



# REVIEW: GETTING INTO THE ACT, WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS IN LONDON 1776–1829, ELLEN DONKIN. PART ONE: OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS, WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS IN LONDON, 1660–1800

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| <b>Received</b> 26 <sup>th</sup> December 2020<br><b>Accepted:</b> 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2021<br><b>Published:</b> 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2021   | The study shed lights on seven playwrights to give an idea about the their achievements. They are: Frances Brooke, Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, Sophia Lee, Frances Burney and Joanna Baillie. |
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## Historical introduction of the period

- ❖ During this period, the number of women playwrights was very few because the cultural and economic resistance has stood against giving a role of women to be playwrights. Moreover, the period has kept women voiceless, propertyless, and with no healthcare. As a result, the percentage mentioned that for every seven female playwrights, there were ninety-three male playwrights.
- ❖ The prevailing wisdom has been that theatre exposed a woman's reputation was at risk due to the contamination "Impurity" of contact.
- ❖ Even though King Charles II permitted actresses to perform in the theater, it was only a little first step toward a larger social shift.

## The target of the study

- ❖ **First**, the study has focused on the role of women playwrights during 1775-1800 for explaining their obvious capability to contribute in playwriting as male playwrights did. They contributed to break the prevailing viewpoint towards women and they relatively could change a series of social restrictions successfully before the act of the production.

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- ❖ **Second**, the study has highlighted on the role of three famous theaters' managers in London who had the power of theatrical production. They are: Drury Lane, Haymarket and Covent Garden. The limit number of theatres has facilitated the political surveillance and control of the King Charles II and political category on the theater production. On other hand, in spite of cultural obstacles, the good relationship between woman playwrights and theatres' managers has contributed to appear and increase the women play productions. For example, David Garrick has taken the management of Drury Lane since 1747 until 1776. He took pride in his reputation for helping new playwrights, but he took particular pride in having helped new female playwrights. His efforts for assisting were highly appreciated by woman playwrights who called his management a "Style". It is absolutely true that Garrick was operating more consciously with respect to gender than any other managers of the same period.

## General views about the period:-

- ❖ The duration of study has shown that there were many restrictions for not giving a real role to women to be playwrights. The restrictions done by the political categories, social traditions, cultural widespread and theatres managers. Despite, Charles II and Lord Chamberlain have facilitated participating women in the theatres to work as actresses, but the role of woman playwrights still not visible and effective. They subjected all theatres productions under "The censorship" which they founded to control theaters.
- ❖ The procedures of accepting the scripts of any play were very tough and complicated especially for novice playwright. Censor's approval, waiting for long list of scripts reviewing, the have to be convinced to theatres managers to be accepted and then approved.
- ❖ In addition, the limit volume of theatres and getting an opportunity to watch play wasn't easy especially for woman. There was long line to wait outside to get in.
- ❖ Some theatres managers were also playwrights. So, they also looking for their own benefits.

- ❖ Also, there was a challenge whether the play would be successful or not. They also try to use the playwrights for pay less money through not publishing it in high season.

#### Challenges related to woman to be a playwright: -

The woman have faced two main obstacles: **Education and Conduct.**

- ❖ The Educational level given to girls (woman) was less than boys. The girls had a right to finish primary and secondary schools only with very limited exercises of Arts during that time. No permission for girls to join college yet. At the meantime, the boys had taken much knowledge about the arts especially plays and theatres. So, they were so familiar and experienced than girls. Moreover, most of girls were learning in their houses privately and then to teach their brothers. On another hand, the education was a mean to build network of relationships with the educated and official levels which have the power to give a permission to woman to compete men in arts areas, but the woman missed it.
- ❖ The second obstacle is the area of "Conduct" Not "Behave".  
The conduct regards a way in which a person behaves, especially in a specific occasion or context). The woman playwright within manhood superiority, cultural and educational restrictions had to deal with the procedures of play production so careful and professional to show them her capability to take a role of such respectful art.

#### Q. How to scaffold the female character (conduct)?

A. In the book *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, Thomas Gisborne goes on to name the three particulars in which the impact of the female character is most essential to be trained;

First, by daily contributing and interacting to the comfort of all social activities.

Second, by shaping and developing general manners, dispositions "tendencies", and the conduct of other sex by the society.

Third, by designing the human mind during the early stages of the growth, and reforming, while it is not ductile until adulthood.

#### Lists of the kinds of the injury that inflict on females' role:

Thomas Gosborne has also shed light on the impacts of injury on the play production of woman playwrights if they didn't care of them.

- ❖ Vanity encouraging. The simplicity and working very closely and respectfully with actors and managers at every single moments and feeling them that playwright is not a writer and she takes care every tiny details of production.
- ❖ Obedience and Compliance. How to liberate woman from the obedience of manhood dominance. It has a careful and sensitive period to build the social change.
- ❖ Moreover, the economic difficulties have pushed the women to be only survived. Women get up learning sort of rules of dependence upon men.

Note: the period of the women as playwrights refers to two rather distinct groups of an activity and a hiatus "gap" in between.

The first dynamic period rounds about 1670 to 1717. They were; Aphra Behn's first proficient production.

The second dynamic period starts about 1717 to 1750. They are; Catherine Trotter, Jane Wiseman, Mary Pix, Delarivière Manley, and Susanna Centlivre.

#### Why did "Ellen Donkin" named the chapter an occupational hazard?

- ❖ During 1750-1800, women playwrights occupied a space of "relative" security and respectability by comparison to their seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Therefore, Female playwrights were still considered amazon, harlot, whore, hussy, and libertine. Almost no woman whose work was professionally produced during this initial period escaped this kind of slander. After their deaths, the slurs continued. This loss of reputation was considered a "Occupational Hazard" at the time. It is a "Professional Expense.". For number of women interested in writing for the theatre in the period after 1717, this cost may simply have been too high, which would help to account for the drop numbers. After this dry spell, in the last half of the eighteenth-century, woman started to re-emerge as a playwright. This time, however, something was substantively different.
- ❖ When the woman playwrights have started her path among men, there was a norm appeared called "Imposter Syndrome"; it is suggesting that the manager's help and protection became so important that the woman's sense as a writer became absolutely dependent compared to his ongoing support and approval. Some women like Inchbald kept a careful distance: the prefaces of her plays are conspicuous "clear" for the absence of encomiums "praises" to managers and the sustained refusal to thank anybody.  
Anyhow, David Garrick was supportive figure for women playwrights. So has deserved the appreciation.

#### Audience:-

Audience tastes were changing, partly as a consequence of the theatres themselves, which had increased vastly in size during the 1790s but lost both visibility and audibility. The result was a tremendous increase in the popularity of spectacles "scene". The mood of audience was affecting by the traditional, cultural, and political changes..

#### American and French Revolution Impacts

Two major political revolutions that shared philosophical and theoretical roots with the origins of feminism profoundly influenced the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At that time in France and America, the prevailing opinion argued

that women should share the same rights and obligations as males as complete citizens, with the exception of military duty, and that they should participate in all facets of public life. These sequences have influenced the liberation movement in England which already started through playwrights movement. As a result, the women playwright could get benefits of these liberal movements to share man in all life aspects.

### Work Cited

1. Donkin, E. (1994). Getting Into the Act: *Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829* (1st ed.). Routledge.