

BRITISH ENLIGHTENMENT THEATRE

In this groundbreaking work, Bridget Orr shows that popular eighteenth-century theatre was about much more than fashion, manners and party politics. Using the theatre as a means of circulating and publicizing radical Enlightenment ideas, many plays made passionate arguments for religious and cultural toleration, and voiced protests against imperial invasion and forced conversion of indigenous peoples by colonial Europeans. Irish and labouring-class dramatists wrote plays, often set in the countryside, attacking social and political hierarchy in Britain itself. Another crucial but as yet unexplored aspect of early eighteenth-century theatre is its connection to freemasonry. Freemasons were pervasive as actors, managers, prompters, scene painters, dancers and musicians, with their own lodges, benefit performances and particular audiences. In addition to promoting the Enlightened agenda of toleration and cosmopolitanism, freemason dramatists invented the new genre of domestic tragedy, which criticized the effects of commercial and colonial capitalism.

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THEATRE

Dramatizing Difference

BRIDGET ORR

Vanderbilt University, Tennessee



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To Jonathan

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