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**John O'Keefe and the Restoration of Farce
on the Later Eighteenth-Century Stage**

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Of the important critics in the history of English literature, none, perhaps, has been more generally incisive in his practical criticism, in his evaluation of individual works and authors, than William Hazlitt. Certainly, Hazlitt is among those critics whose specific literary judgments have been most consistently ratified by the consensus of twentieth-century criticism. Thus, it is more than a little surprising to encounter his opinion, expressed in his *Lectures on the English Comedy Writers*, that one John O'Keefe was "our English Molière."¹ Nor does Hazlitt stop with this apparently absurd comparison. This same O'Keefe, we are told, is also an "immortal farce writer," and two of his characters, from a play called *The Agreeable Surprise* (1781), are no less than "Touchstone and Audrey revived."² We might easily suppose that such praise for such a dramatist from such a critic were no more than a momentary and perhaps whimsical indiscretion. However, Hazlitt will allow us no such supposition. Eleven years after the publication of *The English Comic Writers*, he again writes of O'Keefe in the *Conversations of James Northcote*, and again O'Keefe is "the English Molière."³

Now, I know of but one modern scholar — Allardyce Nicoll — who has commented on Hazlitt's opinion of O'Keefe, and he admits to being mystified by the romantic critic's praise of the now obscure eighteenth-century Irish playwright.⁴ Professor Nicoll's wonder would no doubt have been all the greater had he known or recalled that O'Keefe was a favorite, not only of Hazlitt's, but also of Hazlitt's contemporaries, Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt. Lamb, in the character of Elia, devoted an entire essay, "On the Acting of Munden," to his reactions to a performance of O'Keefe's farce, *The Modern Antiques* (1791), and Hunt, writing in 1831 for *The Tatler*, numbers "some of the pieces, by O'Keefe" (along with Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*) among "the best pieces produced in later times."⁵

It would, of course, be too much to hope or even wish that the collective praise of Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt might lead to a modern revival of interest in O'Keefe, but this early nineteenth-century critical response to the Irish comedian calls for some explanation, and I believe this can be provided by recognizing the important place which

O’Keeffe occupied in a significant and heretofore unappreciated revolution in taste and repertoire which occurred on the English stage in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

In order to understand this revolution, it is necessary to look briefly at the nature of English comic drama and dramatic criticism during the middle fifty years of the eighteenth century. Professors Hume and Sherbo have taught us that we can no longer explain English comedy of the mid-eighteenth century by simply dismissing it as tediously sentimental.⁶ No one can read many of the comic plays written between 1725 and 1775 without encountering much that is far from any definition of sentimentality. Still, something is, or at least seems, very wrong with most of what passed for comic entertainment during these fifty years.

As one turns the pages of play after play from this period, one is first struck and then oppressed by plots that are mechanical and uninteresting, characters that are tame and conventional, and dialogue that is frigid and flat. I think that what was ultimately wrong in all of this was, more than anything else, the very concept of comedy espoused by most Augustan critics and dramatists. This view of comedy produced not so much sentimental comedy as “elegant” and “genteel” comedy. It produced not so much the systematic inclusion of sentimental scenes and dialogue as the more or less systematic exclusion of all that could be regarded as extravagant, improbable, unnatural, ludicrous, or — to use the favorite eighteenth-century word — “low.”

In 1780, George Colman, in the Prologue to Sophia Lee’s comedy, *A Chapter of Accidents*, surveyed English comedy during his century and could mention only Fielding and Goldsmith as having escaped the iron tyranny of the word “low”:

Long has the passive stage howe’er absurd
 Been rul’d by Names and govern’d by a Word
 Some poor cant Term, like magick Spells can awe,
 And bind our Realms like a dramattick law.
 When Fielding, Humour’s favorite Child, appear’d
 Low was the word — a word each Author fear’d!
 ’Till chac’d at length by Pleasantrys bright ray
 Nature and Mirth resum’d their legal Sway,
 And Goldsmith’s Genius bask’d in open day.⁷

However warmly Goldsmith’s genius “basked in open day,” he none-

theless felt the oppression of conventional criticism and its favorite one-word weapon. In his *Enquiry into the Present State of Learning in Europe* (1759), he writes:

By the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us. Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is low; does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous, then he is very *low*.⁸

The refined Augustan concept of comedy which practically condemned humor itself as low influenced every aspect of comic writing. Thus, the plot had to be "regular" and "probable." An indication of what this meant may be gathered from Elizabeth Cooper's Preface to her comedy *The Rival Widows* (1735), in which Mrs. Cooper points out with satisfaction that the action of her play is "single and entire," that each scene is "intended naturally and consistently to produce and make room for the next," "that the characters neither enter nor exit ... without a manifest reason," and that every act of the play is necessary to the plot.⁹ Comedies, old or new, which failed to conform to the standards of decorum evident in this Preface were generally condemned, and the demands for probability of plot were no less rigorous. As late as 1779, a critic for *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* could write of a performance of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*: "This [confusion of persons] as it has no foundation in nature, cannot be deemed a true source of comedy or a pretense of human life and manners."¹⁰ So too, in 1776 the *St. James's Chronicle* attacks *The Cozeners*, a farce by the popular later eighteenth-century playwright Samuel Foote, as "a Jumble or Assemblage of Incoherences, Improbabilities, and Puerilities." The plot "offends against every rule of Probability." The irate critic finally damns the performance as "the Birth of a Monster."¹¹

The extent to which English critics and audiences during most of the eighteenth century demanded probability and regularity of comic plot may be further illustrated by the critical responses to Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer* (1772). Horace Walpole liked nothing about Goldsmith's comedy, but in a letter written in 1773 to William Mason he especially complains of the "total improbability of the whole plan and conduct" of the plot.¹² Even Dr. Johnson himself, to whom the play was dedicated, felt a little uneasy about his friend's comic plot. In

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1773, he wrote Boswell of *She Stoops to Conquer*: "The chief diversion arises from a stratagem by which a lover is made to mistake his future father-in-law's house for an inn. This, you see, borders upon farce."¹³

If the refined Augustan concept of comedy placed severe restrictions on plot, it was no less rigorous concerning character and language. Even in the Preface to his farcical opera *Love in the City* (1767), Isaac Bickerstaffe felt it necessary to defend his inclusion of characters and language that were not genteel:

The admirers of lords and ladies and fine sentiments will probably quarrel with it for being low; but my endeavour has been, thro' the whole, to make my audience laugh; and however respectfully we may consider illustrious personages; I will venture to say they are the last company into which any one would think of going in order to be merry.¹⁴

It perhaps goes without saying that Bickerstaffe's play was a failure. In 1768, Goldsmith's *The Good Natur'd Man* also met with rough treatment at the hands of audiences and critics, and again the cause had to do with "low" characters and language. In the original form of this comedy, Goldsmith included a scene in which a lowly bailiff appeared whose language was a true reflection of his social position. This scene was almost universally condemned. Writing in 1793, William Cooke recalled the audience's reaction: "In vain did the *bailiff scene* mark with true comic discrimination the manners of that tribe ... The predominant cry of the prejudiced and illiterate part of the pit was 'it was low — it was d — mned vulgar.'"¹⁵ It was not only the "illiterate part of the pit," however, that objected to the bailiff scene. Almost every newspaper critic attacked it. *Lloyd's Evening Post* remarked that the scene was written "in language uncommonly low" and that it "gave some offence."¹⁶ The *St. James's Chronicle* insisted that "the Bailiff Scene must be very much shortened or totally omitted."¹⁷ When the play was printed, the bailiff scene again found disfavor with the critics. *The Gentleman's Magazine* noted that "it depends upon the exhibition of manners, which the taste of the present age will scarce admit even in farce."¹⁸ The drama critic for the *Monthly Review* admitted that he was "not disgusted with the scene in the closet," but nevertheless condemned it as "intolerable upon the stage."¹⁹

One further example of the concept of comedy which obtained during the middle decades of the century must suffice. Most critics

demanded that the characters and language of comedy be not only genteel, but also probable. The prevalence of this demand is best illustrated by the early critical history of Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Although Sheridan's comedy was not a complete failure, the reactions to the character and language of Mrs. Malaprop were overwhelmingly negative. Reviewing the first performance of the comedy, the *London Packet* praised the genteel language of Faulkland and Julia, but damned the speech of Mrs. Malaprop: "The diction is an odd mixture of the elegant and the absurd. Some of the scenes are written in a very masterly stile; others in a low, farcical kind of dialogue, more fit for a Bartholomew-droll than a comedy."²⁰ The *Public Ledger* was no less negative in its response to Mrs. Malaprop's language:

The author seems to have considered puns, witticisms, similes, and metaphors, as admirable substitutes for polished diction; hence it is that instead of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, one of the characters is made to talk of Ovid's "Meat-for-hopes." These are shameful absurdities in language, which can suit no character how widely soever it may depart from common life and common manners.²¹

The Town and Country Magazine disliked the play generally and noted that "the most reprehensible part is in many low quibbles and barbarous puns that disgrace the very name of comedy."²² As in the case of Goldsmith's bailiff scene, the audience as well as the press rejected the departure from the genteel and the "natural." The early nineteenth-century theatrical historian, John Bernard, in his *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830), described its reaction: "Mrs. Malaprop was denounced as a rank offence against probability ... as a thing without parallel in society — a monstrous absurdity which had originated with the author."²³

Given the strength of these demands for a more refined and elegant comedy, it was perhaps inevitable that comedy's poor relation, farce, would be influenced in ways similar to its more exalted cousin, and indeed this is what came to pass. It is significant in this regard that one of the first and most influential genteel comedies, Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1732), contained a Prologue by Leonard Welsted which asked the audience not only to approve Steele's decorous and virtuous comedy, but also to reject farce:

No more let lawless farce uncensur'd go,
The lewd dull gleanings of a Smithfield show.

'Tis yours with breeding to refine the age,
To chasten wit, and moralize the stage.²⁴

In a sense, this sort of attack on farce was conventional. Ever since the early 1660's, when the genre first appeared on the English stage as a recognizable form, critics were uneasy with and often hostile to the absurdity and "lowness" of farce. The most hostile and the most influential of these critics was John Dryden, and though he is not a critic notable for consistency, his attitude toward farce was nearly constant. In prologues, epilogues, prefaces, and essays from 1667 to 1696, Dryden treated farce as a foolish import from France, a dull bag of low comic tricks, an unlawful form of comedy, a genre consisting of "forced humours" and "unnatural events," a kind of play without form or structure, and a debased variety of comedy.²⁵

Critics and dramatists contemporary with Dryden and those who followed him for two generations were largely in agreement with his negative view of the genre. Thomas Shadwell, Edward Howard, Colley Cibber, Thomas Otway, John Dennis, and William Congreve joined in the attack on farce, and Susannah Centlivre nicely summarized the dominant critical view of farce in the Prologue to her *The Beau's Duel* (1702): "If Farce their Subject be, this Witty Age/Holds that below the Grandeur of the Stage."²⁶

Still, despite such critical opposition, farce flourished throughout the period of the Restoration and into the eighteenth century. Such energetically ludicrous plays as Nahum Tate's *A Duke and No Duke* (1684), Aphra Behn's *Emperor of the Moon* (1687), Thomas Doggett's *Hob* (1711), and Charles Johnson's *The Cobler of Preston* (1716) were popular successes, and during the 1730's, Henry Fielding, in a series of plays which combined farce, burlesque, fantasy, and satire, made a notable contribution both to the development of farce on the English stage and to the satiric accomplishments of his age. His particular brand of farcical, non-representational, political satire, exemplified by such plays as *The Author's Farce* and *The Historical Register*, was a radical departure from earlier farcical practice, and in his own time Fielding found no real imitators.²⁷

With the Licensing Act of 1737, of course, Fielding's political plays became an impossibility, and he of necessity turned his attention to other forms of artistic creation. Although it is possible to regret Fielding's forced desertion of the stage and to wonder about the effects of the Licensing Act on the general vitality of English drama, the

evolution of English farce between roughly 1740 and 1780 was, as I have already suggested, conditioned by forces more subtle and complex than either Fielding's retirement from the theater or the passage of the Licensing Act.

To understand something of these forces, we may return for a moment to Welsted's Prologue to *The Conscious Lovers*. Here we see not only the conventional Augustan disapproval of farce, but the specific opposition of "lawless farce" to an ideal of drama which emphasizes breeding, refinement, chaste wit, and morality. Thus, the eighteenth-century concept of "elegant" and "genteel" comedy is brought specifically to bear on farce. As we have seen, such pressure did not bring about any mass or immediate rejection of farce. Nevertheless, Welsted's Prologue looks forward to the later developments in criticism and taste which I have already outlined, and by the early 1740's the critical spirit and the sense of dramatic decorum which would eventually attack Mrs. Malaprop as unnatural and *She Stoops to Conquer* as improbable began to have their effect on farce.

An interesting indication of the truth of this statement is provided by David Garrick's first farce, a play entitled *Lethe* (1740). In this farce there is little slapstick, little absurd "business," little comic extravagance. The premise of the play is improbable enough (a gathering of characters in hell), but the play as a whole is a decorous and general satire on society's foibles. In almost every respect, Garrick's piece is a contrast to the absurdity of Restoration and earlier eighteenth-century farce. Nor was this difference lost on Garrick's contemporaries. In his Prologue for *Lethe*, Samuel Johnson significantly recommended the play as a farce chastened by innocence and "useful Truth." Thus he expresses Garrick's novel intention:

This night he hopes to show that farce may charm,
Tho' no lewd hint the mantling virgin warm.
That useful truth with humour may unite,
That mirth may mend, and innocence delight.²⁸

The play was a success, and when it was revived in 1749, at least some members of the audience recognized that *Lethe* represented a new direction for farce. We can know this because of the publication in 1749

of an anonymous pamphlet praising the farce. This pamphlet, entitled *Lethe Rehearsed or, A Critical Discussion of the Beauties and Blemishes of that Performance* applauds *Lethe*, as a new kind of farce, one which combines general satire and humor, comedy and "meaning." Furthermore, *Lethe* is specifically contrasted with earlier farces in which "Pleasantry [was] unaccompanied with meaning."²⁹

Lethe and the reactions to it suggest the particular ways in which farce came to be influenced by increasing demands for refinement and elegance. Audiences and critics did not generally reject farce altogether, but they did expect something different from the genre. In the middle four decades of the century, farce moved toward standard comedy. In the afterpieces of Garrick, George Colman, Arthur Murphy, and even to a degree Samuel Foote, the wild farce of the Restoration and earlier eighteenth century was "improved" so as to become at times almost indistinguishable from comedy. By 1757 it was possible for Arthur Murphy to praise Samuel Foote's *The Author* as a play which "justly answers the true idea" of farce and which nowhere descends to "low buffoonery" or "indelicate vulgarisms."³⁰ Similarly, in his *A General View of the Stage* (1759), Thomas Wilkes echoes Dryden's strictures on farce but then goes on to state that few plays in English correspond to Dryden's conception of farce and that a new "Species of Drama" has lately risen in place of farce which "answers all the ends of Comedy."³¹ Finally, William Cooke, writing in 1775, congratulates his age on its improvements in farce:

But we are every day improving in this department of drama; as the farces of the last twenty years, instead of exhibiting the most improbable fables, and lowest species of humor ... are many of them, far from deficient in outline, humour, and observation.³²

The "improvements" were real. The extravagant and low form of the Restoration and earlier eighteenth century had become relatively comedic and relatively refined. It is significant that the term *petite comédie* gained some currency as a near synonym for farce among many critics of the period.

It is against the background of these developments in drama and criticism that O'Keeffe's career must be viewed. Whatever the intrinsic merits of his plays, he was the most significant figure in a revolution in taste and in the writing of comic drama which not only rejected the major elements of Augustan comic decorum but also brought

about on the English stage the successful return of genuine, extravagant, low-comic farce.

I think it is fair to place the beginning of this revolution in 1778, for in that year appeared two very popular plays which both contained in their printed forms defenses, not only of "low comedy," but of farce itself. One of these plays was a farce called *The Invasion* by the now forgotten playwright, Frederick Pilon. In the Preface to this play, Pilon defends "downright farce" against *petite comédie*. He argues that it is the true nature of farce to be "extravagant" and "irregular" and cites the examples of Molière and Fielding:

Can anything be more improbable and extravagant than the plot and incidents of *The Mock Doctor*? Yet this has been the production of two of the first geniusses this or any other country produced. It is not to be supposed that Molière and Fielding were ignorant of the rules of the drama; nevertheless, in their best farces, they totally lost sight of them, appearing to have nothing in view but whimsical characters and laughable situations.³³

Pilon goes on to admit freely that true farce is "low" but reminds the critic that Smollett, Fielding, Gay, and Cervantes "all descended to the humble walk of life in search of humor." Pilon's Preface is interesting, but his own handful of plays was too small and too insignificant to have much effect on the farces of comic refinement on the English stage. In John O'Keefe, however, low comedy and "downright farce" found a remarkably fertile and successful champion. Although he had written drama before 1778, it was between 1778 and 1800 that most of his important plays were produced. Despite his present obscurity, O'Keefe wrote literally scores of plays and was probably the most popular English dramatist during the last two decades of the century. The Prologue to his 1778 play, *Tony Lumpkin in Town*, contains a statement similar to Pilon's Preface:

If there's a Critick here, who hates what's low
We humbly *beg* the gentleman would go:
Tonight no Two-Act Comedy you'll view
But a mere farce ...³⁴

Tony Lumpkin in Town was a great popular success and even the critics seemed to fall under its spell. *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* reviewed *Tony Lumpkin in Town* and decided, since it produced laughter, to "avoid severity."³⁵ As O'Keefe continued to

write plays and command popular success, critics not only avoided severity but gave praise. His *Son-in-Law* (1779) was applauded by one critic for its “store of laugh and whim” and by another as “a laughable and diverting broad farce.”³⁶ Indeed, as early as 1779, some critics began to see O’Keeffe as a new and positive force on the English stage. Thus, in *The Public Advertiser* for July 20, 1779, we read that O’Keeffe

has many claims to publick approbation and gives us to hope that [he] will be the means of restoring the reputation of *Farce* which is a species of drama peculiarly proper to the English stage, because it is best expressive of true English humor, and therefore ought not to be thrown aside for that French frivolity la petite comedie.³⁷

O’Keeffe’s successes continued, as did critical approbation. In 1781, he scored two brilliant triumphs with *The Dead Alive* and *The Agreeable Surprise*. Late in the summer theatrical season, the *St. James’s Chronicle* commented upon O’Keeffe’s plays:

Mr. O’Keeffe’s two farces *The Dead Alive* and *The Agreeable Surprise* have deservedly met with success. As downright Farce is intended merely to excite laughter, no matter be what Absurdities it is effected, *The Agreeable Surprise* has created more incessant Roars from every Part of the Audience than perhaps any other Farce whatever. The snarling Critick, indeed, after he has almost burst his sides with Laughter may cavil at the absurd means by which the Author has ensnared him in a Grin, but has he laughed? — then the End of Farce is answered; and it is to be presumed, that the person who can thus set our risible muscles a going by farcical Means is not deficient in those Qualifications that constitute the Comick Writer.³⁸

This reference to the Snarling Critick is significant, for, although O’Keeffe’s plays won popularity with audiences and many critics, they did so in spite of, or perhaps in some cases because of, their flagrant violation of every aspect of conservative Augustan comic decorum, and there were some critics, at least, who continued to attack these violations. The most interesting of these conservative critics was Paul Jodrell, a minor member of the Johnson circle. In 1787, Jodrell published a play called *One and All* which contains a long dialogue prologue in which there appears “a writer of nonsensical farce” named Spatter-Wit who is clearly meant to suggest O’Keeffe and who is made to discuss his latest play with two characters, Sir Peter and his wife:

Spatter-Wit. And does your ladyship really think the little piece has merit?

Lady. Infinite — and quite in the present taste — equivoque — improbability — and everything that is charming!

Spatter-Wit. I was afraid it wanted improbability —

Lady. You are too modest — it rises superior to anything I have seen.

Sir Peter. How the taste of the times differ! — I remember when the latest deviation from what is natural, was the greatest fault a dramatic production could have ...

Spatter-Wit. Thanks to a more enlightened taste, Sir Peter, all that vulgarity is now laid aside.³⁹

At another point in this little dialogue, Sir Peter, the defender of conservative dramatic decorum, attacks Spatter-Wit's (O'Keefe's) characters as unnatural:

Sir Peter. All your likenesses are caricaturas.

Spatter-Wit. Quite the contrary! a caricatura is nature enlarged or diminished; whereas we put nature quite out of the question, and form a new creation. — There lies the difficulty; for as any painter, with decent colours, and with a little knowledge of perspective, may draw your likeness, if you sit for your picture, so may any poet describe your characters and manners, with the smallest observation of your behavior and conduct. The art of copying, therefore, is wisely banished from the stage, and nothing succeeds without originality.

Sir Peter. I thought the stage was a looking-glass, in which men might see their vices and foibles, and learn to correct them.

Spatter-Wit. That's old stuff from Horace and Shakespeare. — But give me the poet, who, as the latter says of his prayers, "outstrips the modesty of nature."⁴⁰

This is itself perhaps a caricature of O'Keefe and his manner of writing, but it is a revealing one. O'Keefe's plays, almost without exception, depend upon the wildest and most absurd of improbabilities — in his extremely popular *The Agreeable Surprise* one strain of a hopelessly complicated plot is based on the hero's successful efforts to convince an entire household that Mrs. Cheshire, a Southwark cheesemonger, is actually "The Princess Rustifusti" of Russia, who has killed a great count of the Holy Roman Empire in a duel and has fled to England for safety. O'Keefe's characters and comic language are no less extravagant. In the nineteenth century the novelist and critic

John Galt was to speak of “the grotesque characters of O’Keeffe,”⁴¹ and Hazlitt was to refer to “those extraordinary and marked characters that Gilray painted, and O’Keeffe drew.”⁴² O’Keeffe’s language was most remarkable for its dependence on the pun — that *bête noire* of Augustan criticism — but the extravagance of O’Keeffe’s handling of language may best be illustrated by a macaronic song which a pedantic schoolmaster in *The Agreeable Surprise* sings to a milkmaid named Cowslip:

Amo, Amas,
I love a lass
As a Cedar tall and slender.
Sweet Cowslip’s grace
Is her nom’tive case
And she’s of the feminine gender.
Can I decline
A nymph divine?
Her voice as a flute is dulcis.
Her oculus bright,
Her manus white,
And soft, when I tacto, her pulse is.
Oh How bella
My puella
I’ll kiss secula seculorum.
If I’ve luck Sir
She’s my uxor
O dies benedictorum.⁴³

Although such absurdity as this continued to offend some critics throughout the century, by the 1790’s, O’Keeffe’s reputation was secure and his revolution essentially complete. In 1795, *The Times* significantly praises him as one “who has even ever defied the rules of the old school,”⁴⁴ and in the same year, *The St. James’s Chronicle* writes:

Horace says ... “Let your Tale have some probability.” “This may be the general rule,” says Mr. O’Keeffe, “but it is not without exceptions — for I have amused and diverted the English Theatre nearly twenty years without much attention to the rule, and I have produced crowded houses; soothed the bosom of care; softened the acrimony of the Splenetick; and unfolded into the sprite of Candor, the harshest features of Criticism.”⁴⁵

As O’Keeffe’s farcical style of drama increasingly met with approval, other playwrights followed his lead. Elizabeth Inchbald, James

Cobb, John Till Allingham, Andrew Franklin, and other once popular dramatists wrote more or less in O'Keefe's manner, and in 1799 *The Sun* could refer to "The School of O'Keefe and his Followers."⁴⁶

Perhaps O'Keefe's greatest contribution as a revolutionary force was to suggest by his example that a departure from Augustan standards might be viewed, not as a despicable aberration from reason, but rather as an exercise in imaginative freedom. It was largely as a result of O'Keefe's influence, I think, that one critic could write in 1784:

Aristotle has defined Tragedy and Comedy. We, his Disciples, the Critics of Newspapers, have, therefore, some Phrases and Terms, if not Principles and Rules, to give Plausibility and Effect to our Decisions. But in Farce we are left to our own Imagination and Feelings, if we should happen to have any. Farce is an unlimited Region of happy Absurdities, Antithesis, Puns, and Repartees. They should be brought together by a Fable as improbable, and Characters as extravagant as possible.⁴⁷

It was, more than anything else, O'Keefe's revolutionary revelation of this happy and absurd "unlimited region" that so endeared him to Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt. It was also, I suspect, the mere fact that O'Keefe was funny, that he made people laugh, and perhaps the best praise of the now neglected Irish comedian is the notice of him in the 1812 edition of the *Biographia Dramatica*: "O'Keefe gladdened the hearts of his auditors between twenty and thirty years, and 'sent them laughing to their beds'; and all this he has done in the hearing of good scholars, good writers, and good critics."⁴⁸

NOTES

¹ *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London, 1903), 8:166-67.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 6:417.

⁴ Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 176.

⁵ Leigh Hunt's *Dramatic Criticism*, ed. Lawrence H. Houtchens and Carolyn W. Houtchens (New York, 1949), p. 256.

⁶ Robert Hume, "Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of 'Laughing' Against 'Sentimental' Comedy," *Studies in Change and Revolution*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Menston, Yorkshire, 1972), pp. 237-76.

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Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (East Lansing, 1957).

⁷ *St. James's Chronicle*, 8-10 August 1780.

⁸ *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman (Oxford, 1966) 1:320.

⁹ Elizabeth Cooper, *The Rival Widows* (London, 1735), p. vi.

¹⁰ *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 23 January 1779.

¹¹ *St. James's Chronicle*, 29 June - 2 July 1776.

¹² *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with William Mason*, ed. Wilmarth Lewis (New Haven, 1955) 1:79-80.

¹³ *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), 1:205-06.

¹⁴ Isaac Bickerstaffe, *Love in the City*, (London, 1767), p. ii.

¹⁵ *European Magazine*, 24:(1793), 94-95.

¹⁶ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 29 January - 1 February 1768.

¹⁷ *St. James's Chronicle*, 28 - 30 January 1768.

¹⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1768, pp. 78-80.

¹⁹ *Monthly Review*, February 1768, pp. 159-60.

²⁰ *The London Packet*, 16-18 January 1775.

²¹ *Public Ledger*, 18 January 1775.

²² *The Town and Country Magazine*, February 1775, p. 43.

²³ John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage* (London, 1830), 1:143-44.

²⁴ *The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford, 1971), p. 302.

²⁵ See Dryden's Epilogue to *The Wild Gallant*, his Prologue to *The Conquest of Granada*, his Prologue to Carlell's *Arviragus and Philicia*, his Prologue to his son's *The Husband his Own Cuckhold*, his Preface to *An Evening's Love*, his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* and his translation of Boileau's *L'Art Poétique*.

²⁶ Susannah Centlivre, *The Dramatic Works* (London, 1872), p. 60.

²⁷ For a good brief discussion of Fielding's historical position as a dramatist see Charles B. Wood's introduction to his edition of Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (Lincoln, 1966), pp. xi-xix

²⁸ *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. 6: Poems, ed. E. L. McAdam, Jr., with George Milne (New Haven, 1964), p. 67.

²⁹ *Lethe Rehearsed or, A Critical Discussion of the Beauties and Blemishes of that Performance* (London, 1749), p. 48.

³⁰ *New Essays by Arthur Murphy*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (East Lansing, 1963), p. 119.

³¹ Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London, 1759), pp. 60-64.

³² William Cooke, *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (London, 1775), p. 170.

³³ Frederick Pilon, *The Invasion* (London, 1778), p. v.

³⁴ John O'Keefe, *Tony Lumpkin in Town* (London, 1780), p. vii.

³⁵ *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 4 July 1778.

³⁶ *The Public Advertiser*, 20 July 1779.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *St. James's Chronicle*, 13-15 September 1781.

³⁹ Paul Jodrell, *One and All* (London, 1787), pp. 11-12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴¹ John Galt, *The Lives of the Players* (Boston, 1831), 2:198.

⁴² *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930) 18:288.

⁴³ John O'Keefe, *The Agreeable Surprise* (London, 1796), p. 15.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 19 March 1795.

⁴⁵ *St. James's Chronicle*, 21-23 March 1795.

⁴⁶ *The Sun*, 28 October 1799.

⁴⁷ *St. James's Chronicle*, 6-8 July 1784.

⁴⁸ David Baker, Isaac Reed, and Stephen Jones, *Biographia Dramatica; or a Companion to the Playhouse* (London, 1812), 1:551.