

LBRIS

We know
books

Charlotte

KATHRYN SHEVELOW

BLOOMSBURY

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	ix
Prologue	i
Introduction: Dress Rehearsal	9
1. Cibbers (1660-1712)	23
2. The Impertinent Intruder (1712-13)	44
3. A Passionate Fondness for a Periwig (1717-20)	51
4. Educating Charlotte (1720-27)	63
5. Laureate (1720-30)	78
6. The Provoked Wife (1729-30)	95
7. Chambermaids and Pretty Men (1731-32)	113
8. Show, show, show, show! (1732)	126
9. Stormy Weather (1732-33)	140
10. Mutiny (1733)	156
11. Wearing the Breeches (1733-34)	167
12. Mad Company (1734-35)	181
13. Cordelia; or, The Art of Management (1735-36)	198
14. On the Edge (1736)	215
15. Bad Acts (1737)	232

16. Punch's Theatre (1737-38)	251
17. Hard Times (1738-41)	268
18. Down and Out in London (1741-44)	285
19. A Mind to Get Money (1742-46)	303
20. A Little, Dirty Kind of War (1746-53)	319
21. The Female Husband (1752-54)	333
22. The Prodigal Daughter (1755-56)	347
23. Curtain Calls (1757-60)	365
Epilogue	377
Note to the Reader	383
Notes	385
Bibliography	407
Acknowledgments	415
Index	419

We know
books

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Charlotte Charke's neighbourhood	12
2. <i>Melancholy</i> , a statue created by Charlotte's grandfather, Caius Gabriel Cibber	24
3. <i>Raving</i> , another of Caius Gabriel Cibber's sculptures	25
4. Caius Gabriel Cibber	29
5. Colley Cibber, Charlotte's father, as Lord Foppington	42
6. Charlotte Charke imitating her father	54
7. Rowdiness in Covent Garden, during the time of Charlotte's career	64
8. Anne Oldfield, Colley Cibber's favourite leading lady	85
9. Richard Charke, Charlotte's husband	98
10. Charlotte as a young woman	116
11. Robert Wilks, an actor at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane	138
12. Theophilus Cibber, Charlotte's brother, as Ancient Pistol	143
13. The players defy their managers in <i>The Stage Mutiny</i>	157
14. Bartholomew Fair at the time of the stage mutiny	168
15. Betty Careless in a sedan chair	170
16. Colley Cibber, poet laureate	201

17. The Little Haymarket Theatre	We know books	218
18. Henry Fielding		239
19. William Hogarth's <i>Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn</i>		252
20. Hogarth's <i>Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn</i> , detail		254
21. Susannah Cibber, Charlotte's sister-in-law		276
22. Theophilus Cibber		276
23. The King's Head Tavern in Hogarth's <i>The March to Finchley</i>		290
24. Charlotte's father with one of his granddaughters		312
25. Charlotte Charke		355
26. Charlotte's letter to the Lord Chamberlain		371

CHARLOTTE

LBRIS

We know
books

PART

ONE



CIBBERS

(1660-1712)

Of all the spectacles in London, one of the most popular was Bethlem Royal Hospital, the madhouse. "Bedlam" drew crowds of the curious, eager to pay admission to stare with horror at the inmates, howling in frenzy or slumped in silent dejection. In 1676, Bethlem Hospital had relocated to Moorfields, just outside the City's northern wall. The stately design of its new building and gardens, said to resemble the Tui-leries, contrasted starkly with the brutal treatment of the miserable "lunaticks" inside, who often were bound in chains and manacles, and routinely whipped and bled.

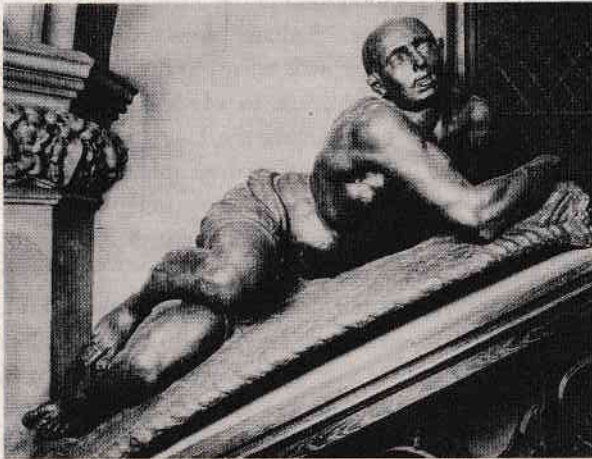
Bedlam's entrance gate itself produced an unsettling thrill, for on either side loomed the recumbent statue of a near-naked madman. One, *Melancholy*, reclined on his side in passive imbecility, gazing open-mouthed into space. The other, *Raving*, thrashed against his chains, his countenance twisted and angry. A little larger than life, these sculpted madmen were reputed to represent actual inmates once incarcerated inside Bedlam. But visitors familiar with Rome might have recognized the influence of Michelangelo's tomb statuary and Bernini's fountain sculptures in the Piazza Navona.

Bedlam's disturbing figures had been carved of Portland stone at the end of the seventeenth century by Caius Gabriel Cibber, and were widely

acknowledged as his masterpieces.* To Caius Gabriel's son Colley, the Bedlam statues held more equivocal significance.

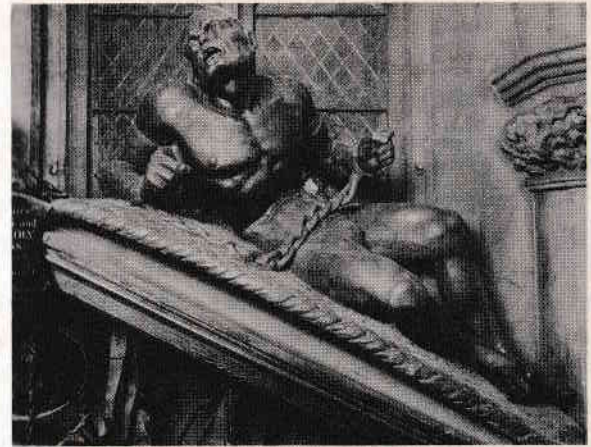
A common metaphor (then as now) equated artistic productions with children. A playwright might declare a play to be "a brat of my brain"; poets spoke of their poetical "offspring." Colley, the child of the creator of these lunatics, could thus be said to bear a kinship with them: all were "sons" of his father. This metaphorical affiliation provided an irresistible lure to Alexander Pope, who used it to strike a neat blow in *The Dunciad*. Pope imagined a "Cave" of hack writing, located near Bethlem Hospital, "Where o'er the gates, by his fam'd father's hand, / Great Cibber's brazen brainless brothers stand" (I: 29–32). Pope may not have been the first of Colley's contemporaries to think of this gibe, but he was the one who immortalized it.

The Bethlem statues evoke the contradictory legacy that Caius Gabriel Cibber bequeathed to his elder son, Colley, and that he in turn bestowed upon his family, especially his only son, Theophilus, and his



Charlotte's grandfather created the famous statues at the gates of Bedlam, London's most notorious madhouse. (Caius Gabriel Cibber, *Melancholy [or Imbecility]*. Courtesy of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.)

* C. G. Cibber's statues *Melancholy* (more accurately, *Imbecility*) and *Raving* are displayed today in the museum at Bethlem Hospital in Eden Park, Kent. Despite lamentable erosion, they remain evocative and unsettling.



Another of Caius Cibber's creations for Bedlam. (Caius Gabriel Cibber, *Raving*. Courtesy of the Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.)

youngest daughter, Charlotte. Each generation of Cibbers put its particular twist on that legacy, but the general outline remained constant. Virtually from its emergence into the public eye, the name of Cibber implied the idea of professional prominence marred by arrogance, recklessness, or misjudgment. For three generations (the name died out in the fourth), members of the Cibber family cultivated their inheritance of achievement and ignominy, acclaim and censure.

Colley Cibber was the ambitious son of an ambitious father. Like his son and granddaughter after him, Caius Gabriel Cibber, an émigré sculptor born in Flensburg, Holstein, sought and gained a place in the British public eye. He also invented the family name that he and his descendants would make notorious. When young Caius Gabriel (his original full name) immigrated to England from Copenhagen, where his father had moved the family, he added the new surname "Cibber" to his own. Caius Gabriel had studied in Italy, and the name was possibly an Anglicized form of Cibò, an Italian aristocratic patron of the arts, whose coat of arms he adopted.* Like his son after him, Caius Gabriel relished his associations with aristocracy.¹

* Unlike the Italian pronunciation, the name Cibber in English was pronounced with a sibilant C—not a hard C, as many believe—evidenced by its frequent misspellings such as "Sibber," "Nybars," and "Zibber."

Caius Gabriel Cibber immigrated to London in the late 1650s, settling west of the old City walls in Covent Garden, where many of his descendants would also live. He arrived on the cusp of three great events that would shake the country and its capital: the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 after the collapse of the Commonwealth established by the Puritan victors of the Civil War; the return in 1665 of the Black Death (bubonic plague), which killed nearly 100,000 people; and the Great Fire of 1666, which destroyed most of the City of London and left as many as 200,000 people homeless.

After 1666, having survived both plague and fire, Caius was well positioned to profit from the latter. The burned-out City had to be rebuilt immediately, so the guilds that controlled London's trades relaxed their traditional restrictions against foreign builders, creating ripe opportunities for the young immigrant sculptor. Caius embarked upon a career that would leave a lasting imprint upon his adopted city.

Decades later, Charlotte Charke and her father would frequently have encountered vivid reminders of their family legacy. Charlotte, seeking employment or adventure within the old City walls, might have passed the massive columnar Monument to the Great Fire (it still stands today, on Fish Street Hill) and paused to scrutinize its vigorous bas-relief. If she had reason to enter the south door of St. Paul's Cathedral, she would have passed under the carved phoenix that symbolized London rising from its ashes.

If, after his parents' death, Colley ever visited the graceful Danish church in Wellclose Square (now destroyed) where they were buried, he could have admired the four vivid sculptures of burnished wood—Saints Peter and Paul, John the Baptist, and Moses (now displayed in the Danish Church in Regent's Park). In the West End, Charlotte and her father would have walked often through Soho Square, where a statue of Charles II stood (and where it stands again today, though much eroded).² All of these sculptures, and the design of the Wellclose Square church itself, were the legacy of Caius Gabriel. His work was rewarded in 1693 with his appointment as sculptor in ordinary to William III, a position in the King's household dedicated to the conservation and repair of the statuary at the royal palaces.³

In 1670, as his London career was beginning to flourish, Caius, a recent widower, achieved another kind of success by taking as his second wife, Jane Colley, daughter of an old Rutlandshire gentry family whose forebears had played prominent parts in local and national politics. (Colley Cibber later boasted that his maternal ancestors were recorded "as Sheriffs and Members of Parliament from the Reign of Henry VII.")⁴ Though the Colley family had lost their land and most of their wealth, they retained vestiges of their former gentility.

Jane, who had control of her own considerable income of £6,000, must have found the young sculptor an appealing matrimonial prospect, since Caius's profession, though once ranked among the manual trades, had risen considerably in status. (Charles II, when creating the office of "Master Sculptor," had issued a statement declaring sculpture and carving in wood an "Art of more excellent skill and dexterity" than arts such as carpentry, masonry, and furniture-making.)⁵ Caius was also a handsome man: in a surviving portrait his dark eyes focus intensely and his stylish moustache gives him a dashing air. A year after their marriage, on November 6, 1671, Jane gave birth to their first child, Colley, christened on November 29 at the church of St. Giles-in-the-Fields. But whatever prospects of marital happiness Jane may have envisioned were soon dampened if not completely blighted. For all of his public success, Caius left a private legacy of disappointment that would sour his family life and ultimately shape his descendants' history.

Caius Gabriel Cibber, observed his younger contemporary, the engraver George Vertue, was a "gentleman-like man and a man of good sense." However, Vertue added, "he died poor." His story was common enough: a wealthier gentleman who lodged in his house supposedly introduced him to gambling, creating an addiction Caius could ill afford.⁶ Despite Jane's handsome dowry, he ran into debt within a year of their marriage. Bills mounted as he borrowed money from creditors and then defaulted. Finally, when Colley was a little more than a year old, the bailiffs arrested Caius and clapped him into Marshalsea, one of the debtor's prisons in Southwark, the rough district south of the river. Caius would become all too familiar with the Marshalsea and King's Bench prisons during the next five years.

The threat of debtor's prison hovered over the Cibber family during