

'Liberty joined with Peace and Charity': Elizabeth Inchbald and a Woman's Place in the Revolution

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ABSTRACT: While the French Revolution was one of the defining events of the eighteenth century, it is conspicuously absent from female-authored plays of the time. By the 1790s, women had been using the drama genre to write insightful commentary on other political issues for some time, but writing about the Revolution was accompanied by particular challenges in the form of censorship and increased concerns about sedition. Elizabeth Inchbald's 1792 drama *The Massacre* represents an exception to the stage's general reticence on the topic. While the play was not staged and the Revolution never named as explicit inspiration for the plot, Inchbald provides a detailed and moving account of the Revolution. This article analyses her perspective on the role and potential of female morality as a means for political change, focussing on the significance of Inchbald's inclusion of Madame Tricastin as a tragic martyr figure who condemns the Revolution's descent into violence. It also contextualises the unique place that both the Revolution and this particular play occupy in Inchbald's writing career.

KEYWORDS: Eighteenth-century Drama; Inchbald; French Revolution; Women Writers; Mary Wollstonecraft; Politics.



ELIZABETH INCHBALD'S TRAGEDY *The Massacre*, written in 1792 but not performed in her lifetime, showcases her complex engagement with the major political upheavals of the late-eighteenth century – a time in which the American Revolution of 1776, the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and especially the French Revolution in 1789 contributed to a climate of uncertainty. In the midst of these events, contemporary authors tried to reflect, reflect upon, and influence current political developments through their writing, and determine how the extraordinary changes in the political landscape would impact their own society. Previous analyses of *The Massacre* have highlighted Inchbald's interest in documenting the Terror of the French Revolution, and her interaction with and

adaption of French culture and literary genres.¹ Building on this existing scholarship, this article focuses on Inchbald's consideration of female morality as a potential means for political change, and her often critical interpretation of the Revolution's tenets of liberty and equality. In particular, analysis of Inchbald's representation of women's role in reforming society reveals remarkable connections with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. Through *The Massacre's* tragic female character Madame Tricastin, Inchbald develops a nuanced analysis of themes also featured in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, engaging in a similar exploration of the position of women in a rapidly changing society, and the factors that could impede their full participation in political discourse.

As Mathew Kinservik has noted, 'Many critics and artists in the eighteenth century [...] insisted that literature and politics were necessarily interrelated', and this interrelation is particularly noticeable in the last, revolutionary decades of the century.² The increased fusion of political discourse and debate with the literature of this time coincided with a remarkable increase in the number of women working as professional authors, particularly in the field of playwriting; Betty Schellenberg has calculated that 'women increased [...] from being responsible for approximately 14 percent of all new novels for the three decades of 1750 to 1779 [...] to a slight majority of known authors at the end of the century.'³ For female playwrights, Judith Phillips Stanton notes that only two new women playwrights were published in 1760-69; thirteen in 1770-79, another thirteen in the 1780s; and sixteen in the 1790s.⁴ This rise in numbers gave readers and theatre audiences an unprecedented opportunity to hear political

¹ John Robbins, 'Documenting Terror in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 57.3 (2017) pp.605-619; Wendy C. Nielsen, 'A Tragic Farce: Revolutionary Women in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* and European Drama', *European Romantic Review*, 17.3 (2006) pp.275-288.

² Mathew J. Kinservik, 'Reconsidering Theatrical Regulation in the Long Eighteenth Century', in *Players, Playwrights, Playhouses: Investigating Performance 1660 – 1800*, ed. by Michael Cordner and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp.152-171 (p.166).

³ Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.17.

⁴ Judith Phillips Stanton, 'Statistical Profile of Women Writing in English from 1660 to 1800', in *Eighteenth-century Women and the Arts*, ed. by Frederick Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) pp.247-253 (p.251).

commentary written by a variety of female voices. It also confirmed that these women writers had access to both stage and audience, making their engagement with the political landscape an intensely public one. As a writer of eighteen plays, Inchbald can certainly be counted as a prominent voice among them and *The Massacre* sees her using that voice in a new way, as she negotiated a particularly careful balance between boldness and respectability. In her book *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage*, Betsy Bolton has found that '[t]he careers of female dramatists depended on their political innocence or neutrality – yet their plays might well engage political issues within a pose of female domesticity'.⁵ Inchbald usually maintained this 'pose' by writing in the genre of domestic comedy, but in *The Massacre* she takes on both a new genre—tragedy—and a new theme: revolution. The tragic ending of the play, combined with Inchbald's inability to publish it during her lifetime, reflects in some ways the failure of the Revolution to bring about a new equality, especially where women were concerned.

While the number of female literary voices at the end of the eighteenth century is remarkable, it was not unprecedented for women writers to comment on contemporary politics; Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley, among others, had made names for themselves by writing political satire in the previous century. Playwriting and the theatre had always been a place for political engagement. Plays were relatively quick to write and to produce compared to longer poems and novels, so that playwrights could react to contemporary events much faster than novelists. This meant, for example, that Hannah Cowley could set her play *A Day in Turkey* (1792) during the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792) only a few months after the war had ended, and Mariana Starke's *The Sword of Peace* (1788) could comment directly on the ongoing trial of Warren Hastings and Cornwallis' new approach to governing India.⁶ Playwright Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) remarked on the close association between theatre and politics in the period, claiming that the 'theatre engrossed the minds of men to such a degree [...] that there existed in England a fourth estate, Kings, Lords and Commons and Drury

⁵ Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.39.

⁶ Jeanne Moskal, 'English National Identity in Mariana Starke's "The Sword of Peace": India, Abolition, and the Rights of Women', in Catherine Burroughs (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp.102-132.

Lane Playhouse'.⁷ As a result of this close association, plays presented on the eighteenth-century stage had the potential to influence the political perceptions of their audiences, as well as reflecting contemporary political developments.

While there was therefore nothing inherently new about the representation of political events in the theatre, late eighteenth-century female playwrights who wrote about politics faced a number of unique restrictions. As playwrights, they were restricted by official theatre legislation in the form of the Licensing Act of 1737, which enabled the Lord Chamberlain to censor or reject plays on the grounds of controversial political content. As women, they were additionally restricted by their society's changed expectations about female morality.⁸ Unlike Behn and Manley, eighteenth-century female playwrights could not have written an openly satirical work about their politicians, as to do this would have resulted in censorship of their manuscript by the Examiner of Plays, and in censure of the playwright herself by her audience and critics. Hannah More warned in 1799 that any woman in the public eye must be prepared to have 'her sex always taken into account'.⁹ When a woman wrote a play, her audience and critics would examine not only what she had written, but also whether it was appropriate for a *woman* to have written it. The rules of the Licensing Act of course applied to writers of both sexes, but the disproportionate amount of scrutiny female-authored works received in the press implies that women had to be particularly careful not to step outside the parameters of what was considered respectable.¹⁰ Female playwrights depended on their reputation as respectable women in order to continue their professional careers – producing a play was in many ways a collaborative effort, and depended on social connections which had to be continually maintained. Especially during the time of the French Revolution, women in the public eye had to be careful

⁷ Qtd. in Linda Kelly, *The Kemble Era: John Philip Kemble, Sarah Siddons, and the London Stage* (London: Bodley Head, 1980), p.31.

⁸ Barbara Darby has written about this parallel between the stage and society in *Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-century Stage* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997).

⁹ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1799) pp.12-13.

¹⁰ Greg Kucich, 'Reviewing Women in British Romantic Theatre', in *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, and Society, 1790-1840*, ed. by Catherine Burroughs (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) pp.48-78 (p.50).

not to be perceived, and consequently shunned, as part of the threat to British respectability.¹¹

The events of the Revolution made the tension between the theatre's political engagement and the increasing restrictions on what could be represented especially apparent. Any examination of literature published at this time shows that the French Revolution influenced novelists, poets, diarists, painters, and generally artists of any kind, including Mary Wollstonecraft, William Wordsworth, and Helen Maria Williams among many others. George Taylor has argued that 'throughout this period of cultural crisis, the popular theatre embodied and reflected in many forms not only the material concerns but also many of the wider, less tangible, anxieties of its audiences.'¹² Playwrights were concerned not only with the potential danger to human lives that the Revolution represented, but with the less immediately obvious effect it had on their society and its culture and values. Female playwrights had very effectively used their access to the stage to reflect contemporary concerns before. For example, Elizabeth Griffith's *The Platonic Wife* (1765) had shown the precarious legal and financial situation of women leaving their marriages. Inchbald herself had taken on the issue of prison reform in her play *Such Things Are* (1787), and her novel *A Simple Story* (1791) has been credited with co-founding the English Jacobin Novel.¹³ Generally, therefore, female playwrights were neither apolitical nor afraid to comment on politics, despite the official restrictions of the Licensing Act. On the matter of the French Revolution, however, female playwrights remained mostly silent. The extent of the cultural anxieties caused by the Revolution in the late-eighteenth century and the increasing number of trials for treason in Britain during the 1790s contributed significantly to a cultural environment in which it was simply safer to avoid the subject.¹⁴

Inchbald's *The Massacre*, the only female-authored play of this time that is clearly about the French Revolution, therefore stands out not just in the context of Inchbald's own career, but also among the works of female playwrights more broadly.

¹¹ See Tim Fulford, *Romanticism and Masculinity: Gender, Politics and Poetics in the Writings of Burke, Coleridge, Cobbett, Wordsworth, De Quincey and Hazlitt* (London: Macmillan, 1999) p.5.

¹² George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage 1789-1805* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p.14.

¹³ Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Kenneth R. Johnston, *Unusual Suspects: Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p.xiv.

While the massacre of the title supposedly refers to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in France in 1572, it is quite obvious to the reader that Inchbald is writing about the September massacres of 1792.¹⁵ The timing of Inchbald's production of the text, the setting of the play, and finally the fact that the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre is hardly mentioned, heavily imply that the story is about contemporary events in France. The September massacres were a period of unprecedented violence during the French Revolution. France's struggle in the war against Austria and Prussia, combined with internal conflicts about the country's new government, led to increased anxiety and paranoia about treachery. Encouraged by rumours of a counter-revolutionary plot, mobs attacked prisons in Paris and executed prisoners, often finding them guilty of treason in impromptu courts. By the end of the massacres, over a thousand people had become victims of this violence. It was one of the events that contributed to the opposition against the Revolution in other countries, especially in Britain.¹⁶

Inchbald's play represents this undercurrent of violence and paranoia by showing its effects on a French family, the Tricastins – consisting of husband and wife, their young children, and the husband's father – who are in danger of being executed by a revolutionary mob. The father and son are captured and put on trial; the judge, chosen by the citizens, reveals himself to be a moderate and sensible man who protects them after nobody can offer any tangible evidence that they have committed a crime. The leader of the mob threatens them with his soldiers, but the soldiers also refuse to harm the Tricastins without cause. However, having survived this incident at the trial, father and son learn that Madame Tricastin and her children have been murdered by the mob. Simply from a summary of the plot, it becomes clear that this play is unlike anything else Inchbald wrote. She often referred to current political and social issues in her writing, but usually she mitigated her commentary on these issues with comedic elements and more light-hearted storylines, and most of her plays have separate

¹⁵ See Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015) p.95.

¹⁶ Alexander Mikaberidze (ed.), *Atrocities, Massacres, and War Crimes: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2013) I, p.594; Mary Ashburn Miller, *A Natural History of Revolution: Violence and Nature in the French Revolutionary Imagination, 1789-1794* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp.58-59.

interwoven plots with different themes.¹⁷ *The Massacre*, in contrast, only consists of one storyline, which is heavily focused on the intersection of female morality and revolutionary change.

Critical opinion is somewhat divided as to whether Inchbald intended the play to be produced as a performance or simply published as a text. Melynda Nuss, for example, calls it a closet drama, arguing that while Inchbald did want to publish the play text, the play itself was never intended for the stage.¹⁸ Annibel Jenkins, however, writes that Inchbald did send the manuscript to a theatre manager and was rejected.¹⁹ Considering the play text in detail, the assumption that Inchbald did intend it as a closet drama seems reasonable. The play has only three acts, making it easier and quicker to read at home; there is very little physical action and a great deal of dialogue, making it less well-suited for a live theatrical production due to its static nature. Most tellingly, there are only two female roles and one, that of Amédée, is practically non-speaking. Inchbald usually wrote many good roles for actresses, having been an actress herself, so to suddenly deprive her colleagues of good parts in this play is quite out of character. For a closet play, the character division makes more sense: Inchbald would not be concerned about writing roles for other actresses in a play that was never going to reach the stage, and female readers at home would find it easier to read through the play with members of their own families, or perhaps a friend. Additionally, a preliminary note to the posthumously published text informs us that, '[t]his play was suppressed, though printed, before publication in deference to political opinions'.²⁰ This suggests that Inchbald had considered publishing the play as a printed, though not performed, text before the increasingly volatile political situation dissuaded her. The non-public nature of *The Massacre* accounts partly for how much it differs from Inchbald's other

¹⁷ See Misty G. Anderson, 'Genealogies of Comedy', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832*, ed. by Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp.348-367 (p.352).

¹⁸ Melynda Nuss, *Distance, Theatre, and the Public Voice, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.36.

¹⁹ Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015) p.318.

²⁰ Elizabeth Inchbald, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald, Including her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of her Time*, ed. by James Boaden (London: Bentley, 1833) p.356.

works. It is also, of course, a tragedy, and therefore stands out from the comedies which were usually her genre of choice.

The play represents a departure for Inchbald not only in its form, but also in its tone and characterisation. She very rarely writes about anything in an entirely sombre tone, and even serious subjects in her other plays are frequently treated with a dry, black humour. But in this instance the play is entirely serious, and this shift in tone and approach indicates, perhaps, Inchbald's awareness of the Revolution's tremendous impact on her society and culture. The play is intended to shock her readers rather than to entertain them, and includes no comedic elements that might soften or mitigate the terror of the Revolution. In her preface to *The Massacre*, Inchbald introduces her work by quoting Horace Walpole's statement about his own play *The Mysterious Mother*:

The subject is so horrid, that I thought it would shock, rather than give satisfaction, to an audience. Still I found it so truly tragic in the essential springs of *terror* and *pity*, that I could not resist the impulse of adapting it to the scene, though it never could be practicable to produce it there.²¹

Inchbald states how applicable this comment is to the subsequent pages, and 'imagines that no further reason requires to be alleged for their not having been produced at one of our theatres'.²² Having provided this explanation, she then adds that the play's plot is 'founded upon circumstances which have been related as *facts*, and which the unhappy state of a neighbouring nation does but too powerfully give reason to credit'.²³ This statement serves a twofold purpose: it refers obliquely to the Revolution without actually naming it, and lends Inchbald the objective authority of reported '*facts*', helping her to pre-empt any accusation of merely inventing a story for her own (or others') entertainment. John Robbins in his analysis of the drama has shown how Inchbald here 'positions herself as a member not only of the reading public but also of the news-gathering and news-interpreting media structure'.²⁴ This positioning, along with her insistence on the factual nature of the story suggests she is writing out of public

²¹ Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Massacre*, in *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald, Including her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of her Time*, ed. by James Boaden (London: Bentley, 1833) p.357.

²² Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.357.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Robbins, 'Documenting Terror in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*', p.614.

and, crucially, moral duty, reporting the unfortunate realities of the Revolution even though she and her readers may find it uncomfortable.

In the same vein, Walpole's remark also constitutes a kind of warning: if the reader was expecting one of Inchbald's usual comedies, they were to abandon that expectation immediately. The play itself certainly deserves this warning; the scenes in which the mob threatens the Tricastins, and the description of Madame Tricastin's death (III, 2) contain graphic violence, and the main characters are in mortal peril for almost the entire story. The play starts with Tricastin narrowly escaping death on a visit to Paris, where he describes seeing children being killed in their sleep, and 'the Seine – its water blushed with blood', which 'bore upon its bosom disfigured bodies'.²⁵ Inchbald asserts the historical accuracy of these events in a footnote, which tellingly refers to the St. Bartholomew's massacre only as an afterthought:

Shocking, even to incredibility, as these murders may appear, the truth of them has been asserted in many of our public prints during the late massacre at Paris; and the same extravagant wickedness is attested to have been acted at the massacre of St. Bartholomew.²⁶

This sense of shocking violence accompanies the Tricastins throughout the rest of the play until, tragically, Madame Tricastin becomes its victim. Inchbald's representation of violence as a constant threat captures the turbulent atmosphere of the September massacres, in which events were unpredictable and deaths occurred frequently. It also reflects the mood in Britain, where the volatile situation in Europe caused concern and uncertainty. The threat of mob violence, 'the fury of the multitude', was an especially present one for someone as closely associated with the theatre as Inchbald, since theatre audiences had a history of becoming violent to express their displeasure.²⁷ Both Drury Lane and Covent Garden had seen riots in 1744 and 1763 respectively, and more theatre riots would occur at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Robert Shoemaker has argued that those living in London were especially aware and cautious of mob violence, as the large population of the city facilitated this method of expressing anger or disagreement:

²⁵ Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.365.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.372.

Violence, insult and riot were frequently used in order to defend and enhance Londoners' reputations and advance their interests. Although most such disorder was limited by cultural norms, it generated real fears of mob rule among those with power and property.²⁸

Inchbald's representation of a constant undercurrent of hostility reflects these anxieties at a time when they were fuelled by the violence of the French Revolution, and events such as the Priestley Riots (1791) brought the fear of hostile crowds home to England.²⁹

However, despite the threatening atmosphere prevailing throughout Inchbald's play, her work is not primarily about the physical dangers of revolution, but instead reflects on the concept of morality in challenging times. The play explores what it means to be a good citizen, and how good citizens react when faced with violence. In the context of the French Revolution, ideas of personal liberty and responsibility are predictably an important theme, and crucially, all the characters believe in the concept of liberty, though they interpret it in very different ways. Glandeve, the judge, declares: 'If I am a friend to freedom, my first object is, freedom of *thought*, advocating for the right to express a political stance regardless of whether it contradicts his own. The leader of the mob, Dugas, argues for 'the voice of the people', who have collectively invested him with the power to arrest and charge those he feels are against the principles of the Revolution.³⁰ Their differing views are made particularly obvious in the following exchange, in which Glandeve refuses to sentence the captured Tricastins without evidence:

DUGAS: I thought, Glandeve, you were the sworn friend of Liberty?

GLANDEVE: And so I am — Liberty, I worship. But, my friends, 'tis liberty to do good, not ill — liberty joined with peace and charity. (III, 2)

While Dugas may appear as the villain of the piece, he believes he is doing what is right – he is also on the side of liberty. Although Inchbald certainly favours Glandeve's approach, none of her characters are painted as simply morally good or bad; instead Inchbald shows them as occasionally making morally questionable choices because of

²⁸ Robert Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-century England* (London: Continuum, 2007) pp.24-26.

²⁹ See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.47.

³⁰ Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.376.

their mistaken views or the influence of outside circumstances. Later in the same scene, Tricastin attacks Dugas with a knife, intending to kill him. Glandeve prevents him from doing so, and his standing between the two opponents makes such an impression on Tricastin that he immediately gives up his weapon. Dugas retaliates by calling in his soldiers to kill the Tricastins, but they refuse to carry out the execution. Their colonel remarks:

Yes, Sir, my brave men have received your commands; and this is their brave reply: —
They are all men of courage— all ready to enter the field of battle against an insulting foe, and boldly kill him; but, amongst the whole battalion, we have not one hangman.
(III, 2)³¹

His repetition of the words 'brave' and 'courage' emphasises that refusing to use violence here is neither an act of cowardice nor an act motivated by fear of consequences. In the case of both Tricastin and the soldiers, refraining from violence is the more difficult and more courageous choice. This, Inchbald is saying, is real liberty: the ability to apply reason and restraint to a situation, even if it results in a personal disadvantage. She does not support any particular side of the conflict; she does not even seem to object entirely to the conflict itself, as the play does not condemn the act of revolution. What is important to her is the manner in which such conflicts are fought. It is difficult to know precisely what Inchbald's personal views on the French Revolution were at this time, but it is very clear in this play that she objected to the indiscriminate violence and lack of humanity that characterised the Reign of Terror.³² Her comments on the Revolution, at least in this instance, are not focused on its politics but on its morality. Wollstonecraft similarly explored the idea of liberty in *Vindication* when she wrote, '[l]iberty is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature'.³³ Like Inchbald,

³¹ Inchbald includes a footnote stating that these lines are based on an actual reply sent by a military commander during the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre (p.378, fn.1).

³² Inchbald wrote an autobiographical work, which might have given us more insight into her opinions; however, she eventually destroyed it on the advice of her confessor. Her published *Memoirs* were heavily edited by James Boaden.

³³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.103.

Wollstonecraft emphasises the important role liberty plays in enabling conscious choice, and explicitly links the concepts of personal freedom and morality.

Wollstonecraft's demand for liberty in her *Vindication* is of course specifically advocating on behalf of women; it may appear from this analysis so far that *The Massacre*, in contrast, is very centred on male characters – and, in comparison with Inchbald's other works, it certainly is. Madame Tricastin is the only female character with any significant dialogue and stage time, and even her presence is quite limited. She functions mainly as a representation of the humanity and morality which Inchbald identifies as vital in preventing a descent into bloodshed and revenge. Madame Tricastin is a constant reminder of how male violence during a revolution affects women's lives. She is the only named character who dies in the play, and throughout the story, she tries to prevent violence and rash decisions. She does this first by telling Tricastin, 'let us fly the danger which threatens us [...] the infection of the metropolis still spreads – let us leave this city – nay, the land'; when he objects, she reminds him that he has a family who would be devastated if he died in the fighting.³⁴ She does this again in the second act, trying to prevent Tricastin from killing either himself or others by taking his weapon from him: 'Why do you hold that poniard in your hand? – do you mean to turn it against yourself? Oh! Give it me'.³⁵ In the last act, Madame Tricastin is herself killed by the mob; the soldiers who witness this are so affected by her death that they no longer engage in combat but instead guard her corpse from being mistreated. They carry her to the hall in which the judgement of the Tricastin men is taking place, where she becomes a powerful visual symbol of the consequences of violence. The shock of seeing her dead body prompts Glandeve to reaffirm the need for reason and humanity, and his final speech functions as both a political statement and her eulogy:

My friends, I conjure you to take every care that the perpetrators of this barbarous outrage are secured. [...] Then, the good (of all parties) will conspire to extirpate such monsters from the earth. It is not party principles which cause this devastation; 'tis want of sense — 'tis guilt — for the first precept in our Christian laws is charity — the next obligation — to extend that charity EVEN TO OUR ENEMIES.³⁶

³⁴ Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.365.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.369.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.379-80.

His fervent insistence on universal charity and mercy rather than party politics shows him as a proponent of active Christianity, a concept Inchbald also champions in some of her other plays – especially *Such Things Are* (1787), in which the story's moral heart, Haswell, takes a compassionate and charitable stance that resembles Glandeve's.³⁷ Both characters are men with considerable social influence, and both show an approach to leadership that values compassion; where Dugas' method is to create division by identifying those he considers enemies, both Glandeve and Haswell aim to create equality. A system of values which is based on equal treatment for everyone clearly represents an improvement for women who were frequently faced with unequal treatment. Madame Tricastin is a victim of the division in society caused by the identification of certain groups as enemies, and Glandeve's more equitable approach represents the best hope of avoiding further deaths.

Female characters participate less actively in both these plays, as their main function is to help both the male characters and the audience to determine the morally right thing to do. It is undeniable that this representation of women is far more conservative than making the heroine a witty woman who outsmarts others to get what she wants; this kind of heroine is a more frequent feature in Inchbald's comedies and is rooted in the unapologetically outspoken women of Restoration drama, such as Aphra Behn's *Hellena* and *Widow Ranter*.³⁸ *The Massacre's* characterisation of Madame Tricastin owes much more to late eighteenth-century texts which cast women as supporting characters who help to civilise male society – ideas which would later evolve into the Victorian ideal of the Angel in the House.³⁹ In the context of *The Massacre's* exploration of moral citizenship, Madame Tricastin's passivity also signals her exclusion from participating fully in that citizenship; she has no actual political or legal power, only entering the male space of the courthouse as a symbolic dead body, not as an active participant. While Tricastin, Glandeve, and Dugas have the ability to make

³⁷ Michael Tomko provides a more detailed exploration of *The Massacre's* religious aspects in 'Remembering Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre*: Romantic cosmopolitanism, sectarian history, and religious difference', *European Romantic Review*, 19.1, pp.1-18.

³⁸ For an exploration of Restoration drama's 'unruly' women, see Rebecca Merrens, 'Unmanned with Thy Words: Regendering Tragedy in Manley and Trotter', in *Broken Boundaries: Women and Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. by Katherine M. Quinsey (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996) pp.31-50.

³⁹ Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London, Paris & Melbourne: Cassell and Company, 1891).

impactful choices – even to make the wrong choices, if it supports Inchbald's representation of the importance of a reasoned pursuit of freedom – Madame Tricastin's own liberty is limited. Wendy Nielsen has argued that, '[i]n Inchbald's dramatic plots, mothers and wives are legitimate targets for political wrath but do not share the same privileges as their male relatives.'⁴⁰ Consequently, rather than being an active heroine, Madame Tricastin becomes a passive symbol, recalling in some way Edmund Burke's synecdochic use of Marie Antoinette as a representation of the lawless revolutionaries' destruction of genteel, feminine virtue and motherhood.⁴¹ She represents liberty and morality as theoretical concepts, but is never able to actively employ them in a way which improves her own life in a practical manner – she only demonstrates them to others.

In many other female-authored plays of this period, public displays of female virtue are more actively influential and can sometimes function as catalysts for social change, which is often achieved through a female character demonstrating such unrelenting virtue that other characters are compelled to change their own behaviour by her example. In Inchbald's own *Every One Has His Fault*, Eleanor Norland's virtue reforms her father Lord Norland, and Miss Wooburn shames her rakish husband Sir Ramble into reversing their separation (though in Ramble's case there is some doubt as to how permanent this change will be). Similar instances can also be found in Elizabeth Griffith's *The Platonic Wife*, in which Emilia is able to defend herself against the predatory Mr. Frankland through her steadfast belief in her own virtuousness when he threatens her '[w]ith one of the greatest misfortunes that can possibly befall [sic] an innocent young woman — the loss of reputation, madam.' She replies: '[m]y character, Sir, is far above the reach of malice, nor has the tongue of slander ever yet pronounced my name.'⁴² Similar words are spoken by Seraphina in Hannah Cowley's *School for Greybeards* (1786): 'A woman, who respects herself [...], is safe in every situation; – she ne'er incurs risk, who has sense of Duty for her Guard!'⁴³ In all these instances, women use their morality as an active virtue, and their 'sense of Duty' and moral rightness has

⁴⁰ Nielsen, 'A Tragic Farce: Revolutionary Women in Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* and European Drama', p.83.

⁴¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Dodsley, 1790) p.78.

⁴² Elizabeth Griffith, *The Platonic Wife* (Dublin: Wilson et al., 1765) II. 1.

⁴³ Hannah Cowley, *A School for Greybeards, or, the Mourning Bride* (Dublin: Porter, 1787) V. 5.

a noticeable effect on others around them. In this they resemble Madame Tricastin, but there is one crucial difference: her virtue improves things for others, but not for herself, whereas female characters in other plays benefit in some way – either by reconciliation, marriage, or increased social standing. In *The Massacre*, the concept of female virtue succeeds in reforming society only to some extent, and that reform comes at a heavy price for the female character.

Tricastin even addresses his wife as a 'Dying saint', explicitly linking the reforming example of her exceptional virtue with the sacrifice of her life.⁴⁴ His characterisation of her as a saintly figure, however, also points to an unequal dynamic in their relationship – his idealisation of her fragility places her in a situation in which her self-sacrifice is almost expected as part of her role of virtuous martyr. Wollstonecraft argued that this attitude of courtly gallantry towards women impeded their ability to make rational and practical choices:

'It seems natural for man to search for excellence, and either to trace it in the object that he worships, or blindly to invest it with perfection, as a garment. But what good effect can the latter mode of worship have on the moral conduct of a rational being?'⁴⁵

Inchbald similarly identifies the social expectations of female passivity and delicacy, which have placed Madame Tricastin in an inescapable situation, as the cause of her inability to defend herself. The play shows that Madame Tricastin's helplessness is not an innate part of her character, but has rather been encouraged by external influences. When Tricastin decides that flight is impossible and they should attempt to fight their attackers, his friend Menancourt suggests that Madame Tricastin should have a weapon as well:

MENANCOURT: Give her an instrument of death to defend herself — our female enemies use them to our cost.

EUSEBE: No, by Heaven! so sacred do I hold the delicacy of her sex, that could she with a breath lay all our enemies dead, I would not have her feminine virtues violated by the act.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.379.

⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p.114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.368.

His refusal to even consider that his wife should be able to defend herself means that once she is separated from him, there is no possibility of her fighting back. Her 'delicacy' and 'feminine virtues' are of no practical help at all to her, since they cannot protect her. She is almost too virtuous for her own good, and her (and her family's) idea of female virtue is one of passivity. Inchbald thus suggests that trying to be too delicate and self-sacrificial, and basing one's sense of self exclusively on maintaining a state of extreme virtuousness is actively harmful to women. Her ideas here show especially remarkable parallels to Wollstonecraft's critique of the cultivation of helplessness, and society's view of women 'as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone'.⁴⁷ In her introduction to the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft 'wish[es] to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of body and mind'.⁴⁸ Madame Tricastin's death can certainly be attributed to a lack of strength on her part – because of the difference in physical strength between her female body and those of her male attackers, but also because of her inability to contradict her husband's decisions – so Inchbald is here similarly considering the negative consequences of discouraging women from acquiring the power to 'stand alone', both mentally and physically. While Inchbald uses a more subtle approach here compared to Wollstonecraft's forthright style, it is remarkable how comparable they are in their critique of the artificial passivity society encouraged women to perform.

Wollstonecraft was, in some ways, fairly confident about the potential for women to achieve equality through a reform of their society and education:

It is time to effect a revolution in female manners – time to restore to them their lost dignity – and make them, as part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world. It is time to separate unchangeable morals from local manners.⁴⁹

Inchbald is rather less optimistic in *The Massacre*. Madame Tricastin possesses the 'unchangeable morals' that Wollstonecraft champions; her first speech in the play shows that her character prioritises sincere affection over material wealth: 'I condemn avarice; and yet, was gold half so precious to me as the society of my dear Eusèbe

⁴⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.73

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.113.

Tricastin, I should be most avaricious!'.⁵⁰ When she is surrounded by the mob, she tries to shield her children: 'The eldest, to the last, she held fast by the hand – the youngest she pressed violently to her bosom, and, struggling to preserve, received the murderer's blow through its breast, to her own.'⁵¹ Her speech and actions are always intended to foreground her virtue, and thus it becomes her defining characteristic. As a consequence, her husband seems to be more concerned about a potential loss of her virtue than he is about the loss of her life. Tricastin is clearly influenced by 'local manners' – contemporary ideas about the nature and value of female morality – in his indignant response to the idea of his wife wielding a weapon. He considers it a serious transgression that would have 'violated' her, equating the sanctity of her female body with her feminine virtue; in his idealisation of her virtue, he chooses to 'blindly invest [her] with perfection', and she is therefore unable to escape the passive vulnerability he expects of her.⁵² Inchbald's fictional characters perfectly illustrate the same argument Wollstonecraft makes in her more theoretical, philosophical treatise – that rigid definitions of respectable and appropriate female behaviour could leave women with very little choice or agency.

Violence is established throughout the play as the morally incorrect choice, and by 1792, female physical violence especially had become associated with chaos and societal breakdown rather than empowerment.⁵³ Unable to defend herself physically, and without access to legal or institutional protection, Madame Tricastin is left with no material defence. Like Wollstonecraft, Inchbald recognises the need for large-scale reform if women are to participate actively in society to the same degree as men. However, Inchbald's representation focusses on the potential cost and resistance that any female reformer might encounter both on a personal and an institutional level by representing the circular and finally fatal moral standards women are required to uphold. Ultimately, it can be argued that Madame Tricastin does succeed in effecting some reform in her society, as Glandeve's speech promises 'an end to blind obedience'

⁵⁰ Inchbald, *The Massacre*, p.351.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.379.

⁵² Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p.114.

⁵³ Wendy C. Nielsen, *Women Warriors in Romantic Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013) p.116.

and a prioritisation of reason and charity, but this reform comes too late for her.⁵⁴ No female characters, except for the dead Madame Tricastin, are present in the last scene of the play. Therefore the reforming of society, though prompted by the death of a woman, is ultimately led and conducted by men and only results in material benefits for the male characters. A great deal of the sense of unease and danger present in this play stem from the fact that reform can only be enacted by a woman if it is accompanied by her self-sacrifice.

In comparison, Inchbald's representation of women's ability to affect societal reform is not quite so pessimistic in some of her other plays; *Every One Has His Fault* and *Such Things Are* both end with strides having been made towards a more reasonable and humane society, which also visibly improves the lives of the female characters that most closely resemble Madame Tricastin (Eleanor and Arabella, respectively). However, in both plays this reform is supported by a male character with institutional power: in *Such Things Are* by Haswell the prison reformer, who has the ear of the Sultan of Sumatra; and in *Every One Has His Fault* by the wealthy Lord Norland. The female characters in these plays are also put in danger—with Eleanor living in poverty and Arabella in prison—but accounts of their suffering prompt the Sultan and Norland to institute reforms which enable the women to escape those dangers, and will prevent other women from facing similar situations in future. While these two female characters therefore avoid Madame Tricastin's tragic fate, Inchbald uses them to consider the same duality of reform that she includes in *The Massacre*: she simultaneously acknowledges the role of women in reforming society, and the fact that those reforming women face societal barriers. The publication of *Every One Has His Fault* in 1793 proves that Inchbald was not silenced by the repressive atmosphere that followed the Revolution, but it also shows the potential danger she was in; her cynical social satire in this play earned her the *True Briton's* accusation of being a 'Democrat', implying that her intention was to undermine the British government and monarchy.⁵⁵ As Angela Smallwood has noted however, *Every One Has His Fault* is positioned more carefully than *The Massacre* 'to operate on the margins of radical ideas and discourse.'⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p.90.

⁵⁵ *The True Briton*, 30 January 1793, Issue 26.

⁵⁶ Angela Smallwood, 'Women Playwrights, Politics and Convention: the Case of Elizabeth Inchbald's "Seditious" Comedy, *Every One Has His Fault* (1793)', *CW3 Journal*, 1 (2004) [n.p].

Despite its political content, *Every One* does not mention revolution, and is framed as a domestic comedy. *The Massacre*, trying to do without these safeguards, probably exceeded the safe margins within which Inchbald usually operated.

The Massacre is an intriguing development in Inchbald's writing career, both in her discarding of the domestic comedy frame and in its ambiguity. Some of this ambiguity comes from external sources: the uncertainty of its status as an unperformed play, a text published after the author's death, a reflection on a contemporary event that masquerades as a historical one, and the unusual choice of genre on Inchbald's part. The contents of the text itself have invited a variety of interpretations of Inchbald's intentions, as well as revealing a marked uncertainty surrounding the status and safety of women in public spaces, particularly in revolutionary spaces. The ambiguity inherent in the text perhaps speaks to Inchbald's own uncertainty regarding the extent to which women could enact political reform, and her awareness of her own precarious status as a writer in a time when other authors were being censored and prosecuted for sedition. After *The Massacre*, Inchbald returned to writing the comedies for which she was known, which perhaps allowed her to write in a safer and more clearly defined mode. The political content in these plays operates within the traditional structure of the domestic comedy, and Inchbald herself could therefore define herself as a comic writer rather than a radical one.

Amy Garnai has described Inchbald's career as one 'defined by caution', and this caution is in some ways present in *The Massacre*, both in its careful framing as a documentation of historical violence and as a closet drama, and in the reservations it expresses about the effectiveness of revolution and reforms in female manners.⁵⁷ The fact that the French Revolution could not be safely framed within the genre of a domestic comedy, in combination with the increased anxiety surrounding potential threats and treason against the British government, certainly justified any female playwright's cautious approach to the subject. To abandon caution, as Mary Wollstonecraft did, and comment openly on the Revolution without any attempt to soften the blow, was to risk isolating oneself socially and professionally. On the other hand, Madame Tricastin, standing alone against the mob, exemplifies the precarious situation in which a woman in the public sphere might find herself without institutional or social support. Even from her relatively secure position as an established writer with

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.703.

a good reputation, Inchbald was keenly aware of the restrictions placed on playwrights, writing that, '[t]he novelist is a free agent. He lives in a land of liberty, whilst The Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government.'⁵⁸

Given these restricting circumstances, writing about the Revolution in the first place was a remarkably bold stroke in 1792, and one that speaks to Inchbald's underlying potential for radicalism. Other critics such as Gary Kelly and John Robbins have previously explored the radical tendencies present in Inchbald's writing, and her connection with male radical writers such as Holcroft and Godwin. Her connection to Wollstonecraft, however, has been much less widely acknowledged, perhaps partly because Inchbald eventually distanced herself from her personal acquaintance with Wollstonecraft, and a perception that Wollstonecraft's 'deep, at times obsessive, preoccupation with personal authenticity' tended to set her apart from other women, who at least for appearances' sake sometimes performed elements of traditional femininity and respectability in order to avoid repercussions.⁵⁹ While it is undeniable that both in their personal lives and in their choice of literary genres Inchbald and Wollstonecraft seem very dissimilar, the ideas expressed in Inchbald's writing accord remarkably with those expressed in the *Vindication*, in foregrounding the consequences of society's imposing of the expectation of passive virtue on women, and the potential agency of women themselves to reform and change those expectations. Wollstonecraft is therefore not entirely alone in questioning these expectations, as Inchbald similarly acknowledges the vulnerable position of women in a society in which they lacked either social or political influence, and therefore advocates for women's equal inclusion in the reforming of that society.

Because of the restrictions of the Licensing Act, and the caution women writers needed to employ in order to remain respectable, the role of female playwrights in the development of eighteenth-century proto-feminist thought has frequently been overlooked or diminished. However, works like Inchbald's demonstrate the complexity of female playwrights' engagement with both contemporary events and contemporary societal shifts, and their remarkable ability to maintain the necessary balance between

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Inchbald, 'To the Artist', *The Artist: A Collection of Essays Relative to Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Architecture, the Drama, Discoveries of Science, and Various Other Subjects*, 1.14 (1807), p.16.

⁵⁹ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.32.

expressing their often radical ideas and retaining their reputation as respectable women. Inchbald's inability to publish *The Massacre* during her lifetime, and the accusations of sedition levelled against her by newspapers like the *True Briton*, show that there was always a potential danger inherent in engaging in political discourse in this way. In order to enable women to participate more actively in this discourse without major repercussions, Inchbald demonstrates in *The Massacre*, society needs to make space for choice and compassion – 'Liberty joined with Peace and Charity' – and overcome artificial concerns about propriety that stifle both women's ability to be active participants in political reform and women writers' ability to write and publish freely.



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