



Transgressive Theatricality, Romanticism, and Mary Wollstonecraft

Lisa Plummer Crafton

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Throughout her works, Mary Wollstonecraft interrogates and represents the connected network of theater, culture, and self-representation, in what Lisa Plummer Crafton argues is a conscious appropriation of theater in its literal, cultural, and figurative dimensions. Situating Wollstonecraft within early Romantic debates about theatricality, she explores Wollstonecraft's appropriation of, immersion in, and contributions to these debates within the contexts of philosophical arguments about the utility of theater and spectacle; the political discourse of the French Revolution; juridical transcripts of treason and civil divorce trials; and the spectacle of the female actress in performance, as typified by Sarah Siddons and her compelling connections to Wollstonecraft on and off stage. As she considers Wollstonecraft's contributions to competing notions of the theatrical, from the writer's earliest literary reviews and translations through her histories, correspondence, nonfiction, and novels, Crafton traces the trajectory of Wollstonecraft's conscious appropriation of the trope and her emphasis on theatricality's transgressive potential for self-invention. Crafton's book, the first wide-ranging study of theatricality in the works of Wollstonecraft, is an important contribution to current reconsiderations of the earlier received wisdom about Romantic anti-theatricality, to historicist revisions of the performance and theory of Sarah Siddons, and to theories of spectacle and gender.

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