

James Gray

**"MORE BLOOD THAN BRAINS": ROBERT DODSLEY AND THE
CLEONE AFFAIR**

When Robert Dodsley's tragedy *Cleone* opened at Covent Garden on Saturday evening, December 2, 1758, one of the most heated controversies in the history of the London stage came to the boiling point.¹ Once in service as a footman and now in business as a bookseller, Dodsley had earned the distinction of ranging some of the great names in eighteenth-century letters both for and against his play. For it, at one time or another, were Alexander Pope, Lord Lyttelton, the Earl of Chesterfield, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Richard Graves, and William Shenstone.² Against it were David Garrick, William Warburton, Dr. John ("Inspector") Hill, and Mrs. Theophilus Cibber. At first lukewarm towards it, but on the opening night applauding heartily in its favour was that most formidable of theatre-goers Samuel Johnson.³ The rivalries between Drury Lane and Covent Garden, which had been expressed in so many ways in the past, were given new impetus by the production of Dodsley's play at the one house and by Garrick's decision to stage Susanna Centlivre's *The Busie Body* simultaneously at the other.

Among the more remarkable circumstances surrounding the debut of *Cleone* were the extraordinary appearance of some very distinguished people at the rehearsals, the unusual amount of collaboration in the writing and preparation of the play, the fastidiousness with which the playwright ensured that his work would be acceptable to the celebrated ladies in his audience, and the special difficulties confronting the actress chosen for the leading part, George Anne Bellamy, then in her twenty-seventh year. Nor should we overlook the fascinating questions raised by the occasion. Why was Garrick so resolutely opposed to putting on *Cleone* at Drury Lane? Why was Johnson so determined that

the play should be a success? Was he still, nine years after the disappointment of his own *Irene*, smarting under the treatment Garrick had given his tragedy? Did he sink his recent and much publicized differences with Lord Chesterfield in order to throw his full support behind Dodsley at the rehearsals? Was there, in effect, a pro-Dodsley conspiracy at work against David Garrick? Did the merits of *Cleone* justify all the elaborate teamwork? Was the success of the play so great as to humble Garrick in the theatrical dust?

Before these questions can be answered, we must go back to the genesis of the play. "I shew'd my first Plan of the Piece," writes Dodsley, "which was in three Acts, to Mr. Pope, so long as two or three years before his death [in 1744], who told me, that in his early youth, he attempted a Tragedy on the same subject, which he afterwards burnt; and it was he [who] advis'd me to extend my Plan to five Acts. I let it lie by me, however, some years after his death, before I thought any more about it, deter'd from pursuing it by fear of failing in the attempt. But happening at last to fall upon a method of altering and extending my Plan, I resum'd the design, and as leisure from other avocations permitted, have brought it to its present state."⁵ In June, 1756, Dodsley took the manuscript of *Cleone* to his friend Shenstone at the Leasowes, the poet's picturesque home near Birmingham, where it was given an enthusiastic reception. At Shenstone's suggestion, he passed on the script to another poet, Richard Graves, then Rector of Claverton, near Bath, who had yet to give the world *The Spiritual Quixote*.⁶ As will be seen, Shenstone and Graves later collaborated with Dodsley on the Epilogue to *Cleone*. The play passed through several other practised hands, including those of John Hawkesworth, Samuel Johnson and Bennet Langton,⁸ all of whom found it moving and wished it well. To be sure, Johnson thought it had "more blood than brains" at first reading, but his later verdict was extravagantly favourable: "Sir, if Otway had written this play, no other of his pieces would be remembered."⁹ Hawkesworth, writing to Dodsley on September 14, 1756, entered some detailed objections to the handling of the plot, but observed that the tender scenes had moved his wife to "more tears than, considering her Indisposition, I thought she could afford."⁷

For the plot of *Cleone*, Dodsley had consulted a translation by Sir William Lower, first published in 1654, of Father Rene de Ceriziers'

French version of the story of St. Genevieve. Lower, himself a dramatist, a soldier on the Royalist side in the Rebellion, and a friend of Anthony Wood, had given his work the title, *The Innocent Lady, or The Illustrious Innocence*, translating from the second part of Ceriziers' book, *Les Trois Etats de l'Innocence*.¹⁰ In this story, Genevieve, the beautiful daughter of one of the Princes of Brabant, is courted and married by Sigfridus or Sifroy, one of the most powerful of the Palatines of Treves. When the King of the Saracens, Abderame, attacks France with "the most fearful Army that the west had ever seen", Sifroy leaves his wife for the battlefield, committing her and her unborn child to the care of the supposedly faithful Intendant, Golo. Abusing his trust, Golo makes advances to Genevieve, whose firm denials turn his lust to hatred. In revenge, he imprisons her, refuses to assign her a nurse when her baby son, Benoni, is born, and conveys to Sifroy the malicious lie that she has been having an affair with Drogan, the cook. To dispel Sifroy's doubts, he engages a sorceress to conjure up a mirror image of Drogan making love to Genevieve. Sifroy orders her to be put to death, but miraculously she is spared by her executioners, and with Benoni manages to survive for seven years in the wilderness before Sifroy discovers them. Having discovered also that he has made a terrible mistake, Sifroy orders Golo to be killed by the painful method of oxen-hauling. In the end, Genevieve, who has suffered so many privations so unfairly, dies a saintly death, and Sifroy and Benoni become hermits.¹¹

In Lower's translation, the tragedy is relatively low-keyed. Genevieve, for all her trials and torments, retains her sanity to the end, and her son is succoured by a hind, later to be immortalized as a white statue lying at the feet of St. Genevieve. As will be seen, Dodsley intensified the tragedy in several ways, such as the madness of his heroine and the assassination of her son. Yet, while the translation is studiously pietistic, Lower's Golo is represented as a much more lascivious fellow than his counterpart in Dodsley's play: his repeated attempts on Genevieve's honour (carried on even when she is eight months pregnant and imprisoned in the tower), his trumped-up story that she has been sleeping with Drogan, the cook, and his insinuation that Benoni is not the child of Sifroy—all of these are much more forcefully presented as motives than anything in *Cleone*.

Dodsley's adaptation of the Lower translation went through several

versions, evidently in response to comments and criticisms from Garrick as well as from friends, including some female admirers, such as Lady Luxborough and the Duchess of Leeds, whom the author-bookseller was especially anxious to please.¹² Even the names of the characters appear to have been altered several times, but eventually Genevieve becomes Cleone, Golo is replaced by Glanville, Drogan the cook by Paulet, and Benoni (or Tristan) by Sifroy, Jr.; Isabella, a kind of amalgam of the nurse and the sorceress in the Lower version, and the assassin, Ragozin, are largely of Dodsley's own invention.

In altering and extending his plan, Dodsley departed considerably from the original story. Glanville, more materialistic than lustful, is betrothed to Isabella, with whom he schemes to obtain the estates of Sifroy, using Iago-like tactics. By stirring Sifroy to jealousy over Cleone's alleged affair with Paulet, he hopes to make him commit "some desperate act" that will "plunge him into ruin" [Act I, sc.i, p. 3]. The desperate act Glanville has in mind is, of course, the murder of Paulet, which would lead to Sifroy's execution. Glanville also has an eye on an ultimate union with Cleone herself: he is merely using Isabella as a temporary means to that end. Though we are told that he has admired Cleone passionately since she was a child, Glanville strikes us as being jealous of Sifroy more for his power and his possessions than for his wife.

Nonetheless, while Sifroy is pursuing the defeated Saracens on the battlefield, Glanville tries to seduce Cleone with these words:

Methinks the man but ill deserves your truth,
Who leaves the sweet Elysium of your arms
To tread the dangerous fields of horrid war.

[Act I, sc. iv, p. 12]

Dismissing Cleone's defence of her honour as romantic nonsense, he employs some of the casuistry that Comus had tried in vain with the Lady in distress:

Romantic all! Come, come, why is your form
So exquisite, so tempting for delight;
With eyes that languish, limbs that move with grace—
Why were these beauties given you, but to soothe
The strong, the sweet sensations they excite?
Why were you made so beauteous, yet so coy?

[Act I, sc. iv, p. 13]

Paulet intervenes, only to receive Glanville's accusation that *he* is Cleone's lover. Telling Cleone that Sifroy is aware of her infidelity with Paulet, Glanville then explains his own attempt to seduce her simply as a trick

To gain one personal proof
Of her incontinence...

[Act I, sc. vii, p. 18]

Paulet challenges Glanville to a duel, but the latter refuses, and later orders his servant to kill Paulet in the dark to "prevent/His future babbling." [p.19]

In the second act, Cleone decides to flee to the woods with her son in order to escape both the corrupt schemes of Glanville and the coming wrath of her husband. Meanwhile, Ragozin, Glanville's servant, with the aid of two "bold ruffians", has despatched and buried Paulet. Glanville now orders him to intercept and kill Cleone and the boy, and plans to noise abroad the report that Cleone has eloped with Paulet. Cleone's speech as she leaves her home to take flight is one of those with which Mrs. Bellamy, and later Mrs. Siddons, moved their audiences to tears:

And must I go?
Adieu, dear mansion of my happiest years!
Adieu, sweet shades! each well-known bower, adieu!
Where I have hung whole days upon his words,
And never thought the tender moments long—
All, all my hopes of future peace, farewell!

[Throws herself on her knees].

But, O great Power! Who bending from thy throne,
Look'st down with pitying eyes on erring man,
Whom weakness blinds, and passions lead astray,
Impute not to Sifroy this cruel wrong!
O heal his bosom, wounded by the darts
Of lying slander, and restore to him
That peace, which I must never more regain...[Rises]

[Act II, sc. v. pp. 27-8]

Cleone's brother Beaufort, Jr., arriving at the castle, is appalled when he hears from Glanville of the accusations against his sister. In terms reminiscent of the Elder Brother in *Comus*, he defends her:

Discretion crowns her brow,
And in her modest eye, sweet Innocence
Smiles on Detraction...

[Act II, sc. viii, p. 31]

At this point Beaufort, Sr., frail but determined to probe to the truth of the story about his daughter, doubts Glanville's allegations and prays that he may have enough life left in him to redress the wrongs done to his child.

In the third act Sifroy himself appears, and Glanville gives him the false story of Cleone's elopement with Paulet. He is then visited by Beaufort, Sr., who reproaches him for having accepted the allegations without evidence or verification, and without considering the fact that Cleone's child is with her—a circumstance that would suggest a degree of responsibility uncommon in elopers. Cleone's father adds that he thinks Glanville both "treacherous and base". Just at this moment Beaufort, Jr., enters with the news that Paulet has been murdered, his sword and "bloody marks" having been found "in the dark path which to the cloyster leads", and he proclaims that, since Cleone has not gone with Paulet,

The villain Glanville's false!
My sister is traduc'd!

[Act III, sc. v, p. 45]

Sifroy, his eyes now opened to his tragic error, becomes frantic with anguish and remorse, but is calmed by his father-in-law, who urges him to seek out Cleone and right the wrong visited upon her through the evil-doing of Glanville. Meanwhile, in the dark wood Cleone's child is murdered by Ragozin, and she falls into a swoon which the assassin mistakes for death. When he departs, Cleone, now hysterical with grief, imagines her child is still alive and goes to pick wild berries for him.

In the fourth act Ragozin reports to Glanville on the successful conclusion of his desperate mission, and claims his reward. Beaufort, Sr., orders Glanville's arrest, but the villain alleges that it was Sifroy who, in a fit of revenge, had murdered Paulet, and he shows him Sifroy's threatening letter to support his accusation. Not knowing whom to believe, Beaufort, Sr., orders Sifroy to attend the inquiry which follows Glanville's arrest. Beaufort, Jr., enters to announce that Cleone has been driven to distraction by the murder of her child—as he thinks, at her own hand. Sifroy, blaming himself for all this woe, is restrained once again by Beaufort, Sr. Together they go to Cleone's side, taking Glanville with them. Sifroy concludes this act with the moving lines,

Yet whither can I fly? Where seek for peace?
 O in its tenderest vein my heart is wounded!
 Had I been smote in any other part,
 I could have borne with firmness; but in Thee,
 My wrong'd, my ruin'd love, I bleed to death.

[Act IV, sc. vi, p. 66]

The final act opens with what the eighteenth-century theatre called an "affecting" scene: "Cleone is discovered sitting by her dead child; over whom she hath form'd a little bower of shrubs and branches of trees. She seems very busy in picking the leaves from a bough in her hand." Then she sings, *largo affetuose*,

Sweeter than the damask rose
 Was his lovely breast;
 There, O let me there repose,
 Sigh, sigh, and sink to rest...

As if to deepen the Websterian echo,¹³ Dodsley has Cleone, now in the hearing of Sifroy, Beaufort, Sr., Isabella, Glanville, Ragozin and the others, incant as she sits by her dead infant,

No, no; all still—As undisturb'd he sleeps
 As the stolen infant rock'd in the Eagle's nest.
 I'll call the red-breast, and the nightingale,
 Their pious bills once cover'd little babes,
 And sung them to repose...

[Act V, sc. ii, p. 69]

Cleone fails to recognize her husband or her father. In the heart-rending scene which follows, Sifroy cries out,

O let sweet Pity veil
 The horrors of this scene from every eye!
 My child! my child! hide, hide from me that sight!

Cleone. Stay, stay—for you are good, and will not hurt
 My lamb. Alas, you weep—why should you weep?
 I am his mother, yet I cannot weep.
 Have you more pity than a mother feels?
 But I shall weep no more—my heart is cold.

Sifroy. O mitigate thy wrath, good Heaven! Thou know'st
 My weakness—lay not on thy creature more
 Than he can bear...

[Act V, sc. ii, p. 71]

It is at this point that Isabella, full of contrition for her part in the dreadful succession of events, comes forward to tell the true story to Sifroy, when Glanville "suddenly pulls out a short dagger...and attempts to stab her; Sifroy wrenches it from him." Ragozin tries to escape, but is caught by one of the officers. Isabella then quickly reveals the whole sequence of Glanville's crimes. Beaufort, Sr., reproaches her for her complicity in the entire sordid business (it will be remembered that, in Lower's translation, this lady is a sorceress, employed by Golo to deceive Sifroy into believing his wife to be unfaithful) and turns to Glanville:

But canst thou bear—
 Can thy hard heart sustain this dreadful scene?
Glanville. I know the worst—and am prepar'd to meet it.
 That wretch hath seal'd my death—And had I but
 Aveng'd her timorous perfidy—the rest
 I'd leave to Fate; and neither should lament
 My own, nor pity yours.

Sifroy. Inhuman savage!
 But Justice shall exert her keenest scourge,
 And wake to terror thy unfeeling heart.

[Act V, sc. ii, p. 73]

The scene ends with Sifroy still wild with rage and grief, Cleone distracted, and Beaufort, Sr., doing his best to keep everyone calm. He advises Sifroy,

Collect thy self, and with the humble eye
 Of patient Hope, look up to Heaven resign'd.

[Act V, sc. ii, p. 74]

In the next scene, Beaufort, Jr., reveals that Paulet is, after all, alive. Cleone now comes forward, aware at last of the full enormity of what has happened:

O who hath done it!—Who hath done this deed
 Of death?—My child is murder'd—my sweet babe
 Bereft of life!—Thou Glanville! thou art he!
 O bloody fiend! destroy a child! an infant!—
 O wretch, forbear!—See, see the little heart
 Bleeds on his dagger's point!

[*Looking down to earth*]

But lo! the Furies!—the black fiends of hell
 Have seiz'd the Murderer! look!—Hark! he strikes—
 His eye-balls glare—his teeth together gnash

In bitterness of anguish—While the fiends
Scream in his frightened ear—*Thou shalt not murder!*

[Act. V, sc. iii, p. 76]

It will be recalled that in the original story, as translated by Lower, the child survives, and grows up to be a hermit, following his father's lead; and Golo (Glanville's counterpart) meets a frightful end, being dragged by two pairs of oxen in opposite directions. But Dodsley's rendering is tense enough, and we can imagine with what feeling Dr. Johnson strode on stage at this point in the rehearsal to catch Mrs. Bellamy by the arm, as she tells it, "and that somewhat *too briskly*, saying at the same time, 'It is a commandment, and must be spoken, "Thou shalt *not* murder." ' "14

In the final harrowing scene, Cleone, emerging from her distraction and now recognizing everyone, turns to Sifroy and says,

Death's keenest, bitterest pang is that I feel
For thy surviving woe.—Adieu, my love!
I do entreat thee with my latest sigh,
Restrain thy tears—nor let me grieve to think—
Thou feel'st a pain I cannot live to heal.

[Act V, sc. iii, p. 79]

But it is to Beaufort, Sr., that the final speech is given:

Offended Power! at length with pitying eyes
Look on our misery! Cut short this thread,
And let mankind, taught by his hapless fate,
Learn one great truth, Experience finds too late;
That dreadful ills from rash Resentment flow,
And sudden Passions end in lasting Woe.

[Act V, sc. iii, pp. 79-80]

Thus Dodsley had freely manipulated the plot to suit the more melodramatic tastes of his time. If David Garrick found the play cruel, bloody, and unnatural, and Johnson associated it with the slaughter-house, the Covent Garden audiences lapped it up. There were thirteen consecutive performances of *Cleone* in December, 1758, and four more in the second half of the season. Incredible as it may seem, there was even a special production of it, by children under thirteen, at the Haymarket on April 18, 1759, with a Master Ireland taking the part of Sifroy and a Miss Valois that of Cleone.¹⁵

When we recall that Covent Garden had less of a reputation for tragedy than Drury Lane at this period, Mrs. Bellamy's achievement in

the role of Cleone appears the more remarkable. In the 1786-7 season, when Mrs. Siddons revived the part, "the effect was so painful, and indignation at the villainy of Glanville and Ragozin approached so near to abhorrence, that the play could not be endured."¹⁶ One of Dodsley's acquaintances, Alexander Chalmers, suggests that the strong feelings excited by Mrs. Siddons' performance on the first night scared people off. Chalmers continues:

It appears, from this observation, that the exquisite performance of Mrs. Bellamy in 1758 had a different effect from the exquisite performance of Mrs. Siddons [in 1786]. That of the former conduced to the popularity of the play: that of the latter to its removal from the stage. Is human nature changed? Or was the taste of the public more or less refined in 1758 than in [1786]?¹⁷

No doubt public taste had altered in the intervening thirty years or so. Yet one wonders whether the different acting techniques of Bellamy, who deliberately underplayed the role of Cleone, and of Siddons, who gave it a characteristically "powerful" interpretation, may not have had something to do with the contrasting reactions. Genest gives the opinion, which coincides with that of Chalmers, that the ladies in the audience were so affected by the Siddons portrayal of Cleone's maternal agonies that the Boxes on the second evening (November 24, 1786) "were to a certain degree deserted."¹⁸ George Anne Bellamy's own account lends credence to the view that her more conservative approach paid off. After all, she points out, *Cleone* was a domestic, not an imperial, tragedy, and "domestic feelings strike more to the heart, than those of crowned heads." The language of Dodsley's play was simple, "and I determined that my performance of it should be the same."

Her opinion was not shared by Dodsley himself nor by Lord Lyttelton, one of the distinguished *literati* who attended the rehearsals and who tried to persuade the playwright that Bellamy had "totally misconceived" the character of Cleone. As the actress explains it, "The public had been so accustomed to noise and violence in their *mad* stage ladies, that it was supposed from my manner, which was so weakened by real indisposition, and prevented my rehearsing out, that the piece, which totally depended upon me, would not succeed." Her account continues:

Upon my going to the theatre to dress, Mr. Dodsley accosted me with all the apprehensions of an author for his darling bantling. He intimated to me, that all his friends, as well as himself, imagined I was not *forcible* enough in the mad scene. The pain I was in from a blister, which my indisposition had rendered necessary, together with the anxiety naturally attendant upon appearing in a new character, made me answer that good man with a petulance, which afterwards gave me uneasiness. I told him, that I had a reputation to lose as an actress; but, as for his piece, Mr. Garrick had anticipated the damnation of it, publicly, the preceding evening, at the Bedford Coffee-house, where he had declared, that it could not pass muster, as it was the very *worst* piece ever exhibited. Having said this, I left him, not very well pleased with me for my freedom, And he afterwards informed me, that he greatly regretted having chose me for his heroine.

She stuck resolutely to her intentions, however:

The unaffected naivite, which I intended to adopt in the representation, was accompanied by the same simplicity in my dress. This was perfectly *nouvelle*, as I had presumed to leave off that unwieldy part of a lady's habiliments, called a hoop. A decoration which, at that period, professed nuns appeared in; as well as with powder in their hair.

Her determination paid dividends:

Novelty has charms which cannot be resisted. And I succeeded in both points beyond my most sanguine hopes. Indeed the applause was repeated so often, when I seemingly died, that I scarcely knew, or even could believe, that it was the effect of approbation. But, upon hearing the same voice which had instructed me in the commandment, exclaim aloud from the pit, *I will write a copy of verses upon her myself.* I knew my success was insured, and that 'Cleone' bid fair to run a race with any of the modern productions.

Among those joining in congratulation the next day was Lord Lyttelton, who said he was delighted that "his conjecture had not taken place." Bellamy goes on to record that even this moment of triumph was marred by a terrifying incident:

I then went up to Sir Charles [Hanbury Williams], and asked him if he thought that *violent* madness would have had the desired effect? Without making me an answer, he stared wildly upon me, and appeared to be going to lay hold of me. Lord Lyttelton, observing this, pulled me away. And Mr. Harris, who was sitting beside his friend Sir Charles, on the sofa, held him down, whilst I made my escape from his fury. For he snatched up a knife, which lay upon the table with the breakfast equipage, and vowed he would find me out, and murder me.

This circumstance appeared the more strange, as, till then, Sir Charles had shown no signs of insanity. And even so lately as his entering the room, he had honoured me with the warmest compliments on my performance. He

survived but a few days; and, strange to tell, to the last moment of his life persisted in wishing to destroy me.¹⁹

Apart from this shock, Bellamy had every reason to be gratified with the reception given her performance, and Dodsley with the results of his years of patient planning, rewriting and reshaping. Congratulatory letters appeared in the public press. Garrick wrote to him on the morning after the opening night in terms of warm felicitation, accompanied by concern lest the playwright had been troubled by the rivalry of *The Busie Body* at Drury Lane. Dodsley's reply was a sharp rebuff, which elicited from Garrick one of the most stinging retorts courteous in history:

MASTER ROBERT DODSLEY,

When I first read your peevish answer to my well meant proposal to you, I was much disturb'd at it—but when I consider'd that some minds cannot bear the smallest portion of Success, I sincerely pity'd you; and when I found in y.^e same letter, that you were graciously pleased to dismiss me from y.^r acquaintance, I could not but confess so apparent an Obligation, & I am wth. due Acknowlegm^{ts}.,

Master Robert Dodsley,
y.^r. most oblig'd
D.G.—²⁰

Johnson, meanwhile, wrote in glowing terms to Bennet Langton: "*Cleone* was well acted by the characters, but Bellamy left nothing to be desired. I went the first night, and supported it as best I might; for Doddy, you know, is my patron, and I would not desert him. The play was well received. Doddy, after the danger was over, went every night to the stage side, and cried at the distress of poor *Cleone*." Johnson's loyalty to his "patron" (so called because Dodsley had published all his most important writings to date) might suggest that Garrick had somehow tried to draw him away from the Covent Garden performance. While there is no evidence to support this supposition, it may be significant that, in the same letter to Langton, Johnson noted: "The two Wartons just looked into the town, and were taken to see *Cleone*, where David [Garrick] says, they were starved for want of company to keep them warm."²¹ Garrick's observation may, of course, have been more sardonic than wishful. From newspaper accounts we draw the impression that *Cleone* attracted larger audiences as its run progressed, though at no time did it appear to have a capacity crowd, except possibly for Dodsley's benefit night on December 5, when Garrick

sportingly refrained from acting at Drury Lane. Unfortunately, we have no precise attendance or receipt figures for December 30, the night the Wartons probably saw *Cleone*.²²

Why Garrick should have appeared so hostile to Dodsley's play is one of the mysteries of eighteenth-century theatre history. Most of the commentators on the subject, from Garrick's lifetime to today, have considered him ungenerous on this particular issue, and perhaps even jealous of Dodsley. Thomas Davies suggests that the great actor disliked the play because the part he would have played in it, that of Sifroy, was inferior to that of Cleone, which Mrs. Cibber would have performed in such a way as to outshine him.²³ Arthur Murphy is too much concerned with Garrick's rejection of his own play in 1758, *The Orphan of China*, to notice Dodsley's similar plight. James Boaden inclines to the view that Dodsley's relatively humble background as a "son of the trade" (which would explain Garrick's emphasis on *Master Dodsley* in his notorious retort) and a former footman may have had something to do with the rejection of his play.²⁴ Dodsley's biographer, Ralph Straus, is content to say that "Garrick's behaviour was more than a little doubtful."²⁵ No one seems to have taken the actor-manager's criticism of *Cleone* as "a cruel, bloody, and unnatural play" as the real reason for his attitude towards it, and yet, when we recall Dodsley's multiplication of the agonies contained in the Lower translation, this becomes an understandable point of view. Some light may be shed on the mystery by the fact that, almost from the outset, Garrick thought the tragedy unsuited to the tastes of his own theatre: indeed, as late as 1766, eight years after the first performance of *Cleone*, we find him persisting in his opinion that the play would not have been well received at Drury Lane.²⁶

Whether we agree with Garrick's judgment in this matter or not, we must at least respect it. The two licensed theatres had quite different traditions, and almost equally dissimilar clienteles. The prevailing fashion, at any rate, was for the upper ranks of society, with some notable exceptions, such as the Prince of Wales,²⁷ to patronize Drury Lane, and to leave Covent Garden to the noisier, riot-loving *hoi polloi*. Garrick could not see Dodsley's domestic tragedy appealing to the occupants of the Boxes at the Lane, however much he may have espoused the cause of "natural" acting. Ironically, as things turned out, Dodsley's success was primarily with the ladies of the Boxes, and

Bellamy's triumph was based, as has been shown, upon her decision to play the part of Cleone as unaffectedly as she could.

Here it may be observed that Johnson, an inveterate enemy of theatrical posturing, could have been instrumental in helping to ensure the right climate of reception for Dodsley's play. In two issues of the *Idler*, Numbers 3 and 25, both published the same year as *Cleone*, he had turned his attention to two faults in contemporary theatre, the predictability of the plots, and the stiltedness of the acting, but he was careful to point out that excessive histrionics could be cured:

The care of the critic should be to distinguish error from inability, faults of inexperience from defects of nature. Action irregular and turbulent may be reclaimed; vociferation vehement and confused may be restrained and modulated; the stalk of the tyrant may become the gait of a man; the yell of inarticulate distress may be reduced to human lamentation.²⁸

Interestingly enough, it is in the same *Idler* that he condemns clagues or "combinations" in the theatre as fraudulent, and yet he seems to have joined one for Dodsley's play, as well as for Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. But when we remember Johnson's intervention at the rehearsal of *Cleone*, the advice on acting offered by the *Idler* of October 7, 1758, takes on a new importance: it may have helped persuade George Anne Bellamy to interpret her role with that very underplayed naturalness which brought about her success and confounded the expectations of David Garrick.²⁹

It was Bellamy's naturalism that commended itself to a correspondent who signed himself "Atticus" in *The London Chronicle*:

Never did a part more naturally become an actress: her first appearance was amiable and interesting; and her words fell from her, as if they were the pure effusions of her heart. Artless innocence, truth, candor, and every lovely quality, seemed to accompany her in her distress; the storm no sooner began to gather about her, than every mind in the theatre took a tender interest in her fortunes; and her departure from her own house, in order to fly for shelter to her father's, with her little infant, was executed by the performer in a manner so affecting, and with such genuine accents of the passions, that he must have arrived at a very high degree of inhumanity, who can hear and see her without melting into tenderness. Were I to say that I have not seen scenes of madness better executed either by Mr. Garrick or Mrs. Cibber, I am sure I might hazard the assertion without being confuted by any judicious critic, who has felt the power of Mrs. Bellamy in the character of Cleone...

The same letter, with minor modifications, appeared in *Lloyd's Evening Post*.³⁰ In a subsequent issue of *The London Chronicle*, a reviewer

noted that *Cleone* was gaining strength every night, and that "the pathetic powers of the Author having been felt by many persons of distinguish'd taste, the Ladies now begin to revolt against fashion, and to send for places to this long neglected theatre."³¹

If Robert Dodsley had not been a conspicuously modest man, one might be tempted to say that his public relations men had been expertly chosen. Certainly, he now had the reaction that he had hoped, prayed and worked hard to produce: to please the Ladies and to convert them to a taste for theatre at Covent Garden. To achieve this end, he had invested a prodigious amount of effort, not only in the play itself, but also in the Epilogue, in the composition of which he sought the co-operation of Richard Graves and William Shenstone. The latter is given the credit for the final version, but Dodsley's own painstaking hand is clearly at work in making it palatable to the female members of the audience, as an antidote to the starkness of *Cleone's* tragedy. As was customary on such occasions, the Epilogue functioned as a light-hearted contrast to the preceding pathos; but Dodsley, as will be seen, went a step further by eliminating any suggestion of offence to the ladies, and by concluding with a handsome compliment to the Boxes.

Even in the hour of his triumph, the playwright was faced with difficulty, however. The prolific Dr. John Hill, author of a series of essays which appeared under the pseudonym of "The Inspector", and of a recently published treatise on the art of acting,³² saw fit to condemn *Cleone*. Although his little book had recommended style, grace, truth, naturalness, force and fire in acting, and had found both Garrick and Mrs. Cibber wanting in tragic roles because of their inability to move naturally from anger to sorrow, he gave Dodsley's play little credit, and no chance to prove itself. A few days after the opening night, in fact, he published *An Account of the New Tragedy of Cleone*, condemning it outright. Contemporary observers were convinced that Garrick had employed Hill to produce this scurrilously unfair *Account* in order to justify the Drury Lane manager's refusal of the play. In return for this service, they alleged, Garrick had agreed to stage Hill's farce, *The Rout*, as an afterpiece at Drury Lane during the run of *Cleone* at Covent Garden. If so, the reward was a hollow one, as the afterpiece was heartily disliked, and had to be discontinued after the second night (December 21, 1758).³³

Once again, it is difficult to verify such allegations. For one thing, Garrick had accepted *The Rout* with some reluctance, and, for another, there was little love lost between the author and the actor before or after the abortive performances. Here I find the conclusions drawn by Dodsley's biographer, Ralph Straus, a little hard to accept: that some kind of agreement had been reached between Garrick and Hill to damn Dodsley's play in return for the staging of *The Rout*, a piece as feeble as the name of its central character.³⁴

While Dodsley naturally resented Hill's premature and unjust criticism of *Cleone*,³⁵ he was far more incensed at Garrick's apparently deliberate attempt to undermine the success of his play by performing as Marplot in *The Busie Body*, a popular Restoration-type comedy that was sure to attract large audiences.³⁶ Essentially a ribald skit on the matrimonial state, with its Sir George Airy and Sir Francis Gripe and Sir Jealous Traffick and the rest, it could hardly have stood in sharper contrast to the theme of marital fidelity in *Cleone*. Fortunately for Dodsley, as has been shown, the reviewers were largely on his side. A writer for *The London Chronicle*, for instance, carefully points out that, whereas *Cleone* supports the domestic virtues and vindicates a faithful wife, neither Hill's *The Rout* nor Centlivre's *The Busie Body* can be said to be anything but disruptive of moral standards. Garrick as Marplot is compared unfavourably to previous interpreters of the part, including Woodward, who had recently absconded to Dublin, and, as a postscript to his already devastating review, the writer delivers this *coup de grace*:

P.S. It were injustice not to mention that in the scene, where Marplot attempts to bully the old man, Mr. Garrick acts then like himself, and has the advantage over his antagonist: The circumstance of running about from door to door to alarm the neighbourhood by using the different knockers, might as well have been reserved for a pantomime. In Woodward's absence it might have been of service: I must add, in Mr. Garrick's just praise, that this is the first part in comedy, in which, I think, he has fallen very short of himself.³⁷

It is clear, then, that Dodsley had the sympathy of both the theatre-going public and the reviewers, a fact which gave him no small gratification. Added to this was the encouragement of such well-known people as Spence, Lowth,³⁸ and Melmoth (the author of the Prologue to *Cleone*), not to mention the retinue of celebrities who had assisted at the rehearsals and applauded the performances. To be sure, Lord

Chesterfield's contribution had been restricted to correcting the player's pronuciation of "Sifroy", which they had anglicized to rhyme with "boy", but his interest was sufficient to warrant Dodsley's dedicating the play to him; and one of the by-products of his interest was at least a temporary reconciliation between him and Johnson.

Like many another tragedy of the period, *Cleone* was eventually consigned to oblivion. As has been pointed out, Mrs. Siddons' attempt to portray the unfortunate heroine some thirty years later was a notable failure, and Johnson's celebrated ranking of Dodsley with Otway might well be considered on a level with lapidary inscriptions. A tragedy which stretched the audience's emotions to the breaking point, and which put an almost equal strain upon credulity, was unlikely to last. As Ralph Straus has observed, "Calmly considered, his [Dodsley's] plot is a very bungling one....Sifroy's sudden activity after a three years' absence, without any waiting for real proof, may seem a little unaccountable; but Dodsley deserves good praise for the reserve with which he treats a subject that had hitherto called forth bombastic extravagances....In the scenes which require a deep insight into the psychology of passion, he fails hopelessly, but when, so to speak, a domestic touch is needed, he is without equal as a writer of simple and expressive lines."³⁹

Interestingly enough, the writer of the original draft of the Epilogue to *Cleone*, Richard Graves, had anticipated the criticisms just quoted:

Well, Ladies! So much for the Tragic stile—
Behold me now equipt to make you smile—
To make us smile! methinks I hear you say;
We've *laugh'd* behind our fans thro' half the Play.
Where did the Poet find this strange Romance!
Cleone sure was never bred in France.
At least, no English girl just brought from school,
With such a dolt would act so like a fool.
The Captain gone three years!—One should be good—
But wives, like other folks, are flesh and blood.⁴⁰

But Dodsley did not like the ironical suggestion that the ladies had been scoffing at the play behind their fans, and he changed the fourth line to read,

Why, who can help it, at so strange a Play? ⁴¹

He was afraid, as he says in a letter to Shenstone, who had amended Graves's version of the Epilogue, that "some parts of the Irony of the Play, should be taken in earnest," and equally concerned lest the next part of the Epilogue would offend the ladies:

A modern dame would hardly think it treason;
And if accus'd would give the brute some reason.⁴²

The implication here is that the woman of fashion in 1758, quite unlike Cleone, would have thought herself justified in having an affair after being deserted by her husband for three years. As for her solicitude for her child,

What could she think—thro' horrid woods to roam!
Who would have brought the little chit from home?⁴³

These lines were omitted from the Epilogue as spoken by Mrs. Bellamy, and a plea to the wives and mothers in the audience to bring back the decencies and domestic virtues of yore was added:

'Tis yours, ye Fair, to bring those days agen
And form anew the hearts of thoughtless men;
Make Beauty's lustre amiable as bright,
And give the soul, as well as sense, delight;
Reclaim from folly a fantastic age,
That scorns the Press, the Pulpit, and the Stage.⁴⁴

Still apprehensive about the reactions of the ladies, Dodsley asked Shenstone to soften the conclusion, "or change the last four lines into a Compliment to the Ladies." The original had concluded on a note of implied censure of modern women who frequented public places, wore seductive *decolletage*, flirted with the men, and gambled. The contrast with the olden time was sharply drawn:

Domestic Virtues then were all the mode,
A wife ne'er dreamt of Happiness abroad.
Obey'd her Spouse—despis'd fantastic airs;
And with the joys of Wedlock mix'd the cares.
No slighted virgins pin'd, or dreaded then,
Tho' thin'd by Holy Wars, a dearth of Men:
No Rakehells ridicul'd the marry'd life,
Nor deem'd a Mistress equal to a Wife.⁴⁵

In his edited version of Shenstone's revision of this draft, Dodsley ends the Epilogue on a more positive, hortatory note:

Let Truth and Tenderness your breasts adorn,
 The Marriage chain with transport shall be worn;
 Each blooming Virgin rais'd into a Bride,
 Shall double all their joys, their cares divide;
 Alleviate grief, compose the jars of strife,
 And pour the balm that sweetens human life.⁴⁶

He was still dissatisfied with it, however, as the ending now smacked of a sermon. After further collaboration with Shenstone, and no doubt keeping in mind the ways in which the rival production at Drury Lane had been ridiculing the matrimonial state, Dodsley printed the last lines as follows:

'Tis yours, ye Fair! to mend a thoughtless age,
 That scorns the press, the pulpit, and the stage!
 To yield frail Husbands no *pretence* to stray:
 (Men will be rakes, if women lead the way)
 To soothe—But Truce with these preceptive lays;
 The Muse, who, dazzled with your ancient praise,
 On present Worth, and modern Beauty tramples,
 Must own, she ne'er could boast more bright examples.*
 * Addressing the Boxes.⁴⁷

Thus Dodsley, combining his editorial tact and skill with the kind of deference that a former footman might be expected to show to the aristocratic audience he was determined to captivate, brought his play to that pitch of acceptability for which he had striven so hard and so long. If we are more impressed now by his assiduity and his perfectionism than by the quality of his drama, we are only showing that times and tastes have changed yet again. But for one moment in the history of the theatre, "Master" Robert Dodsley, with the help of some talented and influential allies, had succeeded, to use his own words, in stemming the tide of fashion, which had been running very strongly against Covent Garden, and in writing a play which had "supported itself against the strength and popularity of Mr. Garrick"—no mean achievement for a man of quiet decency in an age of uncertain standards.

FOOTNOTES

1 A detailed treatment of *Cleone* is to be found in Ralph Straus, *Robert Dodsley, Poet, Publisher and Playwright*. London: John Lane. 1910, pp. 200-251.

2 All, or nearly all, had professional associations with Dodsley, who had published much of their work and had edited, *inter alia*, the poems of Shenstone and Graves.

- 3 *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. G.B. Hill and L.F. Powell. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1934-50, I.324-6 and notes, and IV.20-21. See also M. Waingrow, ed., *The Correspondence and Other Papers of James Boswell Relating to the Making of the Life of Johnson*. London: Heinemann, 1969, pp. 370 and n., and 371.
- 4 There are some obvious, if superficial, resemblances between *Cleone* and *Irene*. Moreover, Johnson's memory of his difference of opinion with Garrick over the interpretation of the part of Mahomet, and of his general dissatisfaction with Garrick's handling of the play, may have strengthened his sympathy for Dodsley.
- 5 The Advertisement of *Cleone. A Tragedy*. As it is acted at the Theatre Royal in Covent-Garden. Written by R. Dodsley. London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall. 1758. [In this paper, page references are given to this edition, in which the lines of the play are unnumbered].
- 6 See letter from Shenstone to Graves d. July 27, 1756 in R. Dodsley, ed., *The Works, in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone, Esq.* 3 vols. London: Printed for J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall. 1769, IIL299-300.
- 7 Hawkesworth's critical notes on *Cleone* are contained in a letter from him to Dodsley d. September 14, 1756. B.M. Addit. MSS 29300. I am grateful to Hawkesworth's biographer, Professor John Abbott, for bringing this letter to my attention.
- 8 See notes 3 and 6 above.
- 9 *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, IV. 21.
- 10 *The Innocent Lady, or The Illustrious Innocence*. Being an Excellent true History, and of Modern times, carried with handsome Conceptions all along. Written Originally in French, by the Learned Father de Ceriziers, of the Company of Jesus. And now Rendered into English by Sir William Lower Knight. 2nd ed. London: Printed for William Lee. 1674.
- 11 *The Innocent Lady*, pp. 1-106.
- 12 Straus, p. 206.
- 13 Cf. John Webster, *The White Devil*, Act V, sc. iv, 11. 100-103.
- 14 George Anne Bellamy, *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*...3rd ed. 6 vols. London: J. Bell. 1785, III. 107-8.
- 15 *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, Part 4: 1747-1776, Vol. II, ed. G. Winchester Stone, Jr.
- 16 Alexander Chalmers, "Life of Dodsley" in *The Works of the English Poets*. 21 vols. London: J. Johnson et al. 1810. XV.319. [This "Life" appears to be a partial paraphrase of the biography prefixed to Cooke's edition of *The Poetical Works of Robert Dodsley*. London: C. Cooke. 1797, pp. 3-11].
- 17 Cooke's edition, p. 7. I have corrected the date given there 1793, to 1786.
- 18 J. Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*. 10 vols. Bath: H.E. Carrington. 1832. VI. 425.
- 19 Bellamy, pp. 105-112.
- 20 *The Letters of David Garrick*, ed. D.M. Little and G.M. Kahrl. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press. 1963, I.296-7 (Letter 219).
- 21 *Boswell's Life*, I.325-6.
- 22 For information on the Wartons' visit, I am grateful to Mr. David Fairer of Trinity College, Oxford, who kindly showed me the typescript of his paper, "The Wartons as Judges of Drama," 1971.
- 23 Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq.* 2 vols. Dublin: Joseph Hill. 1780, II. 176-7.
- 24 James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons*. London: Gibbings. 1893, p. 356.
25. Straus, p.204.
- 26 *The Letters of David Garrick*, Letter 427, d. Sep1, 1766 (to Capt. Thomas Falkner). ,

- 27 In a letter to Shenstone d. December 9, 1758, Dodsley mentions with pride the attendance at *Cleone* the preceding evening of the Prince of Wales, Prince Edward, Princess Augusta, and three other members of the Royal family. B.M. Addit. MSS 28959, fol. 235.
- 28 *The Idler and The Adventurer*, ed. W.J. Bate *et al.* Yale Ed. of the Works of Samuel Johnson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1963, p. 79.
- 29 Referring to Johnson's outburst of applause, the actress wrote: "...when it is considered, that the involuntary praise of one of the first geniuses in the world must excite the most flattering sensations in every mind desirous of meriting the approbation of the sensible, I hope I shall stand excused for not passing it over in silence..." Bellamy, p. 110.
- 30 *The London Chronicle*, Vol. IV, No. 302, December 2-5, 1758, p. 543. *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Vol. III, No. 216, December 4-6, 1758, p. 539.
- 31 *The London Chronicle*, Vol. IV, No. 304, December 7-9, 1758, p. 558.
- 32 [John Hill], *The Actor: or, A Treatise on the Art of Playing*. London: R. Griffiths. 1755.
- 33 *The London Stage*, Part IV: 1747-1776, Vol. II, p. 702.
- 34 Straus, p. 235.
- 35 Dodsley to Shenstone, January 20, 1759. B.M. Addit. MSS 28959, fol. 243-4.
- 36 *Ibid.*, fol. 239-41: Dodsley to Shenstone, December 16, 1758. Nevertheless, in a letter d. December 12, 1758 [?] Dodsley asked Strahan, publisher of *The London Chronicle* to avoid linking his name with letters censuring Garrick's conduct in the *Cleone* affair, as he wishes it "might be forgotten." [Unpublished A.L.s., Berg Collection, New York Public Library. I am grateful to Dr. G.M. Kahrl for bringing this letter to my attention].
- 37 *The London Chronicle*, Vol. IV, No. 309, December 19-21, 1758, p. 599.
- 38 Straus, pp. 227 and 240.
- 39 Straus, pp. 248-9.
- 40 Opening lines of the MS version, in Dodsley's hand, of Richard Graves's draft of the Epilogue, with amendments in pencil, presumably by Shenstone. B.M. Addit. MSS 28959, fol. 115.
- 41 From the first printed version as it appears in the first ed. (1758) of *Cleone* (see Note 5 above). In this version Dodsley has edited Shenstone's revision of Graves's original draft.
- 42 B.M. Addit. MSS 28959, fol. 115 and 227 (letter to Shenstone d. October 24, 1758, in which Dodsley says he finds the Epilogue spirited, but "it was too long, and so hard upon the Women, that I was afraid of affronting the Boxes.")
- 43 *Ibid.*, fol. 115.
- 44 First printed version of the Epilogue, ll. 30-35.
- 45 B.M. Addit. MSS 28959, fol. 116 (ll. 38-45).
- 46 First printed version, ll. 36-41.
- 47 The final printed version, ll. 46-53, as it appeared in *Cleone. A Tragedy...The Third Edition, Corrected*. London: R. and J. Dodsley. 1759. It was repeated in this form in *The Annual Register* for 1758, pp. 435-6, and in the fourth edition of the play, published in 1765 and reissued, with a few minor changes in punctuation, in 1771. Although Shenstone is credited with all of it, the final form of the Epilogue contains less than half of his lines, the rest being the work of Graves and Dodsley.