



The Publics Open to Us All: Essays on Women and Performance in Eighteenth-Century England

Laura Engel

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'The Public's Open to Us All: Essays on Women and Performance in Eighteenth-Century England' considers the relationship between British women and various modes of performance in the long eighteenth century. From the moment Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, the question of women's status in the public world became the focus of cultural attention both on and off the stage. In addition to the appearance of the first actresses during this period female playwrights, novelists, poets, essayists, journalists, theatrical managers and entrepreneurs emerged as skillful and often demanding professionals. In this variety of new roles, eighteenth-century women redefined shifting notions of femininity by challenging traditional representations of female subjectivity and contributing to the shaping of eighteenth-century society's attitudes, tastes, and cultural imagination. Recent scholarship in eighteenth-century studies reflects a heightened interest in fame, the rise of celebrity culture, and new ways of understanding women's participation as both private individuals and public professionals. What is unique to the body of essays presented here is the authors' focus on performance as a means of thinking about the ways in which women occupied, negotiated, re-imagined, and challenged the world outside of the traditional domestic realm. The authors employ a range of historical, literary, and theoretical approaches to the connections among women and performance, and in doing so make significant contributions to the fields of eighteenth-century literary and cultural studies, theatre history, gender studies, and performance studies.

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