

An illustration of an 18th-century theater interior. The stage is framed by red curtains and features a painted backdrop of a classical building with columns. On the stage, a figure is seated in a boat, and another figure is reclining. The theater is filled with an audience seated in galleries on both sides of the stage. The ceiling is ornate with chandeliers and decorative elements.

# EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DRAMA

*Censorship, Society and the Stage*

**AM** Adam Matthew  
Primary sources for teaching and research

AN ONLINE RESOURCE

*“The Larpent plays have many new discoveries to yield. This unique digital resource makes them available online for the first time.”*

Robert D. Hume, Pennsylvania State University

Delve into the theatrical world of eighteenth-century society, and explore how the Larpent plays reflect the politics of the time, the role of women, views on race and religion, opinions on empire, and European and British past.

## Overview

*Eighteenth Century Drama* features the John Larpent Collection from the Huntington Library – a unique archive of almost every play submitted for licence between 1737 and 1824.

John Larpent was the English Inspector of Plays from 1778-1824 and responsible for executing the Licensing Act of 1737, a landmark act of censorship which required the Lord Chamberlain's Office to approve any play before it was staged. Larpent preserved the original submissions, over 2,500 of which are presented here.

Also included are the diaries of Larpent's wife and professional collaborator Anna, recording her criticisms of plays, as well as insights into theatrical culture and English society. Hundreds of further documents including playbills, theatre records and correspondence provide social context.

The primary source content is supported by two essential reference works for theatre history: *The London Stage 1660-1800* and *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*.

This truly interdisciplinary resource is rich in the breadth and scope of eighteenth-century material available, and will appeal to researchers working on not only theatre and drama, but literature, history, politics, music, censorship, gender and Romanticism.



## Material Types

- Theatrical Addresses
- Artwork
- Biographical Documents
- Correspondence
- Diaries
- Epilogues
- Financial and Legal Documents
- Notes
- Miscellanies
- Objects
- Plays
- Playbills
- Prologues
- Scrapbooks
- Songs
- Illustrations
- Portraits
- Posters

## Additional Features

- **Two landmark works of reference**, *The London Stage 1660-1800* and *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, now available for the first time in a searchable database
- An **interactive map** of eighteenth-century London's theatre district
- A **detailed chronology** charting the key historical events that affected the theatre industry 1730-1830
- **Essays from leading scholars**, providing context for the primary source material.

## Key Themes

- Censorship
- Celebrity culture and key figures in theatre
- Society and fashion
- Women in eighteenth-century drama
- The rise of the opera
- The business of theatres
- Sets and stage design
- Politics



Images: Bottom left – Louisa Cranstoun Nisbett, Bottom right – Mr W West, Top left – Sarah Siddons, Top right – Edmund Kean

# Collection Highlights

Explore a wealth of primary sources with this extraordinary collection of material relating to the vibrant theatrical world of the eighteenth century:

- The Larpent Collection digitised in its entirety, with over 2,500 plays, epilogues, prologues, addresses and songs submitted for licence between 1737 and 1824
- Plays rejected by the examiner, or heavily censored – often in manuscript and unavailable elsewhere
- Anna Larpent's diaries, providing unique insight into theatrical society, the process of censorship and contemporary theatre criticism
- Papers and correspondence of well-known theatrical figures such as David Garrick, Edmund Kean, the Kemble family, Sarah Siddons and many more
- Scenebooks, portraits, illustrations and other visual material.



*"The Adam Matthew digitisation of the Larpent plays is an enormous boon for scholars. This digital edition will enable researchers, no matter where they are located, to gain access to these crucial, sometimes unique, texts."*

Sue Hodson, Curator of Literary Mss,  
Huntington Library

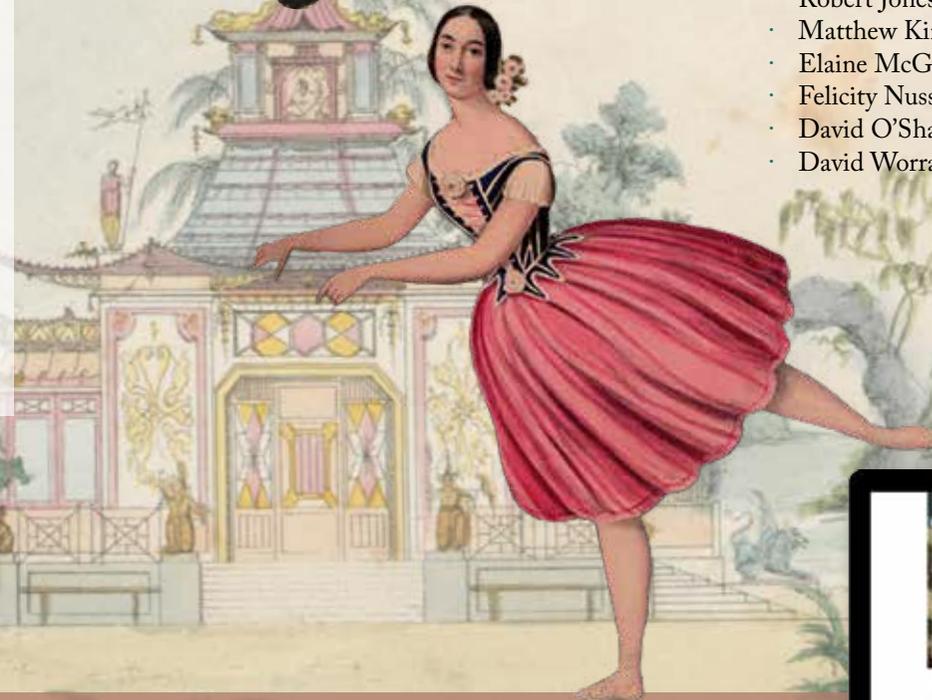
## Source Archives and Libraries

- Huntington Library
- Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond
- Victoria and Albert Museum
- Garrick Club Library
- University of London
- British Library



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Images: Bottom right – Miss Ballin, Top left – Mr Pack, Top right – Mrs H Johnston

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