At first sight the eighteenth century appears to be the least interesting and significant period of theatre history since the Middle Ages. Some histories of theatre virtually omit it, while others treat it as some sort of connecting corridor from the splendours of the Renaissance to the innovations of the nineteenth century, essential but not worth lingering in.

Indeed the eighteenth century produced few great dramatists; several comic talents perhaps: Sheridan and Goldsmith, Marivaux and Beaumarchais, Goldoni and Gozzi, Holberg and Lessing. But an anthology of world drama could legitimately be published without including the works of any of these. Only in the emergent theatre of late eighteenth-century Germany can one point to the major dramas of Goethe and Schiller. Nor could the eighteenth century boast of important innovations in theatre technology, except towards the end of the century with the replacement of candle-light by oil-lamps.

What was significant about the theatre of the eighteenth century, however, is that it developed in Continental Europe a function in society unparalleled since its role in ancient Greece. From being an entertainment at court or in the marketplace it became a political forum for the bourgeoisie, a focus for national identity and even revolution. It moved from being formal and stylized, or from being vulgar and coarse, to a new level of realism; the stage began to search for authenticity and newly to mirror the everyday lives of the spectators. The theatre began to analyse its own aesthetic and to develop from a craft into an art. Actors and actresses rose from the social level of prostitutes and jugglers to become favoured
members of society, and playwrights began to be paid properly for their work. In short, the theatre reflected the philosophical glory of the century, the questioning, the tolerance, and the democratic thinking of the period of Enlightenment.

But in the relative security and unquestioned national identity of eighteenth-century England, the theatre was less concerned with philosophy than with profits, and its profits depended on appeasing new social forces of bourgeois morality and new impositions of governmental control. In April 1698 Jeremy Collier, a dissenting clergyman, published *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage together with the Sense of Antiquity upon this Argument*. For a short view the book was not particularly short; running to over 280 pages, Collier mounted an extraordinary, vitriolic attack on contemporary drama. His microscopic examination of the language of Congreve, Vanbrugh, and others was designed to prove his case that, though drama *ought* to be moral ('The business of plays is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice'):

Our poets write with a different view ... Their liberties in the following particulars are intolerable, viz., their smuttiness of expression, their swearing, profaneness and lewd application of scripture, their abuse of the clergy, their making their top characters libertines and giving them success in their debauchery.

In the aftermath of *A Short View* dozens of pamphlets appeared, attacking and defending the stage; Vanbrugh replied in a pamphlet in June, Congreve responded with another in July. It was not only a pamphlet war: Congreve in *The Way of the World* (1700) provided the best answer to Collier, proof that Restoration comic drama could deal seriously with evil, and Farquhar, in *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), showed that comedy could move beyond London to explore issues as serious as recruiting or divorce without offending Collier. But more worryingly for the theatres, the controversy moved to the courts: actors found themselves prosecuted, with admittedly limited success, for speaking particular lines noted down by informers placed in the audience by the Society for the Reformation of Manners. Adding 'Egod' to a line was now a dangerous business; even speaking lines previously authorized could result in a prosecution.

Something about Collier's invective was clearly timely. Changes in social power, the increasing significance of bourgeois values in opposition to the aristocratic world of the Restoration, found in Collier a suitable champion for a morality that this newly important segment of society wished to see enshrined at the centre of public behaviour. The theatre was the most public forum for such a debate. Apart from anything else, the Collier controversy pushed theatre into the centre of debate and established writing about the theatre as an energetic field of literary and moral argument. Sir Richard Steele, the most vigorous exponent of
the attempt to reconcile the new dominant morality with drama, may have succeeded in creating a moral and sentimental drama, particularly in *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), but his efforts were mostly concentrated on essays about drama and theatre in the widely-read periodicals, like the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, which he published.

While Steele may have transformed the nature of high comedy, the most popular changes in comedy were to happen elsewhere. On 29 January 1728 at the Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre a packed house watched the first night of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*. Gay’s ballad-opera had been turned down by Colley Cibber, one of the managers at the rival patent theatre, Drury Lane, the only other company licensed to act in London. The style of Gay’s opera was too novel for that staid company, whose major dramatic success was to be George Lillo’s tragedy of an apprentice led astray, *The London Merchant* (1731), a play whose huge impact on the development of European drama was out of all proportion to

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### SOCIAL SATIRE AND POPULAR SONG

John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) created a triumphantly successful new genre by adding new satiric words to the tunes of popular ballads. Peachum, the master criminal, still recognizes that a lawyer is an even more efficient thief than himself.

**MRS PEACHUM.** I am very sensible, husband, that Captain Macbeth is worth money, but I am in doubt whether he hath not two or three wives already, and then if he should die in a session or two, Polly’s dowery would come into dispute.

**PEACHUM.** This, indeed, is a point which ought to be considered.

**ACT X. A Soldier and a Sailor.**

A fox may steal your hen, sir.
A whore your health and peace, sir.
Your daughter rob your chest, sir.
Your wife may steal your rest, sir.
A thief your goods and plate,
But this is all but picking.
With rest, peace, chest, and chickens
It ever was decreed, sir.
If lawyer’s hand is fed, sir,
He steals your whole estate.

The lawyers are bitter enemies to those in our way. They don’t care that anybody should get a clandestine livelihood but themselves.
its minimal success in influencing English tragedy. Gay's friends persuaded John Rich, the manager at Lincoln's Inn Fields, to take on his startlingly new combination of popular song, underworld comedy, and political and social satire. Rich was ready to give up after the first rehearsal but was encouraged to persevere. On that first night the audience numbered over 1,200: 250 in the boxes, 300 in the pit, over 600 in the galleries, and a few people sitting on the stage. Initially the audience was bemused. As Alexander Pope, Gay's friend, reported later, We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event, till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyll, who sat in the box next to us, say 'It will do,—it must do!—I see it in the eyes of them'. This was a good while before the first act was over.

By the end the applause was tumultuous and the new form was an unprecedented success. Before the season was over, the play had been performed sixty-two times. The popular tag claimed the work 'had made Rich gay and Gay rich'—indeed Gay told his friends he earned over £600 from the play.

Rich's audience was used to innovation. From 1716 he had experimented with pantomime, his own adaptation of commedia dell'arte, starring himself as Harlequin under his stage name John Lun, and the experiment of a new annual pantomime continued till his death. He also tried adding other entertainments to the main bill; his development of the 'whole show' firmly established the practice of adding short farces, musical entertainments, processions, rope-dancers, contortionists, indeed almost anything to create a varied evening's entertainment for the audience. Some would complain about the unseemliness of this rag-bag; no one could dispute its success.

The extraordinary triumph of The Beggar's Opera not only spawned dozens of imitations but also confirmed Rich in the plan of moving to a larger theatre. In 1730 he began to design a theatre in Covent Garden, completed in 1732. Others too perceived the implications of the work's success: in 1729, in the teeth of city opposition, Thomas Odell opened a new theatre in Goodman's Fields in the East End of the city, at the opposite end of London from normal theatrical activity. Odell had recognized that a sizeable part of the audiences filling the theatre to see Gay's work came from the eastward spread of the expanding city. The new audience deserved its own local theatre. Odell's plan was helped by the creation in 1720 of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, mostly used by visiting companies at first but a wedge driven into the near-monopoly of the patent houses, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields.

In spite of the reformers' use of the law-courts, the moral and clerical concerns of Collierism did not result in new legislation. Government only uses moral anxiety for its own ends. The Licensing Act of 1737, by far the most important governmental control of theatrical activity in the century, was rushed through parliament...
THE LICENSING ACT 1737

Pushed through Parliament at high speed, Walpole's legislation re-established censorship of plays through the Lord Chamberlain's office. The Examiner of Plays had to approve the texts of all spoken drama in British theatres until the office was abolished in 1968.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that from and after the said twenty-fourth day of June, one thousand, seven hundred and thirty-seven, no person shall for hire, gain or reward, act, perform, represent or cause to be acted, performed or represented any new interlude, tragedy, comedy, opera, play, farce, or other entertainment of the stage, or any part or parts therein, or any new act, scene or other part added to any old interlude, tragedy, comedy, opera, play, farce or other entertainment of the stage, or any new prologue or epilogue, unless a true copy thereof be sent to the Lord Chamberlain of the King's household for the time being, fourteen days at least before the acting, representing or performing thereof, together with an account of the playhouse or other place where the same shall be and the time when the same is intended to be first acted, represented or performed, signed by the master or manager, or one of the masters or managers of such playhouse or place, or company of actors therein.

by Walpole: first proposed on 20 May it became law on 24 June. As Lord Chesterfield noted in his speech in the House of Lords, 'It seems designed not only as a restraint on the licentiousness of the stage; but it will prove a most arbitrary restraint on the liberty of the stage.' Two separate sets of interest combined to ensure the Bill's passage. The first was Walpole's anxiety at the mounting use of the stage for political satire; Gay's political satire in *The Beggar's Opera* had stung Walpole but the sequel, *Polly* (1729), was so direct in its mockery that Walpole was able to use the existing powers of the Lord Chamberlain to have the play banned completely. Yet by the middle of the next decade, in Henry Fielding's exuberant satiric plays like *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1737) at the Little Haymarket Theatre, the theatres were using an unprecedented freedom to attack government policy. Walpole's pretext for the Bill was an anonymous and now lost play, *The Golden Rump*, which mocked the King himself as an animate idol in need of the Queen's assistance with enemas to help his golden bowels. The obscenity and ridiculing of the monarch were sufficiently outrageous to guarantee the Bill's passage. The play was passed to Walpole by Henry Giffard, the manager.
of Goodman’s Fields; Fielding for one suspected that the play had been planted by Walpole himself.

Walpole’s interests neatly merged with the anxieties of the managers and financial backers of the two patent theatres. The threat of the new London theatres was substantial and frightening. Colley Cibber, one of the triumvirate of actors who ran Drury Lane, was worried:

How could the same stock of plays supply four theatres which (without such additional entertainments as a nation of common sense ought to be ashamed of) could not well support two? Satiety must have been the natural consequence of the same plays being twice as often repeated as now they need be, and satiety puts an end to all tastes that the mind of man can delight in.

The Licensing Act not only restricted the production of legitimate drama to the two patent theatres but also required all plays to be censored by the Lord Chamberlain, a task he delegated to his Examiners of Plays. But few plays were banned outright; most were slightly altered, generally by that process of self-censorship that ensured a play was acceptable long before the manuscript was submitted for licensing.

There were many ways round the first restriction. Plays were, for instance, offered free to audiences paying, notionally, for a concert or for food and drink. The irrepressible Samuel Foote invited his audience to tea, then performed his satirical revue playlets as a noon matinée and was finally appeased by being granted a personal patent in 1766, in part an act of sympathy for his loss of a leg after a riding accident—though, typically, Foote carried on acting, starring in his satire on doctors, *The Devil upon Two Sticks* (1768). Equally typically, Foote managed to sell on the patent, which was explicitly restricted to his own lifetime.

What the highly competitive conditions of London theatre seemed to be waiting for was a star performer, somebody who could transform both acting and the social status of theatre. On 15 September 1747 the new season at Drury Lane opened with a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Charles Macklin as Shylock, a role he had begun to play in 1740 and would carry on playing almost till his retirement from the stage in 1789. Macklin’s brilliant performance, changing Shylock from the comic tradition into a fierce and powerful figure, was already a known quantity. But Drury Lane was under new management and the prologue to the season, written by Dr Johnson, set out the policy of the company.

Ah! let not censure term our fate our choice,
The stage but echoes back the public voice.
The drama’s laws the drama’s patrons give,
For we that live to please, must please to live . . .
’Tis yours this night to bid the reign commence
Of rescued nature and reviving sense;

The Licensing Act not only restricted the production of legitimate drama to the two patent theatres but also required all plays to be censored by the Lord Chamberlain, a task he delegated to his Examiners of Plays. But few plays were banned outright; most were slightly altered, generally by that process of self-censorship that ensured a play was acceptable long before the manuscript was submitted for licensing.
To chase the charms of sound, the pomp of show,
For useful mirth and salutary woe.

The audience was already being asked to accept one major innovation: gentlemen were now banned from taking their seats on the stage or wandering backstage during the performance. The play was clearly to be more important than the social activity of the audience. One of the managers, James Lacy, had been running Drury Lane for three years; he had now taken on as co-manager the newly established star of the theatre, the greatest actor of the century, David Garrick. Indeed Garrick seems to have been the man who encouraged the use of the word ‘star’ to describe a famous actor. Benjamin Victor, writing in 1761, could look back on Garrick’s appearance as the arrival of ‘a bright luminary in the theatrical hemisphere . . . [which] soon after became a star of the first magnitude and was called Garrick’, the first recorded application of ‘star’ to the theatre.

Garrick, an unsuccessful wine merchant, had his first play performed in 1740. He began acting in 1741, out of town, at Ipswich. Ipswich was one of the permanent theatres on the increasingly important and established provincial circuit as temporary fit-up stages began to be replaced by permanent purpose-built theatres in, for instance, Bristol (1729), York (1734), and Ipswich (1736). His London debut as an actor, as Richard III at Goodman’s Fields in October 1741, was an immediate and spectacular success. He soon followed it with the other major Shakespeare tragic roles, defining his success from the beginning in terms of his unswerving allegiance to Shakespeare as the centre of the national culture.

Garrick was Lacy’s natural choice and soon dominated the partnership. His reign at Drury Lane lasted till 1776. Whatever else he achieved, his career transformed the social status of acting; as Dr Johnson said, ‘his profession made him rich and he made his profession respectable’. He was a friend of the high and mighty in London society, fully accepted as a gentleman, living in his riverside villa at Hampton with its gardens by Capability Brown and its temple dedicated to Shakespeare. At his death, he was accorded a grand funeral and burial in Westminster Abbey. His magnificent library with its unrivalled collection of English drama was a resource for scholars and he bequeathed it to the British Museum at his death, where it still forms the cornerstone of the British Library’s holdings of early drama. He corresponded with the major figures of European theatre, particularly in France, where his visits had a profound influence on Diderot’s revolutionary thinking about the nature of acting in *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien* (*The Paradox of the Actor*), which contrasts the tradition of feeling with Garrick’s virtuoso demonstration of the application of intellect and observation in the creation of emotional intensity in a role. He was also the most painted actor ever, the subject of hundreds of paintings and engravings, a very visible icon of acting.

Garrick’s management hardly produced any major new plays for the repertoire. New comedies and tragedies, new farces and afterpieces were regularly produced
Stage scenery, 1781. This set, for a sea-coast scene, was designed by Philip de Loutherbourg. Its representation of landscape and its careful exploration of depth through the wing-pieces were innovatory strengths of de Loutherbourg’s work.

and Garrick corresponded encouragingly with some dramatists and dealt with the antagonism of the many disgruntled would-be playwrights whose prized work he turned down. But none of the new work has kept its place as an established part of the performed or read drama. His own plays were pragmatic, often very popular, responses to the audience’s taste. The Drury Lane repertoire came increasingly to be built around the concept of a classic repertory, a stock body of plays revived each season.

Always interested in production, Garrick experimented with new effects and spectacle; in 1771, for instance, he attracted Philip de Loutherbourg to London to develop new styles of stage lighting and scenery, new ways of representing place and landscape, and new methods of using light to brilliant effect in night scenes, culminating in his development of the picturesque and topographically exact scenery for *The Wonders of Derbyshire* (1779).

Garrick was prepared too to explore the possibilities of costuming. Where, as Steele wrote in 1711, ‘the ordinary method of making an hero is to clap a huge
plume of feathers upon his head', Garrick was intrigued by the opportunities for a more 'authentic' costuming, following the lead of Aaron Hill, who designed a set of 'old Saxon habits' for his play Athelwold in 1731, though it was Macklin who achieved a 'Scottish'-styled Macbeth in 1773.

In all Garrick worked towards a coherence of style and an integrity of effect in production. If hardly a modern-style director he was trying to create a unity in performance to an extent previously unknown. The attitude extended to his work with the acting company: under his management, rehearsals were taken with great seriousness and actors' temperamental displays were firmly dealt with. Garrick may have been the leading actor in the company but he collected an ensemble of fine performers around him: Spranger Barry and Kitty Clive, Peg Woffington and Hannah Pritchard, all the best actors of the age worked with Garrick.

His own acting was as daring and virtuosic as possible. For his performance as Hamlet he had a wig-maker produce a trick wig whose hair he could make literally stand on end in his confrontation with his father's ghost. But such tricks were far less important than the intensity and innovatory naturalism of his effects. Above all, he seemed to enjoy acting and audiences enjoyed watching him. He also depended on a rapidity and vivacity of effect, allowing his mobility to generate emotional intensity without ever being trapped by a single overarching mood. Where the power of Betterton in the Restoration or his successors like James Quin lay in declamatory style and heroic force, Garrick's success lay in the exploration of character and a form of genius that allowed him to go beyond the rules. In a period when more and more books and pamphlets were appearing on the actor's art (by Aaron Hill, John Hill, and others), Garrick redefined the terms of acting. In tragedy, where stance played a major part, Garrick added a quality of stillness—he was notorious for his use of pauses for effect—and an imagination that went beyond any pattern or expectation. As he wrote to a friend, 'I pronounce that the greatest strokes of genius have been unknown to the Actor himself, till circumstances and the warmth of the scene has sprung the mine as it were, as much to his own surprise as that of the audience.' He did not succeed in every role; when Spranger Barry was playing Romeo at Covent Garden in 1750, Garrick insisted on playing the same role at Drury Lane on the same nights, but popular opinion, though annoyed at the way this actors' squabble proved boring, acknowledged Barry's superiority, particularly in the first half. As Lear, though, his emotional power was unquestionable; as a contemporary rhyme judged:

The Town have found two different ways
To praise the different Lear's:
To Barry they give loud huzzas,
To Garrick only tears.

In comedy there was no contest: the detail of his characterization was coupled to
Lichtenberg, a German visitor to London, wrote finely detailed accounts of the actors he admired. His description makes no mention, however, of the trick wig, whose hair could stand on end, that Garrick used at this moment in his performance.

Hamlet has folded his arms under his cloak and pulled his hat down over his eyes; it is a cold night and just twelve o'clock; the theatre is darkened, and the whole audience of some thousands are as quiet, and their faces as motionless, as though they were painted on the walls of the theatre; even from the farthest end of the playhouse one could hear a pin drop. Suddenly, as Hamlet moves towards the back of the stage slightly to the left and turns his back on the audience, Horatio starts, and saying: 'Look, my lord, it comes,' points to the right where the ghost has already appeared and stands motionless, before any one is aware of him. At these words Garrick turns sharply and at the same moment stagers back two or three paces with his knees giving way under him. His hat falls to the ground and both his arms, especially the left, are stretched out nearly to their full length, with the hands as high as his head, the right arm more bent and the hand lower, and the fingers apart: his mouth is open thus he stands rooted to the spot, with legs apart, but no less of dignity, supported by his friends, who are better acquainted with the apparition and fear lest he should collapse. His whole demeanour is so expressive of terror that it made my flesh creep even before he began to speak. The almost terror-struck silence of the audience, which preceded this appearance and filled one with a sense of insecurity, probably did much to enhance this effect.
the most careful naturalism. Arthur Murphy, describing Garrick, as Sir John
Brute in Vanbrugh's The Provoked Wife, falling asleep in a chair, noted that 'sleep
comes upon him by the most natural gradations. Not the minutest circumstance
about a man in this situation escapes him. The struggle between sleep and his
unwillingness to give way to it is perfectly just.' Over and over again, critics noted
how Garrick could control the audience, a necessary talent at a time when audi-
ence complaint was likely to be noisy and dangerous: Garrick's experiment of
bringing over a troupe of French dancers under Noverre in 1755 resulted in riots
of anti-Gallic feeling lasting six days. Even Garrick could not control the audi-
ence’s patriotic violence: coming onto the stage to try to quiet the hissing, he was
greeted by ironic jeers of 'Monsieur'.

In 1767 the town council of Stratford-upon-Avon invited Garrick to contribute
to a suitable monument for the refurbished town hall in exchange for the freedom
of the town. Garrick’s imagination was fired; everything in his work and in his
idolatry of Shakespeare seemed to have led up to this moment. He set out to cele-
brate the Shakespeare bicentenary in Stratford, slightly belatedly, in September
1769 with a jubilee, a grand series of events in praise of Shakespeare. Pavilions were
constructed on the banks of the Avon for the programme. There were to be
processions through the town, balls and masquerades, concerts and horse-racing;
the climax was to be his own ode on Shakespeare performed by himself at the peak
of the festivities, accompanied by orchestra and chorus. Predictably enough
torrential rain blighted everything and the irritation of London society trans-
ported to the depths of the provinces grew as they were asked to pay outrageous
prices for bed and board. It was easy for mockers to ridicule the jubilee as an over-
ambitious piece of Garrick’s self-aggrandizement. Even George Colman the
Elder, often Garrick's collaborator, wrote a satiric play about it for Covent
Garden. Garrick’s response was, as usual, both pragmatic and successful. He
wrote his own play about the jubilee, mocking provincial naivety (always likely to
appeal to a London audience), and built into the play the spectacular procession
of characters from Shakespeare that had been a damp squib in Stratford. Running
for dozens of performances that season (though quickly forgotten thereafter), The
Jubilee easily recouped Garrick’s financial losses.

If in Garrick’s whole career he failed to generate any significant new drama, his
achievement was focused on his deification of Shakespeare. While the plays
continued to be adapted and reworked, Garrick was also concerned to put back as
many lines as he could and to extend the range of Shakespeare plays performed,
always placing Shakespeare at the centre of his company’s repertory. In the divi-
sion between study and stage that was deepening throughout the century, Garrick
tried to bridge the gap. National pride in its greatest writer, literary admiration
and scholarship, and theatrical viability combined to tie Garrick and Shakespeare
together in the forefront of the culture.
It used to be the standard critical view that the aftermath of the success of Collier and Steele, the ending of the era of Restoration dramatists, established the triumphant dominance of sentimental drama, comedy where tears outweighed laughter and moral orthodoxy, and reform overcame any subversive energies. But the acceptance of a dramatic form by a literary culture is not the same as its acceptance in a theatrical one. Very few works managed to be both; Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* (1771) was one exception, an intriguing redefinition of the title-character from the stereotype comic butt into a naïve but thoroughly moral man finding his way through the dangers of London society. Cumberland’s humane sensitivity suggests a modern liberalism, as in *The Jew* (1794), a reasoned argument against anti-Semitism. The fashion for such serious comedy meant, as Oliver Goldsmith complained, that ‘while the comic poet is invading the province of the tragic muse, he leaves her lovely sister quite neglected’. But Benjamin Hoadly’s *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), the most performed comedy at Drury Lane under Garrick, allows the conventions of sentimentalism to exist in uneasy alliance with the staple features of Restoration comedy. By the 1770s, dramatic comedy found a new lease of life, a new excitement, precisely by rediscovering the possibilities of Restoration form, just as Richard Brinsley Sheridan found the source for his satire on contemporary opera and tragedy, *The Critic* (1779), in Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal* (1665). In Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal* (1777) sentimentalism is displayed most completely as a mask, Joseph Surface’s ingratiating device to cover his hypocrisy. Goldsmith’s anxiety about comedy is part of his distinction between ‘laughing’ and ‘sentimental’ comedy in an important essay in 1773; in the latter ‘almost all the characters are good and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage, and though they want humour have abundance of sentiment and feeling’. Goldsmith’s battle-lines are perhaps too rigidly drawn but there is no question that his *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) celebrates laughter over sentiment as well as the honest virtues of the country over the snobbery of the town.

Sheridan and Goldsmith may have found their way back to a richer seam of comedy but just as important to the evening’s performance was by now the afterpiece, pantomimes like Theobald’s *Harlequin Sorcerer* (performed 337 times at Covent Garden between 1747 and 1776, far and away the most performed play of the period), farces like Garrick’s own *Miss in her Teens*, short musicals like Isaac Bickerstaffe’s *The Padlock*. If the theatrical bill was now less extreme in its multiplicity than earlier in the century, the comic energies of the afterpieces go a long way to balance any sentimental, moral dullness in the main play. Farce, not sentimental comedy, is really the dominant dramatic form of the period, a genre hardly explored before but now richly developed, enthusiastically enjoyed, and, especially, given a particular position in the structure of the evening’s entertainment. The audience’s demand for amusement rather than, as the literary culture would have it, the serious contemplation of moral currents.
have approved, instruction meant that it was hardly surprising that both the patent theatres suffered from damage when the audiences rioted at the managers' attempts in 1762 to abolish half-price admission after the third act of the main play.

Theatre audiences in London were, in any case, growing throughout the century at an even faster rate than the population growth of the city. The changes in theatre architecture reflected this. Where Drury Lane at the beginning of the century had a capacity of no more than 1,200, by 1794, after a number of rebuildings, it could hold over 3,600. Covent Garden expanded from 1,330 in 1732 to 3,000 in 1782. The other new theatres in London now functioning semi-legally, performing pantomimes, equestrian spectacles, and unlicensed plays, were similarly large: for instance, Sadler's Wells (from 1765), with a capacity of 2,600, or the Royal Amphitheatre run by Philip Astley (from 1788), with a capacity of 2,500 after 1803, or the Royal Circus, run by Astley's rival Charles Hughes (from 1782). These colossal auditoriums cried out for spectacle and tragedy. Throughout his management Garrick looked for new tragedies. He rejected the Scottish playwright John Home's *Douglas*, only to find it a phenomenal success in Edinburgh in 1756 (when a chauvinist spectator called out, 'Whaur's yer Wullie Shakespeare noo?') and equally successful at Covent Garden. Home's play, a full-blown
A provincial theatrical performance in England, 1788. James Wright's engraving of *Macbeth* scene I is wickedly mocking of theatre outside London but the energy of the scene and the audience excitement is also portrayed with sympathy. Such fit-up provincial theatres were gradually replaced by purpose-built well-equipped theatres.

romantic tragedy, looked forward. Arthur Murphy, later an efficient writer of comedies, had his first major success with *The Orphan of China* (1759), adapted from Voltaire, looking sideways at France for a tragic form. But the effective search for a neo-classical style needed to find a grandeur of scale in performance.

Garrick's share in the Drury Lane Theatre was bought out by Sheridan but, realizing that the chores of management did not suit him, in 1788 Sheridan passed the day-to-day work on to John Philip Kemble. Kemble had made his London début in 1783. His sister, Sarah Siddons, had returned to Drury Lane in triumph the previous year. Siddons had had a disastrous start with Garrick's company in 1775 and had soon left for the provincial circuit. She learnt her craft first on the important Yorkshire touring circuit, run for over thirty years by Tate Wilkinson, which was also her brother's training ground, then playing at the various Theatres Royal, many of which had now been given royal patents in their own right (Bath in 1768, York in 1769)—before the end of the century the numbers and size of
theatres outside London increased at a prodigious rate. Siddons's return to London, playing Isabella in Garrick's version of Southerne's tragedy *The Fatal Marriage*, marked the beginnings of a new style of acting.

Kemble and Siddons gave the public the kind of tragic performance the theatres demanded: monumental, aristocratic, full of heroic proportions and emotional intensity. They established the standard for an English classical style. Both worked on stage with an unremitting concentration. William Hazlitt the critic summed up Kemble's style perfectly:

In short, we think the distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in one word—*intensity*; in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, in never letting go, and in working it up, with a certain graceful consistency and conscious grandeur of conception to a very high degree of pathos or sublimity.

Clearly he was never going to succeed in comedy; his performance as Charles Surface in *The School for Scandal* was 'as merry as a funeral and as lively as an elephant'. But, where Garrick had succeeded through lightning changes, Kemble's single-minded conception of a role’s through-line had a vastness of scale that suited Shakespearean tragedy in the vast spaces of the new Drury Lane and Covent Garden. His productions—and he, even more than Garrick, worked to create a unified, integrated style for a performance—were full of spectacle, especially in plays, like Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and *Coriolanus*, that gave him a space to create enormous processions as well as opportunities to explore his concept of antiquarian realism in sets and costumes.

The streak of the showman, conspicuously absent from his own acting style, as well as the competition from the rival establishments unable to perform 'legitimate' drama, the legal prerogative of the patent theatres, led to Kemble's encouragement of the fashion for melodrama, of putting animals on the stage (including an elephant), of allowing the craze for Master Betty, the 'Infant Roscius', a 13-year-old lionized for his performance in all the classical roles in 1804–5, to run its course. As one annoyed newspaper complained, Kemble ignored any play that could not 'be
converted into a pageant but brings forward with much pretence any drama that has its proper capabilities of ostentatious spectacle'. The patent houses, though the homes of the traditional repertory, were by no means staid in their productions as they fought for audiences.

Often criticized as an actor for his artificiality and stiffness, his idiosyncratic pronunciation, and his excessive reliance on pregnant pauses (a consequence of his breathing difficulties caused by asthma), Kemble was unequivocally noble in manner, ideal for the patrician coldness of Coriolanus. As Leigh Hunt noted, 'it is in characters that are occupied with themselves and with their own importance... that Mr Kemble is the actor'. Kemble's studied effects complemented perfectly the naturalness that was the key contemporary perception of Mrs Siddons:

Mrs Siddons has the air of never being the actress; she seems unconscious that there is a motley crowd called a pit waiting to applaud her, or that there are a dozen fiddlers waiting for her exit.

Praised for her sweetness and pathos, praised for her terror and dignity, she was praised above all for her identification with her role: as an early biographer commented, 'When Mrs Siddons quitted the dressing-room, I believe she left there the last thought about herself'.

Kemble and Siddons left Drury Lane and the squabbles with Sheridan in 1802 and moved to Covent Garden. After the theatre burnt down in 1808, Kemble rebuilt it on an even larger scale than before. New theatres and grand productions are expensive, even with a huge capacity. Kemble's attempts to put up the admission prices sparked off the 'Old Price' riots that lasted in the theatre for sixty-six nights till Kemble was forced to give in.

The demonstrations and celebrations of the Old Price riots proved conclusively that the audience in England now ruled the theatre and that, as Dr Johnson had predicted in 1747, 'the drama's laws the drama's patrons give'. But to provide the kind of entertainment the audiences expected, the theatre in England had developed, to an extent unimaginable at the beginning of the century, its skills and machinery, its sets and costuming, its showmanship and excitement. Whatever else their work may be about, the huge theatres of 1800 were unequivocally always celebrating their own artistic and spectacular triumphs.

In those countries of Continental Europe that had enjoyed a strong theatrical tradition in the Renaissance, the development of theatre in the eighteenth century was determined largely by the need to create a stage that reflected the changing make-up of society. Against the background of declining aristocratic power accompanied by growing rationalism, high tragedy and formalized acting no longer seemed relevant to the concerns of the expanding middle classes. Even the comedies of the previous century, like those of Molière, presented the image of a
stable society, one in which impending disaster may be averted by the intervention of the all-powerful Sun King (as in *Tartuffe*), comedies in which we are invited to laugh at the follies of individuals who fail to conform to the behaviour of their peers. By the time we come to Beaumarchais's comedies over a century later, it is the extraordinary individual that wins our sympathy and we laugh instead at the follies of society.

This change began with the death of Louis XIV in 1715. When the Sun King set, the austerity of the recent past was rapidly repudiated. The aristocracy threw itself into a bout of elegant self-indulgence, celebrating the sensual delicacy of the rococo in opera, ballet, and masked balls. The Regent invited a leading Italian theatre personality, Luigi Riccoboni, to reopen the Comédie-Italienne in Paris, and in 1716 it returned to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, from which it had been banned in 1697, its front-curtain now boasting an impressive phoenix with the motto: 'Je renaîs' ('I am born again'). Here, as he had tried in Italy, Riccoboni attempted to educate his public to a more serious taste, but after the gloom of the final decades of Louis's reign audiences demanded spectacle, music, dance, and laughter. Riccoboni had to concede to public taste and his French adaptations of the *commedia dell'arte* were so successful that, on the accession of Louis XV in 1723, he was granted a generous annual pension. While these harlequinades, the fore-runners of comic opera, were light, they were not mindless. In one of them Socrates instructs Harlequin:

It is essential to give witty expression to the voice of reason and to useful truths for the correction of manners... to avoid above all trivial jokes, empty pleasantry, puns and all such licence which damages morals and offends common decency.

This progressive and serious conception of the role of comic theatre was further developed at the Comédie-Italienne by Marivaux in his *comédies gaies*. Marivaux displayed a remarkable ability to enter into the mind of his heroines, helped no doubt by his close working association with one of Riccoboni's leading actresses, Silvia. His recurrent theme of sensitive individuals out of joint with an uncaring society paved the way for the domestic dramas for which the eighteenth century was to be so famous.

This move away from the stylization and formality of the classical French stage towards more domestic forms did not occur only within the elegant surroundings of the Comédie-Italienne. Even before the death of Louis XIV the monopoly of the Comédie-Française was being challenged from a much more populist quarter: *le théâtre de la foire* (fairground theatre). For many years this form of theatre was refused permission to use speech, song, or dance; so the performers mounted spectacular dumb shows, often with striking stage effects (waterfalls, live flying animals, etc.), which were accompanied by scrolls of text in couplets, sung by actors planted in the audience and by the more literate members of the public.
The content of these couplets was often felt to be so subversive that one leader of such a troupe, the unfortunate Octave, was thrown into prison for offending the court.

Meanwhile, the Comédie-Française continued to build on its tradition of being the home of fine tragedy. The plays of Racine and Corneille were revived (including the first professional production of Racine's *Athalie* in 1717). It also discovered in Voltaire not only a prolific playwright (he wrote his fiftieth play at the age of 84) but a true man of the theatre: actor, director, and critic. Though impressed by Shakespeare, he felt that his apparent wildness was unsuitable for the French stage. So Voltaire continued to write his plays according to the neo-classical rules but adopted some of the more spectacular effects of Shakespeare, e.g. ghost-scenes. As he wrote in the Preface to his *Tancrede*: ‘il faut frapper l'âme et les yeux à la fois.’ (‘One must make an impact on the soul and the eyes at the same time.’) His plays, too, while cast in the classical mould, contained much of his own contemporary humanist ideas: thus his version of *Oedipe* (1718) contains a biting attack on the priesthood, and in *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (*The Orphan of China*) (1755) the characteristically sentimental eighteenth-century exercise of virtue by the heroine overcomes the lustful desires and menaces of Genghis Khan.

In many respects Voltaire's tragic figures were in fact contemporaries in classical costume, and by the mid-century even the tradition-bound Comédie-Française had to acknowledge the new taste of the public for a theatre which reflected their own society. It was above all Denis Diderot, as both playwright and theoretician, who established the new vogue for 'bourgeois drama' or comédie larmoyante (‘lachrymose comedy’, a sentimental piece with a happy outcome) on the model of Lillo's *The London Merchant*. Most important of Diderot’s plays was *Le Père de famille* (*The Head of the Family*). Presented at the Comédie-Française in 1761, the piece preserved, however improbably, the three unities, but was innovative in placing high emotion and potentially tragic conflict in a contemporary domestic setting. The realism of the piece was reinforced by the prose dialogue, the precise stage directions encouraging full use of the stage, and the technique of crosscutting two conversations, which sacrificed theatrical focus for the sake of naturalness.

The actors, unused to performing in prose, were, according to Diderot, 'trembling as they went on stage as if it were their first time'. More importantly perhaps,
and as a mark of royal approval, it was recorded that Louis XV, one of the 'most hardened egoists of the day', wept copiously at this story of a son whose love for a beautiful but impoverished girl drives him to disobey his father. Fortunately for both Louis and the outcome of the play, the girl turns out to be a cousin, and father and son indulge in a sentimental reconciliation. For without this deus ex machina the evil uncle might have made arbitrary use of a warrant of arrest to incarcerate his young niece; the son might indeed have rebelled against authority, and the play would have acquired a much more revolutionary slant.

This new-found acknowledgement of eighteenth-century theatre as performing an important role in examining the nature of society and allegedly in improving the quality of that society (later most clearly asserted in Schiller's essay 'The Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution' of 1784) had a predictable effect on theatre practice. Actors who developed a more natural style of delivery became popular. Already at the Comédie-Française Adrienne Lecouvreur had enchanted audiences with her natural charm in place of the mannered gestures of the older actors, and had reinforced this by adopting more realistic costume. So, when she performed the role of Queen Elizabeth in 1721, in place of the conventional Versailles gown and high wig, she wore an English court dress with a sash of the Order of the Garter. Later, another star of the Comédie-Française, Mlle Cléirion, similarly shocked her audiences by appearing with 'half-naked arms' and even, awakened from sleep in a version of Dido, in a plain shift. Such authenticity in costume reached a turning-point when in 1789 Talma, who significantly had begun his theatrical career in London, sought advice from the artist David and appeared in Voltaire's Brutus wearing a Roman toga. After recovering from the shock of seeing bare arms and legs on stage, the public were soon won over to this new style of presentation, so much so that when two years later Talma wore a Roman hair-style for the role of Titus, he inaugurated a fashion which was to become the rage for modish French revolutionaries.

Stage-sets also developed a new realism, necessitating the removal of spectators from the stage, which was finally achieved at the Comédie-Française in 1759. Perspective scenery created by sliding wing-flats and a backdrop with objects painted on it were still the norm, but there was now greater care taken with the authenticity of setting and the realism of the furniture and props. No longer were the French public prepared to tolerate absurdities like the appearance of the 70-year-old actor Baron in the role of a child in La Motte's The Maccabees (1721). No one was fooled by the boy's cap perched on his head, and when two actors had to assist him to his feet again after he had embraced the knees of the King, the merriment of the audience was loud and sustained.

Middle-class audiences now preferred a theatre that set out to explore their problems in a realistic even if sentimental manner, but they soon went further. The bourgeoisie could boast ever-growing wealth and intellectual supremacy over
Perfomance in the Hôtel de Bourgogne, 1769. By the latter half of the eighteenth century the Parisian public were demanding greater realism on stage; hence the 'authentic' spinning-wheel and stool and the detailed, even if painted, backdrop.

the aristocracy but were still excluded from political power. So, in addition to a theatre that reflected their world, they demanded one that would give voice to their aspirations. These aspirations in the French theatre were to focus on the unlikely figure of a Spanish barber, created by a writer and adventurer who had only recently begun to write for the stage.

Beaumarchais’s first Figaro play, *The Barber of Seville* (1775), presented the unoriginal but for the times provocative view of the servant as being cleverer and, despite a certain pardonable roguishness, essentially more honest than his master; but it was the much more aggressive stance of Beaumarchais’s next comedy which was to cause a furore in Paris and firmly to establish theatre as a major influence in French political life. Beaumarchais read his *Marriage of Figaro* to the members of the Comédie-Française in 1781, but it was to be some years before it could be seen by the Parisian public. No less an admirer of Beaumarchais than the Queen Marie Antoinette arranged for the play to be read to the King: ‘Louis XVI accompanied the reading with comments of praise or disapproval; more and more,
however, he was moved to utter: “That goes too far! That is indecent! etc.” On hearing Figaro’s fifth-act monologue attacking the aristocracy, he leapt to his feet and cried with prophetic insight: “That’s terrible! It will never be performed: for this play not to be a danger, the Bastille would have to be torn down first.’

Despite this royal condemnation, a private performance of the play was arranged. However, on the appointed evening in June 1783, word came from the King that even the aristocracy were not permitted to see this notorious piece. Predictably, the demand to see it staged grew even stronger, and a further private performance was organized to take place on 26 September 1783 at the château at Gennevilliers. The hall was so packed with gentry that Beaumarchais felt compelled to break a few windows to let air into the stuffy auditorium—an act that was recognized as being symbolic even then. Such was the success that the pressure to release it for public performance grew even greater.

This was achieved remarkably simply: Beaumarchais was permitted to read his play to Breteuil, the Royal Minister, and an assembled company of leading

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**THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO**

Figaro attacks the aristocracy in a monologue which initially convinced Louis XVI that the play must be banned, but which was greeted with thunderous applause at the Parisian première in 1784.

No, Monsieur le Comte, you shall not have her . . . . Because you are a great lord, you imagine you are a great genius . . . . Nobility, wealth, titles, and appointments, they all make you so proud! And what have you done in return for so many favours? You took the trouble of being born and nothing more. For the rest, you are a fairly ordinary man; while, as for me, my God! Lost in a dark mass, I have had to use more knowledge and strategy just to stay alive than was needed to rule the whole of Spain for a century.

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PETER HOLLAND AND MICHAEL PATTERSON

arbiter of literary taste. The wit of the piece and Beaumarchais’s own charming
delivery won over these gentlemen, and the King grudgingly allowed a production
to go ahead, quietly hoping that it would be a flop. So, just eight days after the
Comédie-Française had moved back into their renovated theatre, on 27 April
1784, the most important first night in eighteenth-century France took place. The
alternative title of the piece, La Folle Journée (The Crazy Day), could not have been
more appropriate. Already the previous night ladies of the nobility and women of
the bourgeoisie had, at the expense of both protocol and comfort, shared actresses’
dressing-rooms in order to ensure that they would get a seat. Others took lunch
in the auditorium. As the time of the performance approached, the throng outside
the theatre swept aside the guards and forced the gates, causing several ladies to
faint. Less than half those pressing to get in managed to get tickets. Every single
minister was present, as were all the brothers of the King. Unsurprisingly, the
King stayed away. Beaumarchais himself had the prudence to arrange for two
abbés to sit either side of him to indicate the seriousness of the moral intent in his
piece, although more cynical observers commented that they were there to
provide the spiritual guidance that he so obviously needed.

The performance lasted from half-past five to ten o’clock, interrupted by
rumtulous laughter and applause, with only occasional whistling and hissing.
Dazincourt as Figaro rapidly won over the public with his display of native
cunning, and this was reinforced by the pert charm of Louise-Françoise Contat as
Suzanne; but the greatest favourite of the evening was Jeanne-Adélaïde Olivier’s
Chérubin, in whose youthful yearning the French public perhaps saw something
of their own longing for change. The quality of performance was further height-
ened by the use for the first time of oil-lamps, which gave the stage an unprece-
dented brightness and avoided the usual distraction of stage-hands having to trim
candle-wicks. No doubt to Louis’s chagrin, the piece was repeated over seventy
times.

It is an irony of course that this piece, which Napoleon later described as ‘the
Revolution in action’, and which at the time indirectly led to Beaumarchais’s
arrest, should have been mounted not just with the acquiescence but with the full
support of the aristocracy, whose right to govern was so seriously challenged in the
play. But, however much the effectively suicidal connivance of the nobility was
required at the time, the tide of history and with it the new political role of theatre
in France would anyway sooner or later have broken through the banks of censor-
ship. A few years later, in 1789, Danton himself as leader of the Revolutionary
Council ordered the Comédie-Française to perform Chénier’s Charles IX with
Talma in the title-role. The scene in which a dagger is blessed before being used
to strike the mortal blow on the King was greeted in performance by ten minutes
of unbroken applause. The stage was being used quite manipulatively to prepare
the public for the execution of Louis XVI, and, in recognition of the value of the
theatre to the Revolution, a directive of January 1791 permitted anyone to open a theatre in Paris.

So from the virtual monopoly of the Comédie-Française in Paris at the start of the century, with its classical repertoire and formal playing style, French theatre now took place in many different venues, offering middle-class dramas and comic operas, played in a lively, natural style. What began the century as aristocratic entertainment had now become the forum of the people.

In Spain, the combination of the brilliance of the legacy of Golden Age drama and the lack of any genuinely talented new dramatists proved stultifying. The achievements of the previous century had become a rigid form, hindering innovation. Even the political change at the accession of the Bourbons failed to have any impact on the development of drama. Instead earlier plays continued to be performed, usually heavily adapted to accommodate the increasing audience demand for stage spectacle, the one sure way to achieve success. By the 1760s the government sought to reform the poor state of the theatres by attempting to ensure adequate rehearsal, a less stilted performing style, and a ban on ad libs.

But the major source for significant change was, inevitably, the influence of the new possibilities being explored in French drama. Nicolás Fernández de Moratin tried to combine the traditional style with French neo-classical tragedy to resist the trivialization of drama. But beyond the observation of the unities and a certain new concentration on the triumph of love over honour his tragedies did little to alter the prevailing style.

His son Leandro Fernández de Moratin sought, with far greater success, the reconciliation of national traditions with neo-classical and Enlightenment forms in his five comedies. La comedia nueva (The New Play, 1792) mocked earlier plays for using a neo-classical façade to mask their interest in superficial spectacle. Instead he explored, particularly in his best play El viejo y la niña (The Old Man and the Young Girl, 1786), new areas of concern for drama: bourgeois morality over aristocratic codes of honour, material conditions rather than social structure, free choice against arranged marriages, and the concerns of the significant social group of the untitled nobility. Profiting from the comédie larmoyante, his plays had a new intensity of emotion. This new centring on the social interests of a bourgeois theatre provided the theatre with the means to exchange the patronage of the court for the influence of popular taste without kowtowing to the demand for spectacle; it also combined the strengths of the national tradition with the opportunities offered by the drama of the rest of Europe.

While Italy could not look back to a Golden Age, its native tradition, commedia dell'arte, for all its aristocratic patronage, brought its own problems. Though the materials of the form seemed increasingly exhausted and noble support fell away, it was far from clear what could replace it. The development of opera buffa
(comic opera) seemed to divert energies from the dramatic comedy. Again and again the best talent (actors, playwrights, and designers) was also sucked out of the country, lured to France, where success seemed easier.

In tragedy and scripted comedy, the model of French neo-classical forms was too quickly and easily dominant to allow the development of a national alternative. Luigi Riccoboni, son of a famous Pantalone, attempted to renew the Italian repertoire and create a popular Italian serious theatre, gradually replacing work by Corneille and Racine with plays by Trissino and Tasso and new work by Pier Martelli. But only with Merope by Scipione Maffei did Riccoboni find a major success. Merope, a weighty verse tragedy, was premiered in Modena in 1713 and triumphed in Venice the following year as well as being toured by Riccoboni. But though admired, Riccoboni's troupe had comparatively little impact and, when his attempts to reform comedy were signally unsuccessful at Venice's Teatro San Luca, he headed off to Paris, where, as we have seen, he Gallicized commedia, the reverse of his resistance to the French influence in Italian theatre.

The best Italian tragedy of the mid-eighteenth century was produced for opera, particularly in the libretti of Pietro Metastasio, whose work, from Didone abbandonata (Dido Abandoned, 1724) onwards, was hugely in demand. Serious tragic tragedy had to wait for the end of the century for a significant new impetus. In 1775 Count Vittorio Alfieri wrote his first tragedy, Cleopatra, which succeeded in Turin, Alfieri's home city, with Girolamo Medebach's troupe. However, he soon recognized, by bitter experience, that the public theatres were likely to butcher his plays to please audiences. In Rome in 1781 he wandered into a performance of his Orestes to find that the play had been given a happy ending, with Orestes now reconciled to his mother rather than killing her. Leaping on to the stage and arguing with the actors, Alfieri managed to secure an apology from the theatre's management. Appalled by the actors' lack of professionalism he had most of his later plays performed in private houses before carefully selected audiences by a group of amateur actors under his control. The literary success of Alfieri's work had little effect on the popular theatre. Not the least of his problems was the need to develop an Italian dramatic language, rather than the local, regional forms used for most drama; he had both to learn Italian and use it for his own drama. His own nationalism found a response in the social unrest that would lead to the Risorgimento, the search for a national unity.

In 1750 in the closing speech of the season delivered by the leading actress of the Medebach company in Venice, Carlo Goldoni announced that he would provide no fewer than sixteen full-length new comedies for the company's next season. As a boast it was outrageous; astonishingly he fulfilled it. Venice was now the centre of Italian cultural life, with numerous theatres and a vibrant intellectual society. Though long interested in writing for the stage, Goldoni had produced plays only intermittently while practising law. Initially he wrote the scenes of Arlecchino for the commedia dell'arte, and the earliest of his plays for the theatre were at least in part the result of assignments from an original public of actors. The new enterprise was in part a response to an impetus from the reformer Pietro Metastasio, whose plays had a popular following but lacked the intellectual and social capital of the operatic audience.

In 1762 Goldoni published the first volume of his Commedie complete, to the shock of the critics and authors of his day, who had expected a continuation of the old tradition of the commedia.
scenarios required by commedia style: in 1745, for instance, he developed Arlecchino, servitore di due padroni (The Servant of Two Masters) in scenario form for the brilliant actor Antonio Sacchi. It was only in 1753 that he combined his original text and Sacchi’s interpretation of its lazzì into the fully scripted form in which it is now played. But Goldoni moved beyond this mixture of written and improvised drama, aiming to overturn the crudities and sheer self-indulgence that had come to dominate commedia by developing a scripted comedy, using the traditions but abandoning the masks and improvisational techniques central to its performance.

In 1748 Goldoni became a full-time dramatist working for Medebach’s new company based at the Teatro San Angelo, one of three theatres specializing in comedy. I due gemelli Veneziani (The Venetian Twins) was his first major success, a comedy that, building on convention, found a new possibility of seriousness, social realism, and decisive social comment even as it exploited the virtuoso skills of Cesare D’Arbes, who played both twins.

Frighteningly prolific, Goldoni did not seek immediate reformation but rather a gradual transformation of Venetian theatre. Inevitably it was not an uncontested change. Initially the conservative opposition was focused on the parodies of Goldoni by Chiari produced at rival theatres: Goldoni’s La vedova scaltra (The Cunning Widow, 1748) at the San Angelo was mocked in Chiari’s La scuola delle vedove (The School for Widows) at the San Samuel. Goldoni, who watched Chiari’s play disguised in cloak and mask, found it little more than plagiarism with added comments ridiculing his jokes.

Chiari was hardly likely to stop the flow of reform, a programme for which Goldoni outlined in the first play of the sixteen in the 1751–2 season, Il teatro comico (The Comic Theatre), a polemical manifesto masquerading as a play. In 1753, after arguments over royalties, Goldoni parted company with Medebach, moving to the larger Teatro San Luca. Over the next decade, his work developed in subtlety and ambition, exploring Venetian society in depth. As early as 1748 in La putta onorata (The Respectable Girl) Goldoni had included scenes of Venetian gondoliers, portraying their language and customs; he arranged for gondoliers to attend the theatre free and, as he recorded in his Memoirs, ‘they were enchanted to see themselves represented on stage’.

But by this time his reforms had attracted a more serious opponent than Chiari. Carlo Gozzi was a leading member of the Accademia dei Granelleschi, a literary society founded in 1747 with the express aim of preserving purity of style; Goldoni’s fascination with regional dialect was bound to be offensive to him. Initially basing his attack in pamphlets and parodies, Gozzi was stung by Goldoni’s mockery of critics who do not write into producing his own plays. Working with Sacchi’s company, Gozzi wrote a series of plays which sought to regenerate commedia and re-establish what he viewed as its aristocratic and
empirical representation.

The nature of the relationship and the role of the settler and the settler's perception are critical in understanding the implications of the settler's perspective.

In the context of the relationship between the settler and the native, such questions of identity and dominance are paramount. The settler's perspective, in essence, may reflect a narrative of social and economic domination.

On this note, P. Holland and M. Patterson, in their excellent study of the situation, conclude that the settler's perspective cannot be fully understood without considering the laws and regulations that govern the settler's role. As they state, "the power to define and control the settler's narrative rests in the hands of the settler." Holland and Patterson argue that any attempt to understand the settler's perspective must be grounded in a thorough examination of the settler's role and the legal frameworks that govern such relationships.

This approach is crucial in understanding the complex dynamics of settler-native interactions. It highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis of the settler's perspective, which can only be achieved through a detailed examination of the legal, social, and economic aspects that shape the settler's identity and role.
emphatically conservative political and social values through fables, the _fiabe_. He repudiated any taint of Francophile radicalism that Goldoni was seen as sharing. The best of the _fiabe_, _L'amore delle tre melarance_ (The Love of Three Oranges, 1761) and _Turandot_ (1762), combined fantasy derived from folk-tales with exotic settings and stage spectacle, denying at every step the realism, scenic simplicity, and contemporary idiomatic language of Goldoni. Part scripted and part improvised, Gozzi’s fables also made Aristophanic use of the opportunities for direct satire of Goldoni and topical events.

Initially successful, the vogue for the _fiabe_ passed (not to be rediscovered until the twentieth century in adaptations into opera) and Gozzi eventually abandoned the stage, frustrated by the endless quarrels with Sacchi’s actors. But Gozzi’s initial success, coupled with the temptations of higher salary and reasonable security, was enough to cause Goldoni to follow the high road to Paris, becoming house dramatist at the Comédie-Italienne. Goldoni worked in Paris until his death without ever really adapting to the different circumstances, exiled from the language and society he had so exhilaratingly examined, the very sources of his theatrical inspiration.

On turning from the established theatre nations of England, France, Spain, and Italy to the rest of Europe, a quite different picture is encountered. With the exception of the relatively stable imperial thrones in Vienna and Petersburg, the situation of the German-speaking countries and of the nations of northern and eastern Europe was not conducive to the creation of national theatres. What is now called Germany was divided into over 360 different states, each with its own laws, currency, and measurements; the Netherlands were recovering, albeit with growing prosperity, from the Wars of Spanish Succession (1702–13); Sweden’s role as a European power ended when Charles XII fell in battle in 1718; Denmark was politically strongly influenced by Germany; and Norway was little more than a satellite of Denmark. Bohemia was under the dominance of German culture, Hungary owed allegiance to Austria, and Poland had to endure a succession of ‘Partitions’. Moreover, every European nation outside England looked for cultural guidance towards France. The French language dominated in court circles, the French taught one to dance and to cook well. Leibniz, Germany’s leading Enlightenment philosopher, wrote in French, and the Prussian king, Frederick the Great, went on record as saying that German was a language fit only to use for speaking to one’s horse.

Amongst this adulation of the French, it was the little country of Denmark that tried to establish the first national theatre of northern and eastern Europe. Ironically, the initiative came from two French theatre-practitioners who opened the first theatre for Danish productions, the Gronnegade Theatre in Copenhagen. Two days after the predictable translation of Molière with which the theatre
opened, Denmark was to acknowledge its first and immediately successful national playwright, Ludvig Holberg. Born in Norway, but obliged to write in Danish, Holberg was a university professor, but fortunately one with a strong sense of theatre. His first play, *Den politiske Kandesteber* (The Pewterer who Wanted to be a Politician), owes a great deal to Molière in ridiculing the vices of an extreme comic type, in this case a simple artisan who has pretensions to becoming mayor but is exposed as entirely inadequate to the task. But Holberg goes beyond mere imitation of his French model in the authenticity of the Danish setting and in establishing a testing situation for his comic figures, a style of serious comedy which raises social and philosophical questions in a manner that anticipates Kleist’s comedies.

The opening night of *The Pewterer* was a huge success, with many of the would-be audience obliged to attend the event in the yard outside the theatre. There were rumblings amongst the city fathers that the play was mocking them, but Holberg could claim that his intention was on the contrary to add lustre to the image of the authorities. However tongue-in-cheek this defence of his comedy was, he clearly subscribed to the characteristic Enlightenment view that comedy was a social weapon in the hands of the Enlightenment.
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THEATRE

socially useful in the correction of vices, whether those revealed in the behaviour of the comic protagonist or in that of society at large.

Despite the initial success of Holberg's plays and his own prolific output (in 1723 alone he wrote ten comedies, and by 1727 had written twenty-six), this first attempt to create a new national theatre was dogged by problems, above all the continuing domination of French culture. The Gørnegade theatre was obliged to alternate the comedies of Holberg with the more polished products of Molière, and, while the King supported the enterprise, the robust knockabout humour of the native Danish performances was felt to be too vulgar for actual royal attendance. So, when the theatre was invited to perform at the palace, they offered two French pieces rather than anything by Denmark's own national playwright. Already in 1727 Holberg's *Funeral of Danish Comedy* was performed, and attempts later in the century to revive a Danish national theatre were directed to the performance of operettas and festive operas.

A similar story can be told of Denmark's neighbour, Sweden. An attempt in 1737 (undertaken by a French actor) to found a Swedish national theatre had failed by 1754, and it was only with the accession of Gustav III in 1771 that the theatre in Stockholm began to receive whole-hearted royal support. Gustav was a wholly theatrical personality: he learnt of his accession to the throne during a theatre performance in Paris, and his life ended at a masked ball, when he was shot dead by aristocratic conspirators. He wrote his own plays, one of which was performed in Paris and Vienna, and he loved to act himself, on one occasion taking the lead role in five tragedies and a number of comedies within two weeks. By the time of his death in 1792 there were four permanent theatre companies in Stockholm, a city of not more than 75,000 inhabitants.

However, despite all this encouragement, the foundation for a Swedish-language theatre was not created. No national playwright emerged; and so, apart from Gustav's own plays, most productions were translations of Holberg or of French originals. As in Denmark, it was the musical theatre which proved more popular and led to the building of splendid theatres. Most famous of these today, because it is preserved in its original state, is the court-theatre of Drottningholm, built in 1766. The harmoniously proportioned auditorium is reflected in the generous proportions of the stage, and the sets were not permitted to disturb this aesthetic balance. Thus, whether the setting was a royal palace or a peasant's hut, the dimensions of painted wing-pieces and backcloth remained the same. Here, as in Goethe’s work at Weimar, we see, perhaps for the last time in mainstream European theatre, the pursuit of beauty at the expense of authenticity.

This tension between what was aesthetic and what was authentic, characteristic of eighteenth-century theatre, is well illustrated by the development of Dutch theatre. Here, perhaps owing to their secure and prosperous society in the latter half of the century, there seemed less pressure to create a self-consciously national
Drottningholm Theatre with palace set. The lines of the auditorium are continued on to the stage, creating a shared harmonious space, free of much concern with authenticity.

Drottninholm Theatre with palace set. The lines of the auditorium are continued on to the stage, creating a shared harmonious space, free of much concern with authenticity.

The splendid Schouwburg in Amsterdam, originally founded in 1638, rebuilt after the fire of 1772, attracted a regular audience of burghers, whose casual behaviour shocked visitors from other countries: rowdiness, eating, drinking, talking, and wearing hats were all commented on. The two leading actors at the theatre, who often played the same role on alternate evenings, in many ways incorporated the ongoing debate of the century. Jan Punt was a devoted follower of the Comédie-Française style, concentrating on graceful gesture and pleasing vocal delivery; Marten Corver was much more committed to discovering the truth of performance, adopting a more natural style of acting and wearing historically accurate costumes. Their rivalry led to a spate of vituperative pamphlets in the early 1760s and eventually to Corver’s leaving the Schouwburg to form his own ensemble, with whom he might pursue authenticity. Perhaps he should have been warned: it was just such an attempt at realism that had led to the fatal Schouwburg fire of 1772. In order to play a dungeon scene with appropriate gloom, most of the candles had been screened off; the screens caught fire and led to the catastrophe.

In what would become Czechoslovakia too the development of a national theatre was closely linked to the linguistic separatism from the power of German, the language which dominated Czech in Prague; the need was defined by the
national revivalists as one for a 'patriotic theatre'. Only in 1786 with the founding of the Bouda Theatre were Czech plays on Czech matters written.

In Poland, where a much stronger popular theatrical tradition had existed, the National Theatre, a professional Polish-speaking public theatre, was founded in Warsaw in 1766 by Poland's last king, Stanislas August Poniatowski, as part of an extensive cultural reform in which stage-plays were intended to be the means for the widespread dissemination of Enlightenment ideas. After a sticky start the company flourished under Wojciech Boguslawski, its director from 1783 to 1814, though much of its repertoire was, predictably, adapted from French and German theatre. As Poland vanished as an independent state, Boguslawski's nationalism ran into censorship, especially after Russian objections to the patriotism of his comic opera about peasant disputes, *Cracovians and Highlanders* (1794).

Russian theatre lacked a substantial earlier dramatic tradition. Though, under orders from the Tsar, Pastor Gregory wrote *The Comedy of Esther*, produced at court in 1672 with a cast of sixty-four and lasting ten hours, this hardly inaugurated a continuous dramatic tradition. A later tsar, Peter the Great, tried to found

Van Elvervelt's *Head of the Family* (after Diderot); Amsterdam. Note the bourgeois costumes, the emotionally charged gestures, and the use of the full depth of the stage, which lends a feeling of realism to the scene. Meanwhile in the auditorium the notoriously rowdy Dutch burghers sit with their hats on or totally ignore the play, as at bottom right.
a theatre in Moscow. Much opposed by those who saw theatre as irredeemably anti-Russian, the theatre was built opposite the Kremlin and survived four years (1702–6). While attendance was high when the Tsar was present, at other times the audience averaged twenty-five; the Russian aristocracy did not take to theatre-going. The Empress Elizabeth (ruled 1741–62) made theatre attendance compulsory for her court to ensure an audience. She founded a permanent professional theatre in St Petersburg in 1756, formed by merging the amateur dramatic society of the cadet corps with Fyodor Volkov's semi-professional company which included the actor Ivan Dmitrevsky, later known as 'the Russian Garrick' after his success in Russia led to trips abroad to examine the work of Garrick, Clairon, and Lekain. Volkov's repertory included the plays of Alexander Sumarokov, an aristocrat who saw in drama the crucial means of social change; his adaptation of *Hamlet* in 1748 oddly makes Polonius, not Claudius, the murderer of Hamlet's father. When a play of Sumarokov's was a great success in an amateur production in 1749 the Empress encouraged a repeat performance at court. In 1752 Elizabeth brought the Volkov company to St Petersburg and the Russian Patent Theatre of 1756 was initially run by a triumvirate of Volkov, Dmitrevsky, and Sumarokov.

Catherine the Great, herself a prolific though undistinguished dramatist, continued her predecessor's interest in drama, founding the Imperial Theatre School in 1779 for the training of actors and dancers. Much more significant for the spread of theatre through Russia were her charters of 1762 and 1785 which effectively released the nobility from most of their obligations of state service, enabling them to return to their estates and recreate metropolitan pleasures. The result was the emergence of 'serf theatres'. Over 170 of these were created, of widely differing quality and achievement and with widely differing facilities; the finest had elaborately equipped theatres to rival those in many European cities. The performers were exploited and abused, humiliated and rewarded for their work by their masters.

Sumarokov's tragedies, like *Khorev* (1747), spawned further patriotic, historical epic dramas to a neo-classical formula and others copied the formula of his comedies, firmly based on Molière. Only in the plays of Denis Fonvizin did com-
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY THEATRE

Distinctively Russian in their concerns, Fonvizin's comedies gently satirize contemporary manners. Like Sumarokov he mocked Russian Gallomania and the brutality and smugness of provincial gentry. He even, though cautiously, questioned the institution of serfdom itself. His antipathy to the dominance of French culture in aristocratic education is part of his celebration of Russia. It was, in effect, a reaction to the tendency of other dramatists to try simply to Russify foreign drama. Fonvizin's best comedy, *The Minor* (1781), was immediately recognized as a masterpiece, with forty-six productions in twenty years; in it he created numerous character-types that were to be the staple of Russian dramatic comedy for the next century. Only in the 1780s was the developing Russian drama able to explore Enlightenment ideas without using Enlightenment forms.

By contrast with the sometimes tentative efforts of these nations to establish native theatre traditions, Austria found itself blessed with a capital that in Continental Europe was second only to Paris as a cultural centre. The major achievements of Vienna were in music and opera, and the city was to host many of the premières of Mozart's works later in the century. Grand opera and lavish court entertainments attracted stage and costume designers from all over Europe, most

Private theatre, aristocratic splendour. The extraordinary castle theatre at Cesky Krumlov in Czechoslovakia shows the sophistication and splendour of an aristocrat's private theatre. Its ornate decoration and elaborate sets imitate and realize the imaginations of the Bibienas' theatres in Italy.
Design by Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena, 1740. It is impossible to know how much of the extraordinary feeling of space and the receding perspectives could in practice have been created on stage, but such monumental designs established an ideal for the eighteenth century and beyond.

notably the Italian Galli-Bibiena family, four generations of gifted architects and designers, who were responsible for the opera-houses in Dresden and Bayreuth as well as in Vienna. Their soaring stage designs, created with a freer arrangement of painted flats than the conventional symmetrical arrangement of wings and backdrop, offered intriguing angles (the *scena per angolo*) and a monumental quality that was to live on into the nineteenth century and would re-emerge in the spectacular designs of Edward Gordon Craig.

Serious spoken theatre, on the other hand, did not develop with the same vigour in Vienna: Austria was to wait until the next century for its major tragedian, Grillparzer; there was a standing French company in Vienna; Italian troupes were frequent visitors; and even though in 1776 the Burgtheater was declared to be the Austrian National Theatre, it continued mainly to stage imports from Germany, France, Italy, and England, when it was not devoted to opera. The strongest native tradition was in the popular theatre, in the knockabout farce and improvisation of performers like Stranitzky, Prehauser, Kurz, and Laroche. Their comic figures, scatological versions of the *commedia dell'arte* Harlequin, whether called Hanswurst, Bernardon, or Kasperl, entertained generations of Viennese and were of such quality that they were allowed to perform in Vienna’s most
reputable theatres. However, in 1753 the Empress Maria Theresa, determined to raise the quality of theatrical entertainment in her capital, issued a ban on improvisation and coarse knockabout pieces. Actors were to refrain from ‘all indecency and nonsensical expressions’. A first offence would attract a warning; a second offence two weeks’ prison; and a third a life sentence. Despite this the popular tradition lived on and indeed flourished in the so-called Vorstadtheater (suburban theatres), eventually bearing fruit in the delightful comedies of Johann Nestroy and Ferdinand Raimund and so providing Austria with a genuine native theatre.

It was Austrian domination that doused the brief flickering of an independent Hungarian theatre in the sixteenth century. The proper establishment of a modern theatre derived, inevitably, from the imperial court in Vienna when György Bessenyei, a member of the Empress Maria Theresa’s Hungarian Guards, set out a programme to create a national culture, not least through the re-establishment of Hungarian as a valid literary language. A professional theatre in the country was bound to emerge in Buda and Pest as the twin cities acquired greater and greater significance as centres of government.

It was in Germany that the theatre proved to be the strongest focus for national sentiment in the eighteenth century. Here too there was a lively theatre tradition of wandering players, who, deprived of theatre buildings in which to perform, were obliged to stage their plays in inn-yards and market-places. They were constantly on the move in search of new audiences, and had to act in a coarse
Comedy with German players. Pantalone (left) reflects the influence of the commedia dell’arte, while Hanswurst (right, with his cap and slapstick) is there to make ribald comments to the audience. The small elegant set would have been created by wing-flats and backdrop but anticipates the realism of the box-set.

flamboyant style to compete with the other attractions of the fairground or tavern. The favoured presentation was the Haupt- und Staatsaktion, in which a historical event was re-enacted, interspersed with comic scenes, usually dependent on the figure of the Hanswurst. Hanswurst was so strongly identified with the crudities of this popular theatre that, in his attempt to reform German theatre, Gottsched arranged for his theatrical colleague, Karoline Neuber, to stage a play in 1737 in Leipzig in which Hanswurst was ceremoniously banned from the stage—with as little success as Maria Theresa had had in Vienna.

Beside this popular tradition the only major source of theatre was in the spectacle of Jesuit dramas, mounted in schools and performed by amateurs in Latin. Without any native German tradition other than that of the strolling players, it is understandable that the first attempts by Gottsched to create a national German theatre led to a slavish imitation of French models, even to the wholly inappropriate adoption of the French alexandrine as the metrical form for his dramas, as in his insufferably tedious Der sterbende Cato (The Dying Cato, 1731).

Discovering a new impulse for German theatre that did not derive from France was but one of the achievements of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. In 1759 he published a series of critical essays entitled Briefe die neueste Literatur betreffend (Letters on Modern Literature), in one of which he denounced Gottsched for his
LESSING'S 17th LETTER ON MODERN LITERATURE, 1759

Lessing's early use of 'Genius' is interesting; the ebullient and creative period of the Sturm and Drang became known as the Geniezeitalter (Age of the Genius), and the notion that artists are 'geniuses', recipients of special inspiration, was a major feature of the Romantic movement in Europe.

When Karoline Neuber flourished, and many followed her to serve her and the German stage, our dramatic literature was indeed in a miserable state. Rules were unknown; there were no models to follow. Our Staatstheater and Heldentheater were filled with nonsense, bombast, filth, and vulgar humour. Our comedies consisted of disguises and magic, and slapstick fights were the wittiest moments. . . . And how did Herr Gottsched go to work on this? He knew a little French and began to translate; he encouraged anyone who could rhyme and understand Oui Monsieur to translate as well; . . . he laid his curse on improvisation; he had Harlequin solemnly banished from the stage, which itself was the greatest Harlequinade ever performed; . . . in short, he did not wish merely to improve our old theatre but to be the creator of an entirely new one.

Had he translated the masterpieces of Shakespeare for us Germans—with a few minor changes—then, I am certain that it would have had better results than being made so familiar with Corneille and Racine. For one thing it would have been much better suited to the taste of the common people. . . . for another Shakespeare would have awakened quite different talents amongst us than the French have succeeded in doing. For a Genius can be set on fire only by another Genius.

clumsy attempts to force German theatre into a Gallic strait-jacket and pointed instead to Shakespeare as a model, a writer who succeeded in combining the depth of thought and beauty of expression of Racine and Corneille with the robust vitality and exciting theatricality of the popular tradition. This recommendation had a decisive effect on two aspects of German playwriting. First, it led to the adoption of blank verse as the preferred medium for serious drama, and Lessing's own Nathan der Weise (Nathan the Wise, 1779) was the first major German play to be written in blank verse. Secondly, it encouraged writers to discard the constraints of the neo-classical rules and to risk the portrayal of wider historical themes, using a multiplicity of settings and a wide range of characters. This Shakespeareomanie (Shakespeare mania) was to affect Goethe, Schiller, the writers of the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress), and indeed virtually all German-language playwrights until the present day.
Lessing himself wrote plays set in contemporary Germany, most notably his comedy *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767), in which, in the guise of a love affair between the Saxon title-figure Minna and the Prussian officer von Tellheim, he appeals for reconciliation between two of the hostile states of the Seven Years War (1756–63). At one significant point in the play a foppish French soldier comically attempts to converse with Minna in German, and when in desperation he appeals to her to speak French, she counters: 'Sir, I would seek to speak it in France. But why here?'

German language then was acknowledged not only as a suitable medium for a literary theatre but also as the rallying-point for the German 'nation'. It was in fact the only objective source of cultural identity, and there was, outside the theatre, no national forum where German was spoken—no national parliament, no central court, no equivalent of the Académie Française. The role assumed by the German stage in the eighteenth century is now enshrined in the word *Bühnensprache* (stage-language), the approximate equivalent of the English 'Queen's' or 'Oxford English'. Moreover, the rising class of the bourgeoisie also had no public forum in which they might effect social change or influence the course of political life; so the theatre could be looked on as the one place where moral and social issues might be debated in public.

A national theatre was therefore thought of not merely as a means of raising the quality of German theatre but also as a way of promoting German identity and values. To this end, in 1767 a number of wealthy burghers in the free city of Hamburg embarked on the 'Hamburg Enterprise', the establishment of the first German National Theatre. Lessing, in the role of 'theatre poet', assisted in the undertaking and produced regular articles on the theatre, the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Hamburg Dramaturgy), still one of the most important discussions of theatre in the German language. However, the experience of Denmark and Sweden was repeated here. Despite attempts to make the National Theatre popular and accessible (when Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* was staged, dancers and
acrobats entertained the public between the acts), there was too little public support, and within two years it was forced to close.

The only viable support for theatre came, as with most of the arts, from the many courts of Germany. Initially, German acting troupes were offered a home for the lean winter months and were permitted to tour in the summer. This not only offered performers financial security but also created an environment where they could approach their art with greater seriousness. So in 1753 the great German actor-manager Konrad Ekhof was able to form an academy of actors at the court of Schwerin, at which for the first time plays were read and discussed before being rushed into rehearsal.

Two court theatres were particularly associated with this development of German drama, which was to establish Germany as a major theatre nation in Europe. In 1777, when Duke Karl Theodor moved his court from Mannheim to Munich, he created for his disappointed townspeople the Court and National Theatre of Mannheim. The director of the new theatre, Freiherr von Dalberg, attracted to it a number of leading actors, including the man destined to become Germany’s greatest classical actor, August Wilhelm Iffland. He also appointed as writer in residence a poet and playwright of great promise, Friedrich Schiller. While still at school Schiller had written a wordy but exciting Storm and Stress melodrama about two brothers, Die Räuber (The Robbers). One brother, Franz Moor, is an evil hypocrite who convinces his father that his other son is unworthy of paternal love. The rejected son, Karl Moor, in an act of defiance forms a band of robbers and indulges in wild escapades in the Bohemian woods, finally arriving home to find his father incarcerated by the wicked brother. Karl is reconciled with his father, who dies in his arms, he murders his fiancée from a perverted sense of honour, and finally leaves to find a poor man who will benefit from the reward for his arrest.

The play contains obvious echoes of Shakespeare, especially the rejection and resulting feigned madness of Edgar, and Gloucester’s...
treatment at the hands of Edmund. As with Shakespeare and other Storm and Stress writers (Lenz, Klinger, Heinrich Leopold Wagner) who were so under Shakespeare's spell, Schiller filled The Robbers with dramatic incident and frequent changes of setting. His play has an episodic quality which can now be traced in a line of descent through Büchner and the expressionist playwrights to Brecht's 'Epic Theatre'. It was Dalberg at Mannheim who, while insisting on cuts and on setting the piece in the Middle Ages instead of in contemporary Germany, was bold enough to stage this adolescent firework. The premiere took place on 13 January 1782. It began at five o'clock and did not end until a quarter past nine. Many members of the audience occupied their seats from one o'clock to make certain of not missing a piece that, since its anonymous publication the previous summer, had already gained considerable notoriety. An eye-witness reported:

The theatre resembled a madhouse: rolling eyes, clenched fists, stamping feet, hoarse shouts in the auditorium! Complete strangers embraced each other in tears, women staggered almost fainting towards the exits. It was a general dissolution as in the time of Chaos, from whose mists a new creation springs forth!

After this controversial beginning Schiller later formed a productive alliance with the leading author of Germany, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe wrote poetry, novels, critical articles, scientific papers, and was a Privy Councillor at the court of Weimar; yet he still found time to write plays and to work as theatre director at the court theatre. Schiller's move to Weimar in 1798 initiated a period of intense theatrical activity, cut short by his premature death in 1805. As Goethe reminisced in 1825:

Just think that the boring period of French taste had only just ended, that Shakespeare still seemed fresh, that Mozart's operas were new works and that Schiller's plays appeared here year after year directed by the author himself... I can't deny, it was really something.

In terms of playwriting Goethe contributed little to the development of German theatre. His medieval piece about the robber-baron Götz von Berlichingen of 1773, written in a Storm and Stress intoxication with Shakespeare, was episodic and unwieldy, as was his life's work, Faust; neither was suitable for a conventional stage of the time, whatever their other merits. By contrast, his neoclassical pieces like Iphigenie auf Tauris (Iphigenia on Tauris) (1779, rewritten 1798) and Torquato Tasso (1790) were much simpler to perform but, in their observance of the unities and lack of stage action, looked back to French neoclassicism rather than forwards to any innovative dramatic style. Significantly, Goethe seemed to regard his own plays as more suitable for reading than performance and only reluctantly directed them at his own theatre in Weimar, giving preference instead to much more popular and accessible works by playwrights like Iffland and Kotzebue.
Goethe's major contribution to the theatre lay rather in the care with which he mounted productions. Though a strict disciplinarian, he was generous and supportive to his actors, offering them a reasonable remuneration and treating them with a respect unusual at a time when actors were often still regarded as social pariahs; above all, he fostered a genuine ensemble spirit within the company. Goethe would begin work on a play with careful read-throughs of the text; and would then, after lines had been learnt, direct his actors with particular attention to the delivery of lines and overall stage-picture. In the case of important pieces like Schiller's tragedies, weeks or even months of discussion took place before rehearsals were embarked upon.

At a time when the growing popularity of the theatre meant that actors hardly had time to rehearse, noting only their entrances and exits, and often did not even succeed in learning their lines, depending on the prompter or on improvisation to carry them through the performance, such discipline and concentration made the theatre work of Weimar a model for the rest of Germany. The formality and overriding aesthetic concerns of Goethe's style found many critics, especially when matched against the realism of actors like Friedrich Ludwig Schröder in Hamburg, famous for the psychological truth of his Shakespearian roles. But, by engaging in a process of education for both his audience and his actors, Goethe made it possible to stage serious verse-drama in German, not only his own plays, but also those of Schiller, and later of Kleist and Hebbel, and the new verse translations of Shakespeare. To have established such an excellent model of theatre practice was no mean achievement in a nation which half a century earlier had been struggling to create a theatre worthy of the name.

It is curious how often facets of the European experience reappear in the development of theatre in America through this century. As in Russia, amateur theatricals led to the establishment of the first theatre, a servant-run theatre in Williamsburg in 1716. Others appeared in Philadelphia (1724), Charleston (1736), and New York (in the 1730s). Soon professional companies emerged: Walter Murray and Thomas Kean formed the first in the country, starting in Philadelphia but performing in New York in 1750. Their initiative was copied by the London Company of Comedians, who dominated American theatre for fifty years, founded in 1752 by Lewis Hallam, Sr., and run from 1758 by David Douglass. As in Europe, this company too responded to growing national pride, renaming themselves the American Company of Comedians in 1763. Sent from London they toured New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and other towns, establishing and converting theatres up and down the East Coast, including Southwark and the John Street Theatre, later the Theatre Royal, in New York.

But theatre in America found itself in the crossfire of the struggle for independence. The frequent attempts to ban plays, including the 1774 decision by the
Continental Congress, were as much part of the opposition to British imports as moral objections to drama itself. Only in the aftermath of independence did theatre begin to flourish again as a national cultural form. Restrictive legislation was soon repealed and theatres opened across the country, including New England. American drama too had a new beginning: Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787) was the first American comedy professionally performed. From its tentative beginnings, American theatre ended the century as a rapidly growing, socially acceptable art-form.

Given the growing social importance of eighteenth-century theatre, it is unsurprising that one of the major achievements of the century was in raising the status of theatre practitioners. It may have been predictable that strolling players should have been constantly harassed by the authorities. But the Licensing Act in England in 1737 was

An act to explain and amend so much of an act made in the twelfth year of the reign of Queen Anne, entitled An act for reducing the laws relating to rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars and vagrants into one Act of Parliament; and for the more effectual punishing such rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars and vagrants... as relates to common players of interludes.

It was not only in hasty legislation that actors were treated as social outcasts. For over a decade Adrienne Lecouvreur had been the brightest star at the Comédie-Française; when she died aged 38 in 1730, public tributes and eulogies poured in from all over France. But the Church would not allow an actress proper burial: her body was taken by the police at night to a piece of waste ground beside the Seine, thrown into a pit, and covered with lime with the earth trampled flat to hide the grave. When, thirty years later in Germany, Karoline Neuber, who had done so much for German theatre, was carried to her grave, the coffin had to be lowered over the graveyard wall, since the clergy would not allow it to pass through the church gate.

In some countries actors were well rewarded. A proposal for an English company in 1703 would have paid the senior male and female actors up to £150 a year while others were to be paid a guinea a performance. But elsewhere actors' wages, except in opera, were only just enough to survive on: the leading actor Ekhof received a weekly salary just enough to buy a pair of shoes. Many female actors, who were usually required to supply their own costumes and accessories, were virtually driven to prostitution, even though a few, like Mlle Clairon, exploited their own exploitation and acquired wealth and influence. In the 1760s London theatres began to create contributory pension schemes and in 1776 an Act of Parliament formalized Drury Lane's benevolent fund to provide some financial security for actors unable to work through illness, accident, or old age.
The situation for playwrights was far worse. In the mid-century shareholders of the Comédie-Française could expect an annual dividend of twenty times the usual payment to authors. In England the system of giving authors shares of the profits on the third and sixth nights meant that a poor play which did not survive that far earned the playwright nothing. Even the great Voltaire sometimes had to waive any fee in order to see his plays performed. It was Beaumarchais who led the playwrights' campaign for fair royalties in France, warning that authors would stop writing for the theatre unless they were properly rewarded. A breakthrough was achieved in 1780 when it was agreed with the Comédie-Française that writers should receive one-seventh of the box-office income, thus creating the basis for the modern system of royalty payments. In England by the end of the century the best hope for substantial payment was selling the play outright either to the theatre company or to a publisher; by the 1790s the theatres were paying anything up to £500 for a full-length play, though the more normal payment was closer to £100.

Brockmann as Hamlet. The immensely popular Brockmann assures himself of attracting attention by seeking a prominent position on stage while the players in the 'mouse-trap' scene in the background are virtually ignored.
As the century progressed actors came generally to be treated with much greater respect and generosity. In Weimar in the 1790s Goethe insisted that actors should be reasonably paid and his performers were treated as acceptable members of court society. In 1779 Garrick was buried in Westminster Abbey; in revolutionary France Talma was a public hero; while in Germany and Austria Franz Brockmann’s performance as Hamlet conferred on him the kind of public adulation we would now associate with a pop star, with his image being reproduced on tobacco tins and playing cards.

Perhaps the most remarkable change was the establishment of theatre as an art with its own history. Throughout the century and throughout Europe, writers started to publish histories of theatre, manuals of actor training, descriptions of sets and costumes, biographies of actors and managers, analysis of plays in performance: in England, for instance, works like Charles Gildon’s *The Life of Mr Thomas Betterton* (1710), John Hill’s *The Actor* (1755), Benjamin Victor’s *The History of the Theatres of London and Dublin* (1761), and Francis Gentleman’s *The Dramatic Censor or Critical Companion* (1770) are the tip of this iceberg. The century’s great theatre theorists like Diderot and Schiller belong in this context. Theatre now commanded serious attention as an artistic and cultural form, a specific art in a culture flowing often awkwardly across the whole of Europe; it mattered to the intellectual community of Europe as never before.
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