Introduction
The Politics of Gender in Early American Theater

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The Relevance of Gender for Studying Early American Theater

The study of early American theater has garnered an increased interest in the last years. Looking into how the stage helped to foster (or rebuke) republican fervor, how American dramatists gradually moved from emulating British drama towards "Americanizing" theatrical content and form, how the aesthetics of dramas interlinked with colonial politics, and how the public theatrical sphere gained momentum for discussing matters of national urgency, scholars have recognized the centrality of theater and dramatic form to the cultural politics of the revolutionary and early national periods in particular. Given this refreshing boost of interest, it is surprising that there has been so little attention spared for gender issues. While numerous articles and book chapters address such issues from various critical perspectives, book-length studies on gender in the early American theater are still a scarcity.[1] This edited collection evolved from a research project addressing exactly this lacuna. Our original project title was "Gender and Comedy in the Age of the American Revolution," suggesting a strong—but not exclusive—focus on forgotten female playwrights and their frequent use of comic genres to address their concerns.[2] In the course of the project, funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) from 2015 to 2018 and situated at the University of Salzburg, Austria, we gradually moved from rebuilding an archive of female dramatists and plays to asking

1 A notable exception is Sarah Chinn's *Spectacular Men: Race, Gender, and Nation on the Early American Stage.* However, this book differs from our collection both in terms of its exclusive historical focus on the early Republic and in terms of its concern with masculinity specifically.

2 See Poole, "Interview Ingrid Ladner;" Poole, "'Remembering the Ladies.'"

broader questions about the politics of gender in the American theater of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The essays collected here are based on two conferences, both held in Salzburg, organized by the project's team (Verena Holztrattner, Leopold Lippert, Ralph Poole, and Michael Streif) in cooperation with the section "Art Polemics—Polemic Art" of the joint focus "Science and Art" of the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg and the Mozarteum University Salzburg: "The Politics and Polemics of Gender in Early American Theater" (2016) and "Women Frontstage: Female Polemics and the American Revolution" (2018; this conference also served as the 12th meeting of the EAAS [European Association for American Studies] European Study Group of 19th Century American Literature). The scope of these essays both give evidence to our original tighter focus and to the expansion the project underwent, not least through the fabulous and critical papers given at these conferences.

While taking race, class, sexuality, and religion amongst other intersectionalities in account, this book underscores gender as a crucial category for a revised understanding of early American theater. Throughout the eighteenth century and until the early nineteenth century, i.e. in what is usually considered the long eighteenth century, North American settler colonists have struggled to negotiate the increasing burden of colonial (especially British) rule and the equally increasing wish to found a republic based on a democratic creed. The ways in which this negotiation reverberates in emerging American theater practice prove an especially fruitful ground to investigate how politicized aesthetics operate. Stressing the precarious and provisional character of early American actualities and the dialogical intercourse between arts and politics, Gary A. Richardson is one of the few scholars to particularly accentuate the function of gender in this assemblage of cultural transactions in the theater:

> Versions of the nation's fluid social, economic, and political realities have served not merely as background or context for these plays' composition and production but as distinct voices with which the plays have been in dialogue. The general politics of culture, issues of racial and ethnic identity, the import of race and ethnicity upon the nation's sense of itself, anxieties about economic dislocation, and conflicts surrounding gender configurations—all these topics found their way onto the American stage long before the social protest theater of the 1930s or the 1960s. (x)

At the end of the eighteenth century, the playhouse as an actual cultural space indeed was a realm "that was not only public but often explicitly political, a forum where issues of power and public policy were routinely aired," writes

Faye E. Dudden in her survey of the role of women, especially actresses and audiences, in the American theater at the time (16-17). While mainly white male playwrights took advantage of this public arena to articulate their concerns, the theater was one of the few cultural venues where also women could raise their voices as playwrights. To be sure, the playing field was far from equal. As Michael Warner contends with respect to early American print culture, "although women were reading printed goods in colonial America, very few of those goods were written by women. Nor is it the case that the gender barrier in letters dissolved when women took up pens to write" (15). Warner furthermore asserts that access to "linguistic technologies—speaking, reading, writing, and printing" was tied in to "forms of domination as race, gender, and status" (17). Warner's study (among others by Jay Fliegelman or Christopher Looby) was central to animating early American studies to bring "to light both the ways in which new technologies of print, on the one hand, and revolutionary Americans' sometimes hyperbolic emphasis on authenticity, voice, and rhetoric on the other, shaped theories of citizenship, nationalism, and identity during the revolutionary period" (Murison 243).[3]

In our book, we strongly refer to (and rely on) the cultural practices of having plays printed and circulated as major part of their political agenda—this is especially true for closet dramas that were expressly meant to be read in private circles and not performed on the public stage but that could nevertheless enact a "virtual theatricality" by transcending a purely textual basis and questioning the representational politics of the public sphere (Lippert, "Virtual Theatricality" 71-72). At the same time, we acknowledge the growing body of research paying close attention to oral traditions, performance practices, and material culture. The work of Gay Gibson Cima, for instance, is particularly insightful in this regard. Cima looks at how early American women critics created various gestural or rhetorical "host bodies," for example, by choosing pseudonyms, "to shield themselves from censure as they spoke, whether in person or in print" (3). These women entered the public sphere performing in print through rhetorical moves and/or in person through gestural and oral means, which "enabled them both to shape and to critique notions of race, American-ness, and gender" (Cima 3-4). Dudden similarly partakes in the shift of scholarly attention from the play proper—the script—to practices of performance both on the stage and in the audience. She points out

3 For bringing questions of gender and sexuality into this discourse on early American print culture, see Burgett; and Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom*.

that women's status within the early American theatrical sphere remained precarious. Especially their physical presence on the stage as actresses was perceived "in uncomfortably close proximity to the 'public women'—slang for prostitutes—who crowded the third tier" (21) of that playhouse. Wendy Bellion, in her account on the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia, also draws attention to spectatorship which, as she asserts, cut across class, race, and gender lines. She describes the spectators' various sensory contributions as they "listened, murmured, chatted, coughed, whistled, sneezed, yelled, swore, laughed, clapped, and thumped about" ("Vision" 341)—a form of popular sensory experience that Elizabeth Maddock Dillon calls an "aesthesis from below" ("Aesthesis" 368). Sensations such as those registered in the Chestnut Street Theater, Lauren F. Klein points out, "at times interfered with the experience of aesthetic pleasure that the plays' producers sought to achieve" (440).[4] The close proximity of black and white men and women in theater audiences offered unusual possibilities of observing one another and of facilitating practices of social differentiation quite at odds with what was offered on stage. Like Bellion, Dillon looks at such signifying practices of audiences as part of an alternative aesthetic archive that needs to be considered to get a truer picture of the theatrical culture at the time. She points out that while today the theater often is associated with cultural elitism, historically this was not the case. In her account of the theater of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world (which includes locations such as London, Boston, New York, Charleston, Philadelphia, and Kingston, Jamaica), this theater "attracted broad swaths of the population—so much so that state authorities often sought to limit the ability of theatres to gather 'promiscuous multitudes' in which persons commingled across lines of class, race, and gender" (*New World Drama* 13). In this way, Dillon concludes, "the theatrical public was of a distinctly different shape than the white, male, property-owning electorate on either side of the ocean *and* distinct, as well, from a literate print public" (*New World Drama* 13, original emphasis).

4 Bellion contrasts such spectatorships to the ones attending, for example, Charles Willson Peale's Philadelphia Museum, "which attracted a largely white, male, and affluent audience—or PAFA [the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts], which was idealized as a space of aesthetic and social refinement" ("Vision" 337). See also Bellion's monograph *Citizen Spectator*.

How American Is It? Revisiting the (Dis)Avowal of Early American Theater

One of the enduring laments in the scholarship of American theater history reiterates that before the twentieth century there was no American drama of any major significance. Renowned drama scholar C. W. E. Bigsby, for example, opens his still widely read 1982 study *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* with the remark: "American drama, as a serious form, is a product of the twentieth century" (vii).[5] Even in more recent surveys of early American theater and drama, one can read about the theatrical barrenness and unproductiveness of eras preceding the twentieth century. In their introduction to Volume I of the 1998 edition of *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, Bigsby and Don B. Wilmeth state that the supposedly scattered moments of early American dramatic efforts are marked by striving to copy European and mostly British models. Such Eurocentric attitudes would instill in their readers the notion that the "tradition" of theater in America "was external to its country" (3), the earliest playwrights being "European, as were the popular actors. Theatre building followed European models, as did styles of production" (3). As these examples suggest, for many theater scholars until recently, the genre of American drama has been perceived as the stepchild of American literary culture or rather, as Susan Harris Smith has aptly called it, as *The Bastard Art*, hence the subtitle of her survey on American drama. Whether out of religious, aesthetic, or ideological bias, the nation's cultural arbiters have for a long time been at best ambivalent, more often dismissive about America's drama and its functions and merits. More recently, scholars have added melodrama as a distinct and indeed pivotal literary form not only shaping much of nineteenth-century aesthetic and ethical perception of the American public, but also reaching way into the twentieth century and beyond with its long-lasting effects.[6]

5 The quote remains unchanged in the online version of 2008. The claim that any drama prior to O'Neill should be of considerably less aesthetic value has notoriously been repeated at least until the late 1980s in other overviews as well, for example in Bernard F. Dukore's, who states that "[for] American drama significant to warrant worldwide attention the designation of a starting point is atypically easy. It begins with Eugene O'Neill" (1).

6 See Gerould; Richardson; Postlewait; Kelleter, Krah and Mayer; Poole and Saal.

The critical disavowal of an early American theater tradition alongside an erroneously reiterated proclamation of a prevalent monolithic European theatrical practice up until the early twentieth century, articulated in highly prestigious academic venues, disregards the multiple forms of polyphonic exchange between European and American theater and performance histories. Susan Castillo is among those scholars who opt for a different, revised appraisal of such histories, arguing that theatricality in America cannot be regarded as governed exclusively by European mores and codes. Instead, Castillo argues that the *Colonial Encounters in New World Writing*, as the title of her seminal 2006 study suggests, have produced a range of performative, polyphonic texts which include plays alongside other texts that "perform America" producing "a cacophony of European and native voices attempting to make sense of each other" (2).[7] Another scholar interested in different genealogies of American theater is Peter A. Davis, who sets out to counter longstanding "truisms" such as the following:

> American culture before 1800 is not renowned for its theatre, and American theatre before 1800 is not known for its dramatic literature. […] It is a perception that has influenced the development of American plays and playwrights since the first performances by Europeans more than four hundred years ago, and it still forms the basis of our present understanding of early American theatre. (216)

The quote is taken from the very same *Cambridge History of American Theatre*, edited by Bigsby and Wilmeth, that was mentioned before. Davis here stresses the urgency of rewriting this common lore and provides a closer examination of the "surprising number and variety of plays, written by an equally surprising assortment of playwrights" (216). Even more importantly, he stresses the

7 In contrast, Jeffrey H. Richards, while providing fascinating thick and close readings of some early American plays, still grounds his entire study on the presumption that all early drama relies on predominantly British predecessors and that accordingly the plots revolve less around current topics than around adapting successful models to American circumstances. He incessantly repeats the claim of the emergence of a genuine American drama based on British models, for example, when he writes that "these chapters argue, on the one hand, the deep dependence on a foreign dramatic literature that dominated the American stage throughout the period, while on the other, they maintain that the nearly single-minded obsession with London favorites came to represent both gross and subtle reflections of a multiplicity of identities quite other than 'British'" (33).

fact that against standard theater history that shuns any closer attention to pre-nineteenth-century American drama, this drama very much was an integral part of culture and society.

This revisionist perspective on the various practices of theatricality in early American social life also entails looking anew at the overbearing claim concerning the long-lasting legacy of the Puritan abhorrence of theater. While it is true that there was a ban to stage plays in many English colonies, especially those under Puritan rule, the knowledge of and indeed pleasure in *reading* dramatic literature was abundant. Taking a look at the libraries of demagogues against the theater such as Cotton Mather's—exceptionally well-stocked with both ancient and contemporary plays—reveals the extent to which theater and dramatic aesthetics influenced the colonial mind in spite of the great public and political opposition to the genre. As theater historian Theresa Saxon asserts:

> Common critical practice has led to a somewhat vexed argument that the moral code and value system that contributed to the demise of theatres in Commonwealth England under Puritan rule were transplanted, more or less intact, to Plymouth Rock. […] But puritan anti-theatricality was itself a multifaceted series of ideological perspectives. We should note that performances and entertainments were a feature of colonial life in New England. (68)

Partly, the Puritans' antipathy to drama was grounded in a belief that the imagination was a faculty linked to "the lower soul" and thus subordinate to reason and will (Tichi 87). The world of the stage was seen as an "obviously false environment," since here, as Cecelia Tichi explains, "the dramatist not only purports to create a quasi-reality of his own, but he populates it with men pretending to be other than what in nature they really are" (91). Especially when it came to actors playing roles of the opposite sex on stage, the Puritans' aversion to such performed cross-dressing became apparent since that "was seen as the theatre's perilous blurring of gender roles" (Castillo 149). However, even among the most anti-theatrical Puritans, as Castillo points out, "there existed an awareness of the didactic power of polyphonic texts" (58). This can be seen, for example, in dialogical passages of sermons, which for Puritan writers served specific pedagogic and communicative purposes. Jeffrey H. Richards specifically mentions writers "as antitheatrically orthodox as Michael Wigglesworth and Edward Taylor" (19) who made use of such dialogical exchanges in their poems.

In many ways, therefore, it makes sense to start reviewing the variety and change of attitudes against or in favor of the theater in the course of the eighteenth century by looking at the "legacy" of Puritan antitheatricality. As can be seen, the Puritans' aversions to theater were manifold and contradictory, and while it is true that the enduring effects of this legacy can still be felt in the discussions at the end of the century, more and other reasons have been added. As Jean-Christophe Agnew argues, the Puritans took issue with the theater because for them the action on stage was suspicious and dangerous since it was based on enacting pretended behaviors and therefore suggested that character was not necessarily proven by "outward signs" (128). Even more importantly for the theatrical debates of the late eighteenth century, however, was the Puritan association of the hypocrisy of the theater with a growing merchant population: "The very historical circumstances that had hardened the hearts of New England settlers against an outcast theater rendered them only grudgingly tolerant of the players' more enterprising neighbors: the commercial middlemen" (Agnew 151). Heather S. Nathans adds that the inference suggests "that what an actor could dissemble on the stage, a merchant could dissemble in the city square, selling bad grain for good and extorting high fees for shoddy merchandise" (20).

While both Agnew and Nathans assert the influence of Puritan antitheatricality on the theater debates of the late eighteenth century, especially on the rhetoric of Massachusetts's anti-theater laws, Nathans in particular also sees a shift "from a Puritan-based disdain for the ungodliness of theater, to a more overt resistance to British interference in American life" (26). She asserts that the resistance to staging plays must be seen in light of the discussions surrounding politics as enacted democratic experiments. Referring to the situation in Philadelphia during the first years of the early Republic, she writes: "The State Constitutionalists resisted the theater partly as an expression of partisan solidarity, since they felt that the prospect of a theater undermined the cultural simplicity at the heart of Pennsylvania's democratic experiment" (51). Trish Loughran adds that from today's perspective contrasting stage entertainments with populist political experiments may seem unlikely given the perception that in contemporary American culture such entertainment is understood as a form of popular, if not populist, culture: "In the eighteenth century, however, theater was an *essentially* nonpopulist activity, associated […] with nondemocratic class divides (the province of the rich—and the British)" (203, original emphasis). How then do gender and sexuality play into such experimental fields of theatrical politics?

"Doing Art Means Displacing Art's Borders":[8] Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Aesthetics

For obvious reasons being a highly politicized period, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were, contrary to the beliefs of many American literary historians, not devoid of literary merits. And we believe that the emerging American drama and theater are an especially fruitful ground to investigate the way politicized aesthetics operate, or as Jason Shaffer declares: "By now, the importance of the theatre and theatricality for the study of early America must be clear to anyone following the field for the last several decades" (279). There are critics, to be sure, who warn against basing our understanding of early American drama and theater solely on the grounds of their political, social, and economic significance. In this collection therefore we consider "*both* inquiry into aesthetics *and* inquiry that privileges literature's function as art and imaginative expression," and by doing so we follow Edward Cahill and Edward Larkin's proposition to understand aesthetics "as intimately related to politics and historical change, even as it attempts to take its aesthetic objects on their own terms" (238, original emphasis).

Inquiring into the efficacy of an artistic practice that has imported the political into the aesthetic, Jacques Rancière dates the eighteenth century as a period of transition from a pedagogical model of representational mediation to one of aesthetic distance. The representational model posits that what the viewer sees on a stage is a set of signs formed according to an artist's intention. "By recognizing these signs," Rancière argues, "the spectator is supposedly induced into a specific reading of the world around us, leading, in turn, to the feeling of a certain proximity or distance, and ultimately to the spectator's intervening into the situation staged by the author" (136). Rancière's counterclaim follows Jean-Jacques Rousseau's lead, who in his *Lettre à M. D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) argues against the presumption of a direct relation between the performance of bodies on stage and its effects on the minds of spectators as well as its consequences for their behavior outside the theater. Rancière speaks of the paradoxes of political art in the sense that a connection between art and politics should be cast in terms of dissensus: "[A]rtworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination" (140).

8 Rancière 149.

We believe theatricality in the era of the American Revolution indeed does not follow a direct, i.e. representationally pedagogic aim, but offers a politics of aesthetics that reconfigures the audience's experience. Instead of a direct cause-effect relationship between the playwrights' intention realized in staging or reading their plays and the political mobilization of the viewer or reader, our understanding of a politics of aesthetics is grounded on the premise that the plays are aesthetic realities in and of themselves within their very own specific framework of time and space, namely the long eighteenth century in North America. And within this given framework, it is the writers whose strategies aim to change the frames according to which we perceive the visible and combine it with specific invisible elements and meaning. To make the invisible visible, to rupture given relations between objects and meanings, to invent new relations that were previously unrelated: such a politics of aesthetics reframes the "real" and thus helps build new relationships between reality and appearance as well as between the individual and the collective.[9]

In Rancière's terms, what these artists and their works perform is the creation of a new dramaturgy of the intelligible by creating new modes of individuality, new forms of perception, new models of common experience, and therefore a new frame of "we"—"whose emergence is the element that disrupts the distribution of social parts, […] of those who have no part—not the wretched, but the anonymous" (Rancière 142). Accordingly, in this collection we are concerned, amongst other things, with women's social anonymity being reframed by new forms of individuality as part of the world of common experience that now is perceived and understood as the world of a shared impersonal experience. How this paradox of producing effects by suspending any direct cause-effect relationship is resolved will be a matter of the analysis of the single works that this book unearths and reconsiders.

When dealing with questions of gender in early America, we are aware that what Gayle Rubin in her groundbreaking 1975 essay called the sex/gender system—namely contrasting the two fixed sexes on the one hand with gender as a changeable set of social arrangements on the other—was still much more ambiguous and mutable in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This effected yet another instance of dissensus in a Rancièrian manner, namely that *gender* and *sex* were not clearly distinguished but used inter-

9 For a Rancièrian reading of early American theatrical aesthetics drawing attention to the (in)adequate representation of materiality as symbolic bodies, see Lippert, "Theatrical Aesthetics."

changeably—Thomas Laqueur famously speaks of a "one-sex model" prior to the eighteenth century that distinguishes men and women "as hierarchically ranked versions of each other" rather than categorizing them as two opposite and distinct sexes (802). As Greta LaFleur argues with regard to men and women maintaining their "natural state" (488), there was hardly any consensus about what this "natural state" entailed. She refers, for instance, to Mary Wollstonecraft's polemical question in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), "Is woman in a natural state?" (266), and to Wollstonecraft's assertion that women were "out" of their natural state by lacking education, by labeling them as childlike and irrational, and by deeming them unsuitable for participation in civic life. LaFleur concludes

> that in the late eighteenth century in North America, there was in fact a widespread cultural awareness and recognition of the fact that gender was not necessarily or even often "natural;" that socially acceptable womanhood and manhood could assume plural and sometimes aberrant forms; and that there was a wide, but not universal, degree of tolerance for individual deviations from conventional gender behaviors or presentations. (489)

Whereas it may seem challenging for us today to acknowledge an understanding of the ways gender "worked" in early America, we actually could draw a transhistorical connection between the instability of gender during this period and our contemporary politics of gender and sexuality. As LaFleur suggests for our practice in scholarship and teaching, we should adjust the narrativization of what gender meant in eighteenth-century North America and recognize that gender "was probably understood very similarly to the way that we understand it now: as flexible, contingent, and non-self-identical" (495). This certainly does not mean that there were no social pressures forcing men and women to conform to certain racial, religious, geographical, and class-bound standards of femininity and masculinity—and our volume very much attests to such forces—but this is the case in our world as well. Studying the politics of gender in early America therefore is worthwhile for acknowledging the existence of "gender trouble" way before the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; with our volume we hope to contribute to such an historicization of gender and sexuality and their multifarious politics of aesthetics.

Constellations of Gender and Theatricality in Early America: The Essays

The essays gathered in this collection represent a broad (yet not necessarily comprehensive) inquiry into various constellations of gender and theatricality in early America, with a particular focus on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They include detailed analyses of individual plays and the ways in which they represent gender through dramatic dialogue and action; critical discussions of the cultural politics of gender performativity and gendered conduct, in such varied domains as the educational system, the family, institutional politics, or the military; explorations of the possibilities and limitations of female authorship; as well as analyses of how in early American theater, gender intersected with other markers of cultural difference, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, nation, dis/ability, or socioeconomic class. The essays explore quite different performance histories and contexts, ranging from the formalized stage and auditorium of a playhouse in Philadelphia or New York to the improvised scenes of college theatricals to the mundane enactments of everyday life in revolutionary and early national America.

In the essay that opens the collection, "The Male Stage: College Theatricals and Masculinity in the Age of the American Revolution," Michael Streif looks at theatrical pieces written and performed by male college students during annual commencement ceremonies in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As Streif points out, these ceremonies were highly popular among the local population, and for many early Americans they provided the only access to the theater as a cultural form. Streif discusses five dramatic dialogues performed at Harvard, Yale, and the College of Philadelphia and shows that these pieces used theatrical form in order to engage in complex (and often surprisingly ambivalent) discussions of masculinity, race, and nation. Through close readings of the dialogues and their performance contexts, Streif points out that the white male elite writers/performers exhibited a humorous and playful attitude towards their own "manhood," and engaged in self-irony and self-ridicule. What is more, the dialogues negotiated masculinity in conjunction with questions of race and nation, comparing and contrasting, for instance, white and black, as well as "American" and "British" masculinities.

In the first of two essays in this collection which are concerned specifically with Susanna Haswell Rowson's 1794 play *Slaves in Algiers* (perhaps one of the most prominent theatrical works of the early national period), Etti Gordon Ginzburg problematizes the unquestioned feminism that existing

readings attribute to the play and its author. Her essay, entitled "Liminal Spaces: Cross-Dressing, Monetary Transfers and Other Real and Imaginary Crossovers in Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*," takes a more ambivalent stance instead, and suggests that despite marked feminist statements in the prologue and epilogue, the play as a whole fails to live up to its (ostensibly) feminist objectives. By paying close attention to three "liminal spaces" in the play—cross-dressing, religious conversion, and monetary exchange—Ginzburg argues that *Slaves in Algiers* proposes mostly traditionalist and conservative, rather than feminist, gender politics. The character of Fetnah in particular is indicative of such conservatism: While Fetnah enacts a form of "republican motherhood gone wild" that could be potentially transgressive, the agency of the character is always already contained by the larger narrative and cultural logic of the play. Through a discourse of "safety" in particular, Ginzburg argues, the play renders femininity in highly traditional ways, and thus amounts to little more than yet another dramatization of (conservative) republican motherhood.

In her essay, "Partisan Allegories of Race and Desire: Algerian Captivity as a Musical Entertainment in Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*," Daniela Daniele suggests that the play's form replicates and reinforces the racial boundaries between its characters, as Rowson assigns the musical numbers to non-Anglo characters only. Even though no vocal or musical score is extant, Daniele argues, the lyrical tone of the songs creates an enclosed, parallel space of appearance that immediately separates the non-Anglo singers from the rest of the play. Comparing Rowson's play to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's contemporaneous Orientalist Singspiel *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782), Daniele shows how *Slaves in Algiers*' dramatic structure creates a racist "double standard" according to which the "liberty" of non-Anglo characters is severely curtailed and their desires are repeatedly frustrated. The racial conservatism of Rowson's comedy that forecloses interracial love or an eventual interracial union is thus mirrored in the formal partitions that structure *Slaves in Algiers* from its very beginning.

In her piece on playwright, poet, and women's rights advocate Judith Sargent Murray, "American Theater and the Quest for a Republican Identity: Judith S. Murray's *The Medium; or, Virtue Triumphant* (1795)," Zoe Detsi examines how the play creatively attempts to align women's social roles in the early national period with the dominant ideological frameworks of republicanism and individual liberty. *The Medium*, Detsi argues, serves as a cultural site where Murray can frame her own version of "republican womanhood" as imbued

with the revolutionary ideas of personal freedom and equality. Hence, *The Medium*, even though it does not give up on such gendered notions as modesty and domesticity, suggests a version of femininity that is characterized by emotional strength, self-fulfillment, and sound judgment. As Detsi shows, Murray's female characters are given a certain agency in their decisions—albeit without compromising the norms of respectability and propriety.

Astrid M. Fellner's essay, "The Theatricality of Sexual Difference in Late-Eighteenth-Century America: Deborah Sampson's Gender Masquerade," is similarly concerned with questions of female agency in the revolutionary and early national periods. Unlike Detsi, however, Fellner does not discuss dramatic characters in a play. Instead, her focus is on the historical figure of Deborah Sampson, who joined the revolutionary army cross-dressed as a man. In 1802, Sampson attempted to capitalize on her experience in the military in a well-received lecture tour that led her to perform on various stages in New England and Eastern New York. Analyzing the theatrical aspects of this lecture tour, which included a public address as well as various songs and a rifle drill in uniform, Fellner suggests that Sampson's cross-dressing performances detached the notion of gender from its supposed origins in biological difference, and allowed early American audiences to explore the contingencies in the links between sex, gender, and desire.

Like Fellner's essay, Verena Holztrattner's "Sowing the Seeds of Virtue: Susanna Haswell Rowson's Contributions to Conduct Literature," is also concerned with theatricality and performativity in a broader cultural sense: the text explores the theatricality of conduct literature by Susanna Haswell Rowson. Rowson, who had many careers ranging from novelist to actress to teacher, used a variety of literary genres to teach especially young women how to behave and act properly. Holztrattner places Rowson's efforts in the context of the larger renegotiation of gender roles in the early Republic, and suggests that theatrical form (for instance, dialogue, role play, or fully-fledged drama) proved a particularly useful tool for Rowson to achieve her educational goals. Politically speaking, however, Rowson's stance on gendered conduct is highly ambivalent and warrants differentiated analysis: Holztrattner suggests that her conduct advice was "tentatively subversive yet never confrontational," and that Rowson attempted to acknowledge both the conservative need for social and cultural stability in the postwar period and the proto-feminist desire to give women an active, and knowledgeable, voice in the public debates of the early Republic.

In her essay "Porous Spheres in Times of War: *The Fair Americans* and the Questioning of Gender Roles within the Family," Pauline Pilote examines Mary Carr's play on the War of 1812, *The Fair Americans* (originally performed as *The Return from Camp* at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia in 1815) and suggests that the piece represents a curious anomaly among literature on the armed conflict: Rather than centering on major military figures (such as Generals Warren and Pike), Carr focuses on a village on the shores of Lake Erie, and in particular on the domestic space of two families living there. Because the play combines two stage sets (men on the front and women at home) in the same theatrical space, Pilote explains, *The Fair Americans* structurally blurs the boundaries between the public and private spheres, and thus troubles the ideology of gendered separate spheres already at the time of its consolidation. In the essay, Pilote also highlights the personal connection Mary Carr (and her writing) had to the War of 1812: Her husband died (most likely) from wounds inflicted in the conflict, and Carr had to pick up writing to support herself and her children after his death, which made her one of the first American women to make a living from writing and editing.

Alexandra Ganser's essay "'O'er us, rovers free': Performing Gender and National Identity in Jacksonian Pirate Melodrama" discusses Jacksonian American negotiations of masculinity by looking at the popular genre of pirate melodrama. Through readings of Lemuel Sawyer's *Blackbeard* (1824) and Joseph Stevens Jones's *Captain Kyd* (1830), Ganser suggests that the joint construction of notions of gender and piracy worked to consolidate the idea of a national, U.S. American identity on the popular stage—despite the oftentimes transatlantic genealogies of these dramatic works. For Ganser, the spectacular nature of these plays, and their appeal to senses and sensibilities, was used to create an affective bond within a framework of "folk patriotism" that excluded racial and social Others. Moreover, the essay analyzes how the plays negotiate conflicting versions of masculinity in a period of immigration, industrial growth, and socio-economic transformation, and shows how discourses of patriotism and heterosexuality (and heterosexual romance) were conjoined to generate "model" American citizens.

Taken together, the essays provide fresh insights into how the theater as a form and medium—but also as a cultural logic—constituted a popular site for the articulation and negotiation of gendered ways of speaking, behaving, and being—sometimes explicitly, sometimes obscured or even concealed. In the theater, these essays suggest, early Americans could rehearse and adjust various, and oftentimes conflicted, masculine, feminine, and trans identity

positions and behaviors. By looking more closely at dramatic form and theatrical performance, the essays shed new light on how early Americans literally performed their gendered selves into being, and how they related these gendered selves to the wider cultural contexts in which they were operating. As the essays make clear, the politics of gender in early American theater always already transcended the confines of a particular stage or playhouse, and resonated with broader cultural debates around national identity and nation building in a time of enormous social and political change.

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