

**CIBBER'S REVISION  
OF SHAKESPEARE'S  
RICHARD III**

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Cibber's revision of Shakespeare's Richard III by Arthur Cleveland

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**ARTHUR CLEVELAND**

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**Cibber's Revision**  
of  
**Shakespeare's Richard III**

**ABSTRACT OF A THESIS**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Philosophy  
of the University of Pennsylvania**

**BY**

**ARTHUR CLEVELAND, A.M., Ph.D.**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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1911

## NOTE

The following pages are an abstract of the author's thesis as presented for the degree of Ph. D., University of Pennsylvania, 1906. In their limited scope, they cannot of course enter into a minute analysis of the material with which they deal: that is not their function. They are meant only to give the reader a bird's-eye view of the subject, the details of which can be found in the thesis MS. filed in the University of Pennsylvania Library. It will be seen, also, that for the sake of further compression all notes except a few necessary references to the Shakespearean text of *Richard III* (Globe ed.) have been omitted.

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CIBBER'S REVISION  
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SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD III

I

INTRODUCTION

The object of the original thesis is to ascertain by comparison the relative values of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and its *Revision* by Colley Cibber, considered solely as plays built for the stage, not as poems nor as closet-plays. Without reference, therefore, to the minutiae of their making—changes of words, phrases and the like—they will be examined and appraised only in those essentials of practical playwriting that have stood and must always stand for success in the theatre:

1. Plot: the reviser's addition of one motive, exclusion of five, and general handling of such as are common to both texts.

2. Characters: his use of them in dialogue and as carriers of the plot; his correction of inconsistencies in them; and finally, his rejection of thirty-three of Shakespeare's, with different development and interdependence of the nineteen retained.

3. Technique: his contrasted methods in entrances, exits, and other fundamentals of stage-management.

As preliminary to the discussion, the causes of modern critical hostility toward revision of Shakespeare are analyzed in detail and found to be the following:

1. The dictum that every play must be wholly original;

2. The reverence with which the Master Dramatist is now regarded through—

(a), the force of antiquity itself with the halo that it gives;

(b), the wealth of critical appreciation that its years have brought forth since the commentary of Nicholas Rowe in 1709.

These rules and principles are shown to be strictly modern in their growth: none of them date back to the Restoration Era; none of them can therefore be applied fairly to a group of dramatists to whom they were utterly unknown. They are only laws enacted *ex post facto*.

As a final argument against hostility to Shakespearean revision, the revision practices of Shakespeare himself are cited—his founding of 1 and 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V* on *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *King Lear* on *The Chronicle History of King Leir*, *King John* on *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England*, and *The Taming of The Shrew* on *The Taming of A Shrew*; his frequent copying of Sir Thomas North's phraseology in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*; and his retention in 2 and 3 *Henry VI* of both plot and 3,240 lines from *The First Contention* and *The True Tragedy of Richard* respectively, while adding only 2,740 lines or less than one-half of the plays in their complete form. Shakespeare is thus seen as the pioneer in appropriating others' work, the Restoration Dramatists only as his disciples; and if the opponent of revision flays the disciples for their doctrines, he must flay as well the master who taught them those doctrines. Both stand in the same dock, on the same charge, with the same evidence for and against them; both must therefore be convicted or acquitted together.



It is evident, then, that hostility toward revision of Shakespeare is nothing more than a convention of modern criticism, and that as such it should not be allowed to prejudice the scholar in his estimate of a Restoration writer's work: let him therefore judge the subject of the present paper—Cibber's *Revision of Richard III*—solely upon its merits or demerits as a play, without imputing sacrilege to its author where none was ever meant.

## II

## CIBBER'S FITNESS AS A REVISER

Of all the emendators of Shakespeare, Cibber alone has succeeded in giving to a revision enough lasting qualities to make it permanently supplant its original for theatrical use. Though his *King John* soon passed away—and deservedly—his *Richard III* not only swung into an instant popularity at its production, but has since survived the weeding-out processes of age after age until to-day, when it still holds its place upon our stage as the best acting version of the tragic story ever constructed.

Beyond his possession of a nature that lived only in and for the theatre, Cibber's most valuable asset for playwriting was a stage experience gathered through years of almost feverish activity. Those phases of it which especially fitted him for the task of revision are listed briefly below:

1. His life as an actor: The large number of his rôles gave him a first-hand knowledge of technique, and enabled him to judge the individual parts of a play from behind the curtain—to estimate the effect of a given line, episode, or scene rendered in a given way.

2. His life as a manager: It was this that enabled him to judge the larger appeal of a play—its appeal as a whole—from before the curtain: witness his almost unbroken record of successes in the Haymarket Theatre and later in Drury Lane whose twenty brightest years were due to his unerring instinct for the popular.

3. His life as a playwright: If there was any branch of dramaturgy in which Cibber lacked a thorough training and practice, it yet remains to be discovered. He wrote a number of original plays: in prose, *Love's Last Shift*, *Woman's Wit*, *The Schoolboy*, *The Careless Husband*, and *The Rival Queens*; in verse, *Xerxes*, *Perolla and Izadora*, *Venus and Adonis*, and *Damon and Phillida*. It was his characteristic, however—and again, one which fitted him peculiarly for the task of revision—that his mind worked more vigorously when given some concrete idea of plot as its centre of energy, and thus naturally turned to alterations of others' plays or ingenious combinations of their elements. Those in prose are:

*Love Makes the Man*: a welding of two plays of Beaumont and Fletcher—*The Custom of the Country* and *The Elder Brother*.

*She Would and She Would Not*: taken partly from Leamer's *Counterfeits*.

*The Comical Lovers*: combining in part Dryden's *Secret Love* and *Marriage à la Mode*.

*The Double Gallant*: from Mrs. Centliore's *Love at a Venture* and Burnaby's *Lady's Visiting Day*, and indebted to Thomas Corneille's *Le Gallant Double*.

*The Lady's Last Stake*: indebted to Burnaby's *Reformed Wife*.

*The Rival Fools*: an alteration of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Wit at Several Weapons*.

*The Non-Juror*: taken from Molière's *Tartuffe*.

*The Refusal*: taken from Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes*.

*The Provoked Husband*: completed by Cibber from Vanbrugh's MS. of *The Journey to London*.

And in verse:

*The Tragical History of King Richard the Third*: a revision of Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

*Ximena*: indebted somewhat to the *Cid*.

*Cæsar in Egypt*: taken from Beaumont and Fletcher's *The False One* and Pierre Corneille's *La Mort de Pompée*.

*Love in a Riddle*: an imitation of *The Beggar's Opera*.

*Papal Tyranny in the Reign of King John*: a revision of Shakespeare's *King John*.

Cibber thus had equal experience and facility in prose and verse, whether in original or adaptive work—an instance of combined faculties almost unique. But still more remarkable is the variety of his dramatic productions. No less than six tragedies, thirteen comedies, a comical tragedy, a pastoral, a pastoral interlude, a farce, a masque, and a ballad opera owe their existence to a brain equally fertile and versatile. Many authors have surpassed Cibber in the number of their plays; few, if any, in variety of types. Hardly a note on the histrionic keyboard that he did not touch; hardly a note touched that did not ring in tune with the heart of the people.