

UPCOMING READINGS 2013-14 SEASON

Date	Play	Playwright	Director
Jan 13	<i>The Convent of Pleasure</i> (1668)	Margaret Cavendish	Elyse Singer Artistic Director The Hourglass Group
Feb 17	<i>I'll Tell You What</i> (1785)	Elizabeth Inchbald	Kay Matschullat
March TBA	TBA		

ON HER SHOULDERS is supported largely through tax-deductible gifts from individual supporters and the generous volunteer and in-kind contributions of the producing team (individuals and institutions). **Cash donations are gratefully accepted at the box office to help defray the cost of artist stipends and refreshments.**

Donation checks in support of this program should be made payable to New Perspectives Theatre Company noting OHS as the beneficiary, and mailed to:
New Perspectives Theatre Company
456 West 37 Street, New York, NY 10018

Credit Card donations may be made at
<http://www.nptnyc.org/programs/ONHERSHOULDERS.htm>

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE DONATED TO MAKE THIS SERIES POSSIBLE

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We strive to keep this list up-to-date and accurate. If we have left anyone off, please let us know immediately and accept our apologies!

ON HER SHOULDERS

in association with
New Perspectives Theatre Company
and **New School for Drama**
presents

A Bold Stroke for a Wife

by Susanna Centlivre



Directed by **Rebecca Patterson**
Dramaturgy by **Tasha Gordon-Solomon**

Monday, December 16, 2013
The New School
Wollman Hall, 65 West 11th Street
New York, NY

THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DRAMA



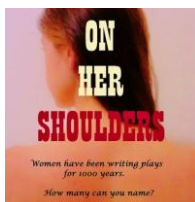
Women have been writing plays and contributing to the Western Theatrical Canon for 1,000 years.

How many of the plays or playwrights can you name?

Total plays by women produced in commercial and regional theatres in the U.S. have remained below 20% for most of the 20th Century and now into the 21st. Yet many of these plays have been the most successful of their time, earning greater awards and box office income than their male counterparts.

At the first reading of this series, Rachel Crothers' *A Man's World*, **ON HER SHOULDERS** surveyed the audience about their knowledge of the play and/or the playwright. Given that our audience is generally composed of theatre practitioners and those with an interest in women in theatre, the numbers were still shocking: only 40% had ever heard of Rachel Crothers; just 21% had read any of her plays, and only 7% had seen a production of one of them.

With a general audience, we can imagine that these numbers would be even worse!



The goal of ON HER SHOULDERS is to remedy this situation. By presenting staged readings of plays from across the spectrum of time and place, with contemporary dramaturges adapting them for modern audiences, we are making it impossible to deny or ignore the great tradition and value of women's contribution to the theatrical canon. Through our reading series we

intend to motivate producers and directors to champion and produce these brilliant plays in New York and regionally, and to incite audiences to demand to see them.

In making history visible, we also shine the light on today's women playwrights and see their work as part of a continuum a thousand years long. They stand on the shoulders of giants--and in restoring our foremothers to their rightful place, we elevate all women playwrights.

The Play in Context, the dramaturgical and scholarly presentation component for all of the readings, is sponsored in part by the League of Professional Theatre Women, a not-for-profit organization promoting visibility and increasing opportunities for women in theatre since 1982. www.theatrewomen.org



ON HER SHOULDERS is also aligned with the goals and projects of 50/50 in 2020: Parity for Women Theatre Artists. This grassroots initiative was launched in August 2009 to work toward 50% representation for women playwrights and directors by the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in the U.S.

Centlivre goes even further to envision a more egalitarian version of marriage. Literary critic Vivian Davis proposes that the play “offers an important alternative model for marital relations, one in which male and female parties are not contract negotiators subject to legally inscribed gender hierarchies, but enthusiastic costars on a shared stage of possibility”. She cites as an example, the final scene, in which Miss Lovely pretends to be experiencing a divine revelation in order to obtain the consent of her final guardian. Davis notes it is Lovely who takes the lead here, hilariously acting out an ecstatic religious possession, while Feignwell takes on the supporting role of straight man.



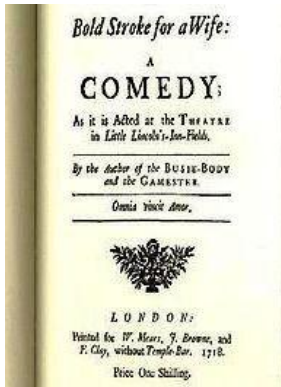
In fact, the humor in the aforementioned exchange is also derived from Anne's innuendo-filled language. (“...and now I see myself within thy arms, yea, I am becoming bone of thy bone and flesh of thy flesh.”) From her first lines in the play, Anne struggles to have ownership over her body. This is manifested in her argument with the religious Prims who make her replace her fashionable, revealing dress with a conservative Quaker outfit. These struggles to express her sexuality in both her words and wardrobe (not to mention in her choice of partner), read today as a clear cry for physical agency.

Finally, although men occupy most of the space in the play, it doesn't make the female characters less important. The four guardians are portrayed as incompetent, and deluded, while Anne is more intelligent and rational. Her awareness that her best option is to find a husband she likes, who will give her as much freedom as she can get, is quite level-headed and realistic, given the circumstance. All the men in the play engage in lying, cheating and posturing. Even if Feignwell is driven by more pure intentions, he still spends most of the play double-dealing. Aside from her moment of pretend in the last scene, Anne tells the truth throughout the play. She sharply calls out the Prims on their hypocrisy and she tells her guardians exactly what she thinks of them, to their faces. No one else in the play is so consistently straightforward. Although she may not have the most lines, Centlivre is telling us to pay the most attention to what Anne says.

And we must pay attention to what Centlivre says – whether it is her call for individual liberty, her incisive social commentary, or the delightfully entertaining story she tells-- which deserves to be heard many times over.

Broad Shoulders!

by Tasha Gordon-Solomon



A Bold Stroke for a Wife is written in the tradition of the restoration comedy of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Following a period of cultural Puritanism, these plays reveled in sharp satire of social mores, and racy, bawdy comedy. *A Bold Stroke* reflects the later restoration comedies, which were geared toward an increasingly middle-class and female audience. During this time, the tamer sentimental comedy, was emerging as a genre. The play can also be seen as a satiric response to these plays and their preoccupation with morality and virtue.

The restoration period was a milestone for women in theater. It saw the emergence of professional female playwrights, beginning with Aphra Ben, whose first production corresponded with Centlivre's birth. During this time, woman actors replaced the convention of men playing different genders onstage. Yes despite this progressive environment, *A Bold Stroke* raises some feminist questions for a contemporary audience. Most of the scenes are occupied by men and the story has a male protagonist. We follow Colonel Feignwell as he tries to get consent to marry Anne. Meanwhile, she spends most of the time relatively inactive, waiting for him to win her freedom from her guardians and access to her inheritance. And this freedom can only be obtained by transferring her charge to yet another male figure, a husband. This irony is encapsulated when Anne says, "He promised to set me free; and on that condition, I promised to make him master of that freedom."

However, a closer look at the play reveals the more subtle ways Centlivre commented on social structures themselves. Centlivre's work had to navigate an environment that was less than ideal. A number of her plays were not published under her (female) name, because publishers feared they wouldn't be successful. The rise in celebrity actors mostly affected men. Centlivre managed to create a play that was a commercial success, while simultaneously subverting the patriarchal structure she was working within.

One target of *A Bold Stroke* is the marriage contract, which is rendered increasingly ridiculous throughout the play. The legalities around marriage at the time were so inconsistent, Britain passed the Marriage Duty acts of the late 1690s in an attempt to lend more formality to the institution. Centlivre herself is believed to have been married three times. In the play, the negotiations among the groom and guardians are based on such bizarre premises, they undermine the validity of the contract itself. Feignwell only gains consent under false pretences, often obtaining written permission that does not even use his real name. This gives the contract, and by extension the institution questionable legitimacy.

ON HER SHOULDERS

is produced by
Melody Brooks, Andrea Lepcio & Lillian Rodriguez
Season One has been curated by Susan Jonas

A Bold Stroke for a Wife

by Susanna Centlivre

Directed by Rebecca Patterson
Dramaturgy by Tasha Gordon-Solomon

CAST
(in order of appearance)

Prologue, Freeman, Servant, Simon Pure
Colonel Feignwell
Obediah Prim, Waiter, Footman, Stockbroker
Sackbutt, Mrs. Prim, Stockbroker
Anne Lovely
Sir Philip Modelove, Stockbroker
Stage Directions, Tradelove

Sarah Hankins*
Elisabeth Preston*
Virginia Baeta
Natalie Lebert*
Sarah Joyce*
Heather MacDonald*
Kelsey Lee Arendt

* Member AEA

There will be a brief, 10-minute intermission.
Please join us after the reading for a discussion with the director and dramaturg.

REBECCA PATTERSON (Director) NYC: *As You Like It, The Wonder, Twelfth Night, The Taming of the Shrew, Edward II, School For Scandal, Much Ado About Nothing, The Lucky Chance, Antony & Cleopatra, The Feign'd Courtesans, The Duchess of Malfi, The Rover, Macbeth* (The Queen's Company) *Wapato, Greeks & Centaurs* (Women's Project), *The Imaginary Invalid* (Resonance Ensemble), *The Gabriels* (SPF) Regional: *One Flea Spare, Angels in America, Vinegar Tom, Too Tall Blondes in Love, Marisol, The Dance and The Railroad* and *The Lisbon Traviata*. Rebecca is Artistic Director of The Queen's Company, known for its innovative productions of classical plays featuring all-female casts.

TASHA GORDON-SOLOMON's (Dramaturg) plays have been developed and produced at Ars Nova, Dixon Place, The Flea, the Public Theater, and the 52nd Street Project, among others. She is a member of the Clubbed Thumb Early Career Writers Group, a recipient of the Dramatist Guild Fellowship, and an alumna of the Ars Nova Playgroup. Directing credits include Ensemble Studio Theater, the New York Fringe Festival, The Brick, Columbia University Graduate Playwriting Department and the Young Playwrights Festival at the O'Neill. She received her MFA in Dramatic Writing at NYU, where she was the recipient of a Goldberg Fellowship in Playwriting and a Tisch Fellowship.

A Bold Stroke of the Pen!

excerpted from enotes: Source: Drama Criticism, ©2005 Gale Cengage.



SUSANNA CENTLIVRE was an English dramatic writer and actress, born about 1667. At sixteen she married the nephew of Sir Stephen Fox, and on his death she married an officer named Carroll, who was killed in a duel. Left in poverty, in 1700 she began to support herself by writing for the stage; some of her early plays are signed S. Carroll.

By number of performances, Centlivre could fairly be called the most successful English dramatist after William Shakespeare and before the twentieth century. Like her more famous counterpart, Aphra Behn, Centlivre suffered the prejudices, slights, and outright attacks peculiar to the station of the woman writer, but her plays lasted much longer and were performed much more frequently than those of Behn. Because her works are better performed than read, she was long dismissed by critics. Recent recognition of her theatrical skill and interest in her unique perspective as a female Whig dramatist have returned Centlivre to prominence as a major playwright of the early eighteenth century.

The facts of Centlivre's birth remain in dispute, but the standard version identifies her as the child of William and Anne Freeman of Lincolnshire, baptized in 1669. According to some, Mr. Freeman was a supporter of Cromwell prior to the Restoration, living in Ireland as an exile at the time of Susanna's birth. Biographer and friend Abel Boyer believed she was born to a Mr. Rawkins, of lower estate than Mr. Freeman. Documentary evidence exists to support both stories but confirm neither. Her early years are clouded by legend: Boyer refers to the "gay Adventures" of her youth "over which we shall draw a Veil," he adds. John Mottley, an acquaintance of Centlivre's tells in her biography that a young Susanna, fleeing a wicked stepmother, was picked up weeping at the side of a road by a Cambridge student, Anthony Hammond, who secreted her in his college rooms--allowing her to get a brief, second-hand university education. William Chetwood, another acquaintance, agreed that Centlivre fled her stepmother but wrote that she joined a troupe of traveling players.

Boyer helped her launch her career in 1700, with the production of the tragicomic play *The Perjur'd Husband* at the Drury Lane Theatre. For the next two decades Centlivre worked steadily at playwriting, though she published her first several plays anonymously. Even her first major success was released without her name attached; *The Gamester* (1705) did so well at Lincoln's Inn Fields that it was used two months later to open the new Haymarket Theatre. In 1706 Centlivre offered her play *Love at a Venture* to Colley Cibber, who was managing the Drury Lane Theatre, but Cibber rejected it. When he produced a very similar play, *The Double Gallants* (1707), under his own name, Centlivre had little recourse, but when Cibber's plagiarism was publicized he was roundly criticized. In the meantime, Centlivre had taken the play to the Duke of Grafton's servants, a troupe of strolling players then at Bath. Evidence suggests that she joined the troupe herself as a traveling performer.

Legend has it that the players performed *Alexander the Great* (some say *The Rival Queens*) for the court at Windsor, with Centlivre herself taking the title role. It was as Alexander, the story

goes, that Centlivre first attracted the notice of one of the Queen's cooks, Joseph Centlivre. After their wedding on April 23, 1707, the couple lived at Buckingham Court, Spring Gardens, which was Centlivre's home for the rest of her life. (at r

Although she was now financially secure, Centlivre continued to write plays, though not without difficulty. Her next play, *The Busie Body* (1709), was nearly rejected by Drury Lane and contemporary newspapers document the actors' contempt for "a silly thing wrote by a Woman." Centlivre's confidence in pressing the play was well-founded; it became one of her most successful works, winning the praise of Richard Steele in *The Tatler* and enjoying command performances at court in the subsequent decade. Her next few plays were beset by further tensions with actors, exacerbated by remarks attributed to her in *The Female Tatler*, complaining of their lack of respect and gratitude. Centlivre denied ever making such statements, but the damage was done. Centlivre's Whiggish politics, about which she became increasingly open, further created problems for theater companies eager to avoid censure from Queen Anne's Tory government. In 1714 she dedicated *The Wonder* to Prince George Augustus of the House of Hanover, Duke of Cambridge, in another show of Whig sympathies. Her faith was well-placed: the Duke soon became King George I, and the play became one of the most popular of the eighteenth century (and in which, as the jealous husband, David Garrick found one of his best parts.) She wrote two political satires in 1715, both of which were repressed by the Master of Revels, and a tragedy, *The Cruel Gift*, in 1716.



Her Whig sympathies, anti-Catholic beliefs, and commercial success also made Centlivre a target for the era's keenest satirist, Alexander Pope. He lampooned her in the character of the playwright Phoebe Clinket in the farce *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717), which he wrote with John Gay and John Arbuthnot; five years after her death he included her in his catalogue of dullards, *The Dunciad* (1728). Centlivre produced her final major comedy in 1718; *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* successfully played at Lincoln's Inn Fields that year, and continued to be a favorite actor's vehicle well into the next century. Her health began to decline in the next year, and she wrote only one more play, the stridently political comedy *The Artifice* (1722), which was not a popular success.

Critical opinion of Centlivre as a minor dramatist restricted the study of her works to *The Busie Body*, *The Wonder*, and *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* well into the twentieth century, but modern reassessments of her talent and importance have begun to increase the standard Centlivre canon. The first significant critical study of Centlivre is John Wilson Bowyer's biography of 1952, which continues to be a primary reference on the author's life and works. Centlivre's treatment of women is a primary theme of scholarship, especially her depiction of marriage and how women fare in finding and surviving a husband. The intersection of gender and political themes has brought renewed attention to *The Gamester* and *The Basset Table*, which contain some of Centlivre's most progressive female characters. As Victoria Warren suggests, the unsettling combination of women and money in those plays spoke directly to Centlivre's predicament as a woman compelled for much of her life to write for her livelihood. Centlivre died on December 1, 1723, and is buried at St. Paul's in Covent Garden.