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## On the Art of Dramatic Probability: Elizabeth Inchbald's *Remarks for The British Theatre*

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In 1806, Longman & Co. publishers commissioned the accomplished actress, playwright, and novelist Elizabeth Inchbald to compose a series of prefatory remarks for the plays to be included in their *British Theatre* series.<sup>1</sup> One hundred and twenty-five in all, each of the plays for Longman's *British Theatre* was originally published and sold separately at a rate of about one per week.<sup>2</sup> Once the series was complete, the plays were bound together and sold as a twenty-five-volume set. As the surviving diary entries from the two-year period during which she wrote her *Remarks* testify, the task proved both arduous and unrelenting for Inchbald, especially as she had no hand in selecting the plays to be included and no control over the order in which she was asked to compose her critical commentaries.<sup>3</sup> Working almost constantly, no sooner had she read one play, drafted her remarks, and copyedited the proof, than she had to turn to the next play sent by Longman, collect her thoughts, and start the process all over again. For the most part, as Annibel Jenkins has noted, “[T]here seems to be no pattern of publishing by date or genre; a tragedy by Shakespeare came out one week and a contemporary comedy the next.”<sup>4</sup> At one point, the strain of this process was so unbearable that Inchbald even tried to renege on her contractual obligations, writing to Longman, “begging to decline any further progress.” This request, as her first biographer, James Boaden, records, Longman “could not be expected to permit; and she was therefore compelled to *remark* through the whole year.”<sup>5</sup> In the event, and however “dreadful” the task may have been for Inchbald, the widely advertised series proved a “great commercial success,” and Inchbald's *Remarks* have come down to us as one of the first great achievements in English dramatic criticism of the early nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps most significant, and I think somewhat undernoted, is that the texts for the *British Theatre* series were drawn not from earlier editions of the plays but rather from the promptbook copies for the Haymarket, Covent Garden, and Drury Lane patent theatres.<sup>7</sup> Although they may have been marketed for inclusion in personal and circulating libraries, the series was quite deliberately composed of

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performance texts and, as such, was meant to reflect not the history of English drama so much as the likes and tastes that regulated the contemporary playhouse repertoire.<sup>8</sup> Graced with a frontispiece featuring a scene from a current production, and with the most recent cast lists from one or more of the theatres included at the front of each play, these texts aimed at encouraging readers either to re-create or reexperience a performance of a play they had already seen, or, drawing on their knowledge of popular performers, to imagine the performance of a play they had not yet seen.<sup>9</sup>

This set of emphases is never far from Inchbald's mind as throughout the *Remarks* she takes great care to note stage performances that spilled over onto the experience of the page. Thus, she wrote, for instance, of George Colman the Younger's three-act play *The Mountaineers*:

Those persons who have never seen Mr. Kemble in Octavian, will yet receive delight in reading this well-written play; but those who have seen him, will weep as they read, and tremble as they weep, for it is most certain they have not forgotten him. Those, again, who have seen any other actor in the character, will peruse the play possessed in all its claims to attention, with indifference; for this true lover requires such peculiar art, such consummate skill in the delineation, that it is probable his representation may have given an impression of the whole drama unfavourable to the author.<sup>10</sup>

In this set of observations, Inchbald indicates how a dramatic text may be brought vividly to life on the stage even if it languishes somewhat on the page. A powerful performance could evoke a passionate response that translated into physiological symptoms—weeping and trembling—not just in the immediate moment of witnessing but much later, during the more leisurely act of recollection that would take place while reading what might otherwise be a rather dull text. Kemble's performance in the starring role thus eclipsed what Inchbald otherwise took to be the failings of a play that, however “well-written,” was also “little calculated for representation.” Indeed, as she wryly observes in her opening comment on this drama, “Poetry, with all its charms, will not constitute a good play: —a very inferior dramatic work may be in the highest degree poetical.”<sup>11</sup>

In this essay, I focus on the distinction that Inchbald draws here between plays that were “calculated for representation” and those that were not, that is, between what she terms “a good play” as opposed to a “very inferior dramatic work.” My discussion thus entails questions about the efficacy of various aesthetic and material forms, the parameters that govern the consumption of those forms, and the particular techniques employed by playwrights to produce what, with all due critical concern, we might designate a “successful” stage representation.<sup>12</sup> While debates about whether or not Inchbald favored the stage over the page, or the page over the stage, and over the extent to which her views on drama either overlapped with, complemented, or departed from those of romantic critics such as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt, have certainly yielded a great deal of valuable scholarship, they have also, I believe, obstructed our view of what I take to be and will aim to illustrate as Inchbald's singular accomplishment over the course of her *Remarks*—her enumeration of the criteria for producing a successful, live, stage representation in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century playhouse.<sup>13</sup> In focusing on

this aspect of her *Remarks*, I seek here not only to illustrate Inchbald's critical accomplishments, as others have done, but also to position her as the foremost theorist of theatrical production and representation in her period.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, my interest in Inchbald lies in her status both as an astute observer of and knowledgeable insider in the playhouse space, and as an adroit, accomplished, and wildly successful practitioner in the art of manipulating and managing dramatic forms. In this respect, I would argue, the question of whether she favored the page over the stage or the stage over the page, around which so many critical discussions of her work have been organized, misses the point of her writing—which was, in effect, to distinguish the elements that must be marshaled, as she herself puts it, with enough “force of expression to animate a multitude” in the theatrical playhouse, from those that would suffice only “to steal upon the heart of an individual.”<sup>15</sup> Taking Inchbald's thinking as our point of departure, this essay finds it more productive to engage not so much with the question of favor or preference, then, as with the question of the extent to which Inchbald sought both to theorize the differing aesthetic demands of theatrical forms and to discern when those demands were met and when they were not.

As I work my way through her *Remarks*, I thus set aside the usual arguments and theories about the stage and page in order to clear the way for taking a fresh look at Inchbald's project. I contend that in Inchbald we have an extraordinary opportunity to mine the insights of one of the most successful playwrights in the period about how to produce a successful play—that is, a lively and enlivened stage performance that engaged large audiences—and that in this sense her aims and interests were of a wholly different kind from those we have come to associate with romantic theories of drama.<sup>16</sup> My goal is thus to tease out what I take to be some of the more consistent, but not yet duly noted, strands of argument that she presents about the art of live representation over the course of this fragmented series of observations and to weave those strands together to produce an understanding of what Inchbald deemed *dramatic probability*—a term she uses in passing but that I take to be, and elaborate upon, as her signature phrase. As I demonstrate, dramatic probability, in Inchbald's parlance, was meant not to designate a mimetic principle so much as to encompass a particular understanding of the conjunction of the playwright's craft, the action of dramatic genres, and the actor's genius.<sup>17</sup> Even more, as I illustrate, her theory of dramatic probability was fundamentally aligned with Aristotle's dictum that “the needs of poetry make what is plausible though impossible preferable to what is possible but implausible.”<sup>18</sup> As Inchbald understood and articulated it, the difficult art of the playwright was no more or less than to produce the conditions and effects of plausibility, that is, to make certain turns and events appear both probable and necessary within the frame of dramatic representation, ones that might otherwise seem impossible outside or beyond that framing. In the three sections that follow, I explore Inchbald's elevated position at the critical center of the historical *mise-en-scène* of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century playhouse; her brilliantly perceptive theorization in her *Remarks* of how the operations of dramatic probability enable a theatrical real to be produced within the frames of dramaturgical fictions; and her insights into the pivotal role played in those operations by gifted actors.

## Elizabeth Inchbald and the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Playhouse

Inchbald's fame long preceded her engagement with Longman. She first appeared on the London stage as an actress at Covent Garden in 1780, and "between 1780 and 1805," as Ellen Donkin has noted, "she wrote twenty plays, ten of which were adaptations, and ten of which were original. Of the twenty, seventeen were conspicuously successful onstage."<sup>19</sup> In engaging Inchbald to write the *Remarks* for their *British Theatre* series, Longman thus chose a writer of significant import whose reputation was impeccable and whose qualifications to comment on the workings of the playhouse repertory were in many respects unparalleled. Her experience as an actress rotating through multiple parts in the repertory gave her insight into what played well and what played poorly, and her great success and popularity as a playwright had not only made her famous but had also made hers a marketable name that would help Longman to sell the entire body of plays. Following the extraordinary success of the *British Theatre* series, they would pay her even more money simply to lend her name, without the onerous burden of writing prefaces, to two other theatrical collections—a seven-volume *Collection of Farces and Other Afterpieces* published in 1809 and the ten-volume *Modern Theatre* series published in 1811.<sup>20</sup>

Though her success and attainments were ultimately quite remarkable, Inchbald came by her credentials in the playhouse the hard way—she earned them. She was neither the beneficiary of a powerful patron nor the protégée of a playhouse manager or patentee. Indeed, she received any number of rejection notices for her playscripts, and until the runaway success of her first staged play in 1784, an afterpiece titled *The Mogul Tale*, she had constantly to lobby playhouse managers like George Colman and Thomas Harris even to consider her plays, with the added shock and indignity of suffering an attempted rape at the hands of the latter.<sup>21</sup> A widow by the age of twenty-five, Inchbald chose never to remarry. Instead she worked constantly to support not only herself but also a number of less fortunate family members, and in her own capacity, she negotiated all of the contractual terms for her play performances and publications, and carefully invested all of her earnings.

Inchbald's *Remarks* reflect both her hard-won success and her strong sense of a work ethic. In the biographical observations that are included in many of the *Remarks*, she has little time or patience for playwrights who squandered either their talent or their money. She can be wry, tart, and witty, but she can also be moralistic and judgmental. The tenor of her comments often verges on the sharp and sardonic, as when she archly observes of John Dryden's changeable political affiliations and conversion to Catholicism, "So distinguished a believer might have done honour to that Church—but Dryden believed also in astrology."<sup>22</sup>

As this cutting comment might suggest, Inchbald was no shrinking violet when it came to expressing her views and opinions. Politics were not out of bounds for her, and quite a few of her *Remarks* touch on stage censorship and the aftereffects of the French Revolution.<sup>23</sup> Of Thomas Southerne's adaptation of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, she pointedly observes, moreover, that the play was never acted in Liverpool, "for the very reason why it ought to be acted there oftener than at any other place—the merchants of that great city acquire their riches by the slave trade."<sup>24</sup> And if Inchbald seems to take a harsh view of female playwrights—writing

moralistically of Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, "the authoress of this comedy should have laid down her pen, and taken, in exchange, the meanest implement of labour, rather than have imitated the licentious example given her by the renowned poets of those days,"<sup>25</sup>—it is also the case that she was no less sparing when it came to judging her own works and her own ambitions. Of her comedy *To Marry or Not to Marry*, she writes of her calculating efforts to anticipate the jabs and quibbles of the playhouse critics, recollecting how, in pursuit of accolades, she thought to herself: "I will shun the faults imputed by the critics to modern dramatists; I will avoid farcical incidents, broad jests, the introduction of broken English . . . whatever may be considered by my judges as a repetition of those faults of which they have so frequently complained," only to find that all such efforts were in "vain." "Supposing all those evils escaped which the authoress dreaded," she attests, coolly referring to herself now in the third person, "what is the event of her cautious plan?—Had she produced a good comedy?—No. She has passed from one extreme to another; and, attempting to soar above others, has fallen even beneath herself."<sup>26</sup> Here Inchbald recounts her earnest attempts to avoid the hackneyed and the overdone and to anticipate the judgment of the playhouse arbiters to whose tastes she felt compelled to appeal. Overly cautious in this instance in her approach to playwriting, she had allowed her desire "to soar above others" to cloud her own instincts for good playmaking. She had acquiesced to letting her reflective consciousness of critical precepts interfere with her success in producing a satisfying and pleasurable live, stage representation.

In contrast, she reports of her more fruitful experience in writing *Such Things Are*: "A bold enterprize [*sic*] requires bold execution; and as skill does not always unite with courage, it is often advantageous, where cases are desperate, not to see with the eye of criticism: chance will sometimes do more for rash self-importance, than that judgment, which is the parent of timidity." Celebrating the triumph that followed upon this less calculating and more instinctual writing experience, she boasts, "Such was the consequence on the first appearance of this comedy—its reception was favourable beyond the usual bounds of favour bestowed upon an admired play, and the pecuniary remuneration equally extraordinary."<sup>27</sup>

Through a kind of trial and error, Inchbald thus learned over the course of her playwriting career to avoid kowtowing to the anticipated judgments of external critics and to place her trust instead in her own creative instincts and artistic insights.<sup>28</sup> In Inchbald's account, moreover, the success of one play and the failure of another often reflected the extraordinary pressures that playwrights were under both to produce and to produce prodigiously for the stage. Noting that "good plays are difficult to produce," she laments that, "those who write often must divide the materials, which would constitute one extraordinary into two ordinary dramas."<sup>29</sup> This situation was exacerbated by the extreme forms of immediate and public judgment to which playwrights were subjected. She observes that

the dramatist, once brought before the public, must please at first sight, or never be seen more. There is no reconsideration in *his* case—no judgment to expect beyond the decree of the moment; and he must direct his force against the weakness, as well as the strength, of his jury. He must address their habits, passions, and prejudices, as the only means to gain this sudden conquest of their minds and hearts.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the private and contemplative space of the closet, the playhouses were public sites of quick and irreversible judgments, and playwrights quite literally ran the gantlet whenever they offered a new play. Thus, Inchbald remarks on Thomas Holcroft's *The Road to Ruin*: "There is merit in the writing, but much more in that dramatic science, which disposes character, scenes, and dialogue, with minute attention to theatric exhibition; for the author has nicely considered, that it is only by passing the ordeal of a theatre with safety, that a drama has the privilege of being admitted to a library."<sup>31</sup> Much more than reputation was at stake, then, as Inchbald makes clear that success on the stage, brought about by "minute attention to theatric exhibition," not only provided access to greater earnings from publication but was indeed a predicate condition for greater fame and influence both within and beyond the growing spaces of the theatrical playhouse. Success in the performed repertory paved the way toward a place not only in the reading archive but also, by virtue of the materiality of print, in histories of theatre and drama.

By the early nineteenth century, the patent playhouses had grown from their modest Restoration capacities of about five hundred to an almost unfathomable size, each seating well over two thousand people. After fires destroyed both Covent Garden in 1808 and Drury Lane in 1809, they were each rebuilt to accommodate massive houses of upwards of three thousand patrons.<sup>32</sup> Even more significant, as the theatres expanded in capacity, they also enlarged the distance between the audience and the stage action.<sup>33</sup> In her *Remarks* Inchbald comprehended not only the appetite for novelty and incident in the playhouse but also the new playhouse optics and spectatorial dynamics that militated against displays of subtlety or minute detail in stage representations. The assumption of many critics in her time, and indeed the assumption often followed by many critics in our own time, has been that a lack of subtlety should be equated with a lack of art. But for Inchbald the structural mandate to eschew subtlety did not equate with poor aesthetic quality on the stage. Indeed, she defended the stage against those who cast aspersions upon its aesthetics, writing rather mockingly that it is "more likely, that public favour has incited the envious to rail; or, at best, raised up minute enquirers into the excellence of that amusement, which charms a whole nation; and criticism sees faults, as fear see ghosts—whenever they are looked for."<sup>34</sup>

In Inchbald's view, the vast playhouses were no disincentive to the creation of smart plays, as adept playwrights understood both how to adapt their craft to engage large audiences and how to adopt aesthetic and dramaturgical strategies for stage representation that would produce specific affective and cognitive effects in those cavernous spaces.<sup>35</sup> Captive audiences and commercial successes were an indicator not of playing to the least common denominator but rather of dramaturgical prowess. It was a fallacy then, as it is now, to think that the achievement of such success required no art. Indeed, those who insisted on forming dramas that relied on the depiction of minute particulars or the subtle movement of the passions without sufficient attention to the demands of "theatric exhibition" met with her disapprobation for failing fundamentally to engage with the current conditions of performance in the patent playhouses. Thus, while she follows the rest of the early nineteenth-century theatrical world in praising Joanna Baillie's genius, she also observes of Baillie's tragedy *De Monfort*: "the smaller, more curious and new-

created passions, which [the reader] may find there, will be too delicate for the observation of those who hear and see in a mixed, and sometimes, riotous company.”<sup>36</sup> She then goes on to conclude:

This drama, of original and very peculiar formation, plainly denotes that the authoress has studied theatrical productions as a reader more than as a spectator; and it may be necessary to remind her—that Shakspeare [*sic*] gained his knowledge of the effect produced from plays upon an audience, and profited, through such attainment, by his constant attendance on dramatic representations, even with the assiduity of a performer.<sup>37</sup>

Inchbald’s commentary here is none too subtle. While others were lavishing accolades on Baillie as the nation’s new Shakespeare, Inchbald suggests that Baillie lacked the necessary prerequisites for that title—a knowledge not just of how dramatic forms operate on the page but of how they can be brought to life on the stage. Like Shakespeare, however, Inchbald *had* studied the stage “with the assiduity of a performer.” Not only had she spent many years performing on the provincial and London stages, but, as Ellen Donkin has observed, “she had trained herself to be a playwright, by watching rehearsals and productions and audiences night after night, seeing what worked and did not.”<sup>38</sup> In every respect, then, she was well positioned to offer precepts on the art of dramatic probability.

### “With minute attention to theatric exhibition”; or, The Art of Dramatic Probability

Since Elizabeth Inchbald left behind no sustained or extended essay on the concept of dramatic probability, we need to piece together the strands of observation and speculation that run through her *Remarks*. Inchbald uses the phrase just once: in her comments on Hannah Cowley’s *The Belle’s Stratagem*, a comedy in which Inchbald herself became known for appearing as Lady Frances Touchwood. Inchbald opens her assessment of the comedy with this observation:

The incident, from which the play takes its title, is, perhaps, the least pleasing, and the least probable, of any amongst the whole; still, this stratagem, as the foundation of a multiplicity of others, far better conceived and executed, has a claim to the toleration of the reader, and will generally obtain admiration from the auditor, by the skill of the actress who imitates a simpleton.<sup>39</sup>

Note, first, how Inchbald distinguishes here between the experience of the reader and that of the auditor—the former will merely “tolerate” a plot that lacks probability, while the latter will come to admire the work precisely because the author has managed, through a certain skill in conception and execution, to bring the plot off—that is, she makes it appear probable, despite its utter lack of probability. Note, too, that Inchbald recognizes here that any success that the comedy might have will depend not only on the playwright’s ability to “execute” but also upon the “skill of the actress” who sets the stratagem in motion and sees it through, a point to which I return to in the final section of this essay. Later in these same *Remarks*, Inchbald observes the improbability of both Lady Frances’s anonymity at the masquerade and of Doricourt’s falling violently in love there, but then she reasons: “though neither of these events, traced

through all their meanders, may appear strictly within the bounds of likelihood, yet *dramatic probability* is seldom for a moment lost; which is the happy art of alluring the attention of an audience, from the observation of every defect, and of fixing it solely upon every beauty which the dramatist displays.”<sup>40</sup> In this locution, dramatic probability emerges as the result of the strategies or “happy art” enlisted by the astute playwright, aided by gifted actors, to distract the audience from any actual improbability in the action and plot. What otherwise might be considered “defects” are not only reconstituted through the skill of the playwright into necessary and enlivening plot points but also constitute a kind of beauty to be admired and appreciated. To produce a sense of the theatrical real within the frame of action, a playwright must draw the spectator’s attention away from those elements that upon reflection would seem absurd and toward those elements that move the comedic action forward and bring it to a happy close.

This is no isolated insight on Inchbald’s part. Indeed, she is remarkably consistent in her formulation of this notion of dramatic probability in comedies. Of Colley Cibber’s *Love Makes a Man*, she enthuses, for instance: “he engages the heart in every event, that the head does not once reflect upon the improbabilities, or even impossibilities, with which the senses are delighted.”<sup>41</sup> And as a global comment on the expansive range of improbabilities that English comedies are allowed when they are set in foreign countries, she humorously notes that it is “as if reason presided alone over the island of Great Britain.”<sup>42</sup> To the extent that such improbabilities dominated the repertoire, Inchbald understood that they also reorganized perceptual logics, which is to say that, at least within the frame of dramatic representation and the flow of action, they altered what it was possible to perceive as natural and true.

Even further, Inchbald makes a clear distinction between how dramatic probability ought to operate in comedies as distinguished from farce—for which, in her theorization of dramatic genres, no such requirement obtains. Writing admirably, for instance, of Arthur Murphy’s *All in the Wrong*, she contends:

the incidents that occur are bold without extravagance or apparent artifice, which is the criterion on which judgment should be formed between comedy and farce. The last scene in the fourth act is an illustration of this position—its effect is comic to the highest degree, yet having arisen from causes consonant with the general events of life, no particle of burlesque infringes on the rational enjoyment which an enlightened audience receives from the whimsical coincidence of unlooked-for accidents.<sup>43</sup>

For Inchbald, the art of the comic playwright inheres in making the improbable appear not only possible but indeed probable, that is, as if arising from “causes consonant with the general events of life.” What we might consider as improbable outside of the frame of the comic representation, that is, within the frame of the real, is made to seem probable within the frame of the dramatic, representational real. All depends, in other words, on the context within which the series of dramatic incidents unfold and the ways in which the conventions of the genre itself encourage us to suspend the usual laws of rational understanding to embrace the “rational enjoyment which an enlightened audience receives.” Rational, because the playwright has managed through her art to transform the logic of perceived probabilities;



enjoyable, because we take pleasure from our experience of that transformation. Where the playwright violates probability too often and, more important, without sufficient art—as she claims is the case for Susanna Centlivre’s *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*—the result is “that of farce, and not genuine comedy.”<sup>44</sup> In Inchbald’s conceptualization, then, artfully arranged improbabilities are to be taken in stride as precisely the foundation from which comedy distracts, builds its forward momentum, and generates its pleasures; and she is no less emphatic about the cultivation of the effects of dramatic probability when she turns to other dramatic genres.

It might be useful to begin our exploration of Inchbald’s *Remarks* on various tragedies with one of my favorite bon mots from the entire collection: “prudence,” she archly observes in her “Remarks” on Colman the Younger’s *The Battle of Hexham*, “is a virtue, which would destroy the best heroine that ever was invented.”<sup>45</sup> Offering an observation that we might be more likely to expect to spill from the lips of a character in an Oscar Wilde play, Inchbald touches on a truth much suppressed about Restoration and eighteenth-century tragedies, especially the persistently popular she-tragedies: that they are set in motion by a singular lack of prudence on the part of the main female characters. Think outside of the plays, just for a moment, of the unlikelihood that so many women in powerful positions could be so singularly lacking in prudence or judgment and then think again about how this very improbability shapes so many of our most prized, tragic works from this period or, to be honest, from any period at all. Indeed, I would contend that the figure of the imprudent woman is built into our generic expectations—so seamlessly so that, but for Inchbald’s observation, we would fail to take notice of it at all. The imprudence of tragic heroines is thus the perfect figure for the operations and effects of dramatic probability.

Inchbald enlarges on the figure of female imprudence and the operations of dramatic probability in her discussion of Edward Moore’s *The Gamester*. Here she notes how *The Gamester* is usually “accounted of high moral tendency,” but she disputes this claim: “The author’s design has been a proper one, and he has produced a very affecting and ingenious drama from his materials. Yet surely its power of deterring one single gamester from his visionary pursuits, seems as improbable as the converting to reason the strayed minds of Moor Fields by the force of argument.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, she continues,

This tragedy is calculated to have a very different effect upon the stage and in the closet. An auditor, deluded into it by the inimitable acting of a Mrs. Siddons and a Mr. Kemble . . . weeps with her; sighs with him. . . . But a reader, blessed with the common reflection which reading should give, calls the husband a very silly man, and the wife a very imprudent woman . . . an audience mostly supposes that she performs an heroic action as a wife, —but readers call to mind she is a mother.<sup>47</sup>

Under the delusive force of dramatic probability in performance, the heroine Mrs. Beverley may be conceived as deserving of all of our sympathy and as taking moral action in selling the family’s last assets to support her gambling husband, but in the quiet of the closet, she is perceived as imprudent, as sacrificing her children to her husband’s pernicious pathology. Contrary to romantic views expressed about the reading of plays, then, in Inchbald’s formulation the closet is not the

site for the forceful release of the feeling imagination but rather the locus of rational reflection—the place where the rational mind in full control of its social and moral faculties tracks the probability of the plot and the consistency of the characters. Where a good stage production—especially one featuring the brilliant Kemble and Siddons—distracts the mind and moves the passions so that flaws in probability, consistency, or character come to be overlooked, the quiet reading of the closet results in a kind of revulsion at the supposedly unnatural acts of the mother.

Whereas in the closet those inconsistencies and flaws can be detected, in performance those flaws are naturalized and made to seem probable—at least in the immediate moment. Thus she asserts similarly in her discussion of Thomas Morton's comedy *Speed the Plough* that the auditor will be more pleased with this drama than the reader, "for, though it is well written, and interspersed with many poetical passages, an attentive peruser will find inconsistencies in the arrangement of the plot and incidents, which an audience absorbed in expectation of final events, and hurried away by the charm of scenic interest, cannot easily detect."<sup>48</sup> Swept up not only in the moment but also in our generic "expectation of final events," we are not perturbed by the momentary lapse in our powers of discernment; it is, rather, a source of pleasure. Whether the performance is of a tragedy or a comedy, then, it is shaped, in Inchbald's account, by dramaturgical practices and generic interests that are designed to delude the auditor, so much so that any inconsistencies or flaws elude detection in the moment. Indeed, so long as the playwright, as she notes in her "Remarks" on *The Merchant of Venice*, is consistent in incorporating improbabilities into the plot, the "extravagant" will become so "familiar" as not to be noted at all.<sup>49</sup> What is generally esteemed unnatural and irrational, especially with respect to social mores, appears in performance as both rational and natural.

This understanding marks Inchbald's engagement with history plays as well in ways that at first appear rather contradictory. On the one hand, she takes great care to assure her readers that the plays represent actual events, that these are true histories. Thus, in her "Remarks" on Shakespeare's *Henry V*, she observes, "A dramatist, who had feigned occurrences, or who had not closely adhered to facts, as Shakspeare [*sic*] in this play has done, might have been charged with burlesquing the human character in the vainglory which is here given to France, and her consequent humiliation."<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, Inchbald makes it clear that history on its own would be lost on the stage, and that to bring it to life in a manner that is compelling to audiences it must be supported by a playwright's skill and imagination. Thus, she expounds:

Fiction, from the pen of genius, will often appear more like nature, than nature will appear like herself. The admired speech invented by the author for King Henry, in a beautiful soliloquy just before battle, seems the exact effect of the place and circumstances with which he was then surrounded, and to be, as his very mind stamped on the dramatic page; and yet perhaps his majesty, in his meditations, had no such thoughts as are here provided for him.<sup>51</sup>

In this account, Shakespeare's adherence to what were considered "facts" provides the foundation from which he can build fictions. What the playwright aims

for, in other words, is not the exact truth but rather that which “seems the exact effect of the place and circumstances,” the rhetorically pitch perfect and eloquent speech that we as an audience would like to imagine the great hero of England would have delivered on the eve of the historically decisive battle of Agincourt. It is not “his very mind stamped on the dramatic page,” then, but rather “as his very mind stamped on the dramatic page.” Where it is far more likely, as Inchbald points out, that the king had “no such thoughts as [were] provided for him” by Shakespeare, the playwright makes it appear otherwise. Under the strictures of dramatic probability, as she theorizes it, the character thus functions in a relationship of simile to history, rather than as testimonial eyewitness.

This point can be illustrated further if we turn to Inchbald’s expressions of disappointment at Richard Cumberland’s failure to embellish more effectively upon history or real fact in his comedy *First Love*. Noting the extremity of the experience of French émigrés in the wake of the French Revolution, she queries rhetorically: “What could fiction add, what could imagination invent, what could poetic description supply, to heighten the real sufferings of, or increase the general compassion for, those outcasts of their country?”<sup>52</sup> In theory or at least on the surface, the abject situation of the émigrés should have been enough in itself to engage the interest of the audience and stimulate human compassion. And yet, Inchbald observes,

The very materials which gave to this drama the semblance of real life have cast an insipidity upon the whole substance. The author, placing his dependence upon a fact, has spared his powers of invention their usual labour; and, lulled into security by the charms of a popular topic, has slumbered throughout his employment, nearly to the sleep of death.<sup>53</sup>

Harsh, perhaps, but her point is clear: the materials of “real life” may lend probability to a stage representation but they are not enough to produce the effects of dramatic probability or draw dramatic interest. The playwright’s obligation is to exercise the “powers of invention” upon the substance of “real life” and to produce a work of imagination that moves past the “insipidity” of lived experience, its familiarity and banality, and instead engages the audience in the inventions of live, stage representation.

In stark contrast for Inchbald, as she makes clear in her extended discussion of Colley Cibber’s *The Careless Husband*, the stuff of “real life” is best consigned to the closet, where it can be carefully examined and assessed. To her mind, Cibber’s comedy was one of the few plays that could not benefit any further from the contributions of actors. “The dialogue,” she writes, is “so brilliant, [and] at the same time, so very natural, that its force will admit of no augmentation, even from the delivery of the best actors.” Even more, she asserts, “[t]he occurrences, which take place in this drama, are of that delicate, as well as probable kind, that their effect is not sufficiently powerful in the representation—whereas, in reading, they come to the heart with infinitely more force, for want of that extravagance, which public exhibition requires.”<sup>54</sup> Here Inchbald distinguishes between occurrences of a “probable kind” whose “effect is not sufficiently powerful in the representation” and those of a more “extravagan[t]” type that are designed for, and have force in, “public

exhibition.” Thus she concludes that with all of its “little touches of refined nature,” *The Careless Husband* provides more readily for tastes that can be savored by “the connoisseur,” whereas, “as an auditor, he might possibly be deprived of his enjoyment, by the vain endeavour of performers, to display, by imitation, that which only real life can show, or imagination pourtray [*sic*].” In short, the imagination, as Inchbald renders it, again works in the closet in the realm of the probable only to reproduce rather than move beyond images of “real life.” With “no violent passions, such as are usually depicted on a stage; but merely such as commonly govern mankind,” the actors, whose mandate is to operate not so much in the realm of mimesis as in the realm of dramatic probability—a kind of modified or fictive mimesis—have very little work to do in *The Careless Husband* to naturalize the action of the drama.<sup>55</sup> The real itself is already too much so to hold any interest for the stage; it may be probable, but it is lacking in the allurements and extravagance of dramatic probability. Under the auspices of this revision of “the whole notion of realism,” one that bears only a tangential relation to what we now term dramatic realism, the effects of the actors, as Francesca Saggini has also argued, become critical elements in the production and perception of a theatrical real.<sup>56</sup>

### Actors and the Art of Dramatic Probability

Although Inchbald may relegate Cibber’s comedy to the closet, she takes an entirely different view of his qualities as an actor in a manner that parallels her distinction between probability and dramatic probability, or between the rational realm of the closet and the inventive realm of the stage. In her defense of Cibber against what she characterizes as the ad hominem attacks of Alexander Pope, she writes:

That admirable poet should have considered, that, of all artists, the actor is most an object of curiosity and incitement to personal acquaintance. The purchaser of a picture, or a book, makes the genius of the painter, or the author, who have produced these works, as it were, of his household, and he requires no farther intimacy—but the actor must come himself to his admirer, as the only means of yielding, to his domestic pleasures, even the shadow of his art.<sup>57</sup>

Where poets, painters, and novelists can be domesticated, made a part of the property of the household, as it were, through the mere acquisition of their works, something about an actor or an actor’s artistry always remains elusive, hovering beyond the public grasp and leaving admirers with only the “shadow of his art”—that fleeting and evanescent quality of being present and absent, embodied and representational at the same time. This is what Joseph Roach refers to as the “It” factor, a quality that teases the audience by proffering markers of public intimacy but ultimately one that eludes definition, comprehension, or, in Inchbald’s construction, domestication.<sup>58</sup> It is to the force and power of these elusive qualities that Inchbald then looks in formulating her ideas about the collaborative dynamics that make the art of dramatic probability possible.

In Inchbald’s account, all successful dramatic stagings ought to be understood as lively collaborations between the skills of the playwright and the creative gifts of the actor. In this respect, as both Greg Kucich and Karen Gevirtz have pointed out, she

understood playtexts as unstable, permeable, and fluid points of departure for performances rather than as written artifacts set in stone.<sup>59</sup> Thus she writes of Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian*,

It cannot be, however, any diminution of the pleasure of reading this comedy, to be told—that, although it may bestow no small degree of entertainment in the closet, its proper region is the stage. —Many of the characters require the actor's art, to fill up the bold design, where the author's pen has not failed but wisely left off the perilous touches of a finishing hand to the judicious comedian.<sup>60</sup>

Here we learn that the astute playwright, in Inchbald's judgment, knows exactly where to leave off in her writing so as to create room for the "finishing hand" of the actor. In this regard, no dramatic text could or should be considered complete without its performance.

Writing with admiration on Thomas Morton's *Cure for the Heart-Ache*, she extends her account of collaboration between actors and playwrights by observing:

A reader unacquainted with the force, the various powers of acting, may gravely inquire how it was possible this play could interest an audience? Much, may be answered, was effected by the actors—but still it was the author who foresaw what might be done in their performance and who artfully arranged his plan to the purpose of exhibition, and penetrated farther than any other eye could have discerned, into the probability of success.<sup>61</sup>

Wielding both foresight and wisdom, skilled playwrights arrange their works for the "purpose of exhibition," that is, they provide the bold scaffolding and framework within which adept actors and actresses may improvise to bring a scene to life. The playwright thus labors on the page to produce the greatest "probability of success," knowing full well that any outcome will depend on the "perilous touches" of the actors who are brought in to perform the work.

That the playwright relies heavily on the technical abilities of skilled actors is a point that Inchbald explicitly articulates in the case of Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens*, writing:

This tragedy is calculated for representation, rather than the amusement of the closet; — for, though it is graced with some beautiful poetry, it is likewise deformed by an extravagance, both in thought and in language, that at times verges upon the ludicrous. Actors, eminent in their art, know how to temper those failings in a tragic author: they give rapidity to their utterance in the mock sublime, and lengthen their cadence upon every poetic beauty.<sup>62</sup>

In short, proper calibration on the part of both actor and playwright not only creates the greatest probability of success but also produces the conditions of dramatic probability, making what might seem absurd or lackluster on the page appear perfectly apt or engaging on the stage.

Perhaps the most extreme case of this phenomenon in defiance of all normative notions of probability occurs when an actor of extraordinary abilities, such as Sarah Siddons, appears able to coax life out of death. This was the case for *The Winter's*

*Tale*, a play that in general Inchbald found more conducive to the closet than to the stage. Asserting that the play “seems to class among those dramas that charm more in perusal than in representation,” Inchbald observes that while “the introduction of various other persons” may divert audience attention from “[t]he long absence from the scene of the two most important characters, Leontes and his wife,” for those in the theatre, those intervening scenes “do not so feelingly unite all they see and all they hear into a single story,” as much as they do for one “who, with the book in his hand, and neither his eye nor ear distracted, combines, and enjoys the whole grand variety.” Intimating that Shakespeare failed in this instance to produce a play that was properly calibrated for public exhibition, Inchbald notes even more that, “[b]esides the improbability of exciting equal interest by the *plot* of this drama, in performance as in the closet; some of the poetry is less calculated for that energetic delivery which the stage requires, than for the quiet contemplation of one who reads.”<sup>63</sup> For all of that, however, Inchbald still deems the play stageworthy for the sake of that singular scene “which is an exception to the rest, in being far more grand in exhibition than the reader will possibly behold in idea. This is the scene of the statue, when Mrs. Siddons stands for Hermione.”<sup>64</sup>

By all accounts, this was one of the most astonishing scenes to be represented on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stage, as Siddons brought the long-thought-dead Hermione to life out of a statuesque form.<sup>65</sup> In this regard, as Franca Dellarosa has observed, “what [was] generally acknowledged as the most *improbable* situation in the drama turn[ed] out to be the most effective in performance,” marking a critical moment “where theatrical ostension [could] even prevail over the imaginative capability of the individual.”<sup>66</sup> In that one moment, in other words, the foresight of a playwright, who understood the pulse of romance and who therefore could conceive the probable success of such a theatrical frisson, found itself in perfect conjunction with the finishing touches of an extraordinary actress, to produce a moment of dramatic probability that made every audience member, immersed in the suspended space–time of theatrical performance, believe what they were seeing. This was, in effect, the very realization of all that live theatre could, and often still hopes, to achieve. In offering these observations as well as many others over the course of her *Remarks*, what Elizabeth Inchbald thus understood, perhaps better than any other critic of her time, is that though audiences may enter the playhouse with a willingness to suspend disbelief, it is the playwright, working in conjunction with skilled actors, whose peculiar gift it is not only to create the conditions of belief but also, through the often counterintuitive operations of dramatic probability, to direct their audiences toward what to believe.

In concluding with this play upon Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s famous dictum on the willing suspension of disbelief, I mean to mark the sustained brilliance of the insights that Inchbald conveyed to us through her episodic *Remarks*. Where Coleridge spoke of “poetic faith,” Inchbald could be said, similarly, to have articulated a theory of what constitutes our experience of theatrical faith, that is, our willingness, when we enter the space of a playhouse, to allow ourselves to be carried by the combined dramaturgical prowess of the playwright and adroitness of the performer into a world of altered, perceptual logics.<sup>67</sup> While she may have shied away over the course of her career either from assuming an editorial perch for a literary periodical or from authoring a grand, aesthetic treatise, she was also, by

virtue of those very choices, free from the encumbrances of what Gay Gibson Cima has termed the “sphere of sociability,” which constrained the criticism of her male counterparts, who wrote both for the periodical press and for the ongoing approval of their peers.<sup>68</sup> In particular, Inchbald was at liberty to be unwavering in her approach to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century stage repertory as a live and enlivened corpus which, at its best, was animated by the imaginative art of dramatic probability, that is, by what a playwright, working in conjunction with gifted performers and with a keen understanding of dramatic interests, could render plausible within the framework of a theatrical real. Even more, through her insistent representation of the project of theatre as an ongoing, collaborative effort, Inchbald not only swept aside any claims for the solitary genius but also generated a groundbreaking set of insights that we can now bring into play to inform our own, present (re)considerations of theatre as a fundamentally live and enlivening art.

## Endnotes

1 Longman’s *British Theatre* was a continuation of Bell’s *The British Theatre* series, the rights to which Longman had recently purchased. See Annibel Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 452–3.

2 Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald’s Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), 149.

3 See Jenkins, who writes, “Her 1806 pocket-book is not extant, but those for 1807–1808 are, and the entries constitute a history of her writing and the methods she and her publisher used to make a great commercial success of their project” (452). Inchbald’s 1807 and 1808 pocketbook diaries are held by the Folger Library, which also holds those for 1776, 1780, 1781, 1783, 1788, 1793, 1814, and 1820. These have all been transcribed in *The Diaries of Elizabeth Inchbald*, ed. Ben P. Robertson, 3 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007). In the letter to George Colman the Younger that was printed with her “Remarks” on his *The Heir at Law*, Inchbald described her lack of input with respect to the entries as follows: “One of the points of my agreement was, that I should have no controul [*sic*] over the time or the order in which these prefaces were to be printed or published, but that I should merely produce them as they were called for, and resign all other interference to the proprietor or editor of the work” (vi). All of Inchbald’s “Remarks” have been gathered in facsimile form in one volume as *Remarks for The British Theatre (1806–1809)*, with an introduction by Cecilia Macheski (Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1990). The “Remarks” appear in the volume alphabetically by play title and, per their facsimile form, are each paginated separately. *Note*: hereafter I reference the “Remarks” by play title and by page within that entry.

4 Jenkins, 452.

5 James Boaden, ed., *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald: Including Her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of Her Time*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), 2: 87.

6 Robertson, 155, citing Inchbald diaries; Jenkins, 452. On advertising and publicity for the series, see Robertson, 161–2. Other scholars who have noted Inchbald’s achievements as one of the first, great drama critics of the early nineteenth century include Anne K. Mellor, “A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics,” in *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 29–48; Nora Nachumi, “To Write with Authority: Elizabeth Inchbald’s Prefaces to *The British Theatre*,” in *Teaching British Women Playwrights of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, eds. Bonnie Nelson and Catherine Burroughs (NY: Modern Language Association, 2010), 174–86; Katharine M. Rogers, “Britain’s First Woman Drama Critic: Elizabeth Inchbald,” in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theatre, 1660–1820*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Ceclia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991), 277–90; and Mary A. Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789–1832* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

7 Fiona Ritchie stands out as one of the few critics who understands Inchbald’s *Remarks* to be fundamentally “oriented towards performance.” Ritchie, however, restricts her observations to Inchbald’s “Remarks”

on Shakespeare's plays, whereas this article seeks to move across the entire performance repertoire represented in Inchbald's writing. See Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 98. See also Francesca Saggini, who recognizes "Inchbald's insistence on the difference between the closet and the stage" in "The Art of Fine Drama: Inchbald's *Remarks for The British Theatre* and the Aesthetic Experience of the Late Eighteenth-Century Theatre Goer," *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 18.1 (2005): 133–52, at 148.

8 The extent to which these texts were not only designed but also recognizable to Inchbald's contemporaries as performance texts, rather than as the authorized textual productions of playwrights, can be seen in Boaden's complaint that they omitted the usual prologues, epilogues, prefaces, and dedications associated with print culture, that is, all those types of front matter that "show us frequently so much of an author's mind, manners, views, and connexions" (2: 88).

9 See also Marvin Carlson, who writes, "there is clearly a theatre-going public that already has seen or can easily see these works in the theatre itself, using these printed texts as a reminder of or anticipation of that experience"; Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: A Woman Critic in Her Theatrical Culture," in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790–1840*, ed. Catherine [B.] Burroughs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 207–22, at 213.

10 "Remarks" on *The Mountaineer*, 3.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Here, it seems to me, the critical question that needs our (re)consideration, and what is addressed below, is what Inchbald meant by, and what our understanding might be, when we term a play "successful." Though Inchbald never composed a sustained treatise, this framing is designed deliberately to resonate with Aristotle's opening gambit in *Poetics*, to "inquire how stories are to be put together to make a good poetical work"; Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and intro. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17.

13 In *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie, and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), Catherine B. Burroughs argues that as a critic Inchbald modeled a "movement between closet and stage" (84). While I also refer to this movement from time to time, I am particularly interested in what Inchbald thought about the art of live stage representation and what it took to succeed at that art in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Significantly, and in contrast to my focus on Inchbald's development of a concept of "dramatic probability" for live, stage performance, Mary Waters looks to Inchbald's prefaces for the articulation of "a coherent theory of closet drama" (Waters, 21). This difference underscores the extent to which Inchbald herself understood these modes of representation—via text or via performance—as distinct operations, requiring distinct aesthetic techniques and producing distinct representational effects. My interest here lies in her theorization of and opinions on the production and effects of live, stage representations.

14 In this respect, I hope to go some way toward satisfying Susan Bennett's repeated calls to move beyond the categories of evaluation to which women writers like Inchbald have thus far been consigned in theatre history and to position Inchbald, without apology or qualification, as the foremost theatrical theorist of her time. See Bennett's discussions of Inchbald's historical status in "Decomposing History (Why Are There So Few Women in Theatre History?)," in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History*, ed. W. B. Worthen and Peter Holland (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 71–87; and her "The Making of Theatre History," in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, ed. Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 63–83.

15 Inchbald uses this phrasing in her "Remarks" on *The Winter's Tale*, suggesting that the "conversations of Florizel and Perdita have more of the tenderness, than the fervour, of love; and consequently their passion has not the force of expression to animate a multitude, though it is properly adapted to steal upon the heart of an individual" (4).

16 These concerns include a focus on the individual genius of authorship and on the psychological formation of characters that were thought by some to be more conducive to the closet. It seems appropriate to note here, however, that scholars such as Greg Kucich have argued that the antitheatrical impulse calling for a shift of dramatic focus from the stage to the page has been exaggerated in romantic criticism, and has more to do with a narrow focus on what poets and critics of that era had to say about Shakespeare than about their actual engagements with the contemporary repertoire. See, for instance, Greg Kucich, "'A Haunted Ruin': Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition, and the Critical Establishment," *Wordsworth Circle* 23.2 (1992): 64–76.



17 In distinguishing between probability and dramatic probability, I am departing from Anne Mellor, who in her groundbreaking essay on Inchbald identifies an emphasis on the “probable” as a key interest that the playwright-critic shared with Anna Barbauld as part of their didactic and pedagogical project (Mellor, 38).

18 Aristotle, 53.

19 Ellen Donkin, *Getting Into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776–1829* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 110.

20 Inchbald is named as having selected the plays for these two collections, but her participation in this process was minimal. Longman sent her a list for each collection, and her only brief was to review the list and strike out or add names as she saw fit. As she herself wrote in a letter in February 1809 to Mrs. Phillips, Sunday, 26 February 1809, she, “earned fifty guineas in five minutes, by merely looking over a catalogue of fifty farces, drawing my pen across one or two, and writing the names of others in their place: and now all those in that catalogue are to be printed with ‘Selected by Mrs. Inchbald’ on the title page. The prodigious sale my Prefaces have had, has tempted the booksellers to this offer” (Boaden, *Inchbald*, 2: 132–3). In the context of the claims of this essay, it seems not insignificant that the full title for the *Modern Theatre* collection is *The Modern Theatre: A Collection of Successful Modern Plays, as Acted at the Theatres Royal, London*. For lists of the contents of these collections, see Robertson, 167–72. For a further account of the ways in which Inchbald’s prefaces for *The British Theatre* catapulted her to critical prominence and how, for various reasons, she ultimately resisted almost all further importunities to play the part of public critic, see Boaden, *Inchbald*, 2: passim, as well as Patricia Sigl, “Prince Hoare’s *Artist* and Anti-Theatrical Polemics in the Early 1800s: Mrs. Inchbald’s Contribution,” *Theatre Notebook* 44.2 (1990): 62–73.

21 For a useful account of Inchbald’s efforts to get her plays reviewed and mounted, see Donkin, 110–31. Inchbald pointedly indicated just how far her obligations to these playhouse managers did and, more important, *did not* extend in her rebuttal letter to George Colman the Younger’s attack on her presumption to act the role of critic. Her letter, along with his attack, were printed as prefatory material to her “Remarks” on his *The Heir at Law*.

22 “Remarks” on *All for Love*, 5.

23 See, for instance, her “Remarks” on *First Love*, discussed below.

24 “Remarks” on *Oroonoko*, 4.

25 “Remarks” on *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, 4.

26 “Remarks” on *To Marry or Not to Marry*, 3. She is equally critical of herself for the shortcomings in stagecraft in her *Wives as They Were, and Maids as They Are*, writing again in the third person at the opening of this “Remark,” “The writer of this drama seems to have had a tolerable good notion of that which a play ought to be; but has here failed in the execution of a proper design” (3).

27 “Remarks” on *Such Things Are*, 2.

28 Thomas C. Crochunis cites some of these same “Remarks” in his excellent discussion of Inchbald’s authorial self-fashioning. Where his interest lies in exploring how Inchbald shaped her public reputation, mine lies in tracing her understanding of the causes of both her own and others’ successes and failures in theatrical production. Hence while we often agree in the main, we sometimes differ in the tenor and significance that we attribute to these entries. See Thomas C. Crochunis, “Authorial Performances in the Criticism and Theory of Romantic Women Playwrights,” in *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, ed. Burroughs, 223–54. For recent discussions of Inchbald’s plays, see, among others, Emily Hodgson Anderson, *Eighteenth-Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction: Novels and the Theater, Haywood to Austen* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009); Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Daniel O’Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

29 “Remarks” on *The Road to Ruin*, 6.

30 “Remarks” on *John Bull*, 4.

31 “Remarks” on *The Road to Ruin*, 3.

32 J. L. Styan, *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 275, 305.

33 *Ibid.*, 277.

34 “Remarks” on *Every One Has His Fault!*, 4.

35 See also Saggini, 139–40, 149, who notes Inchbald’s particular interest in the types of affective and cognitive responses aroused by theatrical representations.

- 36 “Remarks” on *De Monfort*, 3.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 5–6.
- 38 Donkin, 120.
- 39 “Remarks” on *The Belle’s Stratagem*, 3.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 4; italics mine.
- 41 “Remarks” on *Love Makes a Man*, 4.
- 42 “Remarks” on *She Wou’d and She Wou’d Not*, 3.
- 43 “Remarks” on *All in the Wrong*, 4.
- 44 “Remarks” on *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, 5.
- 45 “Remarks” on *The Battle of Hexham*, 5.
- 46 “Remarks” on *The Gamester*, 3.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 3–5.
- 48 “Remarks” on *Speed the Plough*, 5.
- 49 See Inchbald’s “Remarks” on *The Merchant of Venice*, where she writes, “Probability is, indeed, continually violated in ‘The Merchant of Venice;’ but so it should ever be in plays, or not at all—one improbable incident only, among a train of natural occurrences, revolts an audience; but where all is alike extravagant, comparison is prevented, and extravagance becomes familiar” (3).
- 50 “Remarks” on *King Henry V*, 4.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 “Remarks” on *First Love*, 4.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 “Remarks” on *The Careless Husband*, 5.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Saggini, 143.
- 57 “Remarks” on *The Careless Husband*, 7.
- 58 Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).
- 59 See Greg Kucich, “Rewriting Women in British Romantic Theatre,” in *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, ed. Burroughs, 48–76; and Karen Bloom Gevirtz, “Peer Reviewed: Elizabeth Inchbald’s Shakespeare Criticism,” in *Shakespeare and the Culture of Romanticism*, ed. Josephy M. Ortiz (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 31–49. See also Mary Waters, who writes, “Her criticism reveals an understanding of the potential for collaboration among source author, actor, playwright, and even audience that suggests that she regards theatrical texts as possessing far less integrity than today’s scholarship normally attributes to a literary work” (78–9).
- 60 “Remarks” on *The West Indian*, 5.
- 61 “Remarks” on *Cure for the Heart-Ache*, 3.
- 62 “Remarks” on *The Rival Queens*, 4. Inchbald offers similar observations on Arthur Murphy’s *The Grecian Daughter*, writing that although the performances of Barry and Siddons made the play “a brilliant success . . . [i]t is hardly possible to read this tragedy of ‘The Grecian Daughter’ without laughing as well as crying. Some passages excite tears, whilst certain high-sounding sentences, with meaning insignificant, are irresistibly risible” (3–4).
- 63 “Remarks” on *The Winter’s Tale*, 3–4.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 65 For accounts of this performance, see, for instance, Thomas Campbell, *The Life of Mrs Siddons*, 2 vols. (London: Effingham Wilson, 1834), 2: 264–71; and James Boaden, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble*, 2 vols. (London: Longman & Co., 1825), 2: 314–15.
- 66 Franca Dellarosa, “Dramatic Theory and Critical Discourse in Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Remarks on The British Theatre*,” in *Women’s Romantic Theatre and Drama: History, Agency, and Performativity*, ed. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Keir Elam (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 147–58, at 152.
- 67 Coleridge’s famous observation appears in Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), where he discusses his contributions in *Lyrical Ballads* in depicting those “persons and characters” who otherwise appear “supernatural.” In this formulation, he was charged with “transfer[ring] from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. and intro. George Watson (1817; London and Melbourne: Dent, [1975] repr. 1984), 168–9.

68 Gay Gibson Cima, “‘To be public as a genius and private as a woman’: The Critical Framing of Nineteenth-Century British Women Playwrights,” in *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35–53, at 35.

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