

The Chinese Festival and the Eighteenth-Century London Audience

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ABSTRACT

To illustrate the political, social and commercial significance of David Garrick's Drury Lane theatre, this essay investigates the riot at *The Chinese Festival* (1755) and explores three major factors that merged to result in the ballet riot: first, English national animosity against France during the Seven Years' War; second, English class warfare between the aristocratic fans of exoticism and the jingoistic mob; and third, Drury Lane Theatre's competition not only with Covent Garden Theatre but also with the King's Theatre. All these factors entangle with one another to influence the spectatorship and cultural production mode in eighteenth-century London theatres. From the perspective of cultural studies, this paper analyzes the theatre records and historical material to demonstrate that, in the case of the 1755 theatre riot, English patriotism was employed as a strategy for class struggle and theatre rivalry.

KEY WORDS: the eighteenth century, London theatre, David Garrick, patriotism, class, spectatorship

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David Garrick, the famous eighteenth-century English actor-manager, suffered from the greatest disaster in his career in November 1755. To reproduce the great spectacle of the French ballet *Les Fêtes chinoises* in London, Garrick engaged the choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre and the French designer Louis-René Boquet to stage *The Chinese Festival* at Drury Lane in November 1755. The ballet, however, turned out to be a failure, and the riot caused Garrick's greatest financial loss, much greater than the second riot in 1763.¹ At the sixth performance of the ballet, the audience became so violent that Garrick had to send for the militia to disperse the mob. The damage to Drury Lane and to Boquet's costly scenery amounted to the sum of four thousand pounds (Victor 2: 132-33).² As the audience is an active factor for understanding the theatre and the historiography of society, an investigation of the riot at *The Chinese Festival* may illuminate the political, social and commercial significance of Garrick's theatre. This article seeks to explore three major factors that may have merged to result in the 1755 riot: English national animosity against France, class warfare, and theatre competition—all these factors enlighten the spectatorship in Garrick's theatre and the contemporary social scenarios. Several hypotheses have been suggested in this article to account for what might have triggered this particular theatre riot. These speculations are based on my own observations which have evolved through a scrutiny of relevant evidence I have discovered in eighteenth-century theatre records. Thereby this essay is intended to add further analysis to the existing literature on theatre riots in eighteenth-century London.

¹ In the second riot, on 25 January 1763, Thaddeus Fitzpatrick persuaded the rioters to demand admittance at half-price after the third act except at the run of new pantomimes. See Sir St. Vincent Troubridge, "Theatre Riots in London," *Studies in English Theater in Memory of Gabrielle Enthoven* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1952) 3: 54-97.

² For more information on the French-English tensions around the performances of *The Chinese Festival* in London, see Hedgcock 128 ff., and Macqueen-Pope 173-74.

No performance text can be found concerning the plot of *The Chinese Festival*. Nor did Noverre preserve any scenarios of the ballad in his works. The Musée de l'Opéra in Paris, however, holds some scenarios of Noverre's other ballets, including the décor and costume for a Chinese ballet designed by Boquet (reprinted in Lynham 34-35), who was also commissioned to supervise the making of the scenery and costumes for Noverre's ballet at Drury Lane in 1755. Also, a contemporary French playgoer, Jullien des Boulmiers, describes his reminiscence of the spectacle of the 1754 production of Noverre's Chinese ballet in Paris (Lynham 21). Presumably from these visual and verbal illustrations we may infer the grandeur of *The Chinese Festival* performed in London.

Unfortunately, a riot at *The Chinese Festival* in London coincided with strong English antipathy toward the French, before the Seven Years' War between England and France (1756-1763) officially broke out the following year.³ Most of the contemporary accounts of the ballet riot in journals, pamphlets and memoirs took the side of Garrick and condemned the party that violently opposed *The Chinese Festival*, but the protesters also filled contemporary newspapers with articles intended to inflame the jingoism of the public. *The London Evening Post*, for instance, reports: "We are assured that the French are gathering together a great number of small craft at Boulogne, Calais and other Northern ports of France for a descent on England" (qtd. in Lynham 34).⁴ During Garrick's production of *The Chinese Festival*, the theatre, where collective memory and common social references reside with all the social ranks present in the audience, became a forum of social

³ For details concerning the Seven Years' War, see McLynn, *1759: The Year Britain Became Master of the World*.

⁴ The *Journal étranger* also reported that "imagination has been stretched so far as to print that the French dancers were officers and the *Maitre des Ballets*, Prince Edward" (2 [December, 1755]: 223; qtd. in Lynham 34).

deliberations for the cause of nationalism. A contemporary journal article on playhouse riots rightly states: “Tumults in Kingdoms are scarce attended with greater confusion than riots in the playhouse. On these occasions great patriots, theatrical and political, chiefly shew themselves” (*The Beauties* 295).

The public outcry concerning Garrick’s importation of French dancers and crew began on 6 November, two days before the first performance of *The Chinese Festival*, when Garrick played the role of Hastings in *Jane Shore* at Drury Lane. According to the diary of the prompter Richard Cross,

When Mr. Garrick ended the 3d Act with “Die wth pleasure for my Country’s good”—a person in the Gall: cry’d no French Dancers then—wch seems to say much resentment will be shewn when the 24 we have engag’d appear.⁵

Thus, before the riot, Garrick certainly sensed the potential danger in mounting the French ballet. As a matter of fact, Garrick had experienced a xenophobic intervention from a London audience six years earlier. In August 1748, John Rich invited the French theatre director Jean Monnet (1703-1785) to bring his French players to Covent Garden, but Rich reneged on the invitation when Monnet asked for a formal contract to cover certain expenses. Monnet asked Garrick for help, and Garrick advised Monnet to hire the Little Theatre in the Haymarket and put on a subscription season of French comedy. When the season began on 9 November 1749, many Londoners regarded it as “an invasion by French vagrants.” Anti-French feeling ran so high among the more jingoistic of the audience that Lord Chamberlain withdrew his licence

⁵ All the quotations from the diary of the prompter Richard Cross, and from playbills, are from G. W. Stone, Jr. *The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays. Part 4, 1747-1776*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1962.

and closed the theatre. Monnet had to bear the full cost of the disaster, but the Lord Chamberlain gave him one hundred pounds, and on Monnet's behalf Garrick put on a benefit that produced one hundred guineas. These incidents pointed to the polarised attitudes towards French performers among the English audience, especially the bitter conflict between the upper sort's taste for exotic novelty and the lower order's patriotic xenophobia.

Noverre, later the father of the Action Ballet (*Ballet d' action*), was one of Monnet's recommendations to Garrick (Kendall 74-75). Noverre's French production *Les Fêtes chinoises* was successfully presented in Paris in the summer of 1754. The contemporary French journal *Mercur de France* (1st July 1754) notes that Noverre's Chinese ballet was mounted with extraordinary luxury. Charles Collé (1709-1783), a French dramatist and songwriter, witnessed a performance of Noverre's Chinoiserie ballet at Monnet's Opera-Comique, and noted in his *Journal*:

This month, all Paris has flocked to a Chinese ballet given at the Opera Comique. . . . I must admit that this Chinese ballet is unusual, and at least by its novelty and its picturesqueness it has earned a share of the applause it is given. (Collé 1: 248 [July, 1754], qtd. in Lynham 20-21)

Due to the success of the Chinoiserie ballet in Paris, Noverre soon gained a contract with Garrick with excellent terms.⁶

Although many critics observe that Garrick, in producing *The Chinese Festival*, has taken "so little account of the rising tide of anti-French feeling"

⁶ See Hedgcock 102 ff. For details of importation of the French dancers, especially of M. Delaistre, see Lynham 26-40. For the contract, see letters between Noverre and Garrick in Jean Georges Noverre, *The Life and Works of the Chevalier Noverre*, ed. C. E. Noverre (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1882).

(McIntyre 237), I would argue that Garrick was fully aware of the complications attending his staging of the French ballet long before Noverre arrived in London, but he had faith in his power to manipulate the public mood. According to Arthur Murphy, who had joined Drury Lane as an actor that season, “Garrick was alarmed, but still thought he could avert the impending storm” (*The Life of David Garrick* 1: 278). Having paid a large sum of money for the preparation of the ballet, Garrick would not change his decision, and instead relied on the artistic merits and success of the ballet in Paris, on the support of the English elite audience interested in the vogue for Chinoiserie,⁷ and above all on his own managerial capacity and personal charm at the zenith of his powers.

First, Garrick applied to the Lord Chamberlain and gained a command performance from King George II. Then, he made an announcement in the *Public Advertiser* (8 November 1755), claiming that most of the foreign performers were not French. Garrick attracted many spectators in the first two months of the season with a selection of his most popular roles, as well as popular plays by English playwrights.⁸ He also staged Aaron Hill’s adaptation of Voltaire’s *Meropé*, in which the prologue praises the author, the “untam’d Genius of the British Nation,” for his improving rather than imitating its French original.⁹

⁷ For the socio-political context of the craze for Chinoiserie, see Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: John Murray, 1961); O. R. Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977); and Hsin-yun Ou, “David Garrick’s Reaction against French Chinoiserie in *The Orphan of China*,” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 27.1 (2007): 25-42.

⁸ These were *Jane Shore*, *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, *Meropé*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Inconstant*, *The Provok’d Wife*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Orphans*, and *The Earl of Essex*.

⁹ Hill’s *Meropé* was performed with Mrs. Pritchard as Meropé, and Garrick as Meropé’s Son Eumenes. See Aaron Hill, *Meropé: A Tragedy* (London: Printed for A. Millar [etc.] 1750). The prologue by Hill is printed in George Jeffreys, *Miscellanies, In Verse and Prose* (London: Printed for the Author, 1754). I have done firsthand research at the British Library by consulting the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources listed in this essay.

Yet still, the riot was triggered by a premeditated quarrel between different political factions in the audience.¹⁰ In fact, the riot had more bearing on class warfare than on national animosity against France. The vogue for Chinoiserie had been initiated by the English aristocracy who displayed a passion for French imported luxury goods, manners and language, and many English critics had targeted the French Chinoiserie vogue as the source of the vices of the consumer culture. The *World*, for instance, vehemently attacks the Chinoiserie vogue for “their red, their pompons, their scraps of dirty gauze, flimsy satins, and black calicoes” (No. 183, May 1753). In the clash between different social ranks at *The Chinese Festival*, the rioters from the lower order were hostile to all foreigners as much as they resented the French, and, most importantly, they opposed the exoticism enjoyed by the upper order. As Marc Baer observes, disturbances in theatres over foreign performers, notably in 1738, 1749 and 1755, are “more of the products of antagonism between orders, than the conflict between France and Britain” (193), though Baer does not discuss the 1755 riot in detail.

An account by a contemporary witness is given in a lengthy letter, dated 25 November and published in the *Journal étranger* in Paris in December, by an anonymous correspondent, possibly Noverre himself.¹¹ The author completely takes the side of Garrick and Noverre. He compliments the ballet before delivering his description of the riot, which is generally consistent with Cross’s diary. On Saturday 8 November, according to Cross, the first performance of the ballet was received with both applause and hissing: “A good deal of hissing & clapping and some cries of No French Dancers; Great clapping

¹⁰ Other types of the uproars in the Garrick period are, according to G. W. Stone, quarrels among spectators, quarrels among actors, literary tensions and loyalties, management errors, and spontaneous eruption. See G. W. Stone, Jr. “A Critical Introduction,” *The London Stage*, 4.2: clxxxiv.

¹¹ “Lettre écrite de Londres . . . the Auditor sujet des ballets du sieur Noverre,” *Journal étranger* 2 (December, 1755): 233, qtd. in Lynham 35 ff.

too—the Dance is fine—(M. Delaistre is a good Dancer).”¹² The *Journal étranger* blames the mob and commends the noblemen who supported Garrick, although the noblemen were the first to act violently. Murphy observes that the King, regarding the French dance as having no bearing at all on the wars with France, considered the protestors’ behaviour absurd:

The play being finished, the dancers entered, and all was noise, tumult, and commotion, His majesty was amazed at the uproar, but, being told, that it was because people hated the French, he smiled, and withdrew from a scene of confusion. (*The Life of David Garrick* 279)

At the second performance, on 12 November, the young men of fashion fought with the plebeian rioters. The *Journal étranger* gives an interesting portrayal of the English ladies who joined the fight against the demonstrators: when the Lords leaped into the pit and hit the interrupters, the Ladies, “far from being affrighted by the horrible scuffle, gave a hand to the gallants that they might leap into the pit and pointed out to them the people to be knocked out.”

The next night, the Nobility went up to stop hisses from the gallery. According to Cross, one of the protestors was cast down the stairs and seriously injured. The *Journal étranger* confirms the incident, but adds that “this man enjoyed an income of 600 golden sovereigns; he had disguised himself as a hooligan to create a disturbance,” indicating that the rioters were not only from the lower sort, but also included members of the middle order; or perhaps the former was hired by the latter. It is possible that the rioters

¹² M. Delaistre was the leading dancer, as stated in the playbill, reprinted in C. E. Noverre 12.

were hired by a political sect to intimidate the Nobility and challenge their close relations with the French, or even to influence their foreign policies.

The King's Theatre, also known as the Italian Opera (Forrester 63), was opening their season on Saturday 15 November, and most of the Nobility chose to go there instead of Drury Lane. Horace Walpole recalls the "anti-Gallican party against some French dancers" at the ballet: "The young men of quality have protected them till last night, when, being Opera night, the galleries were victorious."¹³ The *Journal étranger* records that "*Les blagards* [the Blackguards, or the vagabonds] made a horrible disturbance," tearing up the benches and breaking all the mirrors, the chandeliers, etc. All the public called for Garrick, who refused to appear. The mob would not disperse until Garrick's partner James Lacy proclaimed that the ballet would not be performed again.

When the Nobility returned to Drury Lane on 17 November, Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* with Garrick as Chamont was performed instead of the ballet. At the commencement of the fifth act, the Nobility demanded *The Chinese Festival* to be staged for the next night, but the opposition party shouted "No French Dancers." They all called for Garrick, who finally came on stage and offered to cut out all the French dancers, but this failed to reconcile the factions. The Lords seized one of the leaders of the rioters in the pit to strangle him. Garrick jumped into the pit shouting: "Gentlemen, do not hurt him, he is a friend of mine," and the man was released. This incident indicates that Garrick was highly esteemed by the Nobility in the audience.

At the sixth performance on 18 November, the Lords banished the rioters from the pit, but new rioters came down from the gallery. The *Journal étranger* recalls "broken arms, legs and heads, people half crushed under the

¹³ Horace Walpole, "Letter to Richard Bentley, November 16, 1755." *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford: Including Numerous Letters Now First Published from the Original Manuscripts*. London: R. Bentley, 1840. Vol. 2 (1749-1759), Part 10, Letter 160.

benches, the Chinese dancers hiding in corners.” Finally, the rioters went to Garrick’s house, broke all the windows, and would have set fire to it if Garrick had not asked for military protection. Garrick had to announce that the ballet would not be repeated. Nevertheless, many of the contemporary writers gave their support to Garrick. A pamphlet by “Grub-street Literatus” was published on 15 November under the title *The Dancers Damn’d; Or The Devil to Pay at the Old House*, with an attack upon mob patriotism. Samuel Foote in his *Minor* also condemned the rioters for their absurd patriotism (Baker 1: Appendix).

Garrick’s decision to produce *The Chinese Festival* was obviously attributed to competition with John Rich’s Covent Garden. The two patent theatres twice put on the same play simultaneously, with the battle of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1750¹⁴ and that of *King Lear* in 1756-1757. Cross records that, on 12 November 1755 at the second performance of *The Chinese Festival*, “Mr Barry Play’d Hamlet at Covent Garden,” indicating that Drury Lane was in competition with the rival theatre and its star actor Spranger Barry. On 17 November 1755, Covent Garden performed *Macbeth* with Barry, and the playbill claims: “with the original music. Vocal parts by Lowe, Howard, Legg, Baker, Roberts, Mrs. Lampe, Mrs. Chambers, Miss Young, Mrs. Vincent, &c. With Dances and Decorations incident to the Play.” With so many vocal parts in the play, Covent Garden seemed to have made the play a musical drama, and reinforced such fashionable elements as music, singing, dance and staging, much as Garrick did with *The Chinese Festival*.

Evidently the constant battles between these two theatres for audiences had a profound effect on their choice of performances. Both of the rival

¹⁴ It lasted twelve consecutive evenings through 11 October and concluded with a triumphant thirteenth performance at Drury Lane on 12 October. See Kalman A. Burnim, *David Garrick, Director* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1961) 129.

theatres appealed to the English appetite for the Orient. As early as February 1749, the production of Samuel Johnson's *Irene* was embellished by several exotic sets, "splendid and gay," exhibiting "the inside of a Turkish seraglio" and "a view of the gardens"—all "in the taste of Eastern elegance" (Nicoll 94). Since the Orient was attracting public interest, these scenes could be put to profitable use in later productions. By the 1750s, the vogue for Chinoiserie had reached its peak. In 1755 a sequence of an afterpiece *Proteus; or, Harlequin in China* was staged at Drury Lane on 4, 6-11, 13-18, 20-24, and 28 January. The cast was not listed on the playbill, but the harlequin was probably played by Henry Woodward (1714-1777), since the playbill of 20 January 1755 claims: "Mr. Woodward's Night for y^e Pantomime." The playbill for the first performance states: "New Entertainment, New Music, Scenes, Habits, machine &c." According to Cross, in the first night "Afterpiece went off but Indiff" scenes lik'd but not the action." On the second night, "Afterpiece went off better" ; on the third, "Afterpiece better still"; and after the eighteenth night, the playbill of 25 January 1755 of Drury Lane stated: "The New Entertainment [*Proteus*] is deferr'd in order to give some respite to [the performers]." Almost on the same dates as the performances of *Proteus*, a *Chinese Dance* "by Granier and Lepy" was staged at Covent Garden: on 4, 7, 11, 18, 21, 23, 25, 28 January, and 16 April 1755.¹⁵ These records substantiate the well-received vogue for Chinoiserie on the London stage during this period. These exotic performances, however, did not experience riots, as they did not employ French performers.

Thus, when Garrick engaged Noverre for *The Chinese Festival*, even at the height of the Seven Years' War between England and France, he was

¹⁵ Also as early as Nov. 2, 1742, at Covent Garden, *Chinese Dance* by Grimaldi and Mlle Auguste. In fact, as early as Dec. 19, 1718 at Lincoln's Inn Field was performed a French pantomime called *Les Chinois; ou, Arlequin Major Ridicule*.

eagerly trying to compete with the rival theatre, Covent Garden, by exploiting the latest trend. The fashion of exoticism on the London stage, along with an emphasis on the precision of Oriental costumes, was also verified by Covent Garden's wardrobe lists: on the day of the first performance of *The Chinese Festival*, Covent Garden "Paid Charlotte Lane for altering a Turkey's Dress in *Zanga* for Mr Ridout, 2s. 6d." (Davies 2: 322). As a pragmatic manager, Garrick endeavoured to exploit the craze for Chinoiserie, and he did succeed at least with the Chinese music for the pantomime *Proteus*, since a collection of musical pieces from Woodward's pantomime at Drury Lane was published in 1755.¹⁶ The peak of Chinoiserie that inspired Garrick's "bold attempt" (Porter 396) to stage *The Chinese Festival* at the height of the Seven Years' War was in fact not so "bold" an attempt, since Drury Lane and Covent Garden were already successful in their productions of Chinoiserie motifs.

Another reason for Garrick's insistence on staging the French ballet is that, in Garrick's time, dance was very profitable. Having surveyed financial records of eighteenth-century London theatre and opera companies, Judith Milhous observes that, as the art of dancing "became increasingly specialised, the amount allotted to dancers fluctuated, but grew as high as 25 to 55 percent of salaries. . . . The substantial appeal of dance must be reckoned in any account of this period" (481-508). This explains why Garrick was willing to invest a huge sum of money on a dance entertainment such as *The Chinese Festival*, which was intended to outdo the pantomimes that had so long made profits for Covent Garden. During this period, John Rich, the manager of Covent Garden since 1732, introduced pantomime to the English stage, and played the figure

¹⁶ *The comic tunes and songs in the entertainment call'd Proteus, or Harlequin in China: as they are perform'd at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. For the harpsicord, violin, &c.* (composer unknown) (London: Printed for I. Walsh ..., [1755]). Du Halde's collection of Chinese music was also published in London around 1750: Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *Chinese Airs: from Du Halde* (London: N. Parr Sculp, [ca. 1750?]). The first and fourth of the five Chinese melodies were included in his *Description de la Chine* (Paris, 1735) 3: 267.

of Harlequin from 1717 to 1760 under the name of “Lun.” Under Rich, Covent Garden specialised in the more spectacular variety of shows or speciality acts such as actual canon shots, animals, and multiple illusions of battle. Garrick was hoping that *The Chinese Festival* would “supersede the necessity of introducing those monstrous pantomimes, with which Mr. Lun hoped he could silence Shakespeare, Johnson, Otway, and Rowe” (Murphy, *The Life of David Garrick* 1: 277).

The 1755 ballet riot shed light not only on the rivalry between the patent theatres, but also on the theatre as a forum of social class confrontations in connection with international conflicts, which may also point to Drury Lane’s rivalry with another theatre. It is possible that minor theatre performers and the audience from the lower order, irritated by the aristocracy’s support of foreign singers, dancers and composers at the elite King’s Theatre, found their chance to express their anger at Drury Lane. It could also be possible that the management of the King’s Theatre encouraged the rioters at *The Chinese Festival*, so that the King’s Theatre could be more profitable. According to Murphy, as soon as Garrick engaged the French dancers, some minor playwrights believed that the French performers were to take away the livelihood of English performers, and hence misled the lower class into thinking that Garrick’s theatrical event was a nationalistic scandal.

The scribblers, the small wits and the whole tribe of disappointed authors, declared war against the manager. In newspapers, essays, and paragraphs, they railed at an undertaking, calculated, they said, to maintain a gang of Frenchmen. The spirit of the inferior classes was roused and spread like wildfire through London and Westminster. (Murphy, *The Life of David Garrick* 1: 278)

The *Journal étranger* regards the riot as being provoked by “minor English actors and dancers” and by “the management and staff of other theatres.” These “other theatres” refer not only to Covent Garden, but perhaps also to the King’s Theatre.

According to Cross’s diary, on Saturday, 15 November 1755, the Nobility went to the opera at the King’s Theatre: “Being Sat. our friends were at y^e opera, & the common people had leisure to do Mischief.” *The Chinese Festival* was a “grand entertainment” of ballet, and the King’s Theatre, as a counter-attraction to the patent theatres at Drury Lane and Covent Garden (the only two theatres licensed to perform spoken drama by the Licensing Act of 1737), was only permitted to stage opera or ballet. Permission at the King’s Theatre was granted through an annual licence, issued by the Lord Chamberlain’s office. Offering *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, and ballet in roughly equal measures, the King’s Theatre was a focus of some opposition to the existing monopoly of Drury Lane and Covent Garden.¹⁷ As it was a private venture without any official right to perform, it was in a state of near collapse in the 1750s, following a sequence of disputes, failures, bankruptcies and imprisoned or absconding managers (Woodfield 1-19). It was lying vacant for four to five months each year, and even during the season staging only two operatic performances a week (mostly on a Saturday), as opposed to the six nights a week at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. What ensured the survival of the King’s Theatre was the unchallenged place of Italian opera at the social world of the English aristocracy (Price 1-4). A comparison of the playbills of these three theatres indicates that the King’s Theatre was trying to improve its

¹⁷ “Opera” was increasingly used by Covent Garden and Drury Lane to signify musical dramas and burlettas, whereas “Opera” at the King’s Theatre meant all-sung Italian operas, many of which were pasticcios designed to show off imported virtuoso singers. See Ian Woodfield, *Opera and Drama in Eighteenth-century London: The King’s Theatre, Garrick, and the Business of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

business by joining the novelty competition between Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In 1759, on 21, 24, 28 April and 1 May, the King's Theatre performed *France*, which, according to the playbill, was "A New Opera. Music by Sig Perez. New Scenes, New Cloaths, and New Dances." In 1761 the King's Theatre was already very competitive in terms of the singers, dance and scenery,¹⁸ for its playbill on 3 June 1761 claims: "Besides the Italian Opera singers, and the usual orchestra, there will be a second band (disposed after a new manner) with a very great number of additional voices; together with a new dance, and a piece of scenery suitable to the solemnity." Yet, its playbill on 16 December 1755 was only able to emphasise its new dances: "With a change of new Dances," much less attractive when compared to the playbill for the first performance of *The Chinese Festival* on 8 November: "With NEW Music, Scenes, Machines, Habits, and other Decorations. Compos'd by Mr Noverre. All our Dancers appear." Noticeably, around the time of the 1755 riot at Drury Lane, the King's Theatre was far from being able to compete with the patent theatres.

Moreover, for the first performances of *The Chinese Festival*, Garrick invited the King, the most important patron of the King's Theatre. Garrick applied to the Lord Chamberlain, requesting the attendance of King George II, before whom Garrick had never performed (Lynham 34). King George II possessed a passion for music, and he inherited his father's love of opera, particularly the work of George Frederick Handel, who had been George I's court musician in Hanover. Handel hired the King's Theatre and embarked on a five-year series of seasons starting in late 1729. The playbill of the King's Theatre on Jan. 25, 1755 states: "Care has been taken to make the House

¹⁸ An anonymous pamphlet of 1753 claims that the principal desiderata for a good opera were a good castrato, novelty in the singers, dance, and new scenery. See *A Scheme for Having an Italian Opera in London, of a New Taste* (London: W. Owen and T. Snelling, 1753).

warmer, by the addition of two more Stoves, one being fixed under the Centre of the Pit, and the other near his majesty's Box." Thus, other than the royal Court, the King's Theatre was the place the King frequented for his entertainment. Garrick opened *The Chinese Festival* on a Saturday, a day on which the King's Theatre was usually open but was not on this occasion, probably because King George II went to Drury Lane and most courtiers followed him. It was two days before the King's Theatre was due to invite subscribers for the ensuing season, as its playbill on 11 November states: 'with new Dances [repeated several times] . . . The Subscribers to the Operas for the ensuing Season, are desir'd to pay their Subscription money to Mr Crawford, Treasurer of the said Theatre.' As such, Garrick's mounting of *The Chinese Festival* not only deprived the King's Theatre of current aristocratic patrons, but probably also of future subscribers.

Therefore, Garrick's staging of *The Chinese Festival* further inflicted the King's Theatre with a strong sense of crisis. And yet, this may have also enraged Garrick's audience of the lower order, who felt that Garrick wished to please only his aristocratic patrons, who already had their exclusive venue for entertainments (operas and ballets) at the King's Theatre. Jesse Foot records that the audience at the ballet riot cried, "Send the dancers to the Opera" (144). They seemed to declare that Drury Lane was entirely for the common people, and *The Chinese Festival* was an entertainment for the upper sort, and should therefore be staged only at the King's Theatre.¹⁹ In spite of Garrick's effort to make himself a patriotic icon through his heroic representations in many dramatic performances, the rioters at *The Chinese Festival* demonstrated their hatred for the French at the cost of Garrick's theatre, which they may have

¹⁹ Similarly, the 1737 riot at Drury Lane under Fleetwood was triggered by footmen who regarded their free access to the upper gallery as a right almost legally granted. See Elizabeth Fitzgerald-Hume, "Rights and Riots: Footmen's Riots at Drury Lane 1737," *Theatre Notebook* 59.1 (2005): 43-46.

regarded as their own theatre as opposed to the elite King's Theatre.

Although Thomas Davies blames the mob for their irrational overreaction against performers from France, Garrick realised that he, "who had been so long the idol of the public, was now openly abused and execrated" (Davies 149-50). He recognised that even great actors at the patent theatres were the servants of the public at the mercy of the public moods and commotions. The riot at *The Chinese Festival* demonstrates that, as theatre takes its meanings from the social milieu and the political influences that operate at a historical moment (Postlewait 9-13), the social, political, and historical conditions shape the theatrical arts. Samuel Johnson writes in the Drury-Lane Prologue, spoken by Garrick at the opening of Drury Lane in 1747:

Ah! let not censure term our fate our choice,
The stage but echoes back the public voice.
The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
For we that live to please, must please to live. (11. 51-54)

One of Garrick's jingoistic poems, "The Lilies of France" (published in 1756), may be intended to eliminate any doubts about Garrick's patriotism after the failure of *The Chinese Festival*:

The lilies of France, and the fair English rose,
Cou'd never agree . . .
Huzza for Old England, whose strong-pointed lance
Shall humble the pride and the glory of France. (374-75)

During the rest of the season at Drury Lane, Murphy's *The Apprentice* (1756) ran for sixteen nights, and the Prologue, spoken by Murphy and written by

Garrick, declares the lesson Garrick had learned from the 1755 riot: “No smuggled, pilfer’d Scenes from France we shew, / ’Tis ENGLISH—ENGLISH, Sirs!—from top to toe.” Indeed, after the ballet riot, once Garrick accepted a play, he endeavoured to produce it by combining not only attractions that attended to fashions and variety, but also to the nationalistic ardour of the populace.

In conclusion, the development of the ballet riot sheds light on the larger context of the contemporary vogue for *Chinoiserie*, the rivalry between London theatres, the clashes between classes, and the rising tide of the anti-French feelings in different sectors of British society. Although the riot was ostensibly triggered by the English feelings of resentment towards the French prior to the impending Seven Years’ War, it in fact had more bearing on class animosity than on international hostility. To compete with the other theatres, Garrick insisted on producing *The Chinese Festival* in order to appeal to the contemporary vogue for the Orient and dance. Yet, the performances not only inflicted the other theatres with a sense of crisis, but also enraged Garrick’s audience of the lower order. As such, the riot at *The Chinese Festival* demonstrates that, during the eighteenth century, the social stipulations and commercial competitions, more than patriotism, fashioned the spectatorship, which in turn influenced the theatre arts.

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《中國節慶》與 十八世紀倫敦的觀眾

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摘 要

本文探討 1755 年於倫敦上演的法國芭蕾舞劇《中國節慶》在大衛·蓋瑞克經營的朱里連劇場中引發的群眾暴動，主要探究其中蘊含的政治、社會與商業上的時代意義。英法兩國於七年戰爭中的仇恨、英國不同社會階層對異國演藝的迥異態度與階級鬥爭，以及倫敦幾家大劇院（朱里連、科芬園和國王劇院）之間的商業競爭，這些因素交互影響十八世紀倫敦觀眾的心態與文化產品的模式，故都可能是導致此次觀眾暴動的原因。本文以文化研究的角度，佐以劇場歷史資料證明：在這次暴動中，國際政爭成為階級鬥爭與商業競爭中所利用的主要策略。

關鍵詞：十八世紀、倫敦劇場、大衛·蓋瑞克、愛國情操、社會階級、觀眾心態

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