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**“What’s in a name?”: *Romeo and Juliet* and the Cibber brand**

**Abstract:** The 1744 and 1748/50 performances of *Romeo and Juliet* by Theophilus Cibber, Jenny Cibber and Susannah Cibber explain the significance of the play’s return to the repertory, uncover the history of rival interpretations of Juliet’s character, and make sense of the careers and reputations of the theatrical Cibbers. The “Cibberian” airs of all three Cibbers were markedly different, as were their interpretations of Shakespeare’s star-crossed lovers.

**Keywords:** Shakespearean adaptation, performance history, celebrity, authorial reputation, repertory

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet apostrophizes Romeo to deny thy father and refuse thy name, assuring her (supposedly) absent lover that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But names are tricky things and are not easily abjured. Names are the bridge between characters and bodies. Repetition and reputation can alter or enhance the experience; we anticipate the rose’s sweetness and sniff to confirm rather than investigate our assumption. In this essay, I explore the question “what’s in a name?” by analysing the careers of the second and third generations of theatrical Cibbers in the turbulent 1740s. The Cibber dynasty was not in bitter feud with a rival theatrical family, but was rather a house divided against itself: son (Theo) against father (Colley); wife (Susannah) against husband (Theo); step-daughter (Jenny) in rivalry with step-mother (Susannah). The Cibbers’ individual performances all impacted on the Cibber brand, and all recalibrated the presumed value of both the Cibber name and the Shakespearean roles they inhabited. I argue that Susannah and Theo’s separation also effected a separation of Colley Cibber’s theatrical legacy and bifurcated the significance of the Cibber name. Susannah inherited her father-in-law’s national treasure mantle while Theo desecrated his father’s name and memory. Theo’s

brazen career resignified his father's practice, bringing both into disrepute. Conversely, Susannah, whose career was initially boosted by her strategic alliance, continued to profit from her Cibberian identity even after she separated from her husband. Susannah was the *celebrated* Mrs Cibber. She had the cachet of Cibberian celebrity; Theo had all the infamy and none of the celebrated talent. This public battle left little space for young Jenny Cibber, Theo's eldest daughter by his first wife. Claimed by her father in periods of economic or reputational crisis, Jenny was unable to escape her father's orbit to forge an independent identity or career. Regardless of her individual merits, Jenny Cibber could not make a name for herself, for she was always perceived as her father's daughter and her attempts to extend the Cibber dynasty to a third generation failed. The very different careers and reputations enjoyed by Theo, Susannah and Jenny demonstrate both the power and the mutability of names.

*Romeo and Juliet* is the perfect text for this exploration, not only for its thematic aptness, but also for the role the play played in presenting and redefining the younger Cibbers to the public after Theo and Susannah's marriage ended in 1739 with the public scandal of a trial for criminal conversation. Theo brought the suit against his wife's lover (of his procuring) when her pregnancy threatened to remove her from the stage, but he miscalculated this manoeuvre: rather than shaming his wife as a fallen woman, the trial exposed Theo as a pimp and bully and presented his wife as the victim of male greed and cruelty. This public scandal resignified not just the Cibbers but also the stage characters they embodied: each role they performed in the 1740s was coloured with the public memory of the scandal, and Shakespeare was central to both actors' celebrity personae. Susannah Cibber chose Desdemona – the ultimate wronged wife – for her return to the London stage in 1742. Theo Cibber chose *Romeo & Juliet* as the vehicle with which to reboot his career in

1744, alongside that of his fourteen-year old daughter, Jenny. Jenny Cibber's naïve teenaged Juliet effectively softened the Cibber brand by infusing her father's reputation with some of her own innocence and simplicity. Her performance also created a daughterly Juliet, whose father's interest, even interference, in her marriage blurs paternal and sexual interest, an interpretation compounded by Theo's decision to play Romeo to his daughter's Juliet, to be father and lover simultaneously.

However, while moderately successful in 1744, these performances have been obscured by the *Romeo and Juliet* that followed. David Garrick chose the play as a star vehicle for Susannah Cibber and for his own restoration of Shakespeare from the taint of Cibberian adaptation, following the successes of his performance as Richard III (1742) and his adaptation of *King John* (1745), both mounted in direct competition to Colley Cibber's adaptations of and performances in those plays. For her part, Susannah Cibber transformed Juliet from the naïve daughter of Jenny's interpretation into another in her line of doomed and tragic wives, into another fair penitent. Jenny's Juliet is the blooming youth whose marriage is expected to unite the nation – Elizabeth of York turned tragic – whereas in Susannah's hands, Juliet is always already doomed; there is no hope in her love. Jenny's Juliet is a performance of her youth, but also of her status as her father's pawn. Susannah's performance of Juliet is a public expiation for the actress's off-stage "rash passion" of her marriage and adultery; by staging her penitence she is able to evoke pity for her situation and therefore retain both her name and her reputation. Finally, Theo's attempt to reposition himself as a leading man discoloured not only his Romeo, but also his work as a Shakespearean adaptor and theatrical manager. Theo was a low comic actor, not a tragic hero. His signature role was 2 *Henry IV's* Ancient Pistol, the swaggering coward. Empty boasting and moral vacuity defined Theo and bled into all the roles he attempted. Theo's

Romeo was hard to take seriously, especially after Garrick's production offered an alternative. This then, is a story of rival Romeos and their Juliets. By re-centring the 1744 production of *Romeo and Juliet* in its performance history, I hope to explain the significance of the play's return to the repertory, uncover the history of rival interpretations of Juliet's character, and demonstrate the centrality of Shakespeare to the careers and reputations of the theatrical Cibbers.

### I. ***Romeo Reviv'd* (1744)**

In 1744, Theo Cibber was running an illegal season at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. This theatre looms large in Theo's personal and professional biography. It was where he led his renegade company in 1733, when his father publicly repudiated Theo's dynastic expectations and sold his share of the patent to Highmore rather than bequeath it to his son. Theo could not metamorphose from Ancient Pistol to Prince Hal, let alone from Hal to Henry V. The Haymarket was also where Theo first saw Susannah Arne, the future Mrs Cibber, who was the main attraction of her brother's English Opera Company in 1732-3 and 1733-4. It was where Susannah Arne Cibber began her career; it would be where her step-daughter Jenny Cibber also attempted to become a leading lady. A small theatre, it was ideal for introducing a new talent – whether the teenaged Susannah in 1732 or the teenaged Jenny in 1744 – because the actress did not need to project her voice as strongly as in the larger patent houses, and audiences were closer and could get a better look at the budding actress.<sup>1</sup> In 1744, Jenny was playing walk-on roles in Covent Garden and beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Although we cannot specify the exact capacity of the Haymarket, we do know that the theatre could seat approximately 650, which would have been crowded in a building with the external dimensions of 48 feet by 136 feet (Burling 80, 79). In comparison, Drury Lane held at least 1500 in the 1740s, and had multiple levels of boxes and gallery.

to appear on playbills, thanks to her famous name, but the theatrical fraternity had closed ranks against her father. Susannah's return to the stage demanded a show of solidarity, and the actors and managers preferred the tragic wife to the amoral husband. Undaunted, Theo removed his daughter from Covent Garden and opened his own season at the Haymarket, gambling on the public's need for amusement and hoping that his name could still draw a house. He was not wrong. The season attracted a lot of attention, both from paying audiences and from the authorities. He did not (contrary to his initial assertion) have a license to perform, and so adopted some of the more popular Licensing Act evasion strategies, including a concert formula and the reclassification of his theatre as an "academy" at which plays might happen to be "rehearsed".<sup>2</sup> But these were not designed to fool anyone. He was programming and advertising a theatrical season little different to those of the patent theatres, as the placement and typography of his daily advertisements attested [fig. 1]. Theo modelled his daily playbills and advertisements on those of the patent houses, but he amplified his marketing with additional puffs and media events, from poetry to public letters. Theo's use of media differed only in degree from that of his legitimate competitors; however, his famous name and infamous character heightened public notice of his actions.

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<sup>2</sup> On 30 October 1744, the *Daily Advertiser* announced: "At Cibber's Academy in the Hay-Market, on Thursday next, the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, will be perform'd a Concert of MUSICK, Vocal and Instrumental [...] The Prices are Four Shillings, Half a Crown, and Eighteen Pence. After the Concert will be exhibited, GRATIS, a Rehearsal, in the Form of the Play (often acted with great Applause) call'd ROMEO AND JULIET" (4374). A very similar formula appeared on 3 November (7854).

D R U R Y - L A N E.

By His Majesty's Company of Comedians,

**A**T the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane,  
on Saturday-next, being the 15th of September, will be presented a Comedy, call'd

L O V E F O R L O V E.

The Part of Valentine by Mr. Giffard; Tattle, by Mrs. Cross; Scandal, Mr. Havard; Sir Sampson Legend, Mr. Bridges; Ben by Mr. Yates; Foresight, Mr. Tiswell; Trapland, Mr. Ray; Buckingham, Mr. Woodburn. Angelica, Mrs. Giffard; Miss Prue, Mrs. Ridout; Mrs. Foresight, Mrs. Cross;

And the Part of Mrs. Frail by Mrs. Worthington.

To begin exactly at Six o'Clock.

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H A Y - M A R K E T.

*Not Acted these Hundred Years.*

**A**T the Theatre in the Hay-Market, on this Day, being the 11th of September, will be reviv'd a Play, call'd

R O M E O and J U L I E T.

Written by Shakespear.

The Part of Romeo by Mr. CIBBER;

And the Part of Juliet to be perform'd by Miss JENNY CIBBER.

Boxes 4 s. Pit 2 s. 6 d. Gallery 1 s. 6 d.

Places for the Boxes to be had of the Housekeeper at the Theatre.

Ladies and Gentlemen are desir'd to send their Servants to keep their Places by Four o'Clock.

To begin exactly at Six o'Clock.

\* \* \* As the Admission of any Person behind the Scenes at that Theatre, must prove an Interruption to the Performance, no Money will be taken at the Stage-Door; and 'tis request'd no Gentleman will take Exception at his being denied Admittance there.

Figure 1. *General Advertiser*, Issue 3066, 11 September 1744.

Theo's main draw in 1744 was a newly-revised *Romeo and Juliet*, the first Shakespearean production since Otway's radical adaptation *Caius Marius* (1680). The advertisements for the production promised both novelty and repertory, assuring potential audiences that the play was both "not acted these 100 years" and "written by Shakespear" (fig 1). Familiarity and novelty also featured in the casting, which initially advertised only a single name: Cibber. "The part of Romeo by Mr Cibber; the part of Juliet to be perform'd by Miss Cibber" trumpeted the daily advertisements. Just as he had with his first and second wives, and to some extent his sister Charlotte, Theo was advancing the career of a female Cibber by producing a star vehicle that conveniently also had a significant role for himself. *Romeo and Juliet* was a canny choice for this project: although frequently printed, the play had not yet been restored to the stage. Theo's adaptation blended some of the elements (and speeches) that had made Otway's *Caius Marius* successful with the "restoration" of Shakespeare's language and characters, creating novelty through the reformulation of

familiarity. As Jean Marsden argues, his adaptation is an “an attempt to reconcile the Shakespearean text with its earlier adaption” (86). His *Romeo and Juliet* was just new enough to entice, but also firmly identified as a conservative return to traditional theatrical programming and performers – Theo was aligning himself with his father the Poet Laureate as a restorer of Shakespeare while signalling his theatrical distance from previous inhabitants of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, including Charles Macklin’s irregular troop and Henry Fielding’s experimental and politically obnoxious Great Mogul’s Company. A Cibber plus Shakespeare promised legitimate drama in an illegal theatre.

Theo Cibber thus marketed his adaptation as a return to authenticity: whereas Otway “rifled” Shakespeare of “half a Play” (prologue, l. 31) and transported Shakespeare’s young lovers into a Roman plot, Theo’s play was “written by Shakespear” – not himself. But Theo also borrows extensively from Otway and introduces some important novelties. The first is to open the play not with a street brawl, but with the reported news that the feud between the Capulets and Montagues has been exacerbated by a paternally-approved match between Romeo and Juliet, “which,” Old Capulet explains, “so increas’d the Anger of our Wives, / (Whose Quarrels we are ever apt to join in) / The Rage of civil War broke out more fiercely” (2). Capulet immediately asserts that his daughter never even knew of the plan and “knows not what is Love” (2), but the audience quickly learn that Romeo and Juliet have already secretly fallen in love with each other, although they have yet to discover that their passions are reciprocated. This conceit allows Romeo to demonstrate both constancy in his love for Juliet (saving his character from charges of fickleness) and filial piety in falling in love as initially instructed; Juliet, too, is following her father’s initial wishes in giving her heart to Romeo. The warring wives are to blame for the civil discord and the play’s tragedy. In Theo’s adaptation, there are no ungovernable children, only selfish, egotistical wives – a

dig at Susannah that also attempts to vindicate his own filial role. The second significant innovation is to extend the tomb scene to give the young lovers one final, doomed exchange. In a *coup de theatre*, Romeo, who has already rashly drunk his poison, wakes Juliet with a kiss:

Jul: The Gods have heard my Vows; it is my *Romeo*.  
Once more they have restor'd him to my Eyes.  
Hadst thou not come, sure I had slept for ever.  
But there's a sovereign Charm in they Embraces,  
That might do Wonders, and revive the dead...  
(Cibber, 62-3)

The lovers embrace, and Romeo dies in Juliet's arms. The extended tomb scene, which closely follows Otway's version, gives Juliet the chance to wonder, rave, love and despair in quick succession. She has twelve lines before Romeo's death and a further twenty-three line soliloquy before she stabs herself. In comparison, Shakespeare gives her just thirteen lines, interrupted by a lengthy speech from the Friar. Otway gives his Lavinia eighteen lines before she is interrupted by the arrival of her father with guards and Metellus, diverting attention from her to the lively stage action. Cibber's tomb scene speech is taken word-for-word from *Caius Marius* (V.407-11) but his innovation is in the stage business and direction. Theo's tomb scene is the first to focus on Juliet rather than the male characters. Whereas Otway's Lavinia spars with her father before stabbing herself, Cibber's Old Capulet does not enter until after his daughter's death: Juliet is never upstaged. Like all successful eighteenth-century Shakespearean adaptations, the greatest liberties have been taken with the heroine's role, highlighting the lead actress's artistry and encouraging audiences to feel with and for her. Juliet's tomb scene makes her the emotional fulcrum of the play: she commands the stage from her bier.

Theo's marketing of his *Romeo and Juliet* also encouraged audiences to see his daughter as the cynosure of both play and theatre. Theo was an expert in promoting public intimacy, in using novelty casting to exploit the slippage between an actress and her role: he had done it with both of his wives. Theo had his first wife, Jane, perform the title character in Charles Johnson's *Caelia*, a she-tragedy about an unmarried mother-to-be, when she was eight months pregnant. A lead role was unusual for Jane, who was outshone in Drury Lane by nearly every other actress, including Mrs Pritchard, Miss Raftor (Kitty Clive), Mrs Mills and Miss Holliday.<sup>3</sup> The visual realism created by of casting a heavily-pregnant woman in the role of a ruined girl seems to have been the only reason for giving Jane the part, and audiences were repeatedly encouraged to see Jane Cibber in the unfortunate *Caelia*. Theo's prologue encourages audiences to "*Behold* her sink beneath a Lover's Scorn, / And violated Truth and Beauty mourn" (ll. 9-10, emphasis in original) and Johnson's "advertisement to the reader" apologises for the indecency of dramatizing the labours of a midwife/bawd, but notes approvingly that "I had the Pleasure, however, to hear the serious Scenes applauded, and to see some of those very Spectators, who were offended at the lower Characters, join with *Cælia* in her Tears" (1). Jane Cibber's physical performance of the mortification of abandoned love was deeply moving: those who saw, felt. However, this was to be Jane's last appearance in public: she collapsed on stage and the next performance of *Caelia* was dismissed. Jane was confined for the rest of her pregnancy and died of puerperal fever shortly after giving birth.

Three years later, Theo joined forces with Aaron Hill and used a similar strategy when promoting his second wife's stage debut in *Zara*. The play was trailed for nearly two

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Cibber was not significant enough to merit her own *ODNB* entry, her own index entry in *The London Stage*, or a *BDA* entry of her own. She had a line in singing maids and confidantes.

weeks before its premiere with claims for novelty: it was a “New Tragedy” that was “new-dress’d” and offered a new performer in Mrs Cibber, this “being her first Attempt of that kind” (*London Daily Post*, Issue 365). These claims for novelty were balanced with acknowledgements that the new tragedy was only a translation of Voltaire’s popular *Zaire* and contained a raft of intertextual references to Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup> The claims for novelty are further softened by an appeal to nature, particularly the “natural” acting of Susannah Cibber. This line of publicity was designed to convince theatre-goers that Susannah, like the character she played, owed her success to nature, not art: this is a trope that also runs through the play. Osmyn, unable to penetrate the mystery of Zara’s behaviour, spends several scenes debating whether her behaviour is “simple nature” or darker “art.” He finally decides that: “*Art* was not made For *Zara*; --- *Art*, however innocent, looks like Deceiving” (IV.157-8). The implication in the packaging of Susannah-as-Zara assures audiences that neither Zara nor Susannah deceive: their performances are always true, always natural. Theo’s prologue for *Zara* continues this theme, devoting the last twenty-five lines to “the greatest Venture of my Life / ... a Wife” (ll. 23-4). Theo sets up the Susannah-as-Zara trope by stressing her naivety, her inexperience, and her artlessness in contrast to the established and accomplished actresses he hopes she will displace. “Her unskill’d Tongue would simple Nature speak ... Amidst a thousand Faults” (ll.33, 35). Susannah, he claims, is a real version of the artless and natural young sufferer she portrays, and he concludes by giving his young wife to the audience: “In You it rests, to Save her, or Destroy, / If She draw Tears from you, I weep – for Joy” (ll. 43-44). This intense identification of actress with role succeeded. *Zara*

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<sup>4</sup> Hill’s prologue positions *Zara* as the love-child of Racine and Shakespeare (“’Tis strange, that Nature never should inspire / A Racine’s Judgment, with a Shakespear’s Fire! / Howe’er, to-night---(to promise much we’re loth) / But---you’ve a Chance, to have a Taste of Both.” ll. 5-8, italics reversed) and to name-check *Othello* as a textual precursor: “from rack’d *Othello*’s rage he raised his style” (l. 11).

played for twelve nights and, as predicted, Susannah became a leading tragedienne. Theo's marketing of his new wife would stand in her in good stead for the rest of her career. She continued to use her stage roles to underscore and refine her celebrity persona, to portray herself as the artless sufferer, as the wronged woman she so often played.

Theo followed a very similar template to the one that had worked so well for Susannah when he launched his daughter's career. As with the many appeals to nature in Susannah's *Zara*, Jenny's *Juliet* was celebrated for its naivety, authenticity or naturalness, and potential. Theo made much of the correspondence between Jenny's and Juliet's age and budding womanhood. He notes in his published text that: "She was then but barely of *Juliet's Age, viz. --- not quite Fifteen*" (73) and dedicates the final turn of the prologue to a catalogue of her virtues, which marry the personal with the familial:

Young Jane, the blooming Promise of our Spring,  
Your Favour to a beauteous Flow'r may bring;  
Whate'er her Genius, and whate'er her Mind,  
Yet in the Husk of Infancy confin'd,  
Time, and Indulgence, can unfold alone:  
She the fair Bud—and you the rip'ning Sun.  
Kindly remember from what Root she came,  
And her just, hereditary Claim;  
Her Grandsire found a double Road to Fame,  
And to the Player join'd the Poet's Name:  
Sometimes you've smil'd upon her Sire's Endeavours,  
Who humbly hopes Continuance of your Favour  
Her Mother's Mem'ry fresh and fair survives,  
And added Lustre to the Daughter gives;  
By Nature's Self inspir'd she gain'd Applause,  
Let her Remembrance plead the Daughter's Cause...

(Prologue, ll. 21-36)

Jenny, like Juliet, was an ingénue: "She the fair Bud—and you the rip'ning Sun" (l.26). But she was a "bud" with a pedigree, a rose with a well-established name. Theo carefully reconfigures the Cibber family tree to put Jenny in closest proximity to Colley Cibber, the

doubly-famous grandsire, and concludes by figuring her as a second Jane Cibber. However, Theo's attempts to invoke Jane Cibber, his first wife, as a ghostly precursor to Jenny serves only to remind audiences of the current Mrs Cibber, the actress whose performances were said to be inspired by "Nature's Self" and were still "fresh and fair" (ll. 35, 33). Jane's first leading role was also her last, and in the decade since Jane's death, the second Mrs Cibber had completely eclipsed her predecessor.

Despite this accidental conjuring of his estranged wife, Theo's marketing was largely effective. The play was successful with at least twelve performances over the course of a three-month season, and the run was stopped by the Lord Chamberlain's enforcing of the Licencing Act (1737) rather than audience ennui. Every performance was advertised, and done so to highlight the Cibber name, which was repeated in small caps twice on each small ad [fig 1]. While Miss Jenny Cibber's Juliet is given second billing to her father's Romeo in the daily ads, her performance was the main marketing device of the run from start to finish. In addition to the sexualised prologue discussed above, Theo's marketing blitz included (puffed) reviews celebrating his daughter's genius and beauty, including a set of 'anonymous' verses on her embodiment of Juliet:

...And tell how sensibly my Heart was mov'd  
When *Juliet* own'd she passionately lov'd;  
What Pain I felt to hear the fond One grieve  
When banish'd *Romeo* took his early Leave!

...

So just her Accent, so correct her Air,  
My Soul confess'd a very *Juliet* there!

...

Where Innocence and rip'ning Beauty meet,  
A solid Judgment and a piercing Wit;  
These, on the *Stage*, Mankind, admiring, see,  
And these Mankind admire and trace in Thee!

(ll. 9-12; 16-17; 26-29)

The verses were published in a number of periodicals and newspapers, including the November 1744 *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *London Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> In addition to pre-performance marketing tools, these verses and reviews also function as advertisements, alerting readers that they can discover Jenny's "uncommon genius" for themselves while assuring a dubious public that both the Haymarket Academy and Jenny Cibber are patronised by Ladies of Quality and therefore represent the perfect blend of respectability and sexual allure:

Last Night the much-admir'd Play of Shakespear's, call'd Romeo and Juliet, was reviv'd at the New Theatre in the Haymarket; there was an exceeding crowded and most polite Audience. Many Persons of Distinction were in the Pit and Gallery, who could not find room in the Boxes, which were all bespoke. The whole Performance was candidly received. Miss Jenny Cibber met with a general and uncommon Applause, in the Character of Juliet; and was allowed by every one to give extraordinary Proofs of an uncommon Genius. The same is to be perform'd again this Night, at the particular Desire of several Ladies of Quality, who could not get Places Yesterday. (Issue 4333, 2)

In a later review of the sixth Day of *Romeo and Juliet*, audiences who had attended one of the first five performances were assured that "Miss Jenny Cibber (who has given Proof of an uncommon Genius) was greatly improved in the Character of Juliet ... the same Play is bespoke for this Night" (*Daily Advertiser*, Issue 3450, 2 October 1744, 1). Repeat business is good business.

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<sup>5</sup> Theo also reprinted it in full in his 1748 *Romeo and Juliet* (pp. 74-75), further supporting the assumption that the poem is a puff by Theo that he couldn't resist recirculating.

Theo's assiduous marketing did eventually force the Lord Chamberlain's hand: Theo claims that "the Monarch of Drury-Lane began to be jealous of what he at first laughingly affected to despise" (76) although this might have had more to do with Theo's poaching contracted actors and plays then in repertory at Drury Lane. The Academy was closed on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1744, but with one last publicity stunt: a benefit performance of *Romeo and Juliet* for Jenny initially planned for the 17<sup>th</sup> November, but deferred until the 17<sup>th</sup> December. The benefit was heavily advertised and given every chance of attracting a full and profitable house.

The remarkable forbearance shown to the Haymarket season might be attributable to Theo's programming. In many ways, *Romeo and Juliet* was an inspired choice. It was inoffensive to the government – more inoffensive than Otway's *Caius Marius*, whose Roman plot could be read as critique of the state – in its domestic tragedy, inoffensive to the patent houses, neither of which had produced *Romeo and Juliet* since 1662, and inoffensive to audiences, for whom Shakespeare was a badge of legitimacy. Shakespearean adaptations like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cymbeline*, also part of the 1744 season, toed the line in non-threatening legitimate theatre. Theo's 1744 season introduced *Romeo and Juliet* – and especially Juliet – to eighteenth-century audiences. That Theo did manage to attract large houses to his Academy of rebels and amateurs attests to the public interest in both *Romeo and Juliet* and the theatrical Cibbers. It seems, for a time, that Theo succeeded in putting the scandal of his second marriage behind him and presenting himself and his daughter as serious, legitimate actors. But this was not to last. When the Haymarket Academy was closed, Theo was left without a stage.

## II. *Romeo Rivall'd* (1748)

On November 29<sup>th</sup> 1748, *Romeo & Juliet* was revived on the London stage. But not by Theo. David Garrick “new-dress’d” the characters and put them on at Drury Lane with Susannah Cibber – Theo’s estranged wife – as Juliet and the Irish actor Spranger Barry as Romeo. The play was an immediate hit, with an impressive run of twenty-one performances before the end of the season. Theo, stung by Garrick’s failure to acknowledge his production, rushed his copy-text into print bundled with:

a Serio-Comic  
APOLOGY  
For Part of the LIFE of  
*Mr. Theophilus Cibber,*  
COMEDIAN.  
Written by HIMSELF,  
In which is contained,  
a PROLOGUE, an EPILOGUE, and a POEM,  
Wrote on the Play of ROMEO and JULIET being first Revived in 1744;  
Also some Addresses to the Publick, on different Occasions;  
LIKEWISE  
Original LETTERS that passed between the late Sir *Thomas DeVeil*, and *Mr. Theo. Cibber*, (*Relating to the Stage Act*) On a Stop being put to the Playing at the *Hay-Market*.  
Interspersed with  
Memoirs and Anecdotes concerning the STAGE-Management and Theatrical  
Revolutions, in the Years 1744, 1745, and 1746, &c.  
AND  
Cursory Observations on some Principal Performers;  
Particularly  
*Mr. QUIN*, *Mr. Ryan*, *Mr. Delane*, *Mrs. WOFFINGTON*, *Mrs. Ward*, and *Miss Bellamy*;  
*Mr. Garrick*, *Mr. Barry*, *Mrs. Cibber*, *Mrs. Clive*, *Mrs. Pritchard*, and Others.  
Concluding with a Copy of Verses called *The Contrite Comedian’s Confession*.  
(70)

Picking a fight by publishing proved to be a strategic error. Theo’s over-laden publication confused the significance of his adaptation and overwrote the memory of his performance; text, even when it is an effective fetish for performance, still struggles against the

immediate power of acting. Here, Theo's text served to invoke (unfavourably) other texts – most notably his father's *Apology* – and other performances – Mrs Cibber's and Mr Barry's. The public sided with the play they could see over the one in print: by forcing them to choose, Theo ensured he would lose. Garrick's adaptation entered the annals of theatre history as the definitive *Romeo and Juliet* two years later, when Spranger Barry and Susannah Cibber's partnership at Covent Garden rivalled David Garrick and George Anne Bellamy's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* throughout the winter of 1750, eclipsing this earlier rivalry and almost eliminating Theo from the performance history of *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>6</sup>

The comparable merits of the two *Romeos* (and their Romeos) was established in print when David Erskine Baker, in his 1782 *Biographica Dramatica*, gives short shrift to Cibber and loving encomia to Garrick for adapting *Romeo and Juliet* in dramaturgically similar veins. I quote at length to emphasise the unequal treatment:

123. *Romeo and Juliet*. A Tragedy, revised and altered from Shakespeare, by Mr. Theo Cibber; first revived (in September 1744) at the Theatre in the Hay-Market; afterwards acted at Drury-Lane, 8vo. No date [1748.] Subjoined to this is a serio-comic apology for part of the life of the author. Very considerable alterations and additions were made in this edition; but these agree so ill with the remainder written by Shakespeare, that it is impossible to read them with any degree of satisfaction.

124. *Romeo and Juliet*. A Tragedy. Acted at Drury-Lane, 12mo. 1751. The third of these alterations, which is now universally and repeatedly performed in all the

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Ritchie claims that "Garrick's 1748 adaptation appeared as a relative novelty; although Theo Cibber mounted a production of his adaptation of the play at the Haymarket in 1744, it ran for only ten performances before the Licensing Act was invoked, preventing further performances" (374).

British Theatres, and is the work of Mr. Garrick, whose perfect acquaintance with the properties of effect, and unquestionable judgment as to what will please an audience, have shewn themselves very conspicuously in this piece. For, without doing much more than restoring Shakespeare to himself, and the story to the Novel from which it was originally borrowed, he has rendered the whole more uniform, and worked up the catastrophe to a greater degree of distress than it held in the original; as in Juliet's awaking before Romeo's death, and the transports of the latter, on seeing her revive, over-coming even the very remembrance of the very late act of desperation he had committed, give scope for that sudden transition from rapture to despair, which make the recollection, that he *must* die, infinitely more affecting, and the distress of Juliet, as well as his own, much deeper than it is possible to be in Shakespeare's play, where she does not awake till after the poison has taken its full effect in the death of Romeo. There is one alteration, however, in this piece, which I must confess, does not appear to me altogether so necessary, viz. the introducing Romeo from the beginning as in love with Juliet, whereas Shakespeare seems to have intended, by making him at first enamoured with another (Rosalind), to point out his misfortunes in the consequence of one passion, as a piece of poetical justice for his inconstancy and falsehood in regard to a prior attachment, as Juliet's in some measure are for her breach of filial obedience, and her rashness in the indulgence of a passion, so opposite to the natural interests and connections of her family.

(317-319)

Cibber's adaption is summed up and rejected in a single sentence: "very considerable alterations and additions were made in this edition; but these agree so ill with the remainder written by Shakespeare, that it is impossible to read them with any degree of

satisfaction” (317). This absolute dismissal means it is easy to overlook the most important information in Baker’s summary: “first revived at the Theatre in the Hay-Market; *afterwards acted at Drury-Lane*” (318, emphasis mine). This “afterwards” is Garrick’s 1748 production. The Drury Lane revival *was* Theo’s adaptation, which is why Garrick was forced to advertise it not as new but as “Never acted there ... The Characters New Dress’d”. Cibber’s *Romeo* was the inspiration for Garrick’s – Garrick uncharacteristically makes no claims to novelty beyond costume.

The advertising strategy is significant, because we do not have reliable evidence of any of the performance texts. Because both Cibber and Garrick presented their *Romeo and Juliets* as “written by Mr. Shakespear,” they were not required to license the text, meaning that no copies were registered. Prompt books for the performances do not exist. There is a 1748 *Romeo and Juliet. By Shakespear, With some alterations and an additional scene. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane* (Tonson, 1748), but this appears to be a spurious version of the 1750 text. It is therefore difficult to know exactly how much Garrick’s script changed between 1748 and 1750, and we also have no record of the 1750 Covent Garden performance text, although a pirated 1754 edition claims to represent the play “as it is acted at Covent Garden and Drury Lane,” muddying the performance history still further. And of course, we know that printed playtexts, even those marketed as authentic representations of the play “as acted at...” differed wildly from performance texts. The printed play excluded stage business and included longer speeches and even whole scenes cut for effective playing. Despite these caveats, the evidence we do have is still telling.

Regardless of when the textual changes seen in the 1750 copy-text were introduced to the performance text, Garrick’s adaptation is based on Cibber’s. Garrick’s 1750 *Romeo*

*and Juliet* does not follow Cibber's word-for-word or even scene-for-scene, but nor is it a wholesale rejection of Cibberisms. In his examen, Baker focuses on two of Garrick's "innovations," one of which he applauds (having Juliet awake in time to watch Romeo die) and one he gently deprecates (having Romeo in love with Juliet from the start). Despite the fact that both innovations are found in Cibber's adaption, it is Garrick's changes that have "rendered the whole more uniform" (318) while Cibber's "agree so ill with the remainder written by Shakespeare, that it is impossible to read them with any degree of satisfaction" (317). Garrick is given credit for improving Shakespeare for the eighteenth-century stage, and Cibber blasted for defacing it. Garrick's name – his brand – protects his legacy and colours the reception of his adaptation. Theo Cibber's name also colours the reception of his work: authorial reputation is the sole barometer of perceived success. Theo Cibber's adaptation is assumed to be bad because Theo was bad. If Aaron Hill is to be believed, Theo Cibber's reputation was coloured by his performance of low comedians and empty boasters even before the public relations disaster of the Cibber-Sloper trials. Hill concludes his preface to *Zara* by asserting that "Mr. Cibber ... is an Actor, of as unlimited a Compass of Genius, as ever I saw on the Stage; and, is, barely, receiv'd, as he deserves, when the Town is most favourable" (n.pag). After 1740, the Town was decidedly unfavourable. Theo, caricatured as Ancient Pistol in the press, was always seen as a mutineer, never a manager.

Authorial reputation – branding – has determined the reception of both Theo Cibber and David Garrick. But Cibber's 1744 *Romeo* was dramaturgically sound. It played well and was good enough to appropriate. Theo failed where Garrick succeeded: in public relations. Theo was a decent comedian and a canny impresario, but his greed meant he was spectacularly bad at judging public opinion. His attempt to merge his stage and celebrity personae, a strategy that had worked so well for his wife, backfired because the roles he played were

neither heroic nor sympathetic. Where Garrick was a celebrated actor and manager widely regarded as a promoter of public and theatrical decency, Theo was a comedian whose own father thought him unworthy of theatrical management and a personality best known for his attempts to promote and then profit from his wife's adultery. By not separating his personal voice from his authorial one, Theo ensured his adaptation would be "impossible to read with any degree of satisfaction" (Baker, 317). Had he simply responded to the 1748 Drury Lane *Romeo and Juliet* by printing his adaptation without commentary, he would probably now be remembered as the first restorer of *Romeo and Juliet*, much as his father is admitted to have revived both *Richard III* and *King John*.<sup>7</sup> But Theo packaged his script with personal letters, observations and anecdote, trying to capitalise on his father's *Apology* with his own "Serio-Comic APOLOGY" and assorted theatrical memoirs. This attempt to capitalise on the Cibber brand and his father's fame undermined both. Whereas audiences were happy to watch Cibberian Shakespeare, *readers* were less able to separate the adaptation from the faux apology, the Shakespeare from the Cibber. Furthermore, Theo's mock-autobiography was such a bad imitation of his father's voice that it called both Theo's Shakespearean adaptation *and* his father's *Apology* into question. The act of publication changed public perception of the performances, rewriting a stage success as something "impossible to *read*". Theo's serio-comic apology reminded the public how very little they liked him, something they had apparently been willing to overlook on Jenny's behalf.

### III. Rival Juliets

Unfortunately for Jenny, her father's devaluing of the Cibber brand affected her reputation as well. Jenny is the only of Theo's children to have been trained for the stage, and she seems to have been fairly well received at the start of her career: she played a number of

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<sup>7</sup> See McGirr, *Partial Histories* 109-144.

juvenile roles from 1742, including the Duke of York and Prince Edward in revivals of her grandfather's adaptation of *Richard III*. If left in the Covent Garden nursery under David Garrick's tutelage, she might have had a very different career. But her father used her to launch his season at the Haymarket, and gave her a run of leading roles. Her 1744 season included the Shakespearean heroines Imogen and Desdemona (to her father's Othello), as well as repertory favourites such as Hermione (*Distres'd Mother*), Rose (*Recruiting Officer*), and Indiana (*Conscious Lovers*). In plays in which she had no part, Jenny was enough of an attraction to be tasked with speaking the Prologue or Epilogue. Even after the abortive 1744 season, Jenny was seen as an actress with great potential. In 1750, her appearance at Drury Lane in the role of Alicia (*Jane Shore*) was heavily advertised and reviewed. The newsworthiness of her performance and the reviews of her acting suggests general, if moderate, approval:

Last Night Mrs. *Midnight* [...] was at Drury-Lane Play-House to see Miss *Jenny Cibber* perform the Part of *Alicia* in *Jane Shore* [...]. The old Lady, who generally speaks with Caution and Deliberation, and always with great Truth and Justice, observed that our young Actress was at first dash'd, and she believes would not have been able to have proceeded, had not she been animated by the repeated Applause of the People. However, after that, she play'd the Part much better than cou'd be expected from one of her Years and Practice; and if a proper Regard is paid to her Modesty and Merit, the old Lady is of Opinion she will become an extraordinary good Player.

(Issue 2635, 2)

But in other quarters, her name was already against her. Garrick disapproved from the start, complaining in 1744 that "the girl, I believe, may have genius, but unless she changes her preceptor, she must be entirely ruined" (qtd. in Burnim, 128). He did give Jenny a trial in

1750, but had her play *Jane Shore's* Alicia, a role her step-mother had added to her own repertoire in 1747 and continued to act to great acclaim. Garrick's performance of impartiality and fairness reads like an invitation to fail. Her return to the stage generated buzz and no doubt profit, but the pre-performance publicity seemed determine to manage expectations downwards: "The Part of Alicia to be attempted by Miss JANE CIBBER" (*General Advertiser*, Issue 4990, 18 October 1750, 2). Where Mrs Cibber performs, Miss Cibber only attempts. His casting young, inexperienced Jenny Cibber in a role owned by the celebrated Mrs Cibber made sure that audiences would evaluate Jenny not according to her own merits, but in comparison to her step-mother's iconic performance in the part. Given this invidious comparison, the restrained praise for Jenny's performance is all the more remarkable. But it was not enough. Another reviewer opined that Jenny played "quite in the old style, not lik'd at all, tho' not hiss'd" (Cross-Hopkins *Diaries*, qtd. Burnim, p. 59). Jenny's association with "the old style" was the end of her career. Garrick argued that the "Manner of Speaking ye Laureat has taught her" disqualified her as an actress (Burnim, 59). The genealogy her father presented as her claim to theatrical legitimacy in the 1744 Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* was now the greatest bar to her success. Her inability to "change her preceptor" – here glossed as "The Laureat" but actually her father – coloured her reception, tainted her brand. Her "modesty" is under threat as long as her father is in charge of promoting her "merit." Strikingly, Garrick does not refer to any Cibber by name here or in any of his caustic dismissals of "the old style," allowing him to conflate the still-popular Colley with the generally-despised Theo. The Cibber brand told against her.

Given the complaints about "the old style," it would be easy to dismiss Jenny's failure as an actress as an example of changing audience tastes and the speed with which Garrick's revolution in acting style took hold. But as I have argued elsewhere, this rather

overstates Garrick's innovations and begs the question of the third theatrical Cibber in this story.<sup>8</sup> Susannah Arne Cibber, Garrick's preferred Alicia, Desdemona and of course, his Juliet, was, in both name and training, as much a Cibber as was her step-daughter. Both had been trained by Colley Cibber and promoted by Theo. And if Kitty Clive's estimation of her rival is to be believed, Susannah did not leave off her Cibberian airs when she left her husband. But Mrs Cibber was a leading tragedienne beloved by audiences while Miss Cibber was ridiculed for possessing the same Cibberian airs. Both Mrs Cibber's triumph and Miss Cibber's failure are, in no small part, Theo's doing. Theo was never far away from his wife or daughter, or their professional reputation. We see this in his attempt to profit from his daughter's acting, demonstrated in the grovelling-yet-brazen letter he published in the *Daily Post* December to advertise the last performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. The letter reads in part: "After twenty-five Years being on the Stage, I am, without even a pretended Reason, excluded it; I have therefore resolv'd (with Permission) on taking a Benefit for my Child: if it meets with the Encouragement of the Publick, and many Friends flatter me it will, I shall venture at one more for myself" (*Daily Post*, Issue 7887, 12 December 1744, 2). Theo is taking his daughter's benefit: there is as little deception about who the performance will profit as there is about the nature of the entertainment at Theo's Academy at the Haymarket. He is putting on plays in violation of the Licensing Act for his own personal profit, a line of work necessitated by his wife's refusal to play in any theatre employing him. With both patent theatres shut against him and public opinion squarely on Susannah's side, Theo was left with little choice but to attempt to exploit his daughter's innocence and talent. His ultimate failure in promoting his daughter as a surrogate for his wife thus says more about his irretrievably damaged reputation than it says about Jenny's skill. As we have

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<sup>8</sup> See McGirr, *Stage Mothers* 63-78.

seen, Jenny was a victim of her name and her dependent position. She had the makings of a good actress: she was beginning to get recognition even before the abortive 1744 season, when she received significant attention and extended her repertoire in both comedy and tragedy. As late as 1750 we see praise for her skill and further potential hedged only by concerns about the fate of her “modesty” in the hands of her “preceptors”. Jenny ultimately failed as an actress because she was her father’s daughter.

But Susannah’s success as Mrs Cibber can also be credited to her husband. Susannah married into a theatrical dynasty. Her recently-retired father-in-law used his leisure time to train the young singer for the dramatic stage, and Theo put his not-inconsiderable energies into promoting his wife’s talents (and earnings). As Mrs Cibber, Susannah had professional opportunities and name recognition she lacked as Miss Arne. Within four years of her marriage and only two years into her stage career, she also had notoriety. The Cibber-Sloper trials may have exposed her as an adulteress, but the facts of the case told against her husband. By the time Mrs Cibber returned to the stage in 1742 hers was a household name, but it was the name of a woman who had been mistreated and who deserved pity and patronage. The scandal of her marriage allowed Mrs Cibber to act the wronged wife, to align her celebrity persona with the tragic heroines – Desdemona, Lady Brute, Isabella – she made her signature roles. Her Juliet followed this mould: Garrick’s real innovation was to age Juliet from 14 to 18, transforming the girl so heavily promoted in 1744 into a woman. Susannah was 34 when she first played Juliet. She was already marked by tragedy, already adept in asking forgiveness for crimes of passion, on stage and off. In Susannah’s interpretation, Juliet was not an ingénue but another of her wronged, doomed wives. Juliet-as-Susannah was “infinitely more affecting” than Juliet without the off-stage pathos.

When Garrick mounted his own *Romeo and Juliet*, he appropriated Theo's script and Theo's wife. Baker waxes rhapsodically about Garrick's "perfections" of the story, but just as his dispraise of Theo's version cannot be separated from Theo's serio-comic apology, so his praise of Garrick cannot be separated from his admiration of Garrick's co-star. The tomb scene was effective not because Romeo died, but because Juliet woke up. As Francis Gentleman enthused, "The waking of *Juliet* before *Romeo's* death, is exceedingly judicious; it gives the opportunity of working the pathos to its tenderest pitch, and shows a very fine picture..." (148). *Her* pathos brings the "catastrophe to a greater degree of distress than it held in the original" (Baker 319): *her* acting allows Garrick (or Spranger Barry) to react. As *The Gentleman's Magazine* concluded, Mrs Cibber's performance turned the play into "JULIET and ROMEO" (438). Jenny Cibber demonstrated the dramatic potential of the scene, but Susannah Cibber made it one of the touchstones of the Shakespearean canon. In her performance, through her reputation, Susannah re-created the role of Juliet, and her interpretation of the part would become the definitive one for much of the eighteenth century.

Whereas Juliet was first and foremost a (sexualised) daughter in Jenny Cibber's hands, Susannah's Juliet is a wife. Theo may have encouraged audiences to leer at his daughter and anticipate her "ripening beauty," but Jenny's was always a performance of incipient sexuality. Old Capulet's interference in Juliet's romantic destiny – first by suggesting Romeo, then forbidding him and insisting upon the match with Paris – creates the tragedy. Juliet is a pawn in her father's dynastic strategies: this focus encourages audiences to see Juliet and the young actress embodying her as the vessel through which peace or continued discord will reign. Conversely, Theo's marriage to Susannah and publication of her adultery made the older actress a publicly and yet strangely legitimately

sexual agent. This invited a very different kind of gaze. The slippage between Susannah's celebrity persona and her stage presence coloured audience appreciation of Juliet's character and recalibrated the emotional response, especially in the extended tomb scene, which suddenly discovered deep intertextuality with Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, whose tomb scene was the most famous in eighteenth-century drama.

Susannah, who had been dubbed Calista in periodical responses to the Cibber-Sloper trials, responded by adding *The Fair Penitent* to her repertoire in her comeback season of 1742-3 and owning the association. Calista would become one of her more popular roles, with at least fifty-four performances between 1742 and 1764. In 1748, her Calista (on the 24<sup>th</sup> November) immediately preceded her Juliet (on the 29<sup>th</sup>). Juliet's tomb scene was thus a return with a difference to *The Fair Penitent's* tomb scene, in which Calista rages against societal pressures to express penitence and admits her continuing love for her lost Lothario, adding yet more poignancy to the fleeting reunion of *Romeo and Juliet's* star-crossed lovers. Calista, like Susannah, rejected her husband for her lover – Susannah's Juliet, ignoring Paris's corpse and embracing Romeo's, follows suit.

Susannah played Juliet at least eighty-seven times, and every performance was an opportunity to remind audiences that she was a fair penitent, that she had abjured a Romeo, that she had suffered nobly for love. Mrs Cibber's affecting tragedy was her terrible marriage: she was, *in propria persona*, an object lesson about the necessary tragedy that follows "rashness in the indulgence of a passion" -- and audiences loved her for it. Susannah turned penance into art. The poignancy of her nightly performances of suffering, madness and death moved audiences to forgiveness. They extended their sympathy from the characters she played to the actress herself. Thus, even though her personal reputation never entirely recovered from the shame of her marriage, in death Mrs Cibber was found

worthy of public mourning and monumentalising. Theo Cibber was little mourned when his ship wrecked in the Irish Sea; Susannah Cibber was buried in Westminster Abbey. The contrasting fates of Susannah and Theo Cibber proves that to be Cibberian was *both* to be brazen, immoral and talentless *and* to be a national treasure. Susannah's public separation from Theo allowed her to retain the Cibber name and residual public affection for the dynasty, leaving Theo and his dependants with nothing.

In a final twist, Jenny Cibber may have failed as an actress, but she did leave a lasting legacy. On October 9, 1756, David Garrick mounted a new *Romeo and Juliet* with a new Juliet. For this production, he copied Theo's strategy of familial casting to blur the distinction between actress and role. Hannah Maria Pritchard made her debut as Juliet under the watchful eye of her mother, Hannah Pritchard, who played Lady Capulet. John Genest records that "Miss Pritchard's was a most remarkable first appearance—the Particularity of the public for her mother—Garrick's patronage and tuition, her own beautiful face, which was fascinating to a degree, had all great attraction. Mrs Pritchard, as Lady Capulet, leading in her daughter as Juliet, the distress of the young lady, the good wishes and tenderness of the town, all combined to make an affecting scene..." (Genest 474). The "daughterly" Juliet, here again in the performance of an actual daughter, proved to be an affecting interpretation of the role. The prompter Richard Cross noted that Miss Pritchard "Met with uncommon Applause" in the first act. (qtd. *London Stage*, 4.2: 557). Though, as with Jenny's Juliet, the eighteenth-century audience was less invested in her tomb scene, preferring Mrs Cibber's wifely Juliet for the tragic dénouement. However, the wide-eyed innocence of the daughterly Juliet, the virginal naïf whose personal fulfilment is thwarted by the quarrels of the older generation, has a performance genealogy that extends well beyond the eighteenth century. Susannah Cibber's Juliet-as-tragic-wife may have been

the preferred interpretation for audiences addicted to she-tragedy, but traces of Jenny Cibber's Juliet can be seen in modern cinematic takes on the role, from Olivia Hussey's performance in Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 *Romeo and Juliet* to Claire Danes's angelic Juliet in Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *Romeo + Juliet*. Making Juliet the star-making vehicle for an ingenue is a tradition that can be traced back to Theo Cibber and his 1744 *Romeo and Juliet*.

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