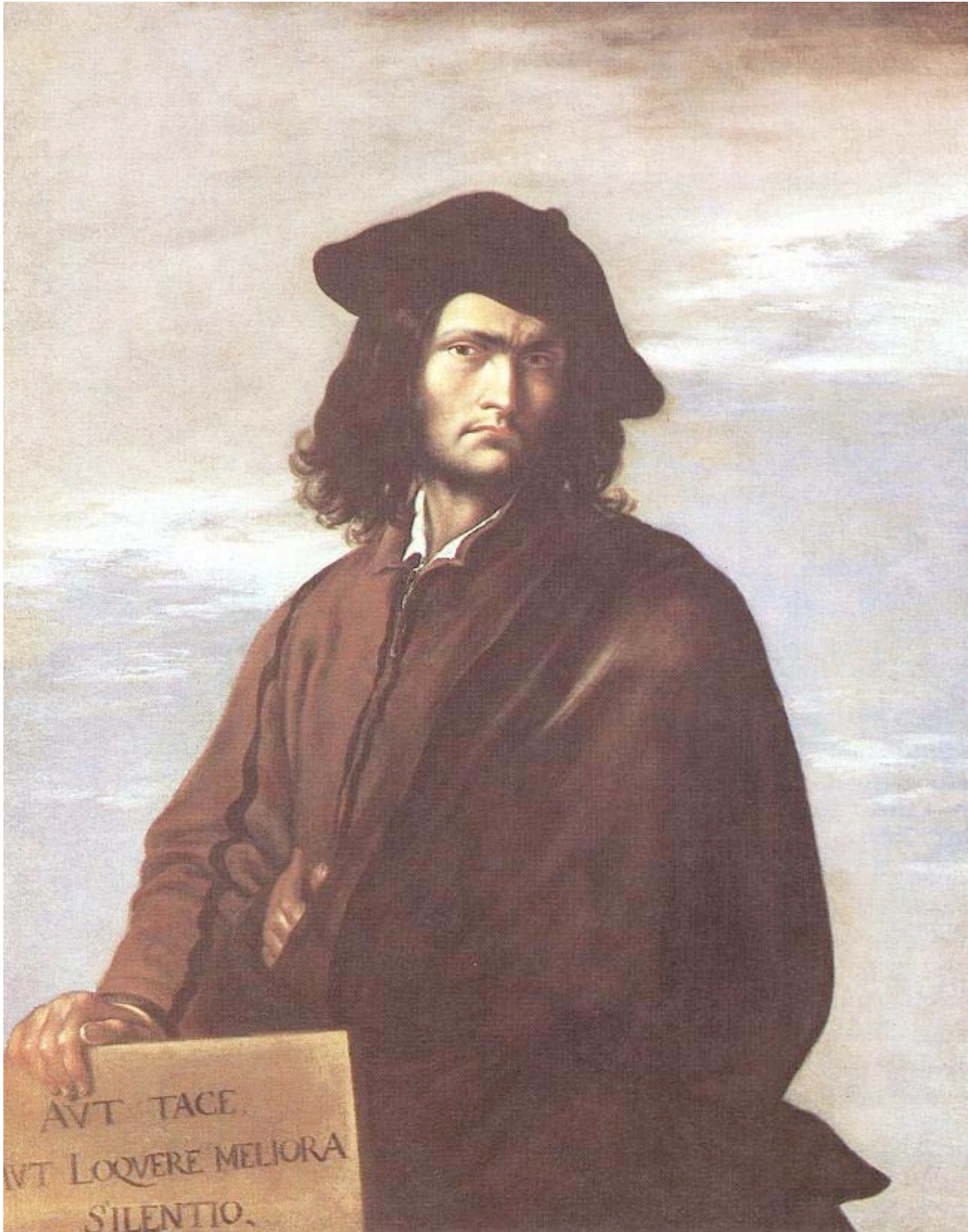


**Personas of the Hirstean sublime -  
1. Colley Cibber (Not the Romantic Artist).**



Salvator Rosa, *Self-Portrait*, c.1641, oil on canvas, 116 x 94 cm. London, National Gallery.

In the question of the subjectivity of the Hirstian sublime, there is the question of the kinds of 'sublime' persona that are available to be taken up. During my research, I have repeatedly found myself trying on figures from the history and from the literature of the sublime to see if they 'fit' Hirst. What kind of a repetition, in other words, are we dealing with, if Hirst is, in some sense or other, a farcical replay of the tragic past of (early) modernity, an absurd replay of the sublime? In what fancy dress does he come to the party of the contemporary art scene? Is the notion of the sublime involved in the kind of figure, the kind of persona he plays himself out as?<sup>1</sup>

The first, and most obvious figure of identification that we might propose is that of the heroic, male, Romantic genius. His very inscription as an artist with a proper (patrilinear<sup>2</sup>) name, a signature with which his work is marked might mark him out

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<sup>1</sup> For repetition, tragedy and farce, see – it goes almost without saying – the introductory paragraphs of Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, [Saul K Padover translation, made from the 1869 ed.], 1999 [first pub.1852, in issue 1 of *Die Revolution*], Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org), Available:

<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>>, 14 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Hirst, though, in one sense, is fatherless, a fact that has in turn become part of his mythology. Hirst never knew his biological father, and his mother, who was Catholic and unmarried, had fled Leeds to Bristol to give birth to him in secret. Damien's mother married the man from whom he took his surname when he was, according to some accounts one year old, and according to others two or three. It was not until he was twelve or thirteen, and the marriage broke up, that Hirst found out that his namesake was merely his stepfather and not his biological father at all. Hirst's inscription into the order of patriarchy and patrilinearity is thus somewhat fraught with complexities. The (literal) 'Name of the Father' turns out not to be the name of the father, the Name being merely that of a usurpation or simulation of the place of the father. The Father himself remains nameless, a position without proper signifier (a proper surname) and a sign ('father') without a proper referent. For accounts of this childhood, see, for example, Carrie O'Grady, "Turner Prize: The People's Poll: Damien Hirst (Winner 1995)," Guardian 1 November 2001,

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/turnerpeoplespoll/story/0,,1073355,00.html>> visited 11/02/06. and Calvin Tomkin, "After Shock," New Yorker 20 September 1999

In a 1992 interview with Gordon Burns, Hirst himself narrates the story thus:

I don't know. I don't know who he is. My real father, I mean. That's why I was born in Bristol. My mum got pregnant. It was the first time she ever had sex with anyone, and he didn't want to know, so she moved to Bristol. From Jersey. She was working in Jersey. She'd always lived in Leeds, and she moved back to Leeds when her parents found out about it. She had a year when she didn't dare tell them or anything. Then she married someone else when I was about two or three. Who I always thought of as my dad until he left when I was about 13, and then my mum told me. He was a car salesman. But my mum's quite artistic. She used to have a florist shop, so... But now she works for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Leeds. She always drew. She always used to make me draw.

An edited version of this interview, including the above passage was printed in Damien Hirst and Gordon Burn, "The Naked Hirst," Guardian 6 October 2001,

within these terms, and a lineage could very easily be constructed into which Hirst, as modern 'master' might fit easily. The role that Hirst has played in the media pulls on the myths of prodigal, carnivalesque *jouissance* of which artists are imagined capable, as part of their exceptional, Romantic capacity for feeling, and their supposed consequent facility for the flouting of convention. (Hirst as Pollock or Bacon, or perhaps even the scandalous Byron. Hirst as latter-day Bohemian.)

In his work, Hirst's grappling with the 'great' themes of art, in particular with mortality, ("Life and death and all that stuff"), and his inscription of himself within a tradition of 'great' (male) painters and artists, stretching back through Warhol, Beuys and Pollock to the Romantic and Baroque traditions of Western art also interpellates him within the kind of Oedipal struggle for self-definition, identity and 'originality' within the oppressively patrilinear institution of modern poetry or art that Bloom describes in his *The Anxiety of Influence*.<sup>3</sup>

But Hirst also wears this kind of subjectivity rather awkwardly. (Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the kind of 'anxiety' that such a system of influence might bring to bear on the individual artist.) Here we see one of many of the 'splits' or contradictions in his artistic persona, and in the position from which he comes to speak/produce art. If Hirst might appear, on the level of theme, to follow this macho grapple in art with the 'great question' of mortality (i.e. castration?), what perhaps made Hirst's name and reputation, the innovation which surprised and fascinated his critics, was in fact the cool, detached, ironic stance he took towards this theme. It's a theme taken up, but taken up as if in quote marks or placed behind glass metaphorically as well as literally; as if this theme was itself a kind of curious artefact from a lost world, displayed in all its mystery in a modern museum. This is not to say that Hirst thereby exits from or 'resolves' the Oedipal pressures that weigh on him from this tradition; rather this is still a move within the game, a way of inscribing himself through revolt within its parameters. In fact, as a strategy, it shows the classic signs of Freudian disavowal (*Verleugnung*): "I know that expression is impossible now in art, but here is expressionist art"; "I know that 'great art' about the 'great themes' is no longer possible, but here is 'great art' about the 'great themes'"; "I know I cannot be a genius, but here I am, a genius nonetheless..."

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<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,563111,00.html>> visited 12/01/05. The full interview is also published in Damien Hirst and Gordon Burn, *On the Way to Work* (London: Faber, 2001). [page number] In this account, Hirst's inscription as an artistic subject is thus through identification with his mother, rather than through a paternal figure. Again, this is perhaps problematic in relation to the proper name of Hirst as attached to the works, in that on separation with Damien's stepfather, his mother reverted to her maiden name.

<sup>3</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Aside: Perhaps this split goes further back than Hirst, who himself has some uncanny facial resemblances with Salvator Rosa, at least as the latter depicted himself in his 1641 self-portrait. In this classic image of the brooding interiority of what would become the persona of the Romantic genius, Rosa himself – idol of the Romantics and one of those whose almost ubiquitous epithet during the eighteenth century was ‘sublime’ – already defines this interiority in terms of a kind of splitting. He depicts his face half in shadow and half in light, as if his ‘depth’ as an individual is constituted in the difference between the dark and light selves, and in the passages back and forth between the two, a passage which is emphasised by the old Baroque trick of placing a slightly different expression on the two halves of the face (on the light side we might read calm seriousness, on the dark side something altogether more menacing), so as to seemingly set it in motion as our eye moves across its surface. Thus we are suspended in this image of a self between illumination and what sinks into the concealment of darkness, a point which is emphasised by the board he holds up and its opposition of speech and silence, in which silence (concealment) itself might be a form of communication, albeit a form of (sublime) ‘negative presentation’.<sup>4</sup> Rosa is not simply depicting himself in terms of an image, but in terms of the gap between two images (Lacan would have been delighted), or between an image, and the refusal of representation. Between what is representable on the relatively cheery, illuminated side of the face, and the dark depths of what will, and cannot, and should not be represented.

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<sup>4</sup> “Aut tace aut loquere meliora silentio”: either be silent, or let your speech be better than silence

## Hirst as Colley Cibber

“The theatrical shopkeeper puts on the aristocratic periwig of Sir Novelty Fashion because it is good for a laugh – but also because, as a bourgeois individual, he has no way of displaying himself that is not.” Michael Glover on Colley Cibber.<sup>5</sup>

“Me, me Mum, me Nan and me Dad went off to Waterloo  
Me, me Mum, me Nan and me Dad, with a bucket of vindaloo” Fat Les, Vindaloo.

Hirst plays up a series of very un-Romantic roles, which he mixes in with that of the Romantic Genius. Against this, we have Hirst the yob (a refusal of the aristocratic implications of Romantic genius or of its middle-class sentimentalism?), Hirst the clown, Hirst the businessman, Hirst the celebrity...



Damien Hirst as clown, from *The Observer* magazine, Sept 2004.

If seeking a character from my archive of the sublime, instead of Hirst as Wordsworth or Shelley, we might be faced with Hirst as Colley Cibber: comic actor, on-stage and off-stage a particular kind of eighteenth-century figure of comedy. the ‘fop’ or ‘coxcomb’, as infamous as he was famous for his pomp, vanity and debauchery, and as much an off-stage ‘celebrity’ as an on-stage presence. Cibber was one of the century’s most successful entrepreneurial theatrical managers, part-owner of Drury Lane theatre, a commercially driven writer of highly popular plays and stage adaptations, who rose to the height of establishment acceptance as poet laureate from his rather *déclassé* origins as son of a foreign sculptor (who spent some time imprisoned for debt) and who had

<sup>5</sup> Brian Glover, "Nobility, Visibility and Publicity in Colley Cibber's Apology," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 22.3 (2002): 537.

chosen the disreputable path of the stage for his career. Cibber, with all the glamour of his colourful life, is also, for me at least (being more a Theobaldian pedant myself) an immensely attractive figure.

However, at first this might not be imagined as a very flattering comparison. Cibber has gone down in history as something of a hack, in contrast to the 'great' and canonised literary figures of his day. His permanent fame seems to rest in his role as the central Duncie in Pope's final version of the Dunciad.

This role as head Duncie is a role that Cibber usurps from Lewis Theobald (re-christened 'Tibbald' in Pope's poem) in the earlier versions<sup>6</sup>, on the one hand to

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<sup>6</sup> **Lewis Theobald (1688-1744)** had brought Pope's wrath upon himself with his *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), a book criticising the errors and inaccuracies of Pope's 1726 edition of the works of Shakespeare. Whilst Pope had attempted to 'smooth' the texts, in line with a Neoclassicist sensibility for literary decorum, Theobald was primarily interested in editorial accuracy – in restoring (to use the words of the subtitle of his book) "the true reading" of Shakespeare. Thus although Pope's poem can be seen on the one hand as a personal attack on a man who had undermined his reputation, it can also be understood to be symptomatic of the clash between two quite different and warring types of literary sensibility, and, furthermore, of exactly the ideological clash which was also to the fore in the 'quarrel' of the Ancients and the Moderns. Theobald's is precisely the kind of "pedantic" modern literary scholarship lampooned by the Scriblerian Club in the character of Martin Scriblerus, and also in particular in Swift's mock-heroic "Battle of the Books" (1704). At stake in the two different ideas of literary scholarship are differences in the conception of history itself, and of the significance of change in literary or stylistic sensibilities and practices. Whilst Pope's edition operates on the belief in an eternal principle of harmony (and the desire to polish the 'rough' corners of Shakespeare to better fit this mould), Theobald takes into consideration the fact that the forms and affective results of Shakespeare's poetry were not the same as those aimed at by early-eighteenth-century Neoclassicists. We might also trace in a movement from Pope towards Theobald's more 'modern' conception of Shakespeare (a modernity attested to by the fact that Theobald's 1731 edition of Shakespeare has become the foundation of modern editions), the shift from a monistic sensibility of the beautiful towards a sensibility of the sublime, and the start of a process taken up by Johnson and Warton amongst others, which reclaimed Shakespeare as a great (and specifically 'English') writer not on the grounds of his similarity to the ancients (his smoothness, propriety, his adherence to classical forms and genres), but rather in terms of the particularity of his grand, irregular style which 'transcends' the literary proprieties of classicism. This is the beginning, that is, of Shakespeare as the 'sublime' poet the Romantics treasured so highly. For an account of the development of a properly 'British' canon, with Shakespeare, Chaucer and Milton as 'ancient moderns' – and in fact a consequent reversal whereby the (Graeco-Roman) ancients start to be prized for their similarity to the literary model of the 'modern ancients', for their roughness and grandeur (in short: for their sublimity), rather than for their smoothness and harmony – see Jonathan Brody Kramnick, Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The details of this argument are summarised by Kramnick on pp.3-5. For more on the problems of

keep the poem contemporary (by the 1840s, Pope's argument with Theobald and the controversy of the Battle of the Books from which it developed must have seemed rather old news<sup>7</sup>), also in part because of the increasing personal hostility that had grown between Pope and Cibber, but perhaps above all because Cibber stood for everything commercial and populist in literature and the arts which Pope deplored.

Admittedly, early eighteenth-century literary controversies, in the tiny and self-enclosed world of English letters, were highly personal and often vicious affairs, and they frequently revolved as much around the personalities of that world, around real or imagined slights and responses to these, or around the clamouring and competition for alliances with other influential figures, as they did around substantive theoretical or political differences. The decline of the personal relationship between Pope and Cibber is documented in Leonard Ashley's biography of Cibber<sup>8</sup>, and is read in just such personal terms, rather than seeing any actual literary, theoretical, political, social or cultural issue being at stake.<sup>9</sup>

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translation and scholarship in the context of the Battle of the Ancients and Moderns, see Satish Padiyar, "Homoeroticism in Neoclassical Poetics: French Translations of the Ideal Male Nude in Late Eighteenth-Century Word and Image," PhD, University College London, 1999.; and Joan DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin De Siècle* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Both of these centre on the 'Battle of the Books' as it was fought out slightly earlier in the context of late-seventeenth-century French letters. For more on Pope and his reaction to the problem of scholarly 'pedantry' and its relation to a growing modernity, and a growing commercialisation, see especially [Harold Weber, "The Garbage Heap of Memory: At Play in Pope's Archives of Dulness," \*Eighteenth-Century Studies\* 33.1 \(1999\).](#) [check: is it this one??] This essay emphasises the links that I have been attempting to put forward in this note in the constellation of 'modernity', 'commodification', 'the sublime', and the growth of academic 'pedantry'...

<sup>7</sup> There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that Pope's poem, which rails against modernity in the name of the eternal values of Neoclassicism relies for its continued popularity on being 'up to date', and on the 'currency' of the literary figures Pope was lampooning... This irony is not insignificant in an understanding of Pope's literary form, and of the way that the contradictions between the Neoclassicist ideal and the realities of the Modern literary market traverse it...

<sup>8</sup> Leonard R. N. Ashley, *Colley Cibber* (Boston: Twayne Publications, 1989) 108 passim.

<sup>9</sup> According to Ashley, the hostilities between the two started with the flop (in spite of its lewdness and slapstick) of John Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717) at Cibber's theatre, a play on which Pope and Arbuthnot are rumoured to have collaborated with Gay. Although Cibber himself had put on the play on, whilst performing in the opening night of the production which followed it at Drury Lane, he ad-libbed some lines ridiculing its failure. This seems to have infuriated Pope more even more than Gay. Whilst Gay merely went backstage to assault Cibber, and then (having received a punch on the nose for his troubles) largely forgot about the matter, Pope began a series of pamphlets accusing Cibber of Catholicism, Pro-Toryism and Jacobitism. Pope continued these attacks and Cibber, although not yet the chief Dunce, is far from absent from the first edition of the *Dunciad*. In his memoirs of 1740, Cibber finally responded to Pope's attacks, with a brief assault which by the standards of the etiquette of eighteenth-century literary controversy might seem miraculously restrained and lacking in venom. (One need only look ,for

However, Cibber, and everything he might be taken to stand for, would have been deeply antithetical to Pope's Neoclassicist sensibility.<sup>10</sup> When, however, we take a step back from the system of values by which Cibber appears as a Dunce, he is perhaps not quite such a negative figure. Even if Hirst himself (and his publicity machine which depends for the high prices that Hirst's work commands on defining his status as that of a 'great' post-Romantic artist) would probably resist the comparison, Cibber remains a rather enlightening cultural prototype for the 'other' side of the Hirstean persona...

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example at the horrendously personal exchange between Pope and Dennis, for contrast). Cibber wrote:

“*Satyr* shall have a thousand Readers where *Panegyric* has one. When I therefore find my Name at length in the Satyrical Works of our most celebrated living Author, I never look upon those Lines as Malice meant to me, (for he knows I never provok'd it) but Profit to himself: One of his Points must be, to have many Readers: He considers that my Face and Name are more known than those of many thousands of more consequence in the Kingdom: That therefore, right or wrong, a Lick at the *Laureat* will always be a sure Bait, *ad captandum vulgus*, to catch him little Readers: And that to gratify the Unlearned, by now and then interspersing those merry Sacrifices of an old Acquaintance to their Taste, is a piece of quite right Poetical Craft.” (Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Vols. 1 & 2*, [created from a reprint of the 1889 Robert W. Lowe edition; (New York: AMS Press) 1966], 1998, University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center, Available: <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Cib1Apo.html>>, 11 Feb 2006, pp.35-6.)

However, Cibber's riposte could be imagined to have hit Pope somewhere below the belt, in that noting the economic function of Pope's poetical strategy pulls from under Pope the literary and moral high ground which he claimed as the basis of his anti-modern and economically disinterested satirical position, and thus reveals that Pope is in fact more enmeshed in the modern literary market that he would like to admit. In this sense, Cibber's aside is in fact a rather astute piece of literary criticism. Pope, in any case, must have been infuriated, because in the 1742 edition of the *Dunciad*, the attacks on Cibber escalate. In reply, Cibber published a pamphlet entitled *A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope* (1742), in which there appears a humiliating anecdote about Pope's behaviour in a brothel. Cibber claims to have physically pulled the enamoured Pope from a syphilitic prostitute, thus saving him from the disease. The image was picked up in a number of satirical prints of the day, Pope's diminutive and hunch-backed frame being already something of an object of common ridicule – a form of ridicule, moreover, which lent itself easily to visual depiction. The next rewrite of the *Dunciad* casts Cibber as King of the Dunces.

<sup>10</sup> It could also, however, be argued, that Pope hated Cibber so much on the basis of their differences but on the basis of their similarities: that in fact, Cibber's unapologetic commercialism only brought to the surface the commercial basis of literature which Pope always wanted to keep hidden in his own work under the elegant and nostalgic veneer of a Neoclassical decorum which would give it the illusion of a timelessness and an autonomy from the modern economic sphere. In many ways, Pope's own entrepreneurialism in the print industry parallels Cibber's on the stage, and Cibber could be imagined not as an ideological opposite, but as an alter ego of Pope. In this sense, 'Hirst as Cibber' is also a matter of 'Hirst as Pope (the entrepreneur)'...

Cibber was, first of all, certainly not an insignificant figure in the cultural history of the eighteenth century, and perhaps in his way has been almost as influential in terms of the history of the stage as Pope was in the history of poetry.<sup>11</sup>

In Hirst and Cibber, we have two individuals (both ambitious, brash, egotistical) negotiating a transition across class boundaries, each through the manipulation of their controversial public personas, and each through a sort of parodic, clowning performance of self, even if each figure's clowning takes on a somewhat different form due to the difference in the class boundaries they are attempting to cross. (The eighteenth-century Cibber wished to move from the class of a 'theatrical shopkeeper' to that of the nobility, whilst in our own time Hirst might be seen as wanting to reclassify himself from working-class, northern origins to acceptance within London's – now high-bourgeois rather than aristocratic – cultural elite.) The parallel, however, is not merely one which stops with the public persona, or the strategies through which it is constructed; rather, it could be argued that this similarity in public persona (such as it is) is a marker of a more 'significant' similarity which runs through the strategies of artistic production which the two artists took up, and which marks the problems of a negotiation of productive artistic subjectivity through the commodified artwork, a problem not faced in the same way by those whose class, gender, sexual, ethnic, or just educational background<sup>12</sup> might locate as more able to identify themselves with the constituency which does not make (or has not needed to make) its art for profit.

[What needs to be added here, perhaps, is a few words teasing out a few of the differences between Hirst's and Cibber's clownings and class interpellations or impersonations; the juxtaposition between the Glover quote and 'vindaloo' would suggest these. The relation to money/commerce is rather differently constructed according to the different class positions;

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<sup>11</sup> Cibber, in fact, is central in finding theatrical forms which reflected the tastes, competences and values of the new 'middling sorts' who were rising in society. He plays an important transitional role between the highly stylised Restoration stage and the naturalism of Garrick. His comedies remained popular over a sustained period (and perhaps even have a lasting influence on more contemporary forms of 'sentimental' or bourgeois comedy such as the sit-com). In terms of the more 'serious' stage, Cibber's adaptation of Richard III, tweaked for the theatrical conventions and modes of viewing of the times, was the version performed throughout much of the nineteenth century. (Not only is this the version in which Garrick made his name, but in fact the Olivier film version still retains a number of lines which are Cibber's and not Shakespeare). Whilst there was a drive in printed versions of Shakespeare towards 'authenticity', the Cibberian-style adaptation remained what theatrical audiences came to see for a not inconsiderable period of time.

<sup>12</sup> Hirst's "E in A-level art" is famous, and Cibber's modest claim in his Apology about his education is thus: "I was sent to the Free-School of Grantham in Lincolnshire, where I staid till I got through it, from the lowest Form to the uppermost. And such Learning as

whilst Cibber's class impersonation is of a higher class (or might it actually be an impression of the very *aspiration* to that class?), Hirst's is distinctly an acting up of the 'low.' Gender performance also becomes something rather different: Cibber feminises or neuters himself in his adoption of the guise of the fop, whilst Hirst is overly macho...]

[Do I also need to make more of the complexity of the reasons why the display of Cibber's bourgeois individuality is fundamentally absurd for Glover. What is easy to miss, apart from the more obvious fact that Cibber pretends to be 'more' than he is, so is riding for a fall – in eighteenth century society it is as absurd that a shopkeeper be a public figure as it is that nowadays a working-class boy from Leeds be an important intellectual –, that there is an absurdity in the *visibility* of the bourgeois individual, who, as defined in the Spectator, is heard and not seen, is an anonymous, private observer of spectacle rather than a public figure of spectacle himself (as the Restoration aristocrat was.)]

**Cibberian and Hirstean Production:** If Hirst's production itself cannot quite be best understood in the mould of Romantic art – if, that is, the work's Romanticism is *not only* complicated or disavowed by its sleek surfaces and the citation of as many 'conceptual' as 'expressionist' artists, *but also*, moreover, is created within a logic of the factory or sweated production line, rather than standing as the unalienated work of the autonomous Romantic and expressive self – then perhaps Colley Cibber might be as good an alternative prototype for Hirst as an artistic self as any full-blown romantic Genius.

The two artists, however, can not simply be aligned through a shared attempt at production-line assembly art: Cibber seems not to have used such a strategy of the division of labour in his poetic process, even though a case might be made that there is already something in Cibber's productive mode that align it with Hirst's quasi-Fordist strategies: Pope had already imagined in the Peri Bathous that something like it would be the ultimate implication of the commercialisation of the theatre and poetry, a commercialisation with which Pope already associated Cibber in this poem, and of which he was later to make Cibber the central figure in the final Dunciad. This link might be understood to lie on the level of the more general problem of the technical (re)production of compelling affect, of the sublime in other words, a problem which in this project I am interested in tracing through various eighteenth-century examples. What seems to me fundamentally to align Hirst with Cibber on the level of production, put slightly more specifically, is that what Cibber and Hirst both turn out are (usually) well-crafted and -judged commodities, which draw on the codes, conventions, expectations and needs of their audiences and which both aim at and are remarkably apt at securing commercial success. In many ways Hirst is to the 'serious' intellectual concerns of 'conceptual' art what Cibber was to the

Restoration stage with his introduction of the genre of the ‘**sentimental comedy**,’ a popular, rather middle-brow form of bourgeois theatre, which played to contemporary audiences’ levels of competence, and mingled the titillation of the bawdy with the ‘safety’ of the family morality that was developing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – just that family morality which served as the lynchpin of the ‘private’ pole of that complex which Habermas (perhaps somewhat inaptly) named the ‘public sphere.’ These family values (rather alien to the earlier Restoration stage, which celebrated the violent, extreme and exceptional in sexuality and character<sup>13</sup>) answered the new needs of a social order thrown up by the growth of a ‘middling sort’, along with their increased status and power within society. (In this much at least, the sentimental comedy is thus very much in line with the agenda of Addison and Steele’s Spectator project.)

In this sense, the quasi-Fordist production of Hirst stands not so much on the footing of a surface similarity in obvious productive technique with Cibber (who operated no such ‘factory’ production), as rather a mark of the shared distance from a Romantic model of expression. This distance might move us to look at other kinds of similarities in their forms of production. Such similarities would seem to rest on the shared model of art as a business: Hirst and Cibber are both as much impresarios and showmen as they are artists.<sup>14</sup>

Probably the most obvious of the similarities that Cibber and Hirst share between their respective processes of production is their use of appropriation. If Hirst’s method is emphatically a matter of multiple borrowings (from Hamad Butt, from Bacon, from Koons, Manzoni, Beuys, from the popular-cultural Gothic, and from the vague field of the popular imagination constellated around the remains of the

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, James Grantham Turner, "'Illustrious Depravity' and the Erotic Sublime," The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Journal 2 (1989). and James Grantham Turner, "The Libertine Sublime: Love and Death in Restoration England," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 19 (1989).

<sup>14</sup> Cibber worked his way up to become manager and part-owner of the Drury Lane Theatre. Hirst’s career started with the curation of a number of exhibitions, and he was known for this ‘moving and shaking’ before he was known for the work that he had made. These shows started with the now highly mythicised Freeze (1989), and the Modern Medicine shows (1990?) with Carl Freeman (check spelling!). Hirst also curated *Some Went Mad and Some Ran Away* (1992) at the Serpentine. In more recent years, this entrepreneurial bent has come back to the fore, first with Hirst’s dalliance in the late 1990s in the restaurant business. Currently in the pipeline is a show of work from Hirst’s own collection at the Serpentine. This collection will be the base for the display at the gothic-style country house that Hirst has bought (details?) (proof, if any was ever needed, that Hirst’s fundamental trajectory of aspiration is that of an eighteenth-century would-be gentleman...). There are also rumours that Hirst is planning to open an exhibition space in London.

Romantic and the Baroque<sup>15</sup>), Cibber was also something of a 'cut-and-paste merchant,' a collagist somewhat before the fact. Cibber, in fact, like Hirst, was involved in a series of controversies about the 'originality' of his work, and was constantly accused, by Fielding and Pope in particular (though by no means exclusively), of having plagiarised other authors<sup>16</sup>. In fact, in her study of early-modern plagiarism, Laura Rosenthal goes as far as to claim that "No playwright has been remembered more vividly as a plagiarist than Colley Cibber."<sup>17</sup> Fielding, for example, in *The Author's Farce* (1730) has Cibber giving advice to his son: "The art of writing, boy, is the art of stealing old plays, by changing the name of the play, and new ones by changing the name of the author."<sup>18</sup> In the opening book of the *Dunciad* itself, Pope pictures Cibber sitting in a vast heap of books (the products of literary commerce), contemplating his past plagiarisms and planning his next. It is lines 127-134 that depict him most vividly as plagiarist:

Next, o'er his books his eyes began to roll,  
In pleasing memory of all he stole,  
How here he sipp'd, how there he plunder'd snug,  
And suck'd all o'er, like an industrious bug.

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, in *On the Way to Work*, not just Hirst's constant reference to these various sources, but also his repeated assertion that his basic method of work is not that of the painter inscribing a mark onto the blank canvas, the irruption of the inner world into the outer, but rather that act which he associates with collage, and also with the act of 'sculpture', where pre-existing elements are assembled or arranged.

<sup>16</sup> It's perhaps worth noting that even the more generous portrait of Cibber that we find in *The Spectator*, when Mr. Spectator visits the Drury Lane theatre, occurs mid-way through a discussion of the dangers of plagiarism and false-advertising, and seems to belong to a moment of controversy around the 'originality' of Cibber's rewrite of *El Cid*. Steele ends up suggesting that Ciber's play – which he finds, as a piece of theatre, "a moving Entertainment wrought out of a great and exemplary Virtue" – is not as insidious as other forms of commercial misrepresentation by "Traders in ordinary Commerce", admitting that in the case of the theatre "The Advantages of Action, Show, and Dress on these Occasions are allowable, because the Merit consists in being capable of imposing upon us to our Advantage and Entertainment." However the article remains ambivalent, expressing a certain anxiety about how Cibber's debt to the original is obscured or revealed through its showy staging (Mr. Spectator is "concerned to let the Town know what was his, and what foreign," and concludes of Cibber: "All that I was going to say about the Honesty of an Author in the Sale of his Ware, was that he ought to own all that he had borrowed from others, and lay in a clear light all that he gives his Spectators for their Money, with an Account of the first Manufacturers"). *Spectator* 546 (26 November 1712), in Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, *The Spectator, in four Volumes*, 14 April 2004 [electronic version of Henry Morley's 1891 edition], online e-text, Project Gutenberg, Available: <<http://www.gutenberg.net/1/2/0/3/12030/12030-h/12030-h.htm>>, May 2004. Vol 3.

<sup>17</sup> Laura J. Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 162.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in the *Biog. Dict. of Actors*, 230

Here lay poor Fletcher's half-eat scenes, and here  
 The frippery of crucified Molière;  
 There hapless Shakspeare, yet of Tibbald sore,  
 Wish'd he had blotted for himself before.

To compare the way Hirst has been imagined as a plagiarist, one need only look as far as the media coverage of the controversy around his Hymn (2000), which was an enlargement of an educational toy from Humbrol's Young Scientist Anatomy Set, designed by Norman Emms. The case between Hirst and Humbrol was settled out of court with Hirst making a large donation to children's charities.<sup>19</sup> There was a similar furore around the patterning of dots in Hirst's contribution to the colouring book produced by the Guardian and Modern Painters for Children's Art Day in July 2003. Computer graphics designer Robert Dixon claimed that the work was copied from an original by him.<sup>20</sup>

However, one perhaps has to be careful before drawing moral or aesthetic judgements about such forms of appropriation. The particular status that Hirst and Cibber share through their attempts to enter the establishment as 'outsiders,' especially in terms of class, along with the resulting explicitly commercial aims of their work, are hardly accidental to their vulnerability to accusations of plagiarism. Rosenthal notes how, in an age when an effortless, aristocratic ease of knowledge was valued above all, and in which there was growing unease both about the growth of the literary marketplace and about the professional forms of writing that were starting to flourish in it, those who departed from the normative figure of the "gentleman scholar who could transcend the marketplace, but nevertheless claim property in his writing"<sup>21</sup> were much more subject to accusations of plagiarism than their more socially and economically privileged counterparts. She cites, in particular, Edward Young's Conjectures on Original Composition (1759) (which incidentally itself [falsely] claims the originality of being the critical site where 'originality' was first valued as the single most important criterion for literary value.<sup>22</sup>). She finds this essay notable for the classed terms in which he contrasts the gentleman's "effortless"<sup>23</sup> originality with

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<sup>19</sup> See Raichel Le Goff, "Plagiarism Does Not Pay, or Does It?," ARTnewsroom.com 23 May 2000, archived at <http://dh.rhoshuu.com/press/2000legoff.html> visited 27/02/06.

<sup>20</sup> See "News: Can a Copycat Change Its Spots?," BRIFFA: Intellectual Property and Information Management, August 2003, Available: <http://www.briffa.com/news/art72hirst.htm>, 27 February 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, Playwrights and Plagiarists 5.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition, in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison, 2nd. ed. (London: 1759) 4.

<sup>23</sup> Rosenthal, Playwrights and Plagiarists 16.

the labour or industry<sup>24</sup> of imitation – which latter also becomes ‘common’<sup>25</sup> through repetition. Young furthermore attempts to draw the distinction between gentlemanly forms of imitation with ‘artistic purpose’<sup>26</sup> (which is not to be understood as plagiarism) and the more reprehensible imitation, which will be labelled plagiarism, performed by ‘hacks’ for commercial gain, and in order to win the approval of the crowd.<sup>27</sup> Cibber, who was unapologetic about the profit motive behind his writing and its subsequent populism,<sup>28</sup> and who furthermore flouted the conventional masculinity of his day (as we shall see later in this entry) with his on- and off-stage persona as a ‘fop’, was thus one of those singled out for attack as much because of his failure (or refusal) to live up to the ideal of the gentleman scholar as he was for the actual ‘unoriginality’ of his work.<sup>29</sup> Cibber’s

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<sup>24</sup> Young puts it thus: “An *Original* [...] rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it *grows*, it is not *made*: *Imitations* are often a sort of *Manufacture* wrought up by those *Mechanics, Art, and Labour*, out of pre-existent materials not their own.” Young, *Conjectures* 12. Cited in Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists* 16. (Young’s emphasis)

<sup>25</sup> Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists* 17.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists* 13.

<sup>27</sup> Young, *Conjectures* 13-14. Cited Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists* 17. As with so many of the authors I examine, Young’s own attempt at distinction between the commercial and non-commercial collapses. The metaphor he finds himself using to account for the need for originality remains an economic one – the debasement of the old by its becoming ‘Currency’, ‘tarnished’ in the marketplace means that new literature must come from the ‘Mint’ of the ‘Press’... Literature, even high, original literature, remains accountable only in terms of money.

<sup>28</sup> Ohne such example of his brazen commercialism is in his *Letter* to Pope, where Cibber admits that he “wrote more to be Fed than to be Famous.” Colley Cibber, *A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope, Etc.*, Augustan Reprint Society, 158 (Los Angeles: University of California, 1973) 9. When we meet Cibber in the *Spectator*, he is pictured as typically modest about the literary merit of his work, but waxing enthusiastic about the professional tricks of the trade that will thrill an audience, asserting that he is sure that Mr. Spectator would “allow the Play well-prepared for his Spectators, whatever it was for his Readers.” Steele, *Spectator* 546 (26 November 1712)

<sup>29</sup> Within the field of writing on contemporary art, the classic deconstruction of the opposition between ‘original’ and ‘imitation’ that in fact runs parallel in a number of ways to Rosenthal’s, and in which original/imitation turn out not simply to be opposing terms but a mutually sustaining pair, is in **Rosalind Krauss**’s seminal “The Originality of the Avant-garde.” In this essay, the repetition and imitation fundamental to what Krauss identifies as Benjamin’s ‘age of mechanical reproducibility’ (but in the terms of my essay may well seem to be less a matter of technical means than a cultural-economic logic) turn out to be at the heart of the ‘originality’ of the avant-garde, and remain its repressed mechanism even if it claims or attempts to escape its gravity. She finds this at the heart of Rodin’s assembly methods, and his abdication of responsibility for various factors to technical workshops, as well as the avant-garde’s self-referentiality, and its repeated returns to the trope of the grid. What is quite to the point of my own inquiry into the (ridiculous) ‘capitalist sublime’ is that we are dealing with the problem of the system and the (aesthetic) ‘event’ that emerges from it (or which commodified culture calculates should emerge from it), a problem that I understand to be at the heart of the eighteenth century’s embrace of Longinus, and of the paradox which drew them to him, of the technique for that which is beyond technique. [See also T.J. Clark’s *Farewell to an Idea*, where something of this problem of technique its beyond has become the logic of modernist art, and where Longinus makes a series

originality, after all, it could be claimed, stretched as far as inventing two highly influential literary forms: the first of these forms would be that of the 'sentimental comedy,' which ruled the eighteenth-century stage; the second, with his Apology, the form of the self-absorbed, confessional autobiography, a format we have to this day.<sup>30</sup> Cibber's only crime was perhaps to have been unoriginal in the 'wrong' way, and to have done it for the wrong reasons.

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of cameos which actually place him more central to the argument than he might at first appear...] Krauss takes the step (which Buchloh never seems to manage to make) of tracing back the problem past the temporal boundaries of the avant-garde to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to the confrontation with landscape and affect in the discourse on the 'picturesque', a move which takes us rapidly towards the territory of the sublime. In Krauss's account, the picturesque sets up a heavily coded system for the appreciation of landscape and for ordering its perception, which stand as the basis for the production of affects and aesthetic singularities. The 'original' is produced (circularly) through repetition or imitation. By taking this step back in time to the eighteenth century – to a point, she suggests, when the negative pole of the originality/imitation opposition has not yet so fully been repressed – the secret grounding of modernist and avant-garde art's key ideal of 'originality' on repetition and imitation is revealed. Krauss also goes on to argue that underway during the late twentieth century was the unbinding of this binary opposition, and that it had become possible in art (such as that in particular of Sherrie Levine) to ask: "what would it look like not to repress the copy?" (168) One could imagine Hirst's work to have emerged as part of this new relation to the pair of terms, and as a response to the generation of New-York artists who Krauss was championing. However, one would probably have to note that with Hirst it's not clear that we have a form simply of the bringing to light of a repressed term in the therapeutic resolution of a conflict. Instead, although the problem of the copy has risen to the surface, its appearance coexists with the continuation or retrenchment of the ideology of the original, to be seen in the appearance of the 'deep' 'originality' of Hirst as artist through all the (excessively) overdetermined modernist markers of angst and interiority which we find in the work. It would seem to me not so much the resolution of a 'repression', but rather a shift from a repressive defence to another form of defence, one involving a split in consciousness where something can be avowed and disavowed at once – a shift which is indicative of the role in general of irony in the ideological functioning of late twentieth-century culture and its 'repressive desublimations'...

Krauss's essay is also pertinent to Hirst in a way which demands further discussion. The avant-gardist and modernist strategies of repetition, modularity and the use of the grid (especially in the spot paintings, but also implicitly in the rectilinear geometry of the vitrines) are central to Hirst's own artistic method. Krauss notes that although modernist artists took up the grid as a ground zero which would let them escape the repetition involved in imitative representation or in drawing on a historical debt, in fact "the grid is extremely difficult to use in the service of invention. And thus when we examine the careers of those artists who have been most committed to the grid, we could say that from the time that they submit themselves to this structure their work virtually ceases to develop and becomes involved, instead, in repetition." This is because "structurally, logically, axiomatically, the grid *can only be repeated*." (160). Although Krauss is writing here about Albers, Mondrian, Rheinhardt and Martin, she might also appear somewhat prophetic in terms of Hirst's own career trajectory. Hirst is clearly to be located within the co-ordinates of this problem of originality (or its refusal) in the age of the culture industry, even if its space has been once again transformed by late-twentieth-century conditions, and even if Hirst's attempts at 'solutions' are somewhat different from those of the avant-gardists.

<sup>30</sup> Cibber, "Apology." Brian Glover, in his essay on Cibber's Apology, suggests that "what they [Cibber's readers] undoubtedly did find odd was Cibber's display of *himself*." Glover goes on to note that at the time, "the idea of autobiography was still largely taboo." Even 'Lives' of others written at the time were often likely to contain

The same worries about economic gain and motivation recur as prominent themes in the condemnations of Hirst as a plagiarist: the 'crime' is primarily that of the robbing of economic rather than aesthetic value, or at least, it is the transformation of the product of an aesthetic robbery into an economic value that is understood to be pernicious. Raichel Le Goff's article on the controversy surrounding Hirst's Hymn (2000) is typical here. The article repeatedly emphasises that what Hirst has copied has the mere status of a 'toy' (a mass-produced commodity, aimed at no greater beings than children) and goes on to bemoan the difference between the £2,000 payment that the designer of the toy, Norman Emms, received for his work, and the cost of Hirst's sculpture. The million-pound price tag of the sculpture is insistently repeated throughout the piece, and the question of aesthetic originality soon gives way to anxieties about the destabilisations of economic value that the piece seems to threaten. The article goes as far as to mention (unnamed) "sceptics" who "in fact have voiced doubts that Saatchi really parted with that much money for Hymn and maintain it is another ploy to inflate the art he collects." The article ends up with an alarming image of the absolute ungrounding of the economic value of art, where the very controversy which Saatchi and Hirst have stirred up about the value of the work, by making it the "world's most famous contemporary sculpture," has ended up "doubling or tripling" the value of the work itself and "escalated the market value not just of Hymn but of everything Hirst produces."<sup>31</sup>

Once we step away from or denaturalise such dualistic models of 'originality' set against 'plagiarism,' a Hirstean or Cibberian strategy of appropriation can be understood in terms of the options that are available in the negotiation of subjectivity. We have on the one side the role of 'plagiarist', a figure from the social-imaginary which is projected onto the sort of (illegitimate) appropriative strategies of Cibber and Hirst (but not on the legitimate ones of the gentleman scholar or his more recent counterparts). On the other hand, as an artist who cannot, will not, is not allowed, or cannot afford to take up the role of gentleman-scholar, other kinds of appropriative strategy become a matter both of building

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anything but personal information about the 'subject' of the life, and to write about *oneself* in this way was a display of such sheer egoism that it amounted to a "breach of propriety." Cibber's egoism, of course, knew no such bounds. Glover, "Nobility, Visibility and Publicity," 525.

<sup>31</sup> Le Goff, "Plagiarism," n.p. This figure of a meta-discursive or theoretical excess creating the practical effect of an economic or aesthetic excess in itself, and radically destabilising the grounds of value may remind one of the arguments about the similarities between discourses of national debt and the sublime put forward by Peter de Bolla. Perhaps this is also the point where we circle back to Mr. Spectator's (in this case Steele's) visit to Drury Lane, and his anxiety about Cibber's plagiarism: the anxiety here is one about what the spectators will get for their money, and the second half of the article drifts into a broader invective against shopkeepers' techniques for the misrepresentation of their goods... Steele, Spectator 546 (26 November 1712).

the artistic self, and the artistic product – of artistic subjectification and artistic production.

Hirst, then, also, as we will see in what follows here, consequently shares something with Cibber in the fashioning of his own public persona as part and parcel of the content and commercial success of the work presented to buying and viewing publics.



### **Cibberian foppery**

As an actor, Cibber specialised in playing 'fops', and his repeated attempts at 'serious' tragic roles tended to be derided by the critics<sup>32</sup>. In his comic roles, however, Cibber was one of the most popular actors of his day.

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<sup>32</sup> In 1734, the Grubb Street Journal, for example, wrote of his performance of the eponymous character of (his own adaptation of) Shakespeare's Richard III, "he foams, struts, and bellows with the voice and cadence of a watchman rather than a hero and a

Building on this fame as an actor, he became what can only be understood in the terms of our own time as a celebrity, and in fact, if we are to believe his harsher critics was as 'famous for being famous' as he was on the grounds of any skills that he had as an actor or a writer.<sup>33</sup> He became very much (as Hirst has become in our own time) a 'personality', of interest to the public as much for his off-stage character and actions as he was for his work on-stage in his professional life as an artist. In fact, Cibber seems to have deliberately blurred the distinction between the two, taking on – or actually writing for himself – parts not just that he could play well, but which were continuous with his off-stage persona.<sup>34</sup> Cibber

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prince.” Aaron Hill in *The Prompter* suggested he played Richard with “the distorted heavings of an unjointed caterpillar.” cited in *Dic. of Actors Biog.* p.217 Perhaps being trapped in a comic role, is something that Hirst and Cibber have in common. Like Cibber, Hirst seems to have difficulty fully taking on the tragic persona, and his constant recourse to ‘grand’, ‘heavy’ ‘serious’ themes ends up repeatedly interrupted by the necessity of taking on an ironic position towards this material. Glover notes the double-bind in which Cibber found himself, where his self-identification as having a form of aristocratic ‘public’ importance opened him up to ridicule as someone who attempts to represent himself as more larger than himself. His strategy was to engineer himself as a “ludicrous, parodic version of aristocratic character that is also a serious attempt to represent an ideal self” (536), both a courting of ridicule and also an attempt at transcendence of the status of the mean and ordinary with which he was stamped as a bourgeois individual. Such a strategy might be noted is the equivalent in terms of classed self-representation that stands at the basis of Pope’s judgements of the bathetic in the ‘*Peri Bathous*’; it is such a pretension (on the level of the trope) to ascend to the grand with base material which is the fundamental trope of the bathetic dullness of the commercial which Pope seeks to sink by revealing the disjunction at its heart.

<sup>33</sup> “He became one of England’s first celebrities, as we now understand the term (that is, he was famous less for accomplishing anything in particular, than for simply inhabiting his own character).” Glover, “Nobility, Visibility and Publicity,” 538.

<sup>34</sup> The *Biog. Dict of Actors* claims of Sir Novelty Fashion, the character he wrote for himself in his authorial debut, “perhaps it would be truer to say he wrote himself into the play, for it is difficult to distinguish Cibber the actor from the parts he played so well.” (p.216) [proper citation!]. Pope himself, in the *Dunciad* puts the following words into Cibber’s mouth: “Did on the stage my fops appear confined? / My life gave ampler lessons to mankind.” (Book1 ll.191-2). Lois Potter has argued that “Cibber’s particular situation contributed to the transformation of a familiar comic type (the fop), and [...] this in turn enabled him to manipulate his audience’s response to him as a human being.” Lois Potter, “Colley Cibber: The Fop as Hero,” *Augustan Worlds*, eds. J. C. Hilson, M. M. B. Jones and J. R. Watson (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978) 154. In this version, there is not simply a conjunction between the two, but Cibber used the continuity between on- and off-stage ‘roles’ in order to create himself a position in eighteenth-century society, a self-creation that has had, in its transformation of the stage, a productive effect in the reshaping of the stage role (who in Cibber’s hands became a much more sympathetic type) and also in general of real social roles. For more on the developments of the stage character of the fop in eighteenth-century

was larger than life, and cultivated (as Hirst has) a certain infamy, courting publicity with the controversy surrounding what can only be called a colourful life.<sup>35</sup> He has been accused of being, like his foppish characters, vain, self-obsessed, and something of a social climber<sup>36</sup>. But we can look at this another way: Cibber was a pioneer of the techniques of swimming in the growing print culture of the eighteenth-century, with its already-prodigious appetite for gossip and celebrity; Cibber fashioned his life into a sort of public art-form, a permanent act, in a way that foreshadows Warhol and his successors such as Hirst and Koons<sup>37</sup>, though nearly a quarter of a millennium before the fact.

It's worth noting in this regard that the fop – Cibber's favoured role both on- and off-stage, and the precursor of the swell and later the dandy – is very much a prototype of one kind of the modern artist, the prototype moreover, if you like, of the modern urban character itself (at least as it has become canonised in cultural theory), thrown as it is into the world of appearances, and forging itself in an auto-poetical act of the synthesis of these appearances. The name of the very character Cibber wrote for himself in the play with which he made his name as an author reverberates with connotations of this condition of modernity. This character is 'Sir Novelty Fashion', who appears in Love's Last Shift (1796). The very name of this character, with all its suggestion of what were to become such central themes of the culture of the next two and half centuries – fashion, appearance, the new, and [self-] 'fashioning,' and with the consciousness of rapidly passing time that these notions imply, emphasises the *modernity* at stake in Cibber's carving out for himself a role as celebrity. [Do I need to cite Nead / Ogborne, etc. on the later character of the swell as central to the experience of modernity as it developed?-- see also Lynda Nead re: the 'Swell' as the development from the fop of this emphatically 'modern' type, and the intensification of the anxieties around appearance, class and masculinity through the nineteenth centuries which surrounded such figures]

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transformations of ideas of masculinity, and the move towards a more 'sentimental' and 'sensitive', modern manliness, see Susan Staves, "A Few Kind Words for the Fop," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 22.3 (1982). Staves goes as far as to suggest that the eighteenth-century fop was in "the avant-garde of sex role change" (420) – a role change that we are perhaps still making our slow way through today...

<sup>35</sup> The Biog. Dict. of Actors notes that on the publication of his autobiography, the Apology one of Cibber's critics claimed "he had lived his life only so that he might apologise for it." (pp.228-9) - *ins proper ref*. Cibber was notorious for his gambling, and in his autobiography hardly kept his various affairs of the heart a private matter...

<sup>36</sup> Columbia Encyc., 6th Ed. p.578 characterises him as "an extremely unpopular, social climbing and insolent man." Cibber himself managed to rise from the rather socially dubious position of actor to a certain degree of acceptance in court circles (which he gained access to, due to his Poet Laureateship), and for a while to Richardson's literary circle, though, according to the entry in the Biog. Dict. of Actors, he was "too liberal in his views to remain acceptable for long." (p.235)

<sup>37</sup> *insert Hirst on Koons -- making the self into art - OTWTW p.60*

The fop on the eighteenth-century stage was a sort of a clownish character, whose comedy arose from his over-valuation of dress and appearance, his slavish imitation of the latest fashion<sup>38</sup>. In the criticism of the time, the on-stage fop was, moreover, understood to be a caricature of or satire on a type that could be met in society itself.<sup>39</sup> There was, of course, something understood to be effeminate, and not properly 'masculine,' about the fop.<sup>40</sup> This figure was taking on a new importance, however, during the eighteenth century, due to the commodification of fashion, with clothes in the latest styles being turned out more cheaply and in numbers, and with the rise of London's spectacular spaces of conspicuous consumption, display and leisure where these commodified fashions were being sold and worn.<sup>41</sup> In these circumstances, it was not just

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<sup>38</sup> how does one cite a dictionary?? it's p.22, 2nd. ed. Vol 6.: "Orig. 'fool' (L. *fatuus*), now 'fop, coxcomb'." The word 'coxcomb' in turn refers both to the hat a fool wore, but also to the plumage on a cockerel's head, and it implies a vain, strutting – but fundamentally idiotic and puny – display.

<sup>39</sup> For example, this is what Steele has to say about Cibber's own creation, Lord Foppington: "if *Lord Foppington* were not on the Stage, (*Cibber* acts the false Pretensions to a genteel Behaviour so very justly), he would have in the generality of Mankind more that would admire than deride him." For Steele not only is the fop a character that one might as likely meet in real life as on the stage, but his alarm is that whatever comedic effect the character achieves on stage, the fop is a character who will tend to gain acceptance and applause in a real life which overvalues appearance as much as Lord Foppington... Spectator 370 (5 May 1712). The 'fop' appears in the Spectator as many times in discussions of real society as s/he does in discussions of the stage. See also, for example, issues 16, 45, 150, 280, and 311.

<sup>40</sup> "As important as the fop's obsession with his appearance is what might be described as a new fop sensibility. Fops are delicate [...] [F]ops are in various ways effeminate [...] [T]hey are asexuals who like to spend their time with the ladies. As connoisseurs of fashion, they have interests in common with women." Staves, "Kind Words," 414. Staves goes on to note the anxieties expressed in the journalism of the time about the feminisation of society and the increasing 'foppishness' of men. She cites the Gentleman's Magazine 6 (1736): 378, where the journalist worries: "I would fain know, whether such Creatures, who, if they are not Women, are at least Hermaphrodites, in their very Souls ... Do such nice young Gentlemen, who dress and play with their Bodies, as with Puppets, promise their native Country either refined and active Statesmen, or hardy and intrepid Soldiers?" Cited in Staves, "Kind Words," 420.

<sup>41</sup> See Porter in Social History of London for the fall of the guilds and the reorganisation of working practices - 148?. See Ogborne for the development of the city during the C18th as a place of leisure, pleasure, display and shopping; ... Susan Staves notes the way that these anxieties about changes in masculinity embodied in the fop were also being negotiated around changes in class, and in the commoditisation of dress. She notes that from the seventeenth century onwards we see a steady decrease in the ornateness of male dress, and simultaneously there is a decline in the laws according to which certain forms of clothing were reserved exclusively for those with particular ranks. This created a situation in which "men who were rich and not aristocratic were able to purchase the elements of magnificence, thus devaluing them as tokens of exclusivity" (426). It is as clothes cease to lose this sure status as marker of class that

anxieties about the effect on masculinity of this wave of luxury goods<sup>42</sup> that might be seen to be expressed in the figure of the fop, but also about the way that commercial culture might be undermining the boundaries of class and the unmooring the appearance of social status from its reality. The fop was emphatically a figure who had overstepped the proper boundaries of his class.<sup>43</sup>

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the stage figure of the fop is transformed into its properly eighteenth-century form. Whilst earlier Restoration fops were wealthy aristocrats, as the century comes to a close they become increasingly frequently (as with Cibber's famous fops, and with Cibber himself) the vulgar *nouveau-riches*, with a mere pretension to *seem* aristocratic, figures around whom these anxieties about the unmooring of the relation between social appearances and social origins can be articulated. Staves lists a series of plays of the period whose plots revolve around foppish characters who cause problems because they appear to be of a class they in reality are not. The zenith of this kind of plot is perhaps found in Baker's *Tunbridge Walks* (1703), in which the fop character, Maiden, turns out to have been a milliner. The heroine of the play comments: "The greatest Beaus we have about Town, now are Milliners, Mercers, Lawyers Clerks, and 'tis such upstart fellows that ruine so many poor Tradesmen; for amongst 'em all you'll scarce find a Periwig that's paid for." (60; cited in Staves, 428.) Here, the relations between fears about the proper performance of gender (evident in the character's feminising name) and of class, and fears about the illusory nature of commodities become clear. The foundation of 'credit', as a function of the sureness of social appearance, has been undermined, mirroring the new insecurities in the economic conditions of capitalism itself.

<sup>42</sup> Do I perhaps need to cite a few eighteenth-century sources for the anxiety about commercialism and luxury robbing the nation of its vigorous masculinity? Who was Mandeville satirising? Who were his opponents? Is there something in Pope on this? See Solkin pp.49-52 on Dennis and Addison on the feminising power of commerce, in which he brings up the notion of the fop...

<sup>43</sup> There is a particularly striking example of this in *Spectator* 88 (11 June 1711). Here the question of the fop comes up in relation to servants: a correspondent complains of their poor behaviour, which he understands as caused by their high wages, plentiful leisure and freedom to change masters (i.e. by exactly the kinds of liberty created by a wage economy and a move away from the feudal system) which he claims marks out servants in Britain from those elsewhere in Europe. Steele agrees with this, emphasising in particular the kinds of disposable income that servants now have as a cause for their unruliness (the giving of 'Board-wages' rather than feeding servants, which wages they are then free to spend not only on food, but on whatever they like...). However, Steele associates this in particular with the growth of an endemic mimesis of their masters which he believes is caused by this disposable income which has been placed in the hands of the lower orders of society, and which means that they can dine or drink at the same places as their masters. Money has become something of a leveller; the servants see themselves as of the same 'kind' as their masters (if at a lesser degree), rather than as of a different sort altogether. Money (and Marx and Simmel agree that this is one of its fundamental properties) has collapsed the qualitative – in this case in terms of social difference – into a matter of quantity. In Steele's essay, the apotheosis of this destruction of class boundaries appears in the habit of servants, amongst their own company, to ironically address each other by the titles and names of their masters – a carnivalesque upturning of the social order which horrifies Steele... This image of chaos

Such a figure had (like Cibber) a pretension to an aristocracy, even if this was one which they could take on in the appearance of their dress only – or, rather, which they could only attempt to take on even in appearance, since the fop was inevitably betrayed as a figure of fun (as Cibber himself was) by the visibility of their overvaluation of appearance, an overvaluation which was imagined as quite alien to proper (aristocratic) decorum. Their state of over-dress would inevitably give them away as a merely vulgar image of the aristocrat.

In Rosenthal's account, the other thing that becomes clear is the way that with Cibber the figure of the fop is tightly bound to that of the 'hack', the writer for hire, and to the very commercial status of Cibber's art. The fop, in his staging of the self as spectacular visual object – and Cibber's staging of himself was nothing if not a matter of the commercial advantage he could ply from his own publicity – places himself within the world of commodities, and hence separates itself from an ideal exchanging and spectating masculine subjectivity which can stand aside from and master this world. The 'hack' was a similar figure; in fact both involved a kind of feminisation in the eighteenth-century imagination. Rosenthal points out that the word 'hack', stemming from 'hackney', referred literally to a horse for hire, but extended its meaning also to imply an act of prostitution, a connotation of the term which was central to its metaphoric uses in the eighteenth century but which is largely forgotten today; hence the term came centrally to refer to something noble and in itself valuable (such as literature) that was sullied through its involvement with commerce, or by its overly common usage or ownership.<sup>44</sup>

### **Hirstean coxcombery?**

With Hirst, we may seem to be a long way from powder, periwigs, lace trimmings, and an overly refined sensibility: his brash laddishness seems somewhat alien to the 'effeminate' fop, whose proper successor today might seem more likely to be a gender-bending, latter-day dandy such as David Bowie (or perhaps Julian Cope, who has even written a song titled after Cibber himself<sup>45</sup>). Nevertheless,

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perhaps, however, becomes even more chilling for Steele when he moves on to consider the way that this charade of identity intrudes in the world outside such clowning. Its insolence gets played out in cases of the lower classes' real and effective impersonations of their superiors. Here, the deceptive nature of clothing and appearance (now that it has become a commodity) reappears in the figure of a servant literally dressing in his masters clothes to play out amorous assignments in his master's role in a sort of class transvestism. Steele fears that the result is that "you have in Liveries, Beaux, Fops, and Coxcombs, in as high Perfection as among People that keep Equipages." Here we have the problem of the 'fop' explicitly articulating fears about class, and about the erasure of class boundaries.

<sup>44</sup> Rosenthal, *Playwrights and Plagiarists* 188.

<sup>45</sup> The song is Julian Cope's "Kolly Kibber's Birthday", on *World Shut Your Mouth*. Bowie and Cope are 'othered' not just in terms of class, but also in terms of sexuality. Another contemporary 'fop' might be boxer Chris Eubank, with his parodic performance

Hirst's public persona is very much a performance as exaggerated and staged as Cibber's, if now inverted as of a sort of hyper-masculinity imagined in terms of a hyper-proletarianism.

If one were to draw a genealogy of the descendents of the fop, one would have to include most youth subcultures from the 'teddy boys' onwards, with their appropriations and exaggerations of elite culture. These exaggerations, like Hirst's do not always take the obvious form of a gender (or even class) transvestism, and one is perhaps led more to the figure of the 'coxcomb' in its original sense of the cockerel's strutting exhibitionism (the 'cock's comb' is the crest on its head). In this sense, the contemporary fop would be that bogeyman of the contemporary media, the 'chav', with his predilection for designer clothes and conspicuous consumption. Although hardly known as a dresser, Hirst's own strutting and hyperbolic performance of self – his cockiness, if you like – might well be imagined in terms of this spectacular and 'vulgar' stepping out of his proper position.

It is perhaps worth noting that in any case, the figure of the fop makes clear something problematic about this strategy as a way of claiming the hegemonic position of that which is defined by our culture as a fully 'masculine' subjectivity, in that in the very stepping into the visual of which such display consists, there is a turning of the self into an spectacular object, which to an extent bars the subject from a full participation in an ideal masculinity which, since the Spectator papers at the very least has involved taking up the position of a purely invisible, private, judging, unsurveyed subject – the position of Mr. Spectator who claims to "live in the World, rather as a Spectator of Mankind, than as one of the Species," and who characterizes himself through his circumspect silence during his education, and, in spite of his ubiquity within the scenes of London life, through his preservation of anonymity within the crowd<sup>46</sup>. In such a logic, the cockerel's exaggerated display only makes him ridiculous: the more he displays the credentials of his potency, the more ineffectual or less 'manly' he appears.

If read as a form of coxcombic performance<sup>47</sup>, the decorative, highly ornamental and showily spectacular element of Hirst's work becomes increasingly transparent, along with his ambiguous feelings towards discussing his work in

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of a refined aristocratic gentleman. Rather than the sexual otherness of Bowie, Eubank is marked as 'other' in British society by his racial origins, by his birth in Jamaica, as well as by having spent periods of his teenage years sleeping rough.

<sup>46</sup> Addison, Spectator 1 (1 March 1711), in Addison and Steele, "Spectator."

<sup>47</sup> The word 'performance' itself might remind us of Nicholas Roeg's 1970 film of the name, in which we see the two polar legacies of the fop at that moment in the 1960s of class transformation in Britain are brought together, contrasting Jagger's androgynous rock-star with James Fox's dandy but hyper-masculine gangster. Both performances of gender, of course, turn out in the film to be fragile constructions.

terms of design, theatre, window dressing and even flower-arrangement. [need to include ref.] Hirst thus moves away from the ideal subjectivity of the post-Spectator artist, whose work resists such showiness.

The problem here, however, has been less to identify Cibber as an exact equivalent for Hirst (or even to validate his artistic strategy as a form of working-class ‘transgression’; such carnivalesque transgressions in any case may well leave the order of things fundamentally untouched, or may even serve to reinforce their normalcy. Nor is it my aim –which would be distinctly problematic – to propose Hirst as an artist who in some sense escapes construction in terms of an orthodox masculinity, to discover in him a validating moment of ‘femininity’.) My aim has rather been to use Cibber to clarify something of the structure of Hirst as an artistic subject. It seems to me that this problem of being out of place, of acting the coxcomb, coincides with my discussion above of Hirst’s and Cibber’s strategies of ‘plagiarism’ in that both involve the results of Hirst’s and Cibber’s a priori exclusion from a hegemonic speaking position, and in both cases it is a strategy of (mis-)appropriation which ensues.<sup>48</sup>

What Hirst and Cibber also seem to share as a result of their social positions is a condition of irony which they cannot but inhabit, and which condemns them to be unable either simply to say what they mean, or to mean what they say; Hirst and Cibber can never quite coincide with themselves. The dilemma of the resulting self-ironisation is perhaps particularly clear in the peculiar contradictions at work in Cibber’s attempts to represent himself in his autobiography. As the ‘object’ of the book’s attention, Cibber presents himself to the reader as absurd, vain, foolish and of rather mediocre talents, a man whose taste is suspect, whose

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<sup>48</sup> As Rosenthal puts it, “the position of the fop converges with the position of the plagiarist, for the fop does not inhabit the masculine position of ownership, but takes the social world as text from which to borrow. He incessantly copies his ‘betters’.” Rosenthal, Playwrights and Plagiarists 198. It is this dubious misprision that repeatedly draws the wrath of Addison and Steele onto the fop, or ‘pretty fellow’. This is perhaps most clear in Steele’s discussion of the difference between the ease and naturalness of Seutonium, the perfect, gentlemanly “man of conversation,” whose good judgment is an indwelling and ‘original’ property, and Jack Dimple, who is merely his imitation: “An imitation of this agreeable being, is made by that animal we call a Pretty Fellow, who being just able to find out that what makes Sophronius acceptable, is a natural behaviour, in order to the same reputation, makes his own an artificial one. Jack Dimple is his perfect mimic, whereby he is of course the most unlike him of all living men.” The foppish Dimple is then depicted gazing narcissistically in a mirror, attempting to perfect his appearance of nonchalance. Steele, Tatler 21 (26-8 May 1709). We find an almost identical definition in Spectator 280 (21 Jan 1712) where Steele differentiates the fop from the agreeable man: “What we call an agreeable Man, is he who is endowed with the 1 natural Bent to do acceptable things from a Delight he takes in them meerly as such; and the Affectation of that Character is what constitutes a Fop.” (Addison and Steele, "Spectator." Vol 2)

morals are questionable and whose intelligence is distinctly limited; and yet as the authorial subject, this is done with a wink: as the knowing subject of the book (rather than its known object) Cibber presents himself as a man of taste and judgement, whose opinions of the times, events and characters he describes we are expected to trust, and who can sit in philosophical judgement over the life of the creature he studies, even if, in fact, we are still to take these two beings as one and the same.<sup>49</sup>

Hirst's own inhabiting of such an ironic condition is made clear in his pronouncement: "I try to say something and not say it at the same time," and in his work in the constant tension between being drawn towards the most 'sublime', serious and artistically respectable themes, and contrariwise a seeming need to constantly undermine this sublimity with elements of the absurd, the ridiculous or the base. Another of his much-repeated phrases, in which he identifies the central theme of his work as that of "life and death and all that stuff" marks out this distance from itself in the way it belies and parodies its own seriousness in the very gesture that it attempts to claim it. In his work, we find the themes of the sublime played out as campily and as exaggeratedly as Cibber's mimesis of aristocracy.

Hirst and Cibber, then, are destined to fail to properly play the role of Longinus's ideal orator, who successfully coincides with the speaking self he carves out for himself through the words he speaks. (A reading could be made of Longinus's essay which stresses the way that this is the concern in each of Longinus's discussions of each trope he discusses. The problem might be posed: how are we to use the trope, twisting language out of shape to mark the force of our presence in it, without revealing this presence as illusory, since our presence is inscribed only through the technical means of oratory? How are we to avoid being like the 'drunken orator' who fails to materialise at all, and leaves his or her audience cold?<sup>50</sup>)

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<sup>49</sup> For further discussion of this dilemma in Cibber's autobiography, see Glover, "Nobility, Visibility and Publicity."

<sup>50</sup> For a parallel reading, if not of Longinus himself, then of the eighteenth century's concern with him, see Chapter 6 of de Bolla's *The Discourse of the Sublime*, entitled "Of the Gesture of the Orator: The Speaking Subject." (146-182) In this chapter, de Bolla traces the influence of Longinus in the concern with the maintenance of the coincidence of speaker and the spoken in eighteenth-century manuals on the techniques of elocution. Such elocution, repeat the manuals, often in direct paraphrase of Longinus, is what allows the self-present orator to overwhelm, ravish and transport his [*sic.*] audience. Incorrect locution, of course, will create the sinking effect of bathos. De Bolla's example of the figure who for the eighteenth century managed most successfully to make himself coincide with the position of the Sublime Orator was William Pitt, with "a voice so sublime, so powerful it causes distant thrones to shudder." Even this, however, was a voice "whose reputation went so far in front of him that the real voice, the real William Pitt had trouble keeping up with the public persona." (143)

[actually, it's a bit more complex than this in Longinus... Note the ambiguity of the drunken orator, who returns as an ideal figure -- the ambiguity of ekstasis which is both a kind of a loss and an assertion of mastery, and so on. I'll have to write more on this, and then return to Hirst / Cibber... For now, the above will have to stand as a kind of place-holder, though... This perhaps also needs to be inflected in terms of the way it is picked up in the C18th and in the present.]

### **Mr. Cibber and Mr. Spectator**

A way of pulling the themes I've been dealing with here together – in particular in relation to the spectre of Longinus who has arisen in this context – might be to look again at the appearance Cibber makes in Spectator 546, when Mr. Spectator (aka. Steele in this case) visits Drury Lane to see the rehearsals of Cibber's adaptation of El Cid.

This takes place within the context of Steele's attack on commercial practices of illusion – of the growing theatricality of commerce, if you like – which increasingly obscures the 'true' value of objects for sale under the spectacle of their appearance in a world of visual display and desire. A visit to the realm of Cibberian theatre, in this context, thus situates it as just such a dangerous practice of visual display – articulating just the kind of anxiety around appearance, commerce and value which is at stake in the figures of the fop and the hack and the plagiarist.

Steele has come to judge the play and its originality, but finds this difficult to do; in fact as Steele depicts Cibber (in a portrait which is both anxious about his production of spectacle, but also perhaps curiously affectionate) as, unlike Steele himself, largely unconcerned about his work's literary merit, but enthusing at length about the theatrical, visual techniques of acting and staging which will make the play, if not a literary masterpiece, then at least something "well-prepared for his Spectators." Steele goes on, with some ambivalence to describe Cibber's account of his craft:

He added very many Particulars not uncurious concerning the manner of taking an Audience, and laying wait not only for their superficial Applause, but also for insinuating into their Affections and Passions, by the artful Management of the Look, Voice, and Gesture of the Speaker.

Just as with the account of the actions of the shopkeepers that Steele goes on to describe, there is here an intimation of robbery and deception: Cibber is involved in 'taking' and audience, 'lying in wait' for them, 'insinuating' his way into their affections. But all this is 'not uncurious'; and Steele seems to be suggesting that the effect the on audience is not just 'superficial,' but reaches deeper into their feelings and desires (their 'Affections and Passions') in a way that gives the piece a certain value after all; the work of theatre, unlike that of sharp shop assistants, serves to enrich its audience as well as Cibber himself. Finally, then, in spite of his suspicion of the visual, Steele seems compelled to differentiate

Cibber's stage from the world of commerce outside it: he "could not but consent that the Heroick Daughter appeared in the Rehearsal a moving Entertainment wrought out of a great and exemplary Virtue."

(This ambivalence perhaps marks something significant about Steele's own relation to the world of commerce and culture which is manifest even in the title of the journal, and in the notion of spectatorship; on the one hand there is a distrust of the illusion which haunts the new urban world of spectacle, and on the other hand there is a kind of embrace of it, in guises such as Cibber's commercial theatre. The Spectator, as 'whig ideology', represents neither simply a reaction against the new world of commerce, nor a simple celebration of its forces, but an attempt at compromise between new and old values, and the search for a way to manage and order the potentially dangerous, but also potentially enriching, forces of early-modern capitalism...)

In fact, for the student of the Longinian sublime, some of the tropes with which Steele (or is it Cibber himself?) describes the theatrical art might remind one of the passage which so fascinated the eighteenth century, close to the start of the Peri Hupsous, in which Longinus discusses the power of the sublime orator over his audience; his power to 'ravish' an audience has now become his 'lying in wait' for an audience; his power to 'take' them; and to 'insinuate' himself into their affections and passions... In fact, the result is precisely a Longinian overpowering of the spectator's (and Mr. Spectator's) powers of reason: if Steele has come to 'properly' judge the play, he finds himself unable to do so: "I found the House so partial to one of their own Fraternity, that they gave every thing which was said such Grace, Emphasis, and Force in their Action, that it was no easy matter to make any Judgment of the Performance." Steele here is perhaps perched between artistic modes: if he comes to judge the poetics of a finely crafted object, he finds himself instead subjected to a theatre which aims at an aesthetics of the affects that it can deliver to an audience. He finds himself carried away before a barrage of the "Passions of Terrour and Compassion," and of the "artful" deployment of the shocks of the "surprising." These leave him (if we believe the evidence of his ambivalence towards, and rather contradictory conclusion as to the value of, the work) in a state of some disarray.

Cibber's display of the theatrical technics of the "artful Management of the Look, Voice, and Gesture of the Speaker" might remind one of nothing less than the handbooks of oratory which de Bolla discusses in The Discourse of the Sublime as amounting to an 'elocutionary movement' somewhat later in the century<sup>51</sup> We might have in this passage evidence of the way that similar

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<sup>51</sup> Peter De Bolla, The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 146-82. See esp. p.149, where de Bolla discusses Sherridan's formula for the orator's Longinian 'seduction' of his audience

discourses of the sublime were in use in the everyday discourses of direction and pedagogy in the theatrical arts – of the way that already in 1711 there were attempts to use the techniques of the Longinian sublime (its techniques for that which is beyond technique) in a commercialising culture, and of its mobilisation for the sake of popular (if not exactly ‘artistic’) success – however uncertain the effects of this “sublimity” might have been, and however partial their transport of the rather befuddled and skeptical Mr. Spectator... If the sublime was involved in a break-away from Neoclassical aesthetics, this was perhaps as much in the name of a populist and commercial aesthetic, the aesthetic that will lead to the Gothic novel and the Panorama, as it was in the name of a high and Romantic art...<sup>52</sup>

It is, of course, precisely this attempt to mechanically manufacture the sublime which so alarms Pope.<sup>53</sup>

### The Cibberian Sublime

“prose on stilts” - Dunciad, 1.190

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with its emphasis on functioning through the epiphenomena of speech that de Bolla almost sets out almost precisely in the terms that Steele uses for those that Cibber also concentrates on: “gesture, body movement and tone of voice.” (147)

<sup>52</sup> There is, in any case (which must be explored elsewhere) a certain amount of evidence to suggest that the Romantic serves as an elaboration on or response to this commercial aesthetic. See for example Mishra on the ‘Gothic fragment’ as providing a ‘scene’ which structures Wordsworth’s Prelude, and also William Galperin’s suggestion that the urban visual culture of the Panorama and its variants also provides a model for the Wordsworthian sublime. See Vijay Mishra, The Gothic Sublime, S.U.N.Y. Series on the Sublime (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). and William H. Galperin, The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> In the Dunciad, we see, for example, his dismay at what he understands to be the over-doing of sound effects in the contemporary theatre, which he suggests are brought in to make up for lack of literary merit:

'Now turn to different sports (the goddess cries),  
And learn, my sons, the wondrous power of noise.  
To move, to raise, to ravish every heart,  
With Shakspeare's nature, or with Jonson's art,  
Let others aim: 'tis yours to shake the soul  
With thunder rumbling from the mustard bowl  
With horns and trumpets now to madness swell,  
Now sink in sorrows with a tolling bell;  
Such happy arts attention can command,  
When fancy flags, and sense is at a stand. (2.221-30)

The addition of thunder, bells, trumpets were frequent additions on the stage at the time. In a note, Pope associates the creation of the sound effect of thunder using a mustard-grinding bowl with Dennis (‘Sir Tremendous Longinus’ himself...)

Cibber's 'sentimental' theatre, then, courting emotional intensities as it does, even if it is primarily remembered as a comical rather than tragic theatre, always has the pretension to something of the effect of tragedy, a pretension that perhaps serves always as a limit towards which it tends but which it can never reach (for reasons not unconnected with Cibber's self-construction as a 'fop', and not unconnected with the mercantile quality of his work) rather than as a reality<sup>54</sup>. Just as later in the century Reynolds was always to want to understand himself as a history painter, but in fact had to centre his art on the portrait painting that was in demand, Cibber repeatedly attempts tragedy, in spite of his main success being in comedies. His was a stage which, in its heightened sentimentality always aspired to "the sublime and pathetic" (as the catch-phrase that would already have started to come into vogue puts it), and even the comedies themselves were marked by the long, emotional scenes of reconciliation that usually concluded them.

This turn to pathos is very much in keeping with the growth of new audiences for the arts, and changes in the ways that artistic value is negotiated, as Joan DeJean describes it in her work on the rise of the cult of sentimentality in seventeenth-century France; a change which locates the sublime at the heart of the transformation from art judged according to poetics to art judged according to the aesthetic.

**aside: The Negative Shaftesburian Sublime:** The involvement of the notion of the 'sublime' with this rise in fact gave it at the start of the eighteenth century a not unambiguous status as a term. As Theodore Wood finds in his expansive survey of the uses of the term, it is a word that pops up surprisingly often at this point in derogatory or satirical, rather than positive and affirmatory usage.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps a prime extended example of this antipathy towards the sublime (though not one Wood brings up) is in Shaftesbury's Characteristicks. Shaftesbury is more often known in the history of the sublime for his promotion of an 'enthusiastic' mode<sup>56</sup> that was closely integrated into discussions of the sublime<sup>57</sup>, and for his coining

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<sup>54</sup> When Cibber's sentimentality was played too straight, it soon appeared as ridiculous as it was. Dennis wrote of Cibber's attempt at tragedy in Perolla and Izadora (1705) that it was "full of Nonsense and False *English* ... stiff, awkward, affected Stuff, and Lines that make as hideous Noise, as if they were compos'd in an Itinerant Wheel-Barrow." Cited in Big. Dict. of Actors, 220

<sup>55</sup> Theodore Edmundson Brown Wood, The Word 'Sublime' and Its Context 1650-1760, (De Proprietatibus Litterarum. Series Maior. No. 7.) (Mouton: The Hague, Paris, 1972).  
(add page number)

<sup>56</sup> "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" in Anthony Ashley Cooper (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury), Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Press, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> especially, for example, in Addison's "Pleasures of the Imagination" papers, where he draws liberally on Shaftesburian aesthetics for his conception of the 'great' as well as for his conception of the beautiful.

of the phrase 'sublime and beautiful' as a high form of praise.<sup>58</sup> However, in the *Characteristicks* the notion of the sublime also appears, without its association with beauty, in a negative sense.

Shaftesbury brings the term up in his "Advice to an Author," in which he gives an account of the birth of comedy and its historical development which is positively Hegelian in its 'dialectic' series of upheavals. For Shaftesbury, the 'sublime' stands at the start of this history; it is a basically primitive, childish mode of art:

'Tis easy to imagine, that amidst the several Styles and Manners of Discourse or Writing, the easiest attain'd, and earliest practis'd, was the *Miraculous*, the *Pompous*, or what we generally call the SUBLIME. *Astonishment* is of all other Passions the easiest rais'd in raw and unexperienc'd Mankind. Children in their earliest Infancy are entertain'd in this manner: And the known way of pleasing such as these, is to make 'em wonder, and lead the way for 'em in this Passion, by a feign'd surprize at the miraculous Objects we set before 'em. The best Musick of *Barbarians* is hideous and astonishing Sounds. And the fine Sights of *Indians* are enormous Figures, various odd and glaring Colours, and whatever of that sort is amazingly beheld, with a kind of Horror and Consternation.<sup>59</sup>

This primitive poetry is to give way to Homer, the 'Father-Poet', "who depos'd that spurious Race, and gave rise to a legitimate and genuine Kind" and who "retain'd only what was decent of the *figurative* or *metaphorick* Style," in order to bring it to order. Poetry retains, however the danger of degenerating into primitive (and false) sublimity, and its against these degenerations which Shaftesbury sees satire as developing in order to guard.<sup>60</sup> Comedy itself, however, falls into excess, and risks degenerating into viciousness and bawdiness, and so required the censorship of the Athenian stage, which appears here not as a matter of foreign tyranny, but rather as a matter of Athens' autonomous self-control, and their forging of a mature, democratic society in which order, sensibility and taste reign supreme<sup>61</sup>... Shaftesbury is suggesting that

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<sup>58</sup> See for example, Paddy Bullard, "The Meaning of the 'Sublime and Beautiful': Shaftesburian Contexts and Rhetorical Issues in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*," *Review of English Studies* 56.224 (2005). Bullard argues that Burke's famous essay is written as an invective against such Shaftesburian aesthetics and in order to separate sublimity as a special aesthetic order aside from beauty.

<sup>59</sup> Cooper (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks* 149.

<sup>60</sup> "Twas of admirable use to explode the false Sublime of early Poets, and such as in its own Age were on every occasion ready to relapse into that vicious Manner. The good Tragedians themselves cou'd hardly escape its Lashes. The pompous Orators were its never-failing Subjects. Every thing which might be imposing, by a false Gravity or Solemnity, was forc'd to endure the Trial of this Touchstone." Cooper (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks* 152.

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there is more at stake in his history of poetic and oratorical style than style itself: it is a matter of styles of formation of the self, of society, and, as he goes on to argue, of philosophical thought itself.

Throughout all this, it's been hard to forget that this is set out in the form of 'advice' to a modern author; these modes have, as well as a genetic or historical reality, a latent presence in the here and now; the structure that Shaftesbury is describing under the guise of a diachronic unfolding is in fact a synchronic structure of the possibilities of poetry, oratory and philosophy in the present. When he does turn towards the modern, he (predictably) understands it as a time which has slipped, or is at least on the brink of slipping, into an advanced state of degeneration: tastes are too blunted for the 'simple' style, and audiences too inattentive and intellectually sluggish for the 'methodical.' (which further threatens to degenerate into the pedantic and absurd). Although Shaftesbury does not explicitly state this, we might surmise that it is the reversion to the degenerate false 'sublime' mode which causes this: his solution to the malaise of modern times, and his advice as to the best course for a modern poet, is the taking up the deflationary mode of early Greek comedy in order to puncture the overblown, pedantic, pretentious and ridiculous which plagues modern culture.

It's also this turn in Cibber to sentimental pathos – a turn which fore-echoes, perhaps, a kind of recurrent alliance of kitsch and a sentimental sublime (**which I shall discuss elsewhere<sup>62</sup>**) – which drew on him the wrath of Henry Fielding, and whose acid wit was unleashed at its utmost in response to the Apology in Fielding's Champion papers of 22 and 29 April 1740. In these, Fielding took (and ran with) Pope's satirical reversal of the hupsous into bathous. He ironically proposes that Cibber is "most absolute Master" of the English language, "for surely he must be absolute Master of that whose Laws he can trample under Feet, and which he can use as he pleases."<sup>63</sup> The kind of master he is a master of the 'profound': his work, writes Fielding: "*abounds with many flowers of that exquisitely sweet silver Stile called the Profound, and with the Perfections purely the Gifts of Genius, not to be imitated by Art or Labour.*" (292)

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<sup>62</sup> See, however, especially Celeste Olalquiaga, The Artificial Kingdom: A Treasury of the Kitsch Experience (London: Bloomsbury, 1999). If Hirst's preserved animals draw on a tradition of the sentimental sublime, then so, certainly, does Olalquiaga's Rodney, a hermit crab encapsulated in a synthetic resin paperweight. If Cibber really can be placed within a valid history of the kitschy sublime, then it is perhaps somewhat symbolic that not only did he die the year that Burke published his Inquiry, but also lived in the house in Strawberry Hill which was to be purchased by Walpole, the inventor of the Gothic novel, as the site for his pioneering Gothic mansion...

<sup>63</sup> Henry Fielding, Contributions to the Champion and Related Writings, ed. W. B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) 292.

Thus emphasising Cibber's 'Longinian' discard of the proper techniques, rules or grammars of (good) writing, Fielding unleashes an avalanche of examples of Cibber's grammatical, stylistic and semantic failures. Parodying Longinus's praise of Homer ("he has in the words *hypek thanatio*, forced into union, by a kind of unnatural compulsion, prepositions not usually compounded. He has thus tortured his line into the similitude of the impending calamity" - [Ch10 No.6 - Roberts Translation]), Fielding suggests that "our great *Master* hath tortured" his language, in an assertion of his "absolute Power" over it (293).

Expanding his Longinian satire on Cibber the next week, Fielding carries on:

"Now in all these Instances, tho' a Boldness of Expression is made use of, which none but great Masters dare attempt [...] yet we may with some little Difficulty without the least help of Grammar, have a guess at his Meaning. But there are other parts of his Work so very sublime, that Grammar offers you its Aid in vain; the following Stile carries a βίαν ἀμύχρον [see Peri Hupsous, 1.4: "irresistible power"], according to *Longinus*, along with it, and *absolutely overpowers* the Reader [...] so can our Author; this Stile comes upon you, says the former Critic like a *Thunderbolt*, or to use a Word which may give a more familiar Idea to my Reader, like a *Blunderbuss*, and carries all before it."

This could be understood simply as an attack on Cibber's rather poor or sloppy writing technique. The book, as Fielding so persuasively demonstrates, is riddled with linguistic and semantic absurdities, and Cibber himself in a number of places is the first to admit a certain limit to his literary powers (in the *Apology*, for example, when discussing Pope's attack on him he writes that "as a little bad Poetry is the greatest Crime he lays to my charge, I am willing to subscribe to his opinion of it."<sup>64</sup>) However, I think there is something significant here as well, in terms of the *kind* of writing Cibber produces, and what it aims at. Cibber's style is gushing and unrestrained, a matter of a barrage of undisciplined effects, just as a Neoclassicist might have feared that the sentimental stage might become; it is aimed at pathos, and at 'nervous' energies. Thus Fielding's critique is not just that the work has 'errors' in it, but these errors involve a certain chaotic, flight of language which aims at a heightening of affect: "his Genius (to speak in our Author's Stile) ascends into the elevated and nervously pompous Elements of the Sublime" where "the Ladder of Grammar offers itself in vain to the Feet of the Reader's Understanding."

This is what Fielding fears and loathes as "The ultra-sublime or Cibberian style"

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<sup>64</sup> Cibber, "Apology." 36

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