

PROLOGUE

In David Garrick's prologue to "She Stoops to Conquer," we are introduced to a scene filled with melancholy and a sense of impending loss within the theatrical world, articulated through the character of Mr. Woodward. Dressed in somber black, Mr. Woodward embodies the mourning and despair prevalent among actors at the time, signifying not just a personal state of sorrow but a communal crisis within the realm of comedy. Mr. Woodward's lamentation begins with a poignant revelation that his tears are not for mere show nor solely because of his mourning attire; they stem from a deeper, irremediable grief: the decline of the Comic Muse. This personification of comedy, on the brink of death, encapsulates the existential threat faced by actors specialized in the comedic arts, including Woodward himself and his contemporaries.

The prologue cleverly addresses the audience directly, blurring the lines between performance and reality, and highlighting the performers' dependency on comedy for their livelihoods and identity. Woodward's fear is not just of financial ruin but of a loss of purpose, underscoring the vital role of the Comic Muse in their lives. The introduction of sentimentality and moralizing in theatrical performances is criticized as a poor substitute for genuine comedy, indicating a shift in public taste that threatens the traditional craft.

Woodward's attempt to adapt by adopting a moralizing tone is both humorous and tragic, illustrating his discomfort and ineptitude with this emerging form of drama. This juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy within the prologue serves as a meta-commentary on the state of theatrical arts and its audience's expectations.

The closing of the prologue introduces a glimmer of hope in the form of a Doctor, a metaphor for the playwright or perhaps the theatre itself, who offers a remedy to revive the ailing Comic Muse. This medicine, a blend of humor and performance contained in "Five Draughts," represents the play "She Stoops to Conquer" itself. The

audience is entreated to open themselves to this comedic elixir, thereby participating in the potential revival of the Comic Muse. The prologue concludes on a note of cautious optimism, suggesting that the success of this theatrical endeavor depends not on the performers alone but on the audience's willingness to embrace the comedic cure being offered, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between actor and spectator in the survival of comedy.

