1740: parentheses, initial use of 'And', semi-colons, and other devices help bring under control sentences whose meaning might otherwise prove too hard won. The effect, it is intended, is to clarify many of Cibber's lines of thought while exposing others, doubtless, to yet harsher criticism. To use his own analogy, this new edition seeks to restore a painting done in chiaroscuro: sharpening the colours and the distinction between light and dark, it helps readers appreciate what this landmark text reveals of its author and his times, and what it hides.

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## TIMELINE

This is a selection of key events in Cibber's life and times. It includes some of his own plays, roles he played in them, and other roles in which he achieved renown; where they are referred to in the *Apology*, a page reference is given in square brackets. Contextual information is given in the right-hand column.

*Key to theatres:* DL = Drury Lane; CG = Covent Garden; LIF = Lincoln's Inn Fields; QH = Queen's Theatre, Haymarket; GF = Goodman's Fields

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events   |
|------|---|---|
| 1660 |   | Accession of Charles II and establishment of King's and Duke's theatre companies under Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant [66]; Sir Henry Herbert reappointed as Master of the Revels under Edward Montagu, Earl of Manchester |
| 1671 | Born in Southampton Row, Bloomsbury; first son of Caius Gabriel Cibber of Flensburg and second wife, Jane Colley of Rutland, m. 1670 [14] | Duke's Company opens Dorset Garden Theatre  |
| 1673 | Caius Gabriel summoned for unpaid debts while in Marshalsea prison  | Thomas Killigrew becomes Master of the Revels   |
| 1674 | Caius Gabriel working on the monument to the Great Fire [15]  | Opening of Theatre Royal, Drury Lane  |
| 1677 | Caius Gabriel serves further term in Marshalsea prison  | Charles Killigrew appointed Master of the Revels under Lord Chamberlain Arlington, and Master of the King's Company   |
| 1681 | Caius Gabriel working for Wren at Cambridge following completion of statues at Bedlam [47]  | Height of Popish Plot fever; Dryden, <i>Absalom and Achitophel</i>  |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events  |
|------|---|--|
| 1682 | Enrolled at Free School in Grantham [16]  | Union of Duke's and King's theatre companies [72]  |
| 1685 |   | Death of Charles II [29]; accession of James II; Earl of Mulgrave appointed Lord Chamberlain           |
| 1687 | Fails exam for Winchester College; goes to London [45]  | Thomas Skipwith acquires a share in the United Company   |
| 1688 | Travels to Chatsworth to be with Caius Gabriel; fails to obtain army commission [54]  | James II flees the country; accession of William III and Mary II [54]                                  |
| 1689 |   | Earl of Dorset appointed Lord Chamberlain  |
| 1690 | Joins United Company: plays Servant to Sir Gentle in Thomas Southerne's <i>Sir Anthony Love</i> (DL) [74]   | William III defeats James II's forces at the Battle of the Boyne [159]                                 |
| 1691 |   | Christopher Rich and Thomas Skipwith gain full control of the United Company; death of George Etherege |
| 1692 | Plays the Chaplain in Thomas Otway's <i>The Orphan</i> (DL) [127]   | Purcell, <i>The Fairy Queen</i> (DG); French victory at the Battle of Steenkirk                        |
| 1693 | Marries Katherine Shore, who joins the United Company [128]; Caius Gabriel appointed Sculptor in Ordinary to William III  | French victory at the Battle of Landen   |
| 1694 | Plays Lord Touchwood in Congreve's <i>The Double Dealer</i> (DL) in place of Kynaston [129]; birth and death of first daughter, Veronica  | Death of Mary II [134]   |
| 1695 | Publishes elegiac ode on death of Mary II; plays Fondlewife in Congreve's <i>The Old Batchelor</i> (DL) [141]; birth and death of second daughter, Mary; birth of third daughter, Catherine | Betterton's breakaway company starts performing (LIF); opens with Congreve, <i>Love for Love</i> [136] |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events   |
|------|---|---|
| 1696 | Plays Sir Novelty Fashion in his own <i>Love's Last Shift</i> (DL) [144]; agrees new contract with Christopher Rich for <i>Woman's Wit</i> etc. and plays Longville (DL); plays Lord Foppington in Sir John Vanbrugh's <i>The Relapse</i> (DL) [147] and title role in Vanbrugh's <i>Aesop</i> (DL) [148] | Failed Jacobite assassination plot against William III [258]  |
| 1697 | Plays title role in Part 2 of Vanbrugh's <i>Aesop</i> (DL); briefly imprisoned for alleged assault on Jane Lucas; birth and death of first son, Colley; younger brother, Lewis, admitted to Winchester College [46], where Caius Gabriel has created a statue of the founder; death of Jane Colley        | Earl of Sunderland appointed Lord Chamberlain; Congreve, <i>The Mourning Bride</i> [137]                |
| 1698 | Birth and death of second son, Lewis  | Jeremy Collier, <i>A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage</i> [182]        |
| 1699 | Own play <i>Xerxes</i> performed (LIF); birth of fourth daughter, Anne  | Earl of Shrewsbury appointed Lord Chamberlain   |
| 1700 | Plays Richard in own adaptation of <i>Richard III</i> (DL) [101] and Clodio in own play <i>Love Makes a Man; or, The Fop's Fortune</i> (DL); death of Caius Gabriel Cibber  | Earl of Jersey appointed Lord Chamberlain; Congreve, <i>The Way of the World</i> [137]; death of Dryden |
| 1701 | Birth of fifth daughter, Elizabeth  | Death of James II, his son recognized as rightful king by Louis XIV; Steele, <i>The Funeral</i> [176]   |
| 1702 | Own play, <i>The School-Boy; or, The Comical Rival</i> completed but not performed until 1703 (DL); acquitted of profanity in performances; plays Don Manuel in his own <i>She Would and She Would Not</i> (DL); birth and death of third son, William  | Death of William III and accession of Anne; Defoe, <i>The Shortest Way with the Dissenters</i>          |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life  | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events   |
|------|--|---|
| 1703 | Plays title role in Crowne's <i>Sir Courtly Nice</i> (DL); attacked in 'Religio Poetae: or, a Satire on the Poets'; birth of fourth son, Theophilus  | The Great Storm ravages southern England  |
| 1704 | Agrees new part-managerial contract with Christopher Rich; plays Lord Foppington in own play, <i>The Careless Husband</i> (DL)   | Earl of Kent appointed Lord Chamberlain; Vanbrugh's licence for QH [210]; Marlborough's victory at Blenheim [353]                                       |
| 1705 | Plays Pacuvius in own play <i>Perolla and Izadora</i> (DL)   | Christopher Rich acquires lease to LIF [277]; opening of QH under Sir John Vanbrugh [210]   |
| 1706 | Defects from Rich to join Haymarket Company [263]; plays Sir Fopling Flutter in Etherege's <i>The Man of Mode</i> (QH); birth of fifth son, James; plays Atall in own play, <i>The Double Gallant</i> (QH) and Sir George Brilliant in own play, <i>The Lady's Last Stake</i> (QH); birth and death of sixth son, a second Colley  | Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Ramillies  |
| 1707 |  | Union with Scotland ratified [197]  |
| 1708 | Drury Lane and Queen's Haymarket Theatres merge under a single company following an order of December 1707, with QH largely reserved for opera [249]; in the augural show, plays Osric to Wilks's Hamlet; Henry Brett acquires patent and appoints Cibber, Robert Wilks, and Richard Estcourt as managers [240]; plays Gloucester in Tate's <i>King Lear</i> , to Betterton's <i>Lear</i> (DL) | Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Oudenarde; capture of Menorca; topping out of Wren's St Paul's Cathedral; John Downes, <i>Roscius Anglicanus</i> |
| 1709 | Plays Samuel Simple in own play, <i>The Rival Fools</i> (DL); Brett returns patent [256]; Owen Swiney makes  | Pope, <i>An Essay on Criticism</i> ; Theatre Royal Drury Lane closed [263]; Nicholas Rowe's six-volume edition of                                       |



| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events  |
|------|---|--|
|      | new agreement with Cibber and co-managers Wilks and Doggett [261]; plays Iago to Betterton's Othello (DL); sued by Christopher Rich, counter-sues; critiques of Cibber in <i>The Female Tatler</i> and other publications   | Shakespeare; Steele begins <i>The Tatler</i> ; William Collier takes over DL [273]   |
| 1710 | Order for Rich's arrest after Cibber's counter-suit; Cibber, Wilks, Thomas Doggett, and Owen Swiney receive new licence; dispute with Swiney over non-payment of dividends  | Earl of Shrewsbury reappointed as Lord Chamberlain; death of Thomas Betterton [88]; trial of Henry Sacheverell [274]; passage of the Copyright Act; Charles Shadwell, <i>The Fair Quaker of Deal</i> [275] |
| 1711 | Swiney sues, alleging misappropriation of funds by Cibber and co-managers   | Addison and Steele begin <i>The Spectator</i>  |
| 1712 | Articles between Cibber, co-managers, and Swiney cancelled; William Collier becomes a sleeping partner in Swiney's place, with Cibber, Doggett, and Wilks as managers [279]; Cibber plays Don Alvarez in own play, <i>Ximena</i> (DL); Barton Booth asserts right to DL share [302] | Swiney licensed to produce opera at the QH; Pope, <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> ; Ambrose Philips, <i>The Distressed Mother</i> [317]  |
| 1713 | Booth joins DL management [307]; Cibber plays Syphax in Addison's <i>Cato</i> , in London and Oxford [294]; birth of sixth daughter, Charlotte (later Charke)   | Owen Swiney escapes to Europe; Addison's opera, <i>Rosamond</i>  |
| 1714 | Cibber and Wilks lodge complaint against Doggett for lack of engagement [305]; Collier's salary cancelled; Doggett's share stopped; Cibber seeks Lord Chamberlain's protection against legal action; Doggett sues over profit share; death of Cibber's fifth son, James, aged 8     | Death of Queen Anne and accession of George I; reopening of LIF by Christopher Rich's sons, John and Christopher Mosyer [267]; desertion of eight DL actors to LIF [318]; death of Christopher Rich [267]  |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events  |
|------|---|--|
| 1715 | Dispute with Vanbrugh over opera stock from QH; Cibber's <i>Venus and Adonis</i> and <i>Myrtillo</i> performed (DL). Patent awarded to Steele with Cibber as co-manager [315]; Cibber defies the Master of the Revels' demands for licensing fees [186]   | Duke of Bolton appointed Lord Chamberlain; Charles Killigrew petitions for his rights as Master of the Revels; licensing arrangements lapse; first Jacobite rebellion [327]; deaths of Louis XIV and William Wycherley |
| 1716 | Sues John and Christopher Mosyer Rich   | Executions of Jacobite leaders   |
| 1717 | Doggett case settled in Cibber and Wilks's favour [307]; Cibber satirized in Breval's farce, <i>The Confederates</i> ; plays Dr Wolf in own play, <i>The Non-Juror</i> (DL) [328]   | Duke of Newcastle appointed Lord Chamberlain; Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, <i>Three Hours after Marriage</i> ; birth of David Garrick   |
| 1718 | Presents a copy of <i>The Non-Juror</i> to George I at court, for £200; withdraws a play by John Breval and puts on <i>Cato</i> with a junior cast – riot follows; suit against Rich's heirs dismissed  | The Holy Roman Empire joins Britain in the Quadruple Alliance  |
| 1719 | Wilks stages <i>The Masquerade</i> (DL) against Cibber's wishes; John Dennis attacks DL repertory, addressing Cibber as 'Judas Iscariot'; Lord Chamberlain demands DL financial statements amid accusations of fraud and failure to submit scripts for licensing; Cibber forbidden to act or manage | Jacobite landing in Scotland; Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>  |
| 1720 | Licence of Cibber and fellow managers temporarily revoked; Steele debarred  | Completion of the Little Haymarket Theatre [189]; Pope completes translation of <i>The Iliad</i> ; South Sea Bubble crisis   |
| 1721 | Publication of two-volume <i>Plays Written by Mr Cibber</i> [177]; plays Witling in own play, <i>The Refusal</i> (DL); dispute with Steele over his non-engagement, pay, and retirement [331]; ordered to pay Steele by Lord Chamberlain  | Robert Walpole becomes Lord Treasurer and de facto First Minister  |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life  | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events  |
|------|--|--|
| 1722 | Continuing attacks on Cibber ('Keyber') in the <i>Weekly Journal</i> , <i>Saturday's Post</i> , etc.; Theatre Royal surveyed following malicious rumours about its safety [323]  | Defoe, <i>Moll Flanders</i> and <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> ; Steele, <i>The Conscious Lovers</i> [339]            |
| 1724 | Attack on Cibber and co-managers in <i>The Tea-Table</i> ; dispute with Steele temporarily resolved; DL company ordered to stay near London for visit of King of Prussia; plays <i>Achoreus</i> in own <i>Caesar in Egypt</i> and sells rights to Chetwood for £105; urges Steele to re-engage [337] | Duke of Grafton appointed Lord Chamberlain; <i>Bishop Burnet's History of his own time</i> , Volume I [342]                |
| 1725 | Cibber and co-managers sued by Steele for withholding payments   | Death of Charles Killigrew, succeeded as Master of the Revels by Francis Henry Lee   |
| 1726 | Counter-sues Steele; sued for non-payment of licensing fees by Master of Revels Francis Lee  | Death of Sir John Vanbrugh; Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>   |
| 1727 | Sells publication rights to <i>The Provoked Husband</i> (completion of Vanbrugh's <i>A Journey to London</i> ) to John Watts for £105  | Death of George I and accession of George II   |
| 1728 | Plays Sir Francis Wronghead in <i>The Provoked Husband</i> (DL) [330]; numerous attacks on Cibber in <i>The Daily Journal</i> , <i>Mist's Weekly Journal</i> [330], <i>Fog's Weekly Journal</i> , etc.; dispute with Steele comes to court [333]; visits France                                      | First version of Alexander Pope's <i>The Dunciad</i> published; John Gay's <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> performed (LIF) [164] |
| 1729 | Plays Philautus in own play, <i>Love in a Riddle</i> (DL) [165], imitating <i>The Beggar's Opera</i> ; own play, <i>Damon and Phillida</i> performed, recycling material from <i>Love in a Riddle</i> (DL)   | Thomas Odell granted patent for new theatre in GF; deaths of Congreve and Steele; Gay's <i>Polly</i> suppressed [166]      |
| 1730 | Appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Laurence Eusden [39]; sued by actor Josias Miller   | Death of Anne Oldfield [369]   |

| Year | Event in Colley Cibber's Life   | Public/Literary/Theatrical Events  |
|------|---|--|
| 1731 | First Birthday Ode to the monarch published; 21-year extension of DL patent drafted for Cibber, Wilks, and Booth; DL actors to perform at Hampton Court [340] | Henry Fielding, <i>Tom Thumb</i> ; George Lillo, <i>The London Merchant</i>  |
| 1732 | Booth sells half his share to John Highmore; Cibber rents his share to his son Theophilus and becomes a salaried actor; death of Wilks [369]                  | John Rich opens new theatre in CG  |
| 1733 | Sells entire share to John Highmore [369]; son Theophilus leads DL actors' rebellion and they are locked out of the theatre; death of Booth [369]             | Alexander Pope, <i>Essay on Man</i> and <i>First Satire of Second Book of Horace Imitated</i> [25]                 |
| 1734 | Death of Cibber's wife, Katherine; Charles Fleetwood buys out the DL management; daughter Charlotte occupies the Little Haymarket Theatre                     | Death of John Dennis; Engraving Copyright Act; <i>Bishop Burnet's History of his own time</i> , Volume II          |
| 1736 | Sued by James Calthorpe for non-payment of dividends  | Henry Fielding, <i>Pasquin</i>   |
| 1737 |   | Passage of the Licensing Act, reinforcing the monarch's monopoly over granting of licences to perform [191]        |
| 1740 | Publication by John Watts of the first (quarto) and second (octavo) editions of the <i>Apology</i>  | Samuel Richardson, <i>Pamela</i>   |
| 1741 |   | Henry Fielding, <i>Shamela Andrews</i> ; Edward Young, <i>Poetical Works</i> ; Garrick's debut as Richard III (GF) |
| 1742 |   | Alexander Pope, revised version of <i>The Dunciad</i>  |
| 1742 | <i>A Letter from Mr Cibber to Mr Pope</i> published   | Fall of Walpole as First Minister  |
| 1743 | <i>A Second Letter from Mr Cibber to Mr Pope</i> published; <i>The Egotist</i> published  | Pope, further version of <i>The Dunciad</i> ; Garrick's first Hamlet   |

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Event in Colley Cibber's Life</b>  | <b>Public/Literary/Theatrical Events</b>  |
|-------------|---|---|
| 1744        | <i>Another Occasional Letter from Mr Cibber to Mr Pope</i> published                        | Death of Pope   |
| 1745        | Plays Cardinal Pandulph in own play, <i>Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John</i> (CG)    | Second Jacobite rebellion; death of Walpole   |
| 1747        | <i>The Character and Conduct of Cicero</i> published  | Samuel Richardson, <i>Clarissa</i> ; Garrick and Lacy take over DL patent                     |
| 1748        | <i>The Ladies Lecture. A Theatrical Dialogue</i> published                                  | Death of Anne Bracegirdle; Liverpool established as main slave trading port                   |
| 1750        | Sells copyright of the <i>Apology</i> to Robert Dodsley for 50 guineas                      | Johnson begins <i>The Rambler</i>   |
| 1755        | Daughter Charlotte publishes <i>A Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Charke</i>         | Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> ; conflict with France in Canada                                  |
| 1756        | Dodsley's second edition of the <i>Apology</i> published                                    | Start of the Seven Years' War with France   |
| 1757        | Dies at home in Berkeley Square, succeeded as Poet Laureate by William Whitehead            | Robert Clive's victory at Plassey in India; defeat of British at Fort William Henry in Canada |
| 1758        | Death of fourth son, Theophilus   | Johnson begins <i>The Idler</i>   |
| 1760        | Death of third daughter, Catherine  | Death of George II and succession of George III   |
| 1761        | Death of sixth daughter, Charlotte; Dodsley's third edition of the <i>Apology</i> published | George III acquires Buckingham Palace; Matthew Boulton's manufactory opens                    |

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