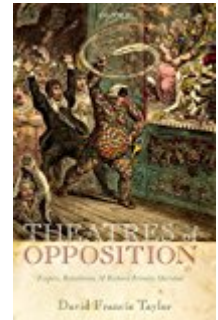


**David Francis Taylor.** *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. xii + 281 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-964284-7.



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**Published on** H-War (December, 2017)

**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

David Francis Taylor's *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan* examines British political culture through the career of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He was a playwright, theater manager, and politician in London. Sheridan overlapped two worlds: theatrical and political, which allowed him to freely express his political views in a multitude of media.

Taylor structures his book into three parts. The first section assesses the connection between Sheridan's political and dramatic views of the American War for Independence. In the next part, Taylor explores Sheridan's speeches in which he expressed negative views about the East India Company and his play *Pizarro*, which debuted in 1799. He demonstrates that these works corresponded with imperial practices in India and Ireland. Lastly, in his final section, Taylor argues that Sheridan and others subverted traditional English characters and plays to have new meanings with allusions to the French Revolution. Ultimately, the author contends that Sheridan's theatrical and po-

litical career was complex and had a tremendous influence on English political culture.

Sheridan's most successful play was *Rivals*, which debuted in 1775. Taylor highlights the general plot of *Rivals*: a young man named Captain Jack Absolute rebels against his father, Sir Anthony Absolute. This was an allusion to England and the American colonies. However, in the play, the son and father reunite after an almost deadly duel. Written in the early stages of the American war, *Rivals* was the perfect imagery of the relationship between America and England: the rebellious nature of children against parental authority.

In the spring of 1777, Sheridan debuted the comedy *The School for Scandal*, which attracted a great audience. In 1779, American John Leacock rewrote the comedy with overt government characters, such as the prime minister and King George III. Taylor suggests that this American version just "recalibrates and magnifies the ideological impli-

cations already resonant in Sheridan's interrogation of a society of fictions" (p. 37).

Taylor notes that Sheridan not only was a theater manager but also edited a newspaper, the *Englishman*, which was a pro-Whig outlet. He published seemingly radical essays under the pseudonym D. The author shows that Sheridan's political commentary was astute, because he correctly understood that the American War for Independence was a "struggle over markets" (p. 39). However, the *Englishman's* pro-American stance seemed to be unpatriotic to Londoners, especially after the French joined the Americans in 1777. The *Englishman* quickly dissolved after the announcement of the Franco-American alliance. The political climate radically shifted in 1777; a new wave of anti-French drama was featured at Drury Lane. For example, Richard Cumberland's tragedy *The Battle of Hastings*, which debuted in 1778, whipped up anti-French emotions and drastically shifted the political-theatrical climate. Ultimately, the fear of a French invasion saturated the entertainment world.

Taylor's next section examines Sheridan's views of the East India Company and the tyrannical rule of Governor General Warren Hastings in Bengal. Sheridan, as a politician, overtly spoke out against Hastings, which sparked a huge controversy and pushed for impeachment of the governor general. In this section, he also explores Sheridan's views of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Sheridan was born in Dublin and obsessed over the Irish dilemma. Taylor connects Sheridan's only tragedy *Pizarro* to the Hasting's Trial and the Irish Rebellion, which were the main political events of the time.

The final section demonstrates how Sheridan's radical views permeated his work throughout his career. The Drury Lane Theatre became the site of many radical productions that provoked many people in the audience. Taylor thoroughly demonstrates that Sheridan was a powerful character who had a complex interconnected-

ness between satire and politics. Ultimately, Taylor successfully argues that Sheridan was both a politician and activist in the revolutionary era.

Overall, Taylor's *Theatres of Opposition* brings much-needed attention to the importance of political satire and activism in theater. Today, we have political comedians, such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, who portray the absurdity of the American government, but they are not doing it in a revolutionary climate as Sheridan's eighteenth century. *Theatres of Opposition* is thoroughly researched and well structured; however, it lacks an examination of Sheridan's time in Parliament. Taylor mentions some of his speeches but does not clearly articulate his other activities later in his career. Although not your standard history, because it is not a history, Taylor's work provides an interdisciplinary look into Sheridan's complex career. It is recommended for an advanced scholar interested in British politics and theater. Nonetheless, Taylor sheds light on the often overlooked career of this political activist playwright.

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**Citation:** Timothy C. Hemmis. Review of Taylor, David Francis. *Theatres of Opposition: Empire, Revolution, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2017.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39467>



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