

# [ (Not) Beyond the Shoe: Shakespeare and Theatre Rivalries in the Augustan Period ]

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**[Abstract]** *Although the high cultural status of Shakespeare was well established in England by the 1760s, the preceding stage history of his plays and the related adaptations are culturally much more ambiguous. This paper focuses on two adaptations of The Taming of the Shrew that were produced in 1716 in London as two short farces, both entitled The Cobler of Preston and written by Charles Johnson and Christopher Bullock respectively. By taking into account the cultural and political circumstances of the period, the analysis of the two farces demonstrates that the establishment of farcical afterpieces as one of the most popular and productive genres of early-18th-century English theatre was greatly accelerated by the staging of the two Shakespearean adaptations. This observation further shows that, as Shakespeare's authority was gradually rising, adaptations of his plays actually contributed to the development of London's commercial theatre culture, which at the time was often presented as the opposition to great classics of the past.*

**[Keywords]** *18th-century British theatre; Restoration theatre; Elizabethan theatre; The Taming of the Shrew; Shakespeare adaptations; farce; afterpiece; Cobler of Preston; Charles Johnson; Christopher Bullock*

The Shakespeare Jubilee, staged in 1769 in Stratford upon Avon, has traditionally been considered the culmination of the process of Shakespeare's transformation from "at worst [...] an artless rustic, at best [...] an archaic father-king," as he was seen in the first decades after the 1660 restoration of the English monarchy, into "the transcendent personification of a national ideal," as he came to be perceived in Augustan England (Dobson 13, 14). A great deal of the credit for Shakespeare's canonisation has previously been attributed to the systematic efforts of the actor, playwright and theatre manager David Garrick, who masterminded the 1769 Stratford event and, even at a young age, linked his professional career and reputation with Shakespeare's name (see Cunningham). This process, however, started decades before Garrick's first entrance onto the London stage, and it was much less obvious and straightforward.

Indeed, as Luca Biagiotti has pointed out, Shakespeare's name gained currency during the five-year period of the Exclusion Crisis (1678–82). At the brink of another civil war in the country, a wave of Shakespearean adaptations appeared with strong political overtones, indirectly addressing the then-current political struggles and anxieties. Biagiotti maintains that the new sensibilities and the changed political climate required the Restoration playwrights to "find different, and safer, dramatic modes" (263) than those previously available to them (such as the comedy of manners or heroic drama). With his generally patriotic and pro-monarchic tone, Shakespeare not only provided the Restoration stage with easily relatable material, but his renewed authority "protected playwrights from possible political accusations" (Biagiotti 258). Although the political topicality imbued into Shakespeare's works disappeared with the end of the crisis, the elevated status that Shakespeare enjoyed at the end of the century led to the highest number of editions of Shakespeare plays since the Interregnum and to the playwright's prominence both on the public stage and at court (see Depledge 150–70). Furthermore, as Jean D. Marsden points out, in the course of the 18th century, a major change in the perception of *what* Shakespeare actually is took place: while in the Restoration period, the old playwrights' merit resided "not in the words they wrote but in larger issues such as character, plot, and even idea" and the authors' words, character delineations or story elements could be freely altered (Marsden 13), over the years, Shakespeare's genius came to be increasingly associated with his language and "[a]daptations which made substantial changes were not written after the 1780s, and by the end of the eighteenth century, only a few adaptations were still being performed" (Marsden 1). Indeed, from the mid-18th century, there was a strong tendency to restore the "authentic" Shakespeare – meaning his unaltered words – on the stage at the expense of radical adaptations, and presenting the "correct" restoration became a matter of prestige both for the theatre and the actor/manager responsible for the production.<sup>1</sup> Thus, around the same time that Shakespeare's status as Britain's "national deity" (Dobson 216) was stabilised, his texts had become a kind of monument to him.<sup>2</sup>

While it is possible to determine the beginning and the end of Shakespeare's journey to canonisation (at least provisionally), to pinpoint the status of Shakespeare at any given moment in the meantime is more complicated. The main reason is the fact that, in the course of the 18th century, English (or British) society underwent significant transfor-

mations – economic, political and cultural – that also had a great impact on theatrical culture. To demonstrate how Shakespeare was adapted to these new conditions in order to remain relevant to new generations of audiences, the following discussion will focus on two early-18th-century short adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* that premiered in two competing London theatres less than two weeks apart at the beginning of 1716. Although they are of limited literary and dramatic quality, both pieces provide us with testimony to their authors' values and culture, and show how Shakespeare could have been employed to address specific issues and anxieties at a specific point in history.

## [1] Competing in Entertainment and Politics

The year 1714 was seminal for the life of the whole country, including England's theatre culture. In December that year, the newly rebuilt theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields opened under the management of John Rich and, after years of monopoly, the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane gained a serious rival on the London theatre scene. The simultaneous operation of two houses with regular offerings (accompanied by productions of Italian opera at the Queen's Theatre in Haymarket) gradually led to fierce competition, requiring new repertory strategies to attract the growing London audiences. Whereas in the first decade of the century, a theatrical evening would be supplemented by songs and dances between the acts of the main play and only occasionally completed with an afterpiece (mostly a farce or a masque), from December 1714 onwards, both houses strived to make their programmes as attractive as possible with the help of diverse afterpieces. As Avery points out, "there was really no turning backward after this season, for Rich's enthusiasm for interludes and pantomime stimulated more multiple programs" (Avery cxvii).

The first two seasons of this rivalry – 1714–15 and 1715–16 – were noticeable for their remarkable production of farces, including the two 1716 adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*. As the competing playhouses became more engaged in their commercial business, their afterpiece culture continued to evolve and thrive. In the late 1710s and 1720s, masque and farce afterpieces would be accompanied at both theatres by hugely successful pantomimes, spectacular entertainments combining the slapstick of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* characters with mythological masque-like dances. Especially Lincoln's Inn Fields was a major pantomime force, its manager John Rich himself being a famous pantomime Harlequin. Drury Lane, however, did not fall behind. Since the introduction of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728, ballad operas hit the town and were often staged as musical afterpieces in both houses.

However, the range of popular entertainments of a farcical, spectacular, musical and pantomimic nature changed the dynamic of theatrical evenings and elicited various negative responses in the contemporary press. Critics of the time complained so often about the deteriorating taste of the audiences and the commercialisation of the playhouses that the perceived decline of the English stage became a staple of theatre criticism in this period.<sup>3</sup> Even the managers of both houses were aware of the declining dramatic quality of their dramatic offerings: Colley Cibber at Drury Lane apologetically confessed that "Vice

and Farcical Folly are the most profitable Commodities” (81), and in a similar vein, John Rich justified his repertory decisions by the need for profit, but pledged to rejoice “whenever the Public Taste shall be disposed to return to the Works of the Drama” (Theobald, sig. [A3]<sup>v</sup>). Nevertheless, their excuses based on the need for commercial gain were not accepted by those theatre commentators who saw the commercial nature of the theatres as a problem in itself, and who were dismayed by the effect which the flood of popular entertainments was having on the position of English canonical authors in the repertory.

Indeed, especially in the late 1720s, at the peak of pantomime and operatic afterpieces, commentators lamented that “Grotesque Entertainments are a new-fangled Invention that is elbowing our Tragedy and Comedy from their hereditary Province” (*The Weekly Journal*) and that “the best of Shakespeares Works will not fill a House unless one of these Pantomime Entertainments be tack’d to it” (*The British Journal*). Against the background of these popular entertainments, the nostalgia for English canonical authors began to grow, paving the path for Garrick’s spectacular rehabilitation of Shakespeare half a century later.

However, the competition between the two major London theatres was not solely commercial, though commercial interest on both sides was its main catalyst. Following the Hanoverian accession in 1714, the Whigs established themselves as the dominant political force in the country for almost half a century, while the Tories, especially after the 1715 Jacobite rising, were discredited and perceived as a treasonous party. Basil Williams has called this era “an age of stability in politics, in religion, in literature, and in social observances” (1); for English theatre culture, however, the Whig Supremacy was a turbulent period, ultimately leading to a major re-definition of theatre business in the country with the 1737 Licencing Act.<sup>4</sup>

With their new partner, the playwright and distinguished Whig politician Richard Steele, the actor-managers of the Drury Lane Theatre did their best to demonstrate their allegiance to the new regime. John Rich’s Lincoln’s Inn Fields, on the other hand, was frequently accused of Tory sympathies – not entirely without reason (see Loftis 63–69). The repertory of London stages became, once again, exceedingly political, with the theatres responding to one another’s taunting by means of special prologues and epilogues, sometimes even entire productions. In December 1717, for instance, Drury Lane premiered Colley Cibber’s satirical comedy *The Non-Juror*, based on Molière’s *Tartuffe*, which harshly criticised the Jacobites and their Tory allies (the piece was a response to the 1715 events). The play was extremely successful and earned its author a royal patronage for the piece, as well as a reward of 200 pounds from the King (Loftis 72). The following year, Lincoln’s Inn Fields staged Christopher Bullock’s farce *The Perjuror*, which, although not dealing overtly with contemporary politics, “satirically condemns the sin of perjury, and it implies that those who take oaths freely, without scruple of conscience (the audience would have thought of the oaths to the new King) may be more reprehensible than those who are prevented by conscience from taking them” (Loftis 71). Similarly, in the early 1720s, a cluster of plays appeared about young lovers whose happiness is marred by their parents’ party rivalry (see Krajník 2019). While Drury Lane’s Susanna Centlivre, in her

comedy *The Artifice* (1722), embraced the main protagonists' Whiggism, Benjamin Griffin's *Whig and Tory* (1720) and John Sturmy's *The Compromise* (1723), both staged at Lincoln's Inn Fields, protested against political antagonism, arguing that "*Betwixt Extreems lies Vertue in the Middle*" (Sturmy, Prologue [page not given]).

It is significant that in this agitated period, a series of heavily politicised adaptations of Shakespeare appeared once again within a short period of time: John Denis's *The Invader of His Country* (based on *Coriolanus*, 1720), Lewis Theobald's *Richard II* (1720), Aaron Hill's *Henry V* (1723), Ambrose Phillips's *Humfrey Duke of Gloucester* (based on *Henry VI, Part II*, 1723), Theophilus Cibber's *Henry VI* (1723), and John Sheffield's *Julius Caesar* and *Marcus Brutus* (1723). As George C. Branam points out, all the aforementioned adaptations are "so extensively changed as to be new plays" (7). What is even more important, however, is that each of the pieces "deals with faction and uprising" (Branam 62) – being, once again, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century authors' response to the threat of Jacobitism or a foreign invasion. In his epistle dedicatory prefaced to *The Invader of His Country*, John Dennis describes the political relevance of the production of his play in November 1719: "[T]he acting of it then had been most seasonable, when the Nation was in the uneasy Expectation of a Double Invasion from *Sweden* on the *North*, and from *Spain* on the *West of England*" (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>). Still in the wake of the Jacobite Rising, Dennis's version of the story furthermore links the titular Caius Marcius with the nation's recent past, "*when Britain's Rebel Sons of late / Combin'd with Foreign Foes t'invade the State*" (sig. [A7]<sup>r</sup>). Similarly to the Exclusion Crisis, Shakespeare thus gained new topicality in a politically sensitive period, providing the 18<sup>th</sup>-century dramatists with a suitable mode of expressing their anxieties and concerns for the wellbeing of the nation.

Just as politics filled London stages, it also usurped theatre criticism. Loftis asserts that "political bias coloured much of the early eighteenth-century journalistic commentary on the theatre" (83). Journals, themselves being active players in the party antagonism of the time, supported "their" theatres on the basis of their political sympathies rather than the merit of the productions. However, as mentioned above, both playhouses were equally criticised for staging the aforementioned commercial, "non-rational" (Loftis 75) entertainments – such as singing, dancing, pantomime or short farces – together with comedies or tragedies.

## [2] Cobbling Politics vs. Cobbling Theatre

In this atmosphere of commercial and party-political rivalry, accompanied by significant changes in the theatre industry, Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields produced two short adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* in early 1716 (or, rather, its unfinished enveloping story with Christopher Sly), both titled *The Cobler of Preston*. In the overall context of Shakespearean productions in London at the time, the choice of the source material might seem rather odd. Indeed, in the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century hardly any comedy by Shakespeare was staged, and his repertory had dwindled to his tragedies (mostly *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *Timon of Athens* and *Caius Marius*,

an Exclusion Crisis-era adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*) and a handful of histories (*Henry IV*, *Henry VIII* and *Richard III*). *The Taming of the Shrew* did get staged occasionally in John Lacy's 1667 adaptation, titled *Sauny the Scot* (which did not include the Christopher Sly induction). Between 1701 and 1716, however, Lacy's piece never enjoyed more than one production a year, and in some seasons it was not staged at all (Hogan I: 414–16).

With the advent of supplementary farcical entertainments, which were often based on older pieces and largely employed “buffoonery, trickery, and intense theatricality, often enabled through (momentary) social inversions” (Howe 26), comedies such as *The Taming of the Shrew* regained relevance for these new genres and their theatrical language.<sup>5</sup> However, even from the prologue to *The Cobler of Preston* by Drury Lane's Charles Johnson it becomes clear that his farce will deal less with Shakespeare's material and more with the politics of the time. Shakespeare's name is not mentioned even once in the prologue, which was delivered by the theatre's co-manager Robert Wilks. Only the brief remark that “*Our Author has a Comick Rebel stole / To make you Mirth; a drinking, noisy Fool*”<sup>6</sup> indicates that the piece is a loose adaptation of an older story (Prologue [page not given]). The farce's main motivation, as the prologue admits, derives not from a dramatic piece of the past, but from contemporary, real-life events of 1715: “*If he [i.e., the author] wants Plot, consider, Sirs, he draws / These Scenes, from the worst Plot that ever was.*” Set in Preston, Lancashire, where the Jacobite rising was defeated in November 1715, the story revolves around “*a plotting Cobler,*” who is “*a quiet Protestant when sober,*” but becomes “*most Popish*” when he starts drinking (Prologue). Unlike the serious mode of contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare tragedies, the end of the prologue of Johnson's *Cobler* invites the audience to enjoy the entertainment and simply ridicule the schemes of the oppositional party: “*– But – may this plot, and every plot hereafter / Produce but little Bloodshed, and much Laughter.*”

The opening of Johnson's farce proper coincides with Shakespeare's induction: the hostess, here named Cicely Gundy, throws Sly out of her alehouse because he is drunk and not willing to pay for the damage he has done. While in Shakespeare Sly is merely a stereotypical clown, Johnson lets him begin his speech with the drunken cheer “*Huzza, Huzza,*” only to continue to praise William Mackintosh, claiming that “*there is something now so courageous, as it were, in the very Sound of his Name*” (sig. B1<sup>r</sup>). Just like the Scottish Jacobite leader whom he so admires, Sly too would like to revolt (“*I must be a Rebel, and I will be a Rebel*”, sig. B1<sup>r</sup>) and, envisioning himself as a great military leader, he already plans the new societal order after the revolution:<sup>7</sup>

I will live upon Free-Quarter, *Cicely*, I am free of all the Eale and Beef in *England*, you Housewife – I will have no Reckonings paid at all – 'Tis downright Abomination, Heresy – Your sober Small-Beer Whey-beards, shall pay all the Scot. – And I will Tax them at my Will and Pleasure, Huzza – He that cannot Leap a Five Bar Gate, knows nothing of Generalship – (sig. B1<sup>v</sup>)

As in Shakespeare's version, Sly ultimately tumbles down to fall asleep on the road, only to be found by a passing lord, who decides to bring the sleeping man into his mansion and

persuade him that he (Sly) is, in fact, a nobleman who merely dreamed that he was a poor cobbler (or tinker in Shakespeare). Unlike Shakespeare's Lord, who just decides to "practise on this drunken man" (*The Taming of the Shrew*, Induction 1.35), Johnson's parallel (with the patriotic name Sir Charles Briton) recognises in Sly a notorious rascal, whose "Head is perpetually confounded with the Fumes of Ale and Faction" to such an extent that "he has laid aside cobbling of Shoes, to mend our Constitution" (sig. B2<sup>r</sup>). Rather than playing a practical joke on Sly, Sir Charles decides to "take this Opportunity to punish him a little" (sig. B2<sup>v</sup>) for his Jacobitism and stage an alternative world around him to cure him of his political persuasion.<sup>8</sup>

Except for a short scene with Cicely and the Constable, which provides the audience with yet another opportunity to learn how "so untowardly about State matters" Sly is (sig. [B4]<sup>r</sup>), the first act of the farce more or less follows the structure of Shakespeare's Induction: Sly is brought to Sir Charles's house, where he is attended by servants dressed as Spaniards and is convinced that he himself is a Spanish grandee, who "These fifteen years" has been in a dream, "Or when [he] waked, so waked as if [he] slept" (sig. [C3]<sup>v</sup>).<sup>9</sup> Instead of Shakespeare's actors, who arrive to stage for Sly a play about the taming of a shrew, Johnson's Sly is entertained by a group of neighbours, who perform for him a dialogue song between a cobbler and his wife, which accurately reflects the misguided Sly and might be understood as a reversed taming story, in which it is the wife who attempts to tame her husband:

*You riot and roar  
For Babylon's Whore,  
And give up your Bible and Psalter:  
I prithe, dear Kit,  
Have a little more Wit,  
And keep thy Neck out of the Halter. (sig. D1<sup>v</sup>)*

However, no reformation takes place in the song – the cobbler does not give up his political ambitions, and he refuses to return to his former profession: "I'll new-vamp the State, / The Church I'll translate: / Old Shoes are no more worth the mending" (sig. D2<sup>r</sup>). Sly is amused, recognising his former self in the story, and orders a large jug of strong beer. His wife Joan appears, scolding Sir Charles and his attendants that they "may be ashamed [...] to keep a Woman's Husband here Ranting and Scanting, when he shou'd be a pains-taking with his poor Wife at Home" (sig. [D3]<sup>r</sup>), but she is forced out. Sly continues drinking and, having once more expressed his Jacobite stance ("Dub – Rub, Dub a Dub! Rumps and Round-Heads, Rumps and Round-Heads! I'll be a Rebel, down with the Rump," sig. [D4]<sup>r</sup>), falls asleep. At the end of the first act, Sir Charles orders that Sly be returned to his house, while he and the remainder of his pro-Hanoverian household will have "the Surloin of Beef I order'd to be by Three [...] [and] a Flask of spritely *Burgundy*, to drink his Majesty's Health, and all the Royal Family" (sig. [D4]<sup>v</sup>).

The second act of Johnson's *Cobler* is largely original. Sly wakes up in his bed, and his wife and their neighbour convince him that his lordly memories are just a dream.

Disappointed, he sits down to work, when Sir Charles's attendants come to his house, lamenting that their lord's (that is, Sly's) "old Distraction" has returned (sig. F2<sup>r</sup>); bringing him his nobleman's clothes, they offer to take Sly back to his palace. Sly is again confused, and when getting dressed, he makes an aside remark to the audience, "*I am devilishly afraid I am but a Pretender*" (sig. F2<sup>v</sup>); this refers to James Francis Edward Stuart, nicknamed by the Whigs the Old Pretender, whose claim to the English throne is compared to the ignorant cobbler's claim to lordship.

The "taming" of Sly takes place in Sir Charles's mansion – similarly to Petrucio's taming of Katherina in his house. Sir Charles and his companions stage a storming of the house by dragoons, convincing Sly that he has been charged with treason and is to be executed. With a halter around his neck, Sly confesses that he was "drawn away, as they sayn, to Drink to you Jacobite Papish Healths," which he initially did "for the Love of the Beer only," and then with his companions used to "beat and knock down all People who were soberly disposed" and also "most abominably disuse both the King and the Parliament" (sig. G2<sup>v</sup>). After making him promise that he will amend his life, one of Sir Charles's companions, posing as the captain of the dragoons, releases Sly, saying, "Then get thee Home, honest *Kit*; learn to Cobble thy Shoes, and let the Commonwealth alone" (sig. [G3]<sup>r</sup>). The reconciliation is underscored by a masque, commissioned for Sly by Sir Charles (sadly, it is not described in the printed edition of the farce). In the final verses of the piece, the reformed Sly promises to "*never Rail against the Crown, / Nor swallow Traytors Healths, in Bumpers down; / Nor sham Pretences of Religion forge, / But with true Protestants cry, Live King GEORGE*" (sig. [G4]<sup>r</sup>).

The political message of the farce, which could be called "the taming of a Tory," is supported by the motto in printed editions: *Ne Sutor ultra Crepidam*, meaning "Shoemaker, not beyond the shoe". In the context of the moral of the piece, the Latin saying is not just a maxim dissuading amateurs from meddling in politics. As Scheil points out, the motto had been connected in satirical works with John Hewson, a one-eyed cobbler who joined Cromwell's army in the mid-17th century and was made lord and governor of Ireland. Scheil argues that Hewson was in all probability the real-life model for the otherwise generic misled Jacobite, creating a link between Civil War and anti-Jacobite literary traditions (163–68). Still, despite its clearly political and didactic message, Johnson's *Cobbler* remains an amusing, competently written afterpiece – the first of its kind deploying a Shakespearean story. After its initial run of thirteen productions in February 1716 in Drury Lane, and two more in April and October of that year each, it was staged in Dublin, where it was even adapted into a ballad opera (this version, apparently staged in New Booth in Dame Street during its only season in 1730–31, was printed in 1732).

It is, however, possible that the piece's topicality was one of the reasons why it did not return to London stages in the 18th century. In 1735, Drury Lane instead produced their own adaptation of *Sauny the Scot* (which remained in Lincoln's Inn Fields' repertory), the ballad opera *A Cure for a Scold* by James Worsdale (see Hogan I: 420), and in 1756, a three-act version of *The Taming of the Shrew* by David Garrick, entitled *Catharine and Petruchio*, premiered (see Hogan II: 613), to be performed as the version of *The Taming of*



*the Shrew* until 1887 (Marsden 1). When Johnson's farce was revived by Drury Lane in the 1817–18 season, with the celebrated singer and comic actor Joseph Shepherd Munden as Kit Sly, a contemporary review in the *Morning Herald* praised the performance given by Munden, who "raised a loud and continuous roar of laughter," but also pointed out some "glaring" faults of the farce, namely that "[t]here is something antiquated and repulsive, indeed, in its allusions to Whigs and Tories; and the object of the trick which is played upon the cobbler, – namely, to change his political sentiments – does not easily come within the present rules of the stage" (Munden 260). There is a question, of course, as to what extent these objections would be relevant for the 18th-century stage, especially in the early decades of the century, but the truth remains that, while Johnson's *Cobler* was printed multiple times throughout the century in Dublin, it does not seem to have enjoyed a London edition after 1716.

Nevertheless, there might have been a stronger reason why Drury Lane's farce was forced off the London stage, namely a second play with the same title, staged by the rival theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields just a few days before Drury Lane's version. The story behind the second farce, written by Christopher Bullock, is perhaps more interesting than its actual text. While Drury Lane was rehearsing their *Cobler*, the information about the piece reached Bullock. According to one testimony, James Spiller, a comedian at Lincoln's Inn Fields and a friend of Drury Lane's William Pinkethman, who was to play the main part in Johnson's *Cobler*,

meditated the Dishonour of the Man he convers'd with, and taking the Advantage which he had waited for, of Mr. *Pinkethman's* being overtaken with Liquor, without any Regard to the Laws of Society, Honesty and Justice, stole the Part of the *Cobler* out of his Pocket, and discharging, (as he was always exceedingly Generous, when he had, as he used to call it, *The Cole upon him*,) the Reckoning, took his Leave of the Tavern, left his Brother *Pinkethman* drunk and asleep, and went immediately with his Prize to his Friend and Patron, Mr. *Christopher Bullock*; who, being a Person of an admirable quick Turn and Thought, and one who always knew what would make for his Interest, embraced Mr. *Spiller* and his invaluable *Piece of Theft*, with all the Transports that naturally arise in a truly Poetical Bosom of such an Occasion: He instantly fell to work, and by the Hints given him by *Pinkethman's* Part of the *Cobler*, was able to bring upon the Stage a Farce of the same Title as Mr. *Johnson's*, a Fortnight before the *other House* could present theirs[.] (Akerby, sigs D1<sup>v</sup>–D2<sup>r</sup>)

Even from the tone of the story, it is obvious that it is exaggerated, although it does indeed seem that Bullock's quick response to Johnson's farce was a minor scandal of the town. The prologue to John Philip's 1716 farce *The Pretender's Flight* (of whose stage production there is no record) opens with a reference to the rival staging of the two *Coblers*:

*I hear Alarms, and bloody Wars begin,  
'Twixt haughty Drury-Lane, and Lincoln's-Inn,  
Advertisements against Advertisements are toss'd,  
Bills fight with Bills, and clash on ev'ry Post;*<sup>10</sup>

*Coblers of Preston like two Socia's Rise,  
So like – they might deceive their Author's Eyes[.]* (Prologue [page not given])

If we are to believe Bullock's own account of the story, at some point he

*did hear, there was a Farce in Rehearsal at Drury-lane Theatre, call'd the Cobler of Preston, and that it was taken from the foremention'd Play of Shakespear's; I thought it might be of as good Service to our Stage, as the other; so I set to work on Friday Morning the 20th of January, finished it on the Saturday following, and it was acted on the Tuesday after; which Expedition, I hope, will be an excuse for the many Faults that are in it.* (Bullock, sig. [A5]<sup>r-v</sup>)

Although it can be assumed that Bullock told his readers a rather noble version of his involvement, the text of his *Cobler* indicates that it is perhaps closer to the truth than Akerby's aforementioned testimony. Bullock's farce is, indeed, very hastily written, significantly shorter and less complex than Johnson's, and except for the title, has very little to do with Drury Lane's piece. In the vein of Lincoln's Inn Fields' appeal for political non-involvement, the prologue promises that – although the piece's title might invite “*Some Heads, brim full of Politics*” to see it – it does not wish to “*run Headlong on a Party-snare*,” but rather to do what “*old Shakespear made – to ridicule a Sot*” (sig. [A6]<sup>r</sup>).

The explicit mention of Shakespeare's earlier play is also something that distinguishes Bullock's farce from that of Johnson, who let his inspiration remain unknown. Even if it is possible that Johnson suppressed Shakespeare's contribution to a low-brow farce “in the interest of Shakespeare's authorial honour,” as Dobson maintains (112), and that Bullock, in contrast, evoked Shakespeare's textual authority to “convince the eighteenth-century theatergoing audience that he did not steal from his rival, Charles Johnson,” as Charles Conaway argues (402), there might be another explanation for this difference. Just as the authors of the earlier political adaptations employed Shakespeare's name to attribute their own agendas to him, Bullock's words “*we've no Plot / But what Old Shakespear made*” could be understood as an assurance that the Lincoln's Inn Fields play will stay true to the old classic and remain free of contemporary references. As will become apparent from the summary of the plot, although Bullock does deviate from Shakespeare's original, this is for the sake of expanding his story rather than due to a desire to imbue it with contemporary topicality.

What is also interesting to observe is how the two rival farces display the rising notion of the textual integrity of a work in its printed form. While in the theatre, general audiences can hardly judge what portion of the language comes from the source and what is the adapter's invention, in a published text, a comparison with an edition of the source is possible. In contrast with Johnson, Bullock not only openly admits his indebtedness to Shakespeare's older play in his preface, but he also clearly distinguishes his words from those of his model in the text of the farce itself:

*I have the Story as it was wrote by Shakespear in the Taming of the Shrew; and part of his Language I have made use of, with a little Alteration (which for the Satisfaction of my Readers, I have distinguish'd by this Mark “ before each Line)[.]* (sig. A3<sup>v</sup>)<sup>11</sup>

This was, of course, at least partly motivated by a desire to ridicule Johnson. But Bullock's gesture towards Shakespeare's language also foreshadows its treatment in the decades to follow, when Shakespeare's genius became associated with his words as they were originally written (see above).

The plot of Bullock's farce is simple: the titular cobbler, here named Toby Guzzle, has an argument with his wife about his drinking and profanity, prefiguring the central conflict of the piece. Dame Hacket, an alewife, demands that Guzzle pay his reckoning; when he refuses and even offends Hacket ("You are a Baggage, and you lye [...] you must spoil [an honest fellow's] sport with your damn'd ill-contriv'd tricks," sig. B2<sup>v</sup>), she leaves to fetch the headborough, while Guzzle falls asleep on the ground. Sir Jasper Manly and his attendants are passing by, returning from a hunt, and spot the sleeping cobbler. Sir Jasper immediately devises a trick on Guzzle, suggesting that he be brought to his home, dressed as a lord and have "a Banquet ready, Musick and Wine to entertain him" (sig. [B3]<sup>r</sup>). After this episode, Bullock adds an original scene, central to the piece's main theme, just like the aforementioned scene Cicely and the Constable in Johnson's piece: for Johnson, the main interest was the cobbler's Jacobitism and his political conversion, which was reflected in the additional scene; for Bullock, by contrast, it is the theatricality of male-female and female-female relationships that the parallel scene clearly foreshadows. The scene in Bullock's *Cobler* thus includes a fierce fight between Toby's wife, Dorca, and Dame Hacket, whom Dorca accuses of stealing her husband. Both women insult one another, calling the other one a "Jade" or a "Whore" (sig. [B4]<sup>r</sup>), and argue which one is entitled to treat Guzzle violently for his trespasses. While Dame Hackett maintains that "if he comes to my House again, I'll comb his Head with a three-footed stool," Dorca objects, asserting "I am his wife, and may correct him by Authority my self, yet no body else shall" (sigs [B4]<sup>v</sup>–[B5]<sup>r</sup>). Ultimately, they decide to take their case to Sir Charles, at which point the audience can assume a surprise encounter of the two women with the intoxicated Guzzle, dressed as a lord.

What is significant for the physicality of the scene is the fact that, unlike in Johnson's farce, where both female characters are present (played by Elizabeth Willis and Katherine Baker), but are not at the centre of attention, Bullock expanded their roles with two celebrated male comedians in mind: John Hall and Benjamin Griffin. John Hall was one of the leading comic actors of Lincoln's Inn Fields from the very first season. Contemporary testimonies describe him as "fat" or "something too corpulent" (among his roles was Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*); furthermore, he also had "a thickness of Speech that might be mimick'd with Ease" ("Hall, John" 27). Both these features surely contributed to his desirability as a comedian and made him ideal for roles in farces, where the physicality of the actor's body significantly contributed to dramatic situations. Hall's acting partner, on the other hand, was "[s]hort and slight of build" and established himself in Lincoln's Inn Fields as "a low comedian, specialising in testy old men and skirts parts" ("Griffin, Benjamin" 365). Similarly to Hall, as a stutterer Griffin had a distinct way of speaking (Howe 31). The pairing of Hall and Griffin, a fat and a slim actor

with speech impediments, as two quarrelsome women, must have been a highlight of the performance and surely contributed to the farce's popularity.

Indeed, the bodies of the actors play a significant role in the second half of Bullock's *Cobler*, when Dorca and Dame Hacket come before Guzzle, who, as a justice of the peace, is supposed to arbitrate their quarrel. At first, neither of the woman recognises the cobbler, but when the confused Guzzle starts rebuking them and asserting his superiority ("How! sure I know better than you; wou'd you give the Lye to *Authority*! throw the Lye in the very Face of *Authority* – I tell you I am *Authority*, and were I to say the *Moon* is made of a *Mustard-pot*, you must believe me", sig. C1<sup>v</sup>),<sup>12</sup> they recognise Dorca's lost husband and begin swearing at him, calling him "Dog" and "Carrion Cur" (sig. C2<sup>r</sup>).<sup>13</sup> To get rid of the two, Guzzle resorts to physical violence to "tame" them: "They are scolding Queans, and let 'em be *whipt*, or carry 'em to the *Ribble* and duck 'em – I'll try if I can tame you" (sig. C2<sup>r</sup>). The protesting women are taken away, only to appear again in the following scene, "*Wet and Dirty*" as the stage direction describes them.

The presence of two male actors on the stage in wet women's clothes must have induced laughter – presumably more laughter than two actresses in the same situation would have caused. We can also assume that, for an 18th-century audience, it would have been hardly imaginable to see two actresses being beaten by a man in the final scene of the farce (as the stage direction reads, when Dorca and Dame Hacket beat Guzzle with a stick, he "*Takes his Strap from his Shoulders, and beats both of 'em*," sig. [C4]<sup>v</sup>). It could be argued that, while Johnson's farce is more complex and more elaborate, and has a clearer didactic message that surpasses the genre of low comedy, Bullock was ingenious in toying with theatrical conventions of his time and made use of the potential of his acting company in order to produce a simpler yet better dramatic piece.

While Bullock was ostentatiously apolitical in his work – even waspishly remarking in the preface that "*that Writer's Wit must sure be at a low Ebb, which can only be supported by one Party for railing at another; and how beneath the Dignity of a Theatre such sort of writing is, I leave to the Determination of the Unbyas'd*" (sig. [A4]<sup>r-v</sup>) – the ending of his *Cobler*, nevertheless, seems to be very much rooted in the political reality of the moment. When Guzzle starts beating his wife and the hostess, they both start shouting "Hold, hold, a Truce, a Truce," upon which both the cobbler and the women lay down their weapons and Guzzle suggests that they all "shake Hands, laugh at all that has happen'd, and drown Animosities in a dozen of Ale" (sig. [C4]<sup>v</sup>). Focusing on the gender dynamic of the piece, Conaway argues that, by means of this ending, Bullock "ridicules the idea that men can rule their wives" (406). Guzzle's call for peace and friendship, however, resembles much more the political appeals of the Lincoln's Inn Fields plays of the period – be it the "*Vertue in the Middle*" in Stormy's *The Compromise* (see above) or Heartfree's observation at the end of Griffin's comedy *Whig and Tory* that "Unity, Peace and friendly Offices to each other, are what we only want to make us happy" (sig. L4<sup>r</sup>). Although not mentioning the Jacobites, Whigs or Tories, the final call for settlement when both parties symbolically lay down their weapons would have certainly been recognised by the audience as a topical comment, especially in a farce responding to a politically controversial work.

### [3] Concluding Remarks

As we have mentioned, Johnson's *Cobler* disappeared quite quickly from the London stage, having enjoyed just seventeen productions from February to October 1716. Bullock's competing farce, on the other hand, was performed regularly between 1716 and 1720, to be revived several times in the 1720s, 30s, 40s and 50s (see Hogan I: 414–22 and Hogan II: 613–36). Writing just over a decade after the premiere of both pieces, Akerby insisted that it was Bullock's unscrupulous practices that "robb'd the above-mention'd ingenious Mr. *Charles Johnson* of great Part of the large Profits which he expected from the Run of a *Farce*" (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>). It is, however, more tempting to conclude that Bullock, who unlike Johnson was an actor himself, better understood the demands of the new genre than his opponent and was better able to put them into practice, even if his piece was hastily written and rehearsed.

It is difficult to judge to what extent the involvement of Shakespeare's authority was a strategy on Bullock's part (or Johnson's, for that matter), or whether he simply picked a suitable story that best served his intentions. As Scheil points out, Johnson's and Bullock's *Coblers* "had a lasting impact on later shrew-taming and cobbler texts" that kept appearing throughout the 18th century, such as Charles Coffey's farcical opera *The Mery Cobler* (1735), James Worsdale's aforementioned short adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, titled *A Cure for a Scold* (1735), or the 1749 burletta *The Jovial Cobler* (Scheil 179–180). However, it seems that both the pieces (and surely the scandal that surrounded them) also contributed to the establishment of comedic/farcical afterpieces as a form that gained popularity in the mid-1710s, soon to become an indispensable part of the London theatres' double or triple bills.

Similarly to his contemporary Christopher Marlowe, whose tragedy of *Doctor Faustus* became an unlikely impulse for the development of English pantomime in the early-18th century (see Krajník and Hrdinová), it appears that around the same time, Shakespeare indirectly helped to institutionalise another genre, the 18th-century farcical afterpiece. While popular afterpieces, including farces, were traditionally considered an absolute opposite to "serious" drama, it was the mingling of high and low elements that ultimately led to the establishment of commercial theatre culture as we know it nowadays. The contribution of Renaissance dramaturgy to this process appears to be one area that should be examined more thoroughly outside the narrow fields of adaptation or Shakespeare studies.

### [Notes]

- 1 For an example of how various restorations of a Shakespeare play in the 18th century could become a matter of rivalry between competing actors or theatre managers, see Krajník 2021.
- 2 It is not surprising that the 18th century saw the birth of Shakespearean criticism (with the first slim volume devoted to Shakespeare, John Dennis's *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear* [sic], published in 1712), as well as the publication

of the first critical editions of Shakespeare's works, beginning with Nicolas Rowe (1709), followed by Alexander Pope (1723), Lewis Theobald (1734), Sir Thomas Hanmer (1744), William Warburton (1747), Samuel Johnson (1756), Edward Cappell (1768), and finishing with the seminal edition by Edmund Malone (1790).

- 3 For more details about the commercialisation of theatre, other public diversions in London in that period and responses to it, see Darryl P. Domingo, *The Rhetoric of Diversion in English Literature and Culture, 1690–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 4 The Licensing Act of 1737 effectively closed all non-patent theatre houses in London, leaving only Drury Lane and Covent Garden (Rich's new theatre, where he moved with his company in 1732) in operation. It further enforced the rule that all play-texts had to be reviewed and licensed before performance by the Lord Chamberlain's office, which enabled the government to censor the content of all plays in London. For more information on the effect of the Licensing Act on English drama, see Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).
- 5 In the same vein, Lincoln's Inn Fields premiered Richard Leveridge's *The Comick Masque of Pyramus and Thisbe* in April 1716, which utilised the subplot of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which clowns stage Ovid's story (see Scheil 180–85).
- 6 In the quotations from the 18th-century editions, italics are given as in the original.
- 7 There is an obvious parallel here between Sly and Jack Cade, another Shakespearean rebel against the government from the lower ranks of society who aspires to greatness: "Be brave, then, for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny; the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common, and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass. And when I am king, as king I will be [...] there shall be no money, all shall eat and drink on my score, and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord" (*King Henry VI, Part Two* 4.2.59–70). Many thanks to David Livingstone for bringing this to our attention.
- 8 One cannot but see a parallel between Johnson's farce and the plot of Richard Brome's Caroline comedy *The Antipodes*, in which Peregrine Joyless is given a sleeping potion and is brought to a country estate of the eccentric aristocrat Letoy, where a group of actors stage the country of Antipodes for him to cure him of his obsession with travel literature and the resulting neglect of his wife. Samuel Pepys saw the play on 26 August 1661 at the theatre in Vere Street, claiming that it contained "so much mirth, but no great matter else" (Pepys II: 83).
- 9 These are some of the few lines in the farce taken verbatim from Shakespeare (*The Taming of the Shrew*, Induction 2.77–78), even set in original blank verse in the otherwise predominantly prose text.
- 10 As a response to the unexpected early premiere of Lincoln's Inn Fields' *Cobler*, Drury Lane made an announcement in their bills "That a new Farce, call'd *The Cobler of Pres-*

ton, was then in Rehearsal at that Theatre, and wou'd be play'd in few Days" (Bullock, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>).

- 11 In the 1676 quarto of *Hamlet*, the same mark is used to suggest cuts of "such Places as might be least prejudicial to the Plot or sense" – a use in a way opposite to Bullock's ("To the Reader" [page not given]).
- 12 Cf. Petruccio's insistence that, in midday, it is the moon that shines so brightly: "Now, by my mother's son – and that's myself – / It shall be moon or star or what I list" (*The Taming of the Shrew* 4.5.6–7).
- 13 Here we can observe the reversal of Shakespeare's text: Toby Guzzle fails miserably where his Italian model previously succeeded (cf. Katherina's "[...] be it moon or sun or what you please, / And if you please to call it a rush-candle, / Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me," *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.5.13–15).

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### [Acknowledgement]

This article was supported by the Czech Science Foundation project GA1907494S, “English Theatre Culture 1660–1737.”

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