

*Caroline Watson and the Theatre of Printmaking**Heather McPherson*

Caroline Watson (1760/61–1814) has been singled out by David Alexander as ‘the first British woman professional engraver’ with an extended independent career.¹ In terms of her well-documented oeuvre, lifetime fame, and professional and financial success as a stipple engraver, she is an outlier. Women printmakers rarely signed their prints so their work often went unacknowledged.² Watson signed her prints and even published a number under her own name (1785–1788), notably the portraits of the Royal Princesses Mary and Sophia after John Hoppner, from Fitzroy Street, where she was living at the time with her barrister brother.³ The engraved portrait of Princess Mary, Duchess of Gloucester, which was dedicated to the Queen, was published on 1 March 1785. Although Watson did not receive any official royal commissions, she was appointed Engraver to the Queen in 1785, and used the honorary title, which added cachet, in signing her prints.⁴ Little is known about Watson’s personal life. After her father’s death in 1790, she lived with her aunt, Elizabeth Judkins. Her professional success and recognition notwithstanding, William Hayley’s obituary acknowledged the constraints of gender

¹ See D. Alexander, *Caroline Watson & Female Printmaking in Late Georgian England* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 2015), 13, the most detailed catalogue of her work, to which I am indebted. It includes a checklist of 118 prints. Watson probably made other unsigned prints.

² Women, who often worked in family workshops, were more prominent in print publishing, especially satirical prints. See T. Clayton, *The English Print, 1688–1802* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 245–246.

³ British Museum (hereafter BM) Q.2.13 and NPG D14891. The British Museum holds multiple impressions including preparatory proofs for both portraits. See www.britishmuseum.org/collection and www.npg.org.uk.

⁴ The pendant portrait of Princess Sophia, published on 12 April 1786, was dedicated to the King and Queen. Alexander suggests that Hoppner orchestrated the commission to raise his profile (*Caroline Watson*, 20).

noting: 'Her great modesty prevented her being so well known as her merit deserved.'⁵

Watson is best known for her portrait engravings after such leading artists as Sir Joshua Reynolds, John Hoppner, George Romney, Thomas Gainsborough, and Thomas Lawrence. This chapter focuses on an understudied aspect of her oeuvre – her theatrical prints – which will serve as a lens for reexamining how issues of gender, printmaking hierarchies, and patronage both shaped and circumscribed her exceptional career as a female stipple engraver. The only other contemporary female printmaker (and painter) specialising in stipple in England was Marie Anne Bourlier (active 1801–1824), who engraved portraits of the royal family after William Beechey. Watson's theatrical prints, which stand out in terms of their scale and narrative complexity are, arguably, her most significant contribution in the arena of printmaking. The four large theatrical subjects she engraved for Robert Edge Pine – *Ophelia* (from *Hamlet*), *Miranda* (from *The Tempest*), *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia*, and *Garrick Speaking the Ode* – and the two large plates, *The Death of Cardinal Beaufort* and *Ferdinand and Miranda Playing Chess*, commissioned for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, testify to the scope of her ambitions as a printmaker and her technical prowess in graphically translating dramatic multifigure subjects in stipple.

Early Career and Patronage

Watson pursued printmaking under the tutelage of her father, James Watson (c. 1740–1790), a leading mezzotint engraver, though there is no documentation regarding her training in stipple engraving.⁶ Stipple or 'the dotted manner', a quicker, less technically demanding engraving process in which tone was added with numerous dots, was adopted in England beginning in the mid-1770s. It was widely employed for reproducing portraits, decorative designs, and small paintings and drawings, and could be printed in colour to resemble a chalk drawing.⁷ Stipple engraving

⁵ [W. Hayley], 'Obituary of Caroline Watson', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 84 (1814): 700.

⁶ Since her father did not practice stipple, she may have trained with another engraver. Elizabeth Judkins (active 1770–c. 1814), who was trained by James Watson, signed seven mezzotints (1770–1775), but did not pursue printmaking. She may have given up printmaking to run James Watson's household after his wife's death. See G. Goodwin, *British Mezzotinters: Thomas Watson, James Watson, Elizabeth Judkins* (London: A. H. Bullen, 1904), 223–224.

⁷ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 17; A. Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 78–83. Stipple (or crayon-manner) became popular following the success of William Wynne Ryland's engravings after Angelika Kauffmann. Francesco Bartolozzi was a leading exponent of the stipple method.

was also financially advantageous because it was faster and more impressions could be pulled without reworking the original plate than with other types of intaglio.⁸ In 1780, Watson produced her first stipple plates, including the frontispiece to a life of Isaac Watts, which was favourably mentioned in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁹ She received commissions from Robert Edge Pine and especially John Boydell in the early 1780s, which were crucial in launching her career. Over the years Watson worked with various publishers including Robert Cribb, Rudolph Ackermann, and the Italian-born printseller Anthony Molteno, who published some of her prints and sold them at his shop.¹⁰

Earning a living from printmaking was challenging, especially for women, who often lacked access to specialised technical training and the artistic and commercial networks to produce and market their prints. Besides commissioning prints, leading publishers, like Boydell, published catalogues and purchased stocks of plates and reissued them, as was the case with the plates Watson engraved after Pine. Watson benefited from familial training and support and her father's extensive artistic network. As the daughter of a prominent printmaker, she had a genteel upbringing and grew up observing her father working on plates at home. Although it is not known why Watson elected to specialise in stipple rather than mezzotint, it was fashionable, less technically demanding and, I suspect, affirmed her artistic independence by differentiating her from her father.

Prints were priced according to the size of the plate, the quality, and amount of work involved.¹¹ The elegantly printed advertisement for a portrait of Mary Amelia Cecil, Marchioness of Salisbury, engraved after a miniature by Robert Bowyer (1790), offers an illuminating example of how prints were niche marketed at different price points as prestigious commodities, whose allure was enhanced by distinguished patrons and

⁸ Clayton, *The English Print*, 216, 246. Scholars have connected stipple engraving with women and fashion. Stipples were dedicated to fashionable women and used by women for needlework and decoupage. Small decorative prints, aimed at female buyers, made attractive wall displays. See also A. M. Hind, *Bartolozzi and Other Stipple Engravers Working in England at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912), who dismissively labels stipple-engraving 'an essentially feminine art' (5).

⁹ See *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 50 (December 1780), 574.

¹⁰ Molteno published Watson's *Maternal Tuition* (1793, BM 1917,1208.3091), after a drawing by Catherine Maria Fanshawe, an accomplished amateur artist (Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, cat. no. 35, 64). Watson sold the copperplates of the Princesses to Molteno, and there is a letter from Watson to Molteno's wife, Mary, dated 7 February 1805.

¹¹ Clayton, *The English Print*, 22–23, compares the prices of prints to other commodities like theatre tickets.

honorifics.¹² Published by Bowyer, Miniature Painter to His Majesty, the portrait was engraved by Caroline Watson, Engraver to Her Majesty, and dedicated to Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal. The delicate stipple engraving, which displays Watson's technical skill in rendering fine details and tonal contrasts, retains the intimacy of a miniature. Marketed to appeal to members of the nobility, wealthy gentry, and upscale collectors, the advertisement stated that orders could be placed with Mr. Bowyer or Mrs. Ryland for the finest proof impressions at 10s 6d (10 shillings and sixpence), or 6s for regular impressions.

From the outset, Watson was patronised by prominent women, notably Frances Coutts, wife of the first Marquess of Bute, whose portrait she engraved.¹³ Throughout her career, she benefited from female patronage and cultivated a female clientele. In addition to dedicating prints to prominent women including members of the royal family, she collaborated with women artists, such as Catherine Fanshawe, whom she may have instructed in printmaking.¹⁴ The most noteworthy example of this female-centric approach is the series of twelve aquatint plates Watson made after Maria Cosway, illustrating Mary Robinson's poem, *The Winter's Day*, which was produced by women for a predominantly female audience.¹⁵ The project, announced in *The Morning Post* on 20 November 1800, took several years to complete. The prints were published in 1803; the letter press is dated 1804. *The Literary Magazine, and American Register* enthused, 'the genius of three ladies, in different departments, are happily and splendidly combined'.¹⁶

Except for *Garrick Speaking the Ode*, Watson's theatrical prints from the early 1780s focus on female characters from Shakespeare and the actress Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), a theatrical sensation and popular female role model, widely admired for her powerful acting and her domestic virtue. Although Watson did not exhibit publicly, her prints circulated fairly widely as frontispieces and individual plates, and were highly regarded.¹⁷

¹² See BM D,3.452 (the advertisement). The print, BM 1850,0810.235, is dated 12 January 1790.

¹³ See BM 1850,0810.231.

¹⁴ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 65. In a letter to Hayley (1805), Watson mentions a letter from Fanshawe.

¹⁵ S. Hyde, 'Watson, Caroline', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), 2004; online ed. January 2008, art. 28830. Published by Rudolph Ackermann, it is Watson's only work in aquatint. *Maternal Tuition* (1793), engraved by Watson after Catherine Fanshawe, foregrounds motherhood.

¹⁶ Cited in Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 53.

¹⁷ That is demonstrated by the numerous commissions she received from prominent artists and publishers and favourable notices for her illustrations for the *Life of Romney* and *The Winter's Day*. Print runs varied considerably, so it is difficult to gauge the circulation of individual prints.

Her prestigious commissions for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery affiliated her with the most significant artistic enterprise of the late eighteenth century. In the 1786 prospectus, Watson figured alongside the leading engravers and artists in England. The only other female participant was Angelika Kauffmann, who contributed two paintings.¹⁸ In examining Watson's theatrical prints and their significance within her oeuvre, I am particularly interested in scrutinizing how individual agency, gender, patronage, market factors, and technical considerations intersected in moulding her successful career as an independent female printmaker.

Theatrical Subjects from the Early 1780s

Robert Edge Pine (1730–1788) probably became aware of Caroline Watson as a printmaker through her father. Primarily known as a portraitist, Pine exhibited at the Society of Artists (1760–1771), and at the Royal Academy, but harboured history painting ambitions. A political radical who supported the American Revolution, he painted an allegorical picture, *America* (1778), known through an engraving.¹⁹ In April 1782, Pine exhibited seven subjects drawn from Shakespeare in the Great Room at Spring Gardens, anticipating Boydell's multimedia Shakespeare Gallery, launched in 1786. The catalogue that accompanied Pine's ambitious exhibition included a prospectus for a series of seven large engravings to be published in pairs after his pictures in the chalk manner by the best engravers.²⁰ Although Caroline Watson's name does not appear in the newspaper advertisements, Pine commissioned her to engrave two Shakespeare subjects (*Miranda* from the *Tempest* and *Ophelia* from *Hamlet*), *Garrick Speaking the Ode* (intended as the first plate), and *Mrs.*

¹⁸ See W. H. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York: Garland, 1976), 78–79. Boydell invited Maria Cosway to participate, but she did not contribute any paintings, due perhaps to Boydell's nationalistic insistence that participants be English artists working in England. As a founding member of the Royal Academy, Kauffmann qualified as an English artist. For a discussion of her work as a printmaker, see Chapter 4 by F. Carlo Schmid in this volume.

¹⁹ The most detailed source on Pine is R. G. Stewart, *Robert Edge Pine: A British Portrait Painter in America, 1784–1788* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1979). Pine settled in Philadelphia in 1784, where he opened a picture gallery in Independence Hall to display his pictures. His paintings were destroyed in a fire in 1803.

²⁰ See *Explanation of Pictures Painted by Robert Edge Pine Representing Select Scenes in the Works of Shakespeare Exhibited at the Great Room in Spring-Gardens* (London: Printed by H. Reyell, 1782). The other Shakespeare subjects were drawn from *King Lear* and *As You Like It*. James Watson was originally slated to engrave two plates, an indication of his role in promoting Caroline Watson's career. The subscription price for *Garrick Speaking the Ode* was slightly lower than for the Shakespeare subjects.

Siddons as Euphrasia, which was added later.²¹ Watson's collaboration with Pine ended abruptly in 1784 when he departed for Philadelphia. According to Edward Edwards, the exhibition failed to meet Pine's expectations, and only some of the prints were completed.²² Boydell purchased the copper-plates from Pine and reissued them under his own name in 1784. *Miranda* and *Ophelia*, which feature female protagonists, were dedicated to prominent aristocratic women associated with the Opposition – *Ophelia* to the Duchess of Norfolk, and *Miranda* to the Duchess of Devonshire – indicating a concerted effort to market them to a female clientele, as does the inclusion of the print of Siddons in the series.²³

When she returned triumphantly to Drury Lane Theatre in October 1782, Siddons appeared as Euphrasia in Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter*, which remained one of her most acclaimed tragic roles. Artists including William Hamilton, John Keyse Sherwin, the young Thomas Lawrence, and Pine rushed to depict Siddons in the heroic role.²⁴ Siddons posed for Pine in January 1783. His ambitious painting of *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* was a speculative venture intended to capitalise on her celebrity, raise his profile, and promote his art. An advertisement in *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 18 March 1783, extolled Mr. Pine's picture and invited readers to view the original at his house in Piccadilly. Pine also proposed having an elegant print engraved from it 'with the utmost expedition'.²⁵ In 1785, Watson engraved *Siddons and Kemble in the Characters Tancred and Sigismunda* (BM 1931.0509.170) after a miniature by Charles Shirreff, on exhibit at the Royal Academy. The subscription refers to her as 'Miss Watson, Engraver to her Majesty', attesting to her name recognition. In April 1785, Shirreff advertised the print for 10s 6d, with subscriptions taken by three other printsellers and her father, James Watson. The print, published by Shirreff on 12 December 1785 (according

²¹ See *The London Courant*, 5 May 1781, n.p., which states, 'plates are now engraving', and that proofs may be seen at Mr. Pine's; Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 19–20. Though not mentioned by name, Caroline Watson was the only engraver Pine employed. Originally, the *Miranda* and *Ophelia* plates were to be engraved by Victor-Marie Picot, a pioneering stipple engraver.

²² See E. Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters Who Have Resided or Been Born in England* (London: Leigh & Sotheby, 1808), 172. Edwards criticised the weakness of Pine's drawing evident in the prints after his pictures. He states Pine lacked employment, suggesting he failed to secure sufficient subscriptions for the series.

²³ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, cat. nos. 4, 5, 34–35.

²⁴ Hamilton's large-scale canvas, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1780, predated her London appearance.

²⁵ See *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, no. 4316, 18 March 1783, 1. On 8 May 1783, Pine advertised the print as 'now engraving by subscription'. Watson's engraving was published by Pine on 10 February 1784, and reissued by Boydell in 1784.

to the inscription), was advertised in *The Morning Post* under Boydell's name in January 1786, with proofs at 10s 6d, and prints at 6 shillings.²⁶

Although it's tempting to posit a direct connection between Siddons and Watson, I have not uncovered any documentary evidence; however, there is an intriguing theatrical connection. Watson engraved Lady Elizabeth Foster's portrait after John Downman in 1788, one of a set of six oval prints after Downman's large portrait drawings of fashionable beauties that had served as scenery for the private theatrical production of Arthur Murphy's *The Way to Keep Him* at Richmond House in 1787. Siddons's portrait, which was engraved by P. W. Tomkins, was part of the series which included fashionable aristocratic ladies – the Duchess of Richmond, Lady Elizabeth Foster, Lady Duncannon, and the Duchess of Devonshire – who had attended the performance, as well as Siddons and Elizabeth Farren, attesting to high society's infatuation with the stage. The prints were marketed both individually and as a set for 36 shillings in black or brown ink, or 3 guineas, printed in colours.²⁷

Pine's commission to engrave the plates depicting Miranda in *The Tempest*, Act I, Sc. 2, and Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Act IV, Sc. 5, was an important opportunity for Watson to demonstrate her printmaking abilities. Reproducing a painting as a print was a complex process of translation from one medium to another that required technical skill and artistic interpretation.²⁸ With their youthful female protagonists, the subjects were well-suited to the delicacy and finesse of stipple, which was associated with women and fashion. Critics of stipple like John Landseer attacked it as inferior, lacking vigour, and propelled by fashion and degenerate taste.²⁹ Relatively large at 38 × 43 cm, the two engravings, though not obviously linked except for their female protagonists and Shakespearean subjects, were marketed as a pair, titled *Miranda* and *Ophelia*, respectively, underscoring their feminine focus. *Miranda*, published by Pine c. 1782, was reissued by Boydell in 1784.³⁰ *Ophelia*, initially published c. 1782–1784,

²⁶ Alexander cites the ads in *The Morning Post*, 30 April 1785 and 18 January 1786, and suggests the plate was delayed at the printers until January 1786 (Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, cat. no. 11, 41).

²⁷ Ibid. 51. Single prints sold for 7s 6d plain or 15s in colour. Five different engravers were engaged to speed up production.

²⁸ See A. R. Frederick, 'Reclaiming Reproductive Printmaking', in Elizabeth Sutton, ed., *Women Artists and Patrons in the Netherlands, 1500–1700* (Amsterdam: E. Sutton/Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 143–156.

²⁹ J. Landseer, *Lectures on the Art of Engraving Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, & Orme, 1807), 125–31.

³⁰ See BM 1869,0508.316. The impression in the British Museum is cropped above the publication line. The 1784 re-impression issued by Boydell has a decorative border and different letterpress. See *Ophelia* BM 1873,0809.364.

was reissued in the same format on 1 June 1784. The scene from the *Tempest* depicting Miranda's excitement at the sight of Ferdinand exhibits a high level of technical skill and a finely modulated tonal range. The scene focuses on the figures of Prospero and, especially, Miranda, whose delicate form and luminous white dress glow against the darker landscape background. The crowded court scene from *Hamlet* showcases Ophelia, her mind unhinged by her father's death and Hamlet's abandonment. Crowned with weeds and wildflowers, she stands at centre stage before the King and Queen, singing and mindlessly distributing herbs, as Laertes weeps at far right. The dramatically illuminated figure of Ophelia flutters like a moth in the shadowy medieval hall. The inconsistencies in scale and anatomical defects are attributable to Pine whose weak drawing was criticised by Edwards.

Imaginary illustrations inspired by Shakespeare, like those of Pine, were grounded in the text, rather than stage performance, and were glossed with quotations. Pine's paintings anticipate the ambitious cycle of Shakespeare subjects Boydell would commission from leading artists a few years later for his Gallery, which he loftily aligned with the promotion of history painting and British nationalism and endeavoured to distance from the taint of theatre.³¹ From the outset, Boydell faced the problem of securing a sufficient number of expert engravers to rapidly produce large and small prints after the paintings for the subscribers. Line engraving, the most costly and time-consuming intaglio process, was the gold standard for reproductive prints after paintings. Stipple, which was faster and less expensive, was effective for small-scale prints, especially the rendering of delicate detail, but lacked the sharp definition of form and tonal variety of line engraving. The issue of quality as opposed to speed would haunt Boydell and his nephew, Josiah. In their struggle to deliver the quasi-industrial volume of plates for the Shakespeare Gallery in a timely manner, they relied increasingly on mixed techniques and stipple engraving.³² Widespread complaints about delays and the declining quality of the plates contributed to the sharp fall-off in subscriptions.³³

Watson's large (47.4 × 35.9 cm) engraving of *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* (Figure 3.1) offered a more expansive expressive register to demonstrate her technical and interpretive skill. Not included in the original project, it

³¹ In *The London Courant*, 5 May 1781, Pine makes the case for representing subjects from Shakespeare, not as staged scenes, but with the 'unconfined liberty of painting'.

³² On printmaking polemics, see Landseer, *Lectures on the Art of Engraving*, 130–131.

³³ See Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, 84–85, citing Joseph Farington and Benjamin West on the mixture of dotting and engraving and general deficiencies in many of the prints, in which quality was sacrificed to economy.



Figure 3.1 Caroline Watson, after Robert Edge Pine, *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia*, 1784.
 Stipple engraving, 47.4 × 35.9 cm.
 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

was presumably added to cash in on Siddons's celebrity.³⁴ Vengefully brandishing a dagger raised over the body of the tyrant, Dionysus,

³⁴ BM 1931,0509.152. See *The Morning Chronicle, and London Advertiser*, 18 March 1783, 1, which states that Pine's painting of *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* will be engraved expeditiously, and that prints after *Garrick Speaking the Ode* and *Miranda* will be ready in about a month.

Siddons, directs her gaze toward her aged shackled father. Giving concrete form to the lines from *The Grecian Daughter* inscribed below, ‘... in a dear Father’s cause, / A Woman’s vengeance tow’rs above her Sex’, Siddons’s lofty figure, forceful pose, and expression of calm fury are strikingly rendered. Overall, the effect is more dynamic and sculptural than the *Miranda* or *Ophelia* engravings. Represented in close-up view, her body pivoting in space, Siddons is dramatically illuminated from the upper right. Rather than an invented illustration, *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* is a theatrical portrait based on her emotionally gripping performance in *The Grecian Daughter*, which contemporaries extolled. Artists including Hamilton, Lawrence, Sherwin, and Pine depicted Siddons in *The Grecian Daughter* in the early 1780s, and her image was widely disseminated in print form.³⁵

David Alexander considers it one of Watson’s least satisfactory prints, due to Siddons’s lack of frenzied emotion; however, the criticism seems misplaced since she was reproducing Pine’s painting for which the actress had posed.³⁶ I contend that *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* should be recognised as one of Watson’s most impressive achievements and that it closely parallels contemporary accounts of her stage performances. Her expression, which combines tenderness with resolve, is subtly transcribed, including her raised eyebrows and powerful gaze. It was widely acknowledged by contemporaries that Siddons’s statuesque poses were influenced by classical sculpture, which she greatly admired and emulated in her own sculptural works.³⁷ Her pose in the print closely resembles one of Gilbert Austin’s *Seven Attitudes by Mrs. Siddons*, illustrated in *Chironomia* (1806).³⁸ Moreover, Pine’s heroic portrayal and Watson’s print after it were doubtless intended to highlight the powerful resolve and fortitude that propelled Euphrasia to slay Dionysus and rescue her father. Like the other prints Pine commissioned from Watson, it was produced in both a plain and a coloured version, printed in red to resemble a chalk drawing. Although *Mrs. Siddons as Euphrasia* demonstrates Watson’s skill at capturing emotion and translating the drama of the stage in graphic form, she only created one other small-scale theatrical portrait, namely, *Siddons and Kemble as Tancred and Sigismunda* (1785), discussed earlier in this section.

³⁵ Hamilton’s painting remained in his studio and served as a model for small copies. Sherwin’s engraving after it was published in 1782; Lawrence’s drawing was engraved by Thomas Trotter in 1783. See BM 1931.0509.169; BM 1931.0509.100.

³⁶ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, cat. no. 6, 36.

³⁷ See H. McPherson, ‘Sculpting Her Image: Sarah Siddons and the Art of Self-Fashioning’, in Andrea Pearson, ed., *Women and Portraiture in Early Modern Europe: Gender, Agency, and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 20–40.

³⁸ G. Austin, *Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1806).

Watson's largest stipple, *Garrick Speaking the Ode*, after Pine, which measures 62.5 × 45.5 cm, was published by Pine on 1 March 1783, and reissued by Boydell on 25 March 1784. Dedicated to Elizabeth Montagu, 'Queen of the Blue-Stockings', it was captioned with the concluding verses of the Jubilee Ode. Pine, who had previously painted Garrick's portrait, bombastically reenvisioned his climactic recitation of the Ode at the 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee, hoping to leverage his posthumous celebrity as the leading interpreter and promoter of Shakespeare.³⁹ Although the procession of Shakespeare characters was rained out at Stratford-upon-Avon, it was successfully restaged at Drury Lane. The plate would have posed particular technical challenges due to its ambitious scale, over-the-top subject, idiosyncratic cast of characters, and otherworldly incandescent lighting. The gesticulating figure of Garrick, declaiming the 'Ode to Shakespeare' and apotheosising the bard's statue, is the only solid element in the murky otherworldly mishmash of Shakespearean characters. To the left of the statue, the Tragic Muse, King Lear, and Cordelia's lifeless body are represented, with Hecate revealing the bloody dagger to Macbeth in the background. At the right, the Comic Muse, Falstaff, Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel are pictured.⁴⁰ The 1782 pamphlet described the cast of characters as, 'all uniting to express the extensive luxurious imagination of the Great Author'.⁴¹ The motley cast and conceptual incoherence of the composition should be laid at the feet of its creator, Pine, rather than Watson. In *Shakespeare Sacrificed: – or the Offering to Avarice* (1789), James Gillray maliciously deconstructed Pine's hyperbolic homage, replacing the figure of Garrick with Boydell – the destroyer and commercial exploiter of Shakespeare.

The Boydell Commissions

The only comparably ambitious theatrical prints Watson would produce were the two large plates commissioned for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, *The Death of Cardinal Beaufort* from *Henry VI*, Pt. II, Act III, Sc. 3, after Reynolds, first state (1790); second state (1792), and *Ferdinand and*

³⁹ BM Ee, 3.157. See H. McPherson, *Art and Celebrity in the Age of Reynolds and Siddons* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2017), 49–50, 53.

⁴⁰ See R. Asleson, "'She Was Tragedy Personified': Crafting the Siddons Legend in Art and Life", in Robyn Asleson, ed., *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1999), 64. Asleson suggests the Tragic Muse may be based on Siddons, which seems unlikely since Pine's painting predated Siddons's triumphant return to Drury Lane.

⁴¹ See *Explanation of Pictures Painted by Robert Edge Pine*.

Miranda Playing Chess from *The Tempest*, Act V, Sc. 1 (1795), after Francis Wheatley, both 57.4 × 40.7 cm. Watson was paid £210 for each print, a standard rate at the lower end of the remuneration scale, but double what Wheatley received – a mere £105.⁴² The commission for the *Death of Cardinal Beaufort* was due to Reynolds's insistence that Watson engrave his painting. She engraved numerous portraits after Reynolds, including his *Self-Portrait* (c. 1788) wearing spectacles, widely considered the best print of Reynolds.⁴³ Boydell, who commissioned numerous prints from Watson, was aware of her technical skill and previous experience engraving subjects from Shakespeare. The intimate genre-like depiction of Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess after Wheatley showcases Watson's delicate stippling and subtle modelling of the illuminated figures, which glow against the dark background of the cave, demonstrating her mastery of lighting and tonal effects.⁴⁴

The task of engraving *Death of Cardinal Beaufort*, which garnered mixed reviews when it was exhibited at the Shakespeare Gallery in 1789, proved challenging on artistic as well as technical grounds. Reynolds, who never profited from engravings after his own pictures, was initially reluctant to participate in Boydell's speculative venture. According to James Northcote, Reynolds considered it degrading to paint for a printseller.⁴⁵ Since *Henry VI* was not mounted on the London stage during Reynolds's lifetime, the picture had no direct theatrical connection. The close-up depiction of the dying cardinal, which was based on an earlier oil sketch, was exhibited at the Shakespeare Gallery in 1789, where its resemblance to Nicolas Poussin's well-known *Death of Germanicus* was noted in the press.⁴⁶ According to William Mason, Reynolds's model for the Cardinal was an elderly porter or coal heaver, who posed grinning in the throes of death.⁴⁷ The controversial fiend (which was a figure of speech) behind the dying cardinal was widely criticised and ridiculed. In *The Bee*, Humphry

⁴² M. Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Subject Pictures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 264–265, n.23, 341. Stipple was less labour intensive than line engraving, so fees were typically lower. Boydell paid Reynolds 500 guineas for the *Death of Cardinal Beaufort*. See Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, Appendix, 233, 243.

⁴³ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 50. The print was published in 1789 and bound with Reynolds's 1788 *Discourse*.

⁴⁴ BM 1922,0428.68. *Ibid.*, 82. A letter from Watson (presumably to Boydell), dated 30 December 1795, stated she would send the plate of *Miranda* perfectly restored, indicating it needed reworking, either because it was damaged or, more likely, because so many impressions had been printed.

⁴⁵ Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 252–253.

⁴⁶ Friedmann, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, 118–119.

⁴⁷ Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 258–260

Repton complained that the fiend was beneath the dignity of the subject and the artist and did not figure in Shakespeare's *dramatis personae*.⁴⁸ However, Reynolds stubbornly refused to remove the troublesome fiend, even at Edmund Burke's urging. In the first state of the print, dated 25 March 1790, as in the painting, the fiend is clearly visible behind the Cardinal's head. Following Reynolds's death, presumably at Boydell's instigation, the fiend was removed from the painting and the engraving. In the final state, dated 1 August 1792, the fiend was laboriously scraped out, but faint vestiges remained on the plate.⁴⁹ The murky bedside scene, with its dramatic chiaroscuro effect evokes mezzotint, which was often used for reproducing Reynolds's paintings, though Watson used stipple and etching. The caricatural quality of the heads, especially the cardinal's grotesque grimace and clawing hand in the painting were faithfully transcribed in Watson's print.⁵⁰ The fiend and grimacing cardinal are emblematic of the pitfalls of attempting to translate Shakespeare's text too literally in visual form, even for an artist as gifted as Reynolds.⁵¹

Watson's Legacy

In concluding, I would like to circle back to the self-effacing nature of reproductive printmaking and the largely invisible, marginalised role of women printmakers with which I began.⁵² Although Watson was exceptional in terms of her professional achievement and technical skill, her career was circumscribed by hierarchies of gender that paralleled artistic hierarchies. When she began publishing prints in the 1780s, the print market was booming, facilitating her success in the fashionable arena of stipple engraving. However, we should not overlook the key elements that made her professional career possible, namely, familial support, access to high-calibre technical training, and the network of artists and printsellers she collaborated with, many of whom had worked with her father. The role of female patronage and Watson's impact on printmaking are more difficult to assess due to lack of documentation.

⁴⁸ See Humphry Repton, *The Bee* (1789), 41–42; Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 261–264.

⁴⁹ See Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, cat. nos. 16–17, 46–47, who reproduces both states. BM 1875.0410.500 (proof); BM 1838.0714.8 It would have required laboriously beating out the previous work. Reference to the fiend was also removed from the caption.

⁵⁰ See N. Penny, *Reynolds* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984), 319–320; Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 264–265.

⁵¹ The problem of the fiend and *ut picture poesis* more generally was discussed in *The Analytical Review* of December 1797, cited in Friedmann, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, 120.

⁵² Frederick, 'Reclaiming Reproductive Printmaking'.

Watson's graphic oeuvre provides the most direct window into her artistic persona and technical prowess. As the prints she produced for Pine and Boydell demonstrate, by her early twenties, as an engraver, she was the equal of her male counterparts. Her pendant portraits of William Woollett, Historical Engraver to His Majesty (1785), and Benjamin West, Historical Painter to His Majesty (1786), after Gilbert Stuart, engraved from the original pictures belonging to Boydell, place her at the centre of the London art world in the mid-1780s. Watson proved highly adept at interpreting and distilling the distinctive styles of painters ranging from Pine to Reynolds to Romney. In the portraits of the Princesses Mary and Sophia after Hoppner, Watson adopted a more delicate technique in response to his style. The series of preparatory proofs for the Princesses' portraits in the British Museum reveal her meticulous working method in which she gradually worked up the face and developed the modelling and shading in successive proofs.⁵³ Reynolds valued Watson highly and selected her to engrave numerous portraits including *Contemplation* (1790), one of her masterpieces.

Examining the arc of her career, Watson rapidly gained a stellar professional reputation and arguably reached her apogee in the 1780s to mid-1790s, when she created her largest most ambitious individual prints of theatrical subjects. After completing the plates for the Shakespeare Gallery, her scope gradually narrowed. After 1800, she made fewer single prints sold through print shops and worked primarily for the book trade and private patrons, creating small literary portraits, notably for Richard Phillips.⁵⁴ Despite declining health, she remained active and even mastered a new technique – aquatint – for the illustrations for *The Winter's Day* (1803), after drawings by Maria Cosway. Watson's last major undertaking was the plates she engraved after Romney for William Hayley's *Life of Romney* (1809), replacing William Blake. The only substantive information we have about Watson beyond her prints is her correspondence with Hayley (1805–1810), at the end of her career.⁵⁵ Although her letters are mostly about personal matters including her health, they also include a technical discussion about the challenges of joining copperplates, which attests to her professional expertise and passion

⁵³ BM Mm15,1534–42. The BM catalogue entry suggests Watson probably donated the proofs, though the provenance is not recorded.

⁵⁴ Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 23.

⁵⁵ Sixteen of her letters dated 1805–1810 to Hayley have survived, transcribed in Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 104–121.

for printmaking. Despite his high regard for her talent, Hayley was a difficult, demanding patron, who paid her only 25 guineas per plate.⁵⁶ Based on estimates of her earnings, Watson was able to support herself comfortably through her printmaking.⁵⁷ She died well off and left a £70 annuity to her aunt, who survived her.⁵⁸ That Watson earned her living primarily from engraving portraits is not surprising in light of the preponderance of portrait painting in England and the popularity and marketability of prints. She eschewed the conventional decorative production that many female printmakers depended on. Watson's large theatrical prints, her most ambitious printmaking endeavour, challenged the perceived limits of the stipple technique and gender hierarchies.

The worsening financial situation in the 1790s, which contributed to Boydell's bankruptcy, adversely impacted the print market, and may explain Watson's diminished production. Printmaking was highly competitive and even the most gifted practitioners often struggled to earn a living. James Gillray (1756–1815), who trained at the Royal Academy Schools, abandoned reproductive printmaking and turned to satirical prints to earn a living. When he wrote to Boydell asking to participate in the Shakespeare Gallery, he was summarily turned down, presumably because Boydell deemed him unsuitable for his lofty enterprise. Gillray took his revenge with his devastating send up, *Shakespeare Sacrificed – or the Offering to Avarice* (1789), viciously pillorying Boydell as 'the commercial Maecenas'.

In his brief obituary, Hayley noted Watson's honorary title as Engraver to Her Majesty and praised her as 'a most amiable woman, and an accomplished artist'.⁵⁹ He underscored her 'unremitting industry' and the high value Reynolds and West placed on her talents. Despite poor health, she was working on an engraving after a Bartolomé E. Murillo painting from the Marquis of Bute's collection at the time of her death. Hayley also expressed regret that, except to a select few, Watson was not as well known as she deserved to be. It is only recently that Watson has emerged from the shadows into the limelight in the theatre of printmaking.⁶⁰ This chapter sheds new light on the significance of Watson's theatrical prints which have received little attention. In terms of scale, narrative complexity, and expressive scope, they demonstrate her extraordinary skill

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24–25, 68–69. ⁵⁷ Ibid., 22. ⁵⁸ Hyde, 'Watson, Caroline'.

⁵⁹ Hayley, 'Obituary of Caroline Watson'. These are standard tropes in discussing women artists.

⁶⁰ In E. C. Clayton's *English Female Artists* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), Watson is barely mentioned (1:376). In Goodwin, *British Mezzotinters*, a brief biography is appended to her father's notice (77–80).

as a stipple engraver and challenge gender and printmaking hierarchies. Reassessing Watson's career is part of a broader examination of women printmakers and the professional obstacles they faced which entails reevaluating reproductive printmaking as a collaborative artistic endeavour in which women made their mark and demonstrated their technical and interpretive abilities despite gender constraints.⁶¹

⁶¹ Frederick, 'Reclaiming Reproductive Printmaking'.