

61 Colley Cibber's description of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, prior to 1696

An apology for the life of Mr Colley Cibber, written by himself, edited by R.W. Lowe (New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 84–6

It must be observed then that the area or platform of the old stage projected about four foot forwarder, in a semi-oval figure, parallel to the benches of the pit; and that the former lower doors of entrance for the actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) pilasters; in the place of which doors now the two stage boxes are fixed. That where the doors of entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional side-wings, in front to a full set of scenes, which had then almost a double effect in their loftiness and magnificence.

By this original form, the usual station of the actors, in almost every scene, was advanced at least ten foot nearer to the audience than they now can be; because, not only from the stage's being shortened in front, but likewise from the additional interposition of those stage boxes, the actors (in respect to the spectators that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main audience than they used to be. But when the actors were in possession of that forwarder space to advance upon, the voice was then more in the centre of the house so that the most distant ear had scarce the least doubt or difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest utterance: all objects were thus drawn nearer to the sense; every painted scene was stronger; every grand scene and dance more extended; every rich or fine-coloured habit had a more lively lustre; nor was the minutest motion of a feature (properly changing with the passion or humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the obscurity of too great a distance. And how valuable an advantage the facility of hearing distinctly is to every well-acted scene, every common spectator is a judge. [. . .]