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Susanna Centlivre

Complete Works



Series Fifteen

The Complete Works of
SUSANNA CENTLIVRE

(c. 1669-1723)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

***Mrs.* SUSANNA CENTLIVRE.**

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Version 1

The Complete Works of
SUSANNA CENTLIVRE



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Complete Works of Susanna Centlivre



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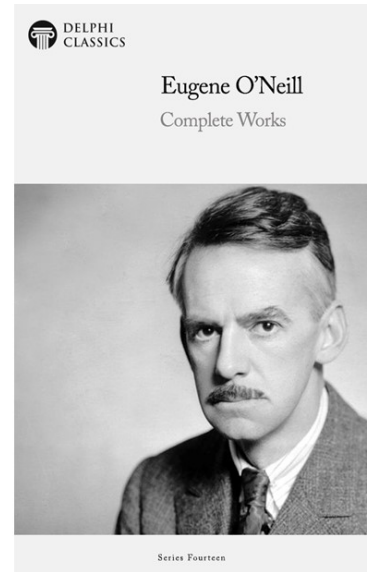
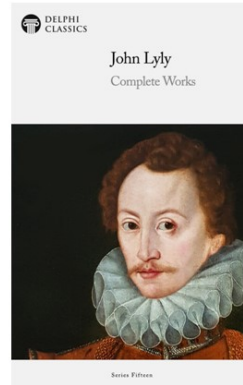
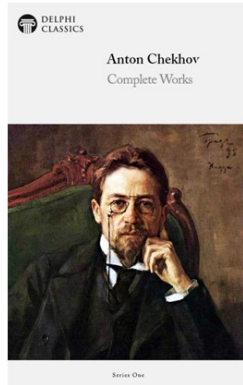
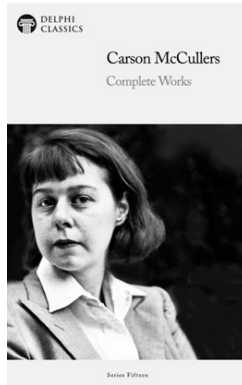
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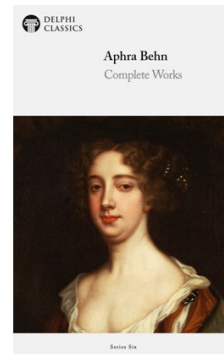
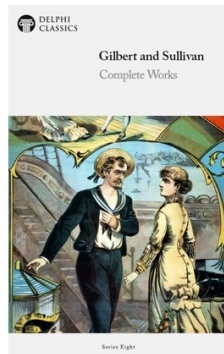
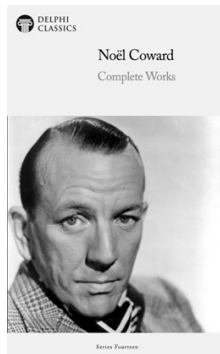


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Classic Drama



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The Plays



Holbeach, a market town in Lincolnshire — Susanna Centlivre's likely birthplace



An early nineteenth century print of the town. Several biographical sources state that Holbeach was the possible place of her birth or at least the place where she spent her childhood. There is much mystery surrounding her early life.

The Perjur'd Husband (1700)



OR, THE ADVENTURES OF VENICE

The most successful female playwright of the eighteenth century, Susanna Centlivre is believed to have been born in Lincolnshire in c. 1669. The main source of information on her early days is provided by Giles Jacob, who claimed he had received an account of it directly from her. She was probably baptised Susanna Freeman at Whaplode, Lincolnshire on 20 November 1669, as the daughter of William Freeman of Holbeach and his wife, Anne, the daughter of Mr Marham, a gentleman of Lynn Regis, Norfolk. Her father was a dissenter and a parliamentarian, so the family would have endured much persecution during the Restoration.

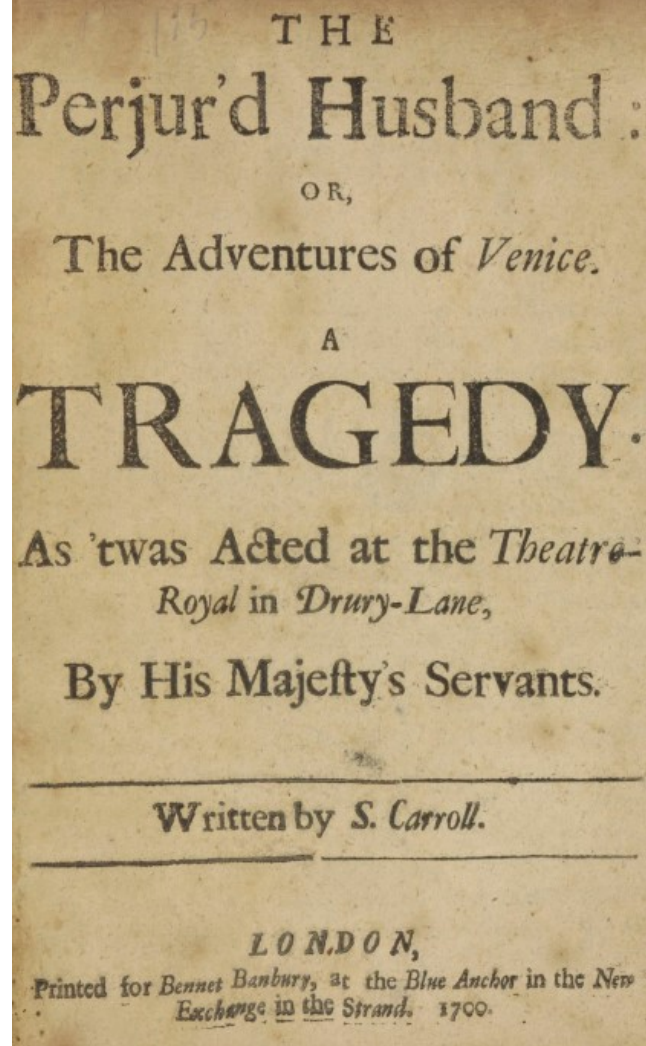
She likely she spent her childhood in the small town of Holbeach. Her father died when she was three and her mother died shortly after remarrying. Her stepfather also married soon after that, so there were few parental figures to guide her early years. There are two stories that explain her transition to acting and eventual arrival in London. The romanticised version tells how Centlivre was discovered weeping by the roadside by Anthony Hammond, a student at St John's College, Cambridge. Enraptured by her manners and good looks, he smuggled her into his college, where she was disguised as a male cousin, 'Jack'. There she remained hidden for some months studying grammar and acquiring "some of the terms of logic, rhetoric, and ethics," before "attracting too much attention" and deciding to head to London. A more plausible tale concerns her joining a company of strolling actors in Stamford, about 25 miles from Holbeach, where she gained popularity acting in breeches roles, for which she was suited due to a "small Wen on her left Eye lid, which gave her a Masculine Air."

Her skill in these roles charmed many admirers, especially a Mr. Fox, who would become Centlivre's first husband when she turned sixteen. However, he died less than a year later. Following Fox's death, Centlivre is claimed to have married an army officer named Carroll, who died in a duel a year and a half after their union. She retained the name Carroll until her next marriage. Although much of her early years is speculation, critics now tend to agree that her knowledge and learning was mostly self-acquired through reading and conversation. Her plays also reveal a thorough knowledge of French drama and a good understanding of the French language. After her husband's death, she spent much of her time in London, where she turned to writing partly for financial support.

Her first published drama, *The Perjur'd Husband: or, The Adventures of Venice* is a tragicomedy that was performed in 1700 at Drury Lane. It takes place during the Venetian Carnival. We are introduced to the rake Count Bassino, who is married to Placentia and yet in love with Aurelia. The latter is betrothed to Alonzo, but falls in love with Bassino, whom she believes to be unmarried. Bassino's friend Armando is outraged at Bassino's behaviour and fetches Placentia to Venice. Bassino promises to be faithful to his wife in future. However, he inadvertently drops a letter that suggests he means to marry Aurelia that very night. The comic sub-plot has Lady Pizalta employ Ludvico, a male prostitute, in cuckolding her husband, Pizalto, who lusts after his wife's clever maid, Lucy.

According to Centlivre herself, the play "went off with a general Applause." It was published under her own name and the prologue takes great pride out of this female

authorship. By the end of 1700, boasting a long list of literary acquaintances and actors, Centlivre was well established in London and her playwriting career firmly launched. Today, *The Perjur'd Husband* is largely regarded as one of her inferior works, often being criticised for its awkward verbiage and drawn-out dialogues. Nevertheless, for a first drama, it is an extraordinary achievement for a young lady that had suffered such a misfortunate and precarious upbringing. *The Perjur'd Husband* also went on to influence Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's play *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755).



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SCENE II.

ACT III. SCENE I.

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ACT IV. SCENE I.

SCENE II. Pizalto's Lodgings.

ACT V. SCENE I.

SCENE II.



'Carnival in Venice' by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, 1750 – a key setting of the drama

THE PROLOGUE.

BY A GENTLEMAN.



Spoken by Mrs. OLDFIELD.

Such dreadful Laws of late 'gainst Wit are made,
It dares not in the City show its Head.
No Place is safe; each Cuckold turns Informer,
If we make merry — it must be in a Corner.
And here's To-night, what doubly makes it sweet,
A private Table, and a Lady's Treat:
At her Reflections none can be uneasy,
When the kind Creature does her best to please ye.
Humbly she sues, and 'tis not for your Glory
T'insult a Lady — when she falls before ye.
But since no human Wit can stand the Test,
With Gorman! and the Champion of the West!
She'll fill the Lists, and then you cannot slight her,
(With Honour safe) for she's a fair Inviter.
Expects no Favour, but at Honour's Call,
Defies the boldest Briton of you all;
Whate'er's her Fate, she's sure to gain the Field,
For Women always conquer, when they yield.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN



COUNT BASSINO, A Savoyard, married to

Placentia, and in Love with Aurelia, Mr. Mills.

Armando, Bassino's Friend, Mr. Simpson.

Alonzo, a Venetian Gentleman,

betrothed to Aurelia, } Mr. Thomas.

Pizalto, a Noble Venetian, Mr. Norris.

Ludovico, a Frenchman, Mr. Fairbank.

WOMEN.

Placentia, Bassino's Wife, Mrs. Kent.

Aurelia, a young Venetian Lady,

betrothed to Alonzo, but in Love

with Bassino, } Mrs. Oldfield.

Forella, her Woman, Mrs. Baker.

Lady Pizalta, Pizalto's Wife, Mrs. Moore.

Lucy, her Woman, Mrs. Lucas.

Maskers, Dancers, Singers, and Attendants.

SCENE, Venice, in Carnival-Time.



End of Sample