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COLLEY CIBBER.

Compiled  
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**University of Tennessee**  
**Colley Cibber**

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## Biographical Note

Colley Cibber (1671-1757) was born on 6 November 1671 to Caius Gabriel Cibber a Danish sculptor and his wife, Jane Colley, the granddaughter of Sir Anthony Colley. His parents sent him to Grantham Free School. In 1687, Cibber failed in his attempt to gain admission to Winchester College. Hoping to have his father pull some strings to get him into Oxford or Cambridge, Cibber went to visit him at the Earl of Devonshire's, where the elder Cibber was executing a commission from the earl. The Revolution of 1688, the so-called Glorious Revolution overthrowing James II, disrupted his plans and instead the younger Cibber joined the troops the earl was raising to support William and Mary's invasion of England. James fled before any action could occur. If the Cibbers expected this to result in any help for Colley, they were mistaken. The earl, soon to be a duke, had other more important things to do than help a sculptor's son.

As Cibber waited in London for the noble patronage that never came, he fell in love with the stage. In 1690, he joined the group of players associated with the actor Thomas Betterton at the Drury Lane Theatre. After an unpaid apprenticeship of three fourths of year, Cibber at last earned a salary of ten shillings a week. His big break came some four years later when at the last minute Edward Kynaston, who was to play the character of Lord Touchwood in Congreve's *The Double Dealer*, fell so ill as to be unable to perform. "In this Exigence, the Author, Mr. Congreve," as Cibber told the tale in his autobiography, "advis'd that it might be given to me, if at so short a Warning I would undertake it." His effort so impressed Congreve that the playwright secured for Cibber a raise from fifteen shillings a week to twenty. Cibber had proved his talent for comedy, though critics frequently ridiculed his later essays as a dramatic actor.

His success as a comedic actor encouraged Cibber to turn his hand to writing plays himself that would showcase his acting skills. His first play was *Love's Last Shift, or, The Fool of Fashion* (1696), which earned from Congreve the left-handed compliment, "a great many things that were like wit in it" and the flattery of having architect/playwright John Vanbrugh write a sequel in which Cibber also starred. Over the course of

his career, Cibber was to write many more successful comedies featuring himself as a fashionable and arrogant fool. And also, as in his acting, his dramas, particularly his attempts to rewrite Shakespeare, were generally greeted with critical disdain.

Cibber was not only an actor, but became a very successful theater manager. The Drury Lane managers, or as Cibber called them “the masters,” proved capricious; rebellion, perhaps not Glorious Rebellion, but rebellion none the less, at last occurred at the theater in 1706 with Cibber and others leaving for another acting venue. Eventually, after much conspiracy and maneuvers, the managers at Drury Lane were stripped of their royal patent to run a theater and Cibber with two others were granted in their stead license to operate the theater. This he did successfully till his retirement as manager some twenty-seven years later.

Cibber actively participated in the cultural politics of the time. In order to understand his conduct the political environment he moved in must be discussed.

The republic of letters suffered the same divisions that the country did in parliament. A *Readers Digest* version of these political divisions would show two basic factions, each divided into subgroups. The first group would be the Tories, who were divided between the Jacobites, who supported a return to the throne of the descendants of James II, and those who accepted the ascension of the Hanoverian dynasty to the British throne. When George I assumed the throne, he immediately threw his lot with the opposition to the Tories by firing the Tory government, and almost immediately faced a Jacobite rebellion, which his armies successfully suppressed. Thereafter George and his son George II used the patronage of the crown to keep the Tories out of control of parliament, though public opinion sided with the Tories, Jacobite or otherwise. The second were the Whigs, who were composed of the upper aristocracy that tried to exclude James II from succession to the crown and led the so-called Glorious Revolution and the political descendants of the more moderate Puritan leaning faction of the Anglican Church. The Whigs were divided between those who supported Prime Minister Walpole and received the bulk of the crown’s patronage and the Opposition Whigs, who while supporting the Georges, wished the places held by Walpole and his cronies for themselves and their cronies.

Unfortunately for the Whigs almost all the best writers, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, John Gay, Henry Fielding, etc., were Tories. That left them with the second best to reward and use to bolster their political position. Cibber was a Whig for the same reason that Willie Sutton robbed banks, -- that's where the money was. Through his plays – for example, *The Nonjuror* was an extended attack on the Tories - -and as a theatre manager, he tried to advance the Whig cause and gain patronage for himself.

The most significant piece of patronage that Cibber received was to be

appointed Poet Laureate. Where before Tory political anger at Cibber was kept in check by his real abilities as a comedic actor and playwright that no longer was the case. Dr. Samuel Johnson scored off both Cibber and the despised Hanoverians with a short poem:

Augustus still survives in Maro's strain  
And Spenser's verse prolongs Eliza's reign;  
Great George's acts let tuneful Cibber sing;  
For nature form'd the Poet for the King.

Others did not control their anger at the appointment with Johnson's cool disdain.

Perhaps the angriest of all was Alexander Pope. First, Pope believed that the Whig establishment was leading to cultural corruption and a decline that was clear in the poetry officially favored by Walpole and the Georges. Cibber was to Pope the prime example of this decadence. By attacking Cibber, Pope saw himself as defending the honor of English poetry. As Peter F. Heaney of Staffordshire University wrote, "Perhaps Pope was right....The noble panegyric declined from the lofty assessor of monarchs and monarchy, the commentary on the state of the nation, to the feeble joke that was the Cibberian Ode."

(<http://www.shu.ac.uk/emls/05-1/heandunc.html>.) Second, politics and poetry aside, Pope had long despised Cibber. The actual cause of their mutual dislike cannot be clearly known, but by 1717, this dislike was clearly evident. In that year, Pope along with John Gay and Dr. Arbuthnot tricked Cibber into playing in his own theater a character based on himself in the satire *Three Hours after Marriage*. Cibber, discovering he had been had, introduced into a play performed the next month scenes mocking *Three Hours*. After the performance, an angry Alexander Pope told Cibber that, if he himself were not crippled, he

would have beaten Cibber for his actions and that in his stead John Gay would do so. True to Pope's words, John Gay showed up the next night at the theater and proceeded to beat Cibber silly, only stopping upon the intervention of the police.

The passage of years did not lessen their mutual antipathy. In 1742, Pope reworked his *Dunciad* to have Cibber as the King of Fools. Cibber reposted by publishing two public letters attacking Pope on among other grounds because of the dwarfish, crippled poet's supposedly inadequate performance in a brothel. The quarrel between the two only ended with Pope's death in 1744.

As Poet Laureate, Cibber continued to crank out his odes yearly with the exception of 1745, the year Jacobite Rebellion came close to victory. Perhaps Cibber felt that doing paeans to the Hanover dynasty was not quite the prudent thing to do at the moment. As a theater manager, Cibber retired in 1732. As an actor, he continued to occasionally perform but with increasing infrequency until his last stage appearance in 1745. On 12 December 1757 Cibber died; his grave's exact location is unknown.

## Chronology

Year	Events	Events in Cibber's Life
1671	<i>Paradise Regained</i>	Born London on November 6 <sup>th</sup> to Sculptor Caius Gabriel Cibber and Jane Colley Cibber.
1674	Death of Milton.	
1678	Catholics barred from Parliament.	
1682	Dryden's <i>Religion Laici</i> .	Enters free school at Grantham.
1683	Muslim invasion defeated at Vienna. Rye House plot.	
1685	Death of Charles II. James II king. Monmouth's Rebellion.	Writes oration Charles' death and an ode to James II.
1687	Newton's <i>Principia</i> . Dryden's <i>Hind and Panther</i> .	Withdraws from Grantham. Rejected by Winchester College.

	Death of Nell Gwyn.	Leaves for London and becomes interested in the stage.
1688	James II overthrown. William and Mary assume throne.	Joins the Earl of Devonshire's troops in rebellion against James II.
1690	Battle of the Boyne.	Unpaid apprentice at Drury Lane Theatre for three fourths of a year.
	Given	a salary of ten shillings per week.
1693	Beginning of national debt.	Marries Catherine Shore.
1694	Queen Mary dies.	Plays Lord Touchwood in <i>The Double Dealer</i> by Congreve, who recommends him for a raise. <i>A Poem on the Death of our Late Sovereign Lady Queen Mary.</i>
1695		Birth of daughter, Catherine.
1696	Jacobite plot fails to kill William III.	<i>Love's Last Shift.</i> Vanbrugh writes sequel ( <i>Relapse</i> ) to Cibber's play in which Cibber establishes his reputation as an actor.
1697	Birth of William Hogarth.	<i>Woman's Wit, or, The Lady of Fashion.</i>
1698	Jeremy Collier publishes <i>A Short View of the Immortality, and Profaneness of the English Stage.</i>	Cibber among those abused by Collier.
1699	Debut of Anne Oldfield at Drury Lane.	<i>Xerxes.</i>
1700	Death of Dryden. Congreve's <i>Way of the World.</i> Act of Settlement.	
1701		<i>Love Makes a Man.</i>
1702	William III dies. Anne becomes Queen.	<i>She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not.</i>

	War of Spanish Succession.	
1703		Birth of son Theophilus.
1704	Battle of Blenheim.	<i>The Careless Husband.</i>
1705	Vanbrugh finishes Queen's Theatre.	
1706		Leaves Drury Lane for Haymarket Theatre. <i>Perolla and Izadora.</i>
1707	Act of Union between England and Scotland.	Alters <i>Woman's Wit</i> into <i>The Schoolboy.</i>
1708	Jacobites invade Scotland.	Haymarket and Drury Lane theaters merge. <i>The Lady's Last Stake.</i>
1709		Cibber, Robert Wiles, Thomas Doggett take over Drury Lane as principal actors and managers Adapts <i>Richard III.</i> <i>The Rival Fools, a Comedy.</i>
1710	Death of Thomas Betterton. Trial of Dr. Sacheverell.	<i>The Secret History of Arius and Odolphius, Minister of State to Empress of Grandinsula.</i>
1711	Handel's <i>Rinaldo.</i> South Sea Company incorporated.	
1712	Birth of Rousseau	
1713	Treaty of Utrecht.	Birth of daughter, Charlotte.
1714	Queen Anne dies. George I king.	<i>Cinna's Conspiracy.</i> With others, <i>The Victim.</i>
1715	Louis IV dies. Jacobite rebellion.	<i>Venus and Adonis.</i>
1716	Septennial Act.	With others, <i>Myrtillo.</i>
1717		In his play <i>The Nonjuror</i> attacks the Tories and is rewarded with 200 guineas by George I. <i>Ximena, or the Heroick Daughter.</i> Unwittingly plays self in

		Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot's satire <i>Three Hours after Marriage</i> .
		Beaten by Gay at Pope's request.
1720	South Sea Bubble breaks.	With others, <i>Hob</i> .
1721		<i>The Refusal, a Comedy</i> .
1723	Birth of Joshua Reynolds.	
1724		<i>The Life and Actions of</i>
	<i>Caius</i>	<i>Julius Caesar in Egypt.</i>
1725		<i>Caesar in Egypt, a Tragedy.</i>
		<i>A Cantata.</i>
1727	Death of George I. George II king. Birth of Gainsborough.	
1728	Gay's <i>Beggar's Opera</i> .	With Vanbrugh <i>A Journey to London.</i>
1729	Treaty Seville.	<i>The Rival Queens.</i> <i>Love in a Riddle.</i> <i>Damon and Phillida.</i> With others, <i>Flora</i> .
1730		Appointed poet laureate.
1731	<i>The Poet Laureate's Ode....</i> <i>Burlesqu'd.</i>	<i>An Ode for a New Year.</i>
1732		Cibber sells his shares in the Drury Lane Theatre.
1734		Death of Cibber's wife.
1735		<i>Mithridates: a Opera...</i>
1736	Porteous Riots. John & Charles Wesley start groups that become the Methodist Church.	<i>Perolla and Izadora.</i>
1739	War of Jenkin's Ear.	
1740	War of the Austrian Succession.	<i>Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian.</i>
1742		<i>Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope.</i> Pope changes dunce in <i>Dunciad</i>

		to Cibber.
		Fielding attacks Cibber in <i>Joseph Andrews</i> .
		<i>A Second Letter from Mr. to Mr. Pope.</i>
1743		<i>The Egotist, or, Colley Upon Cibber.</i>
1744	Death of Alexander Pope.	
1745	Second Jacobite Rebellion.	Cibber's last stage appearance. <i>Papal Tyranny.</i>
1747		<i>The Character and Conduct of Cicero.</i>
1748	Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.	<i>The Lady's Lecture.</i>
1751		<i>Rhapsody Upon the Marvellous, Arising from the First Odes of Horace and Pindar.</i>
1752	Gregorian Calendar adopted by England and her colonies.	With others, <i>Eugenia</i> .
1753	Foundation of British Museum.	With others, <i>The Earl of Essex</i> .
1754		<i>Verses to the Memory of Mr. Pelham.</i>
1755	Seven Years War.	
1757		Cibber dies on the 12 <sup>th</sup> of December.

## Collected Works

Cibber, Colley, *The Dramatic Works of Colley Cibber*,  
London, J. Clarke, C. Hitch and L. Hawes et al., 1760.

PR3347.A1 1760

## Memoirs

Cibber, Colley, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian,  
and the Late Patentee of the Theatre-Royal.: With an Historical View of  
the Stage During His Own Time*, London, John Watts for the Author,  
1740.

PR3347.A8 1740

*An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber Written by Himself,*  
London, J. C. Nimmo, 1889.

PR3347.A8 1889

### **Miscellaneous Work**

Cibber, Colley, *The Character and Conduct of Cicero, Considered from the History of His Life, by the Reverend Dr. Middleton. With Occasional Essays, and Observations upon the Most Memorable Facts and Persons during that Period.* By Colley Cibber, London, J. Watts for the Author, 1747.

DG260.C5C5

### **Plays**

Cibber, Colley, *The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, Jacob Tonson, 1713.

PR3347.A62 1713

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, J. Tonson at Shakespear's Head, 1714.

PR3347.A62 1714

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, J. Tonson, 1725.

PR3347.A62 1725

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, J. Tonson, 1731.

PR3347.A62 1731

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, J. Tonson, 1734.

PR3347.A62 1734

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
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PR3347.A62 1735

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
Dublin, Hulton Bradley, 1760.

PR3347.A62 1760

*The Careless Husband; a Comedy in Five Acts. Written by Colley Cibber, Esq. Taken from the Manager's Book, at the Theatre-Royal, Covent Garden, London, R. Butters, [ca. 1780].*

PR3347.A656 1780

*The Careless Husband; a Comedy in Five Acts. Written by Colley Cibber, With the Variations in the Manager's Book at the Theatre-Royal in Covent Garden, London, W. Lowndes, S. Bladon, and W. Nicoll, 1790.*

PR3347.A62 1790

*The Careless Husband: a Comedy,*  
London, John Bell, 1791.

PR3364.M7 1791

*The Double Gallant, or, The Sick Lady's Cure: a Comedy,*  
London, B. Lintot, 1723.

PR3347.A64 1723

*The Double Gallant, or, The Sick Lady's Cure. A Comedy,*  
London, J. & /r. Tonson, S. Crowder & Co., 1761.

PR3347.A64 1761

*The Lady's Last Stake, or, The Wife's Resentment: a Comedy. As It is Acted at the Queen's Theatre in the Hay-Market, by Her Majesty's Servants, London, Henry Lintot, 1747.*

PR3347.A656 1747

*The Lady's Last Stake, or, The Wife's Resentment: a Comedy, London, J. & R. Tonson, 1761.*

PR3347.A656 1761

*Love's Last Shift, or, The Fool in Fashion: a Comedy: As It is Acted at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, by His Majesty's Servants, London, B. Lintot et al., 1730.*

PR3347.A68 1730

*Love Makes a Man: or, The Fop's Fortune, London, A. Bettesworth, 1726.*

PR3347.L6 1726

*Love Makes a Man; or, The Fop's Fortune. A Comedy, London, J. Clarke, 1761.*

PR3347.L6 1761

*Love Makes a Man; or, The Fop's Fortune. A Comedy, London, J. & R. Tonson, 1765.*

PR3347.L6 1765

*She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not, or The Kind Imposter: A Comedy: as It is Now Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, by Her Majesties Servants, London, W. Mears, 1714.*

PR3347.A74 1714

*She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not, or The Kind Imposter.: A Comedy,: as It is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane. By His Majesty's Servants, London, J. Woodward, J. & R. Tonson, and J. Watts, 1748.*

PR3347.A74 1748

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London, W. Owen, 1749.

PN2593.C5

Doran, John, "*Their Majesties' Servants.*" *Annals of the English Stage, from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean*, London, J. C. Nimmo, 1888.

PN2581.D6 1888

Galt, John, *The Lives of the Players*,  
London, H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831.

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Genest, John, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, Bath, H. E. Carrington, 1832.

PN2581.G4

Van Lennep, W. et al., *The London Stage, 1660-1800: a Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-receipts and Contemporary Comment. Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-68.

PN2592.L6



A scene from *The Careless Husband*.