

Archives
Closed
LD
175
A404
TH
195

THOMAS GODFREY, COLONIAL AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT,
1736-1763

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate School of
Appalachian State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Wilbur E. Carr
July 29, 1968

THOMAS GODFREY, COLONIAL AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT,
1736-1763

by
Wilbur E. Carr

Date: July 29, 1968

Approved:

Irwin Van Neppen
Thesis Advisor

Ernest C. Prozdowski
Major Professor

Max Dixon
Chairman of Department

Ernest Williams
Dean of the Graduate School

A Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts
in the Graduate School
of
Appalachian State University

1968

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present a biography of Thomas Godfrey, Jr., and to show how his play The Prince of Parthia is a part of the beginnings of native American drama. In addition, Godfrey has been examined in the context of the social, and cultural conditions of his time in order to point out the difficulties in establishing a permanent theatre in America.

The evidence collected presents a biography of Thomas Godfrey and shows that The Prince of Parthia was the first drama written by a native American to be produced on a professional stage in America. Moreover, it took over one hundred and fifty years before the theatre took hold as a lasting institution in American life. The demands of the environment and the social and cultural attitudes of the first colonists prevented the early establishment of the theatre. It was Godfrey's play that marked the beginning of native American drama. After the production of the play in 1767, native drama was more heavily relied upon by the theatre groups in America.

The primary sources used in the thesis include the Pennsylvania Archives, the New Hanover County Records, Deeds, and Wills, the three-volume set of The Life and Correspondence of the Reverend William Smith, The Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed, The Letters and Papers of Nathaniel Evans, Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects which is an edited collection of Godfrey's works done by Nathaniel Evans; and The Prince of Parthia, A Tragedy By Thomas Godfrey.

In addition to these sources, a number of newspapers were examined. Among these are the Pennsylvania Gazette and the Pennsylvania Journal both of which are on microfilm in the holdings of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The American Magazine provided the earliest information available on the Godfrey family. In addition to this, several letters written by Godfrey himself were located in the Boston Public Library and the Wilmington Public Library.

These primary sources as well as a long list of secondary sources listed in the bibliography provided the basis for the descriptions and conclusions reached in the study.

PREFACE

My interest in Thomas Godfrey goes back to 1962, when I was a student at Wilmington College. I was enrolled in a playwrighting class which had been given the task of re-writing Godfrey's Prince of Parthia in order to make it shorter and more presentable to local audiences.

In addition to re-working the play, a few of us in that class were asked to provide some type of biographical sketch of Godfrey. This task proved to be a good deal more difficult than any of us had thought possible. After examining some local histories in the Wilmington Public Library we found some material of a limited nature in the New Hanover County Records, Deeds, and Wills, and in Archibald Henderson's volume The Prince of Parthia, A Tragedy By Thomas Godfrey.

But to me, these accounts of Godfrey seemed to ignore the man as a part of the times in which he lived. In other words, there was no attempt to show how Godfrey was influenced or shaped by his environment or the events of that period in American colonial history. In my treatment of Godfrey, I have tried to show him in the perspective of the social and cultural atmosphere of his time. Moreover, I have attempted to show how Godfrey's Prince of Parthia represented a change in the history of the American theatre.

The study is divided into six parts, including an Introduction. The Introduction is an outgrowth of the difficulty engaged in finding good background material on the

colonial theatre. The Introduction is aimed at setting forth the social and cultural attitudes toward the theatre during the colonial period. Chapter One describes the problems encountered by the two most important groups of professional actors who attempted to establish the theatre as a permanent cultural institution in the colonies. This description illustrates how difficult it was for these companies to gain support from the colonists in that period from 1750 until 1767.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four present a biography of Thomas Godfrey, Jr. I have divided them according to his family background, his early life and education, and his work The Prince of Parthia. Chapter Five is aimed at showing how some of the major historians of American drama have failed to present Thomas Godfrey in his proper perspective.

I am indebted to Richard N. Williams, Curator of the Rare Book Division at the Charles Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, Mrs. Ida M. Westlake of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Mr. Robert Black, former Register of Deeds of New Hanover County, and to the staffs of the libraries at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and Appalachian State University for their help in assisting me to collect both primary and secondary source material. A special thanks must go to Mr. Douglas W. Swink of the Wilmington College Department of Drama, Dr. Robert W. Ramsey at Appalachian, Dr. Ina W. Van Noppen, Dr. J. Max Dixon, and Dr. Eugene C. Drozdowski for their special criticisms and recommendations on the final copy. I am most grateful to Mrs. J. Preston Brown for her patience in typing and re-typing of the paper.

W. E. C.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
Abstract.	ii
Preface	iv
Introduction.	2
I THE LEWIS HALLAM FAMILY AND THE DAVID DOUGLAS COMPANY IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1752-1767	7
II THOMAS GODFREY, JUNIOR	14
Family Background of Thomas Godfrey, Jr.	15
Godfrey's Early Life and Education at the Academy 1749-1758.	19
III THOMAS GODFREY'S LATER LIFE, 1758-1763	23
IV THOMAS GODFREY AND THE PRINCE OF PARTHIA	34
V GODFREY'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN COLONIAL DRAMA	39
Conclusion	42
Appendix.	44
Bibliography.	46

THOMAS GODFREY,
COLONIAL AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT,
1736-1763

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Godfrey's tragedy The Prince of Parthia represents an important change in the history of American drama. The tragedy marks the first instance where a native American contributed to the professional theatre in the colonies. Until Godfrey's play was produced, little attention had been given to native Americans by the professional theatre companies residing in the colonies.

From the first permanent beginnings in the English colonies many problems contributed to the general retardation of the theatre as a permanent cultural institution in America. The demands of the environment and the nature of the people who first came to America have generally been regarded as the most prohibitive factors in the establishment of American theatre.¹

The need for cutting a new home out of a wilderness was far more important to the colonists than playgoing. This fact coupled with the religious attitudes of most of the colonists succeeded well in stunting the growth of the professional theatre for over a century. The Puritan beliefs found largely in New

¹Constance Rourke, The Roots of American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), pp. v-xii, 3-75. Hereafter cited as Rourke.

England and the Quaker traditions found in the middle colonies restricted the activities of playwrights until nearly the middle of the Eighteenth century.²

With all this it is not surprising that it was as late as 1767, before native drama emerged. The passage of time, the growth of the colonial town, and the expansion of commerce all contributed toward the establishment of the theatre as an accepted cultural institution.³

No matter how long it took, there was always a positive factor. Even though three thousand miles of water separated the colonists from their mother country, cultural ties existed which could not be extinguished. For one thing, their language was the same, and since the majority of the colonists came from England, the language and the other cultural ties were English.⁴

The theatre was an accepted cultural institution in England. Although it was primarily for the upperclasses, by the early part of the Eighteenth century, the Elizabethan dramatists had made it appealing to nearly all of the people. At the same time the religious prohibitives on entertainment of this nature were becoming more liberal.⁵

²Hugh F. Rankin, The Theater in Colonial America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 1-2. Hereafter cited as Rankin.

³Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (third edition; New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964), pp. 66-67. Hereafter cited as Curti; Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Early America (New York: David McKay, Inc., 1950), pp. 121-125. Hereafter cited as Wish.

⁴Rourke, pp. 3-75.

⁵Oral Sumner Coad and Edwin Mims, Jr., The American Stage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 1-20. Hereafter cited as Coad and Sumner.

The liberalization of religious attitudes in the English colonies was closely related to the emergence of a middle class of people. The growth of the villages and towns into cities created a healthy merchant class of people. The accumulation of wealth created a need for more aristocratic forms of entertainment than that found in the local tavern.⁶

The growth of the merchant class in the colonies also contributed to the development of a more healthy intellectual life. Merle Curti, in his book The Growth of American Thought, attributes much of this intellectual growth to the development of the merchant aristocracy in the large colonial towns such as New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. By 1750, very large fortunes were being accumulated in land speculation, fur trading, lumbering, shipbuilding, fishing, and the lending of money. Most of these well-to-do families imitated the English aristocracy. As a result, says Curti, these colonial aristocracies became the patrons of dancing schools, and would-be opera houses who sponsored touring companies from London and the British West Indies.⁷

So, the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth century towns and people differed. Changes wrought by nearly a century of need, exploration, and invention set the pattern for a new cultural life in the colonies. Harvey Wish in Society and Thought in Early America explains this difference. According to Wish, the Eighteenth century Americans were more interested in the traditional spirit of recreation found in England than those of the Seventeenth century. Wish, as does Curti, stresses the influence of

⁶Curti, pp. 66-67.

⁷Ibid.

town life on the Eighteenth century colonials.⁸

One of the best examples of this change can be seen in a comparison of Seventeenth and Eighteenth century New England Puritans. Unlike the Seventeenth century Puritans, their Eighteenth century counterparts were less stringent in their habits. Apparently there was more public display of drunkenness and games of chance on the Sabbath. Colonial Boston led the Northeast with fortune-tellers roaming freely about her streets; professional showmen with their basket of tricks and exhibits who had come from Europe were commonplace.⁹ Clearly, this is a change. This change was not limited to New England.

Quaker Philadelphia was in many ways changing like Boston during the first quarter of the Eighteenth century. The citizens of Philadelphia began to move into the suburbs of the city in order to escape restraints imposed by the Quaker fathers of the town. Charleston was the same. Laws were enacted and disobeyed for the pure pleasure. Cock-fighting on the Sabbath was a good example of arrogant disobedience found in both Charleston and Philadelphia.¹⁰

Nowhere was the change in the social attitude and existing practice more apparent than in Southern life during the first half of the Eighteenth century. The wealthy in Virginia and Maryland, as well as South Carolina, enjoyed many of the traditional sports of English country life: fox hunts, cock-fighting, dancing contests, and even jolly dinners with comic

⁸Wish, pp. 121-125.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

muses for entertainment.¹¹

Withal, it can be said that it was this Eighteenth century change in social and cultural attitudes that aided in opening the way for the development of the American theatre. Thomas Godfrey, Jr., was a child and a young student in Philadelphia when much of this socio-intellectual, and cultural change had already gained much momentum. Godfrey was writing at a time when he could attend performances given by professional players from London or Jamaica. Without doubt, this environment played an important part in shaping the Godfrey genius and style.¹²

Equally important to the establishment of a professional theatre was the work done by the traveling groups from England and the West Indies. These groups provided the colonials with professional entertainment. These companies came more and more frequently after 1750. The aristocrats patronized them freely.¹³

The two most important professional companies to come to the colonies were led by Lewis Hallam and David Douglas. Hallam came first and paved the way for the Douglas company. Chapter One describes the tours made by both companies, and shows how difficult it was for them to find a permanent home.

¹¹Rankin, pp. 2-12.

¹²Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative American Plays, 1767-1923 (New York: The Century Company, 1917), pp. 3-4. Hereafter cited as Quinn.

¹³Rankin, pp. 7-15.

CHAPTER I

THE LEWIS HALLAM FAMILY AND THE DAVID DOUGLAS COMPANY IN COLONIAL AMERICA, 1752-1767

It was from Jamaica that the two most important English theatrical companies came to America. The two companies, one led by Lewis Hallam and the other by David Douglas, proved that the colonies in America could support a professional theatre.¹

In 1745 the Lewis Hallam family came to Jamaica from London, England. By 1750, they had firmly established a professional repertory theatre on the island. They worked in Jamaica for seven years during which time they built up an excellent repertory of Shakespearean drama. Of this collection, The Merchant of Venice and Romeo and Juliet were the most popular. In 1752, Hallam applied for papers to come to Williamsburg, Virginia. He was granted permission by Governor Dinwiddie to bring his entire company to Virginia. Hallam and his troupe arrived in Williamsburg in September of 1752. On September 15,

¹Dixon Ryan Fox, "The Development of The American Theater," New York History, XVII (January, 1936), pp. 23-24. Hereafter cited as Fox.

1752, the Hallams opened with The Merchant of Venice and played until October 10, 1752.²

What Hallam and his group did from October, 1752, until April of 1753, is not clear. Records and newspapers do not indicate advertisements of other performances. It may be assumed, though, that the company spent time rehearsing and preparing for future visits to other towns. It was Hallam's nature to work long hours toward perfection. Hallam's group left Williamsburg in April of 1753.³

On April 15, 1753, Lewis Hallam arrived in Philadelphia. Here they stayed until the summer of 1754. Again, there is no accurate record of what they did in Philadelphia. In the summer of 1754, Hallam and his family left Philadelphia on the eve of a great Quaker Revival which would certainly have been disastrous to his future in the colonies.⁴

After leaving Philadelphia Hallam and his group went to Charleston. Hallam, seeking to replenish his funds, left for Jamaica alone intending to stay only for a short period of time. Unfortunately, Lewis Hallam was taken ill in Jamaica and there he died of fever. The exact date has not been recorded.⁵

As brief as the tour may have been, the Hallam company was the first known professional company to come to the American colonies to establish permanent quarters. Their work in Philadelphia, Williamsburg, and Charleston, paved the way for another

²Rankin, pp. 43-53.

³Ibid., pp. 60-73.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Rankin, pp. 73-90.

group which came to the colonies several years later.⁶

The second professional theatrical company to appear in the American colonies came in October of 1758. This group, under the direction of a Mr. David Douglas, arrived in the town of New York coming directly from London, England. Douglas, a man of great experience on the London stage, persuaded the remnants of the old Hallam company to join them in New York. Douglas married Hallam's widow in the same year. With this group, Douglas opened an academy of dance and acting in New York.⁷

Douglas was not very successful with his academy. The French and Indian war which began several years earlier hurt his business. Little time or money could be spared for pleasures such as dancing schools or playgoing. So, Douglas left New York, and during the period from February 7, 1759, to April, 1759, they performed in the smaller towns between New York and Philadelphia. The playbills and records show that they stayed several weeks in Perth-Amboy.⁸

⁶The Hallam company was not the first group of professionals to come to America. However, they were the first to come and spend any length of time up until 1752. Records from the York County Virginia "Records, Deeds, Bonds" show that a William Levingston in 1716, applied for permission to build a suitable structure for public performances. The building was apparently completed by 1721. There are no records indicating use of the building for plays. These remarks may be found at length in the November, 1716, to December, 1721, entries. Robert H. Land, "The First Williamsburg Theater," (Williamsburg: The William and Mary Quarterly, July, 1948), p. 362.

⁷William H. Dunlap, A History of the American Theatre (New York: J. J. Harper, 1832), pp. 17-24; Dunlap mentions Douglas as being heir to the old Hallam company, and then traces Douglas' movements from New York to Charleston in great detail. Hereafter cited as Dunlap.

⁸Ibid.

On April 5, 1759, Douglas and his troupe arrived in Philadelphia with permission to perform granted to them by Governor William Denny. Governor Denny, however, placed stipulations on the group before he would allow them to come. In order to secure approval of the town council, Douglas would have to make substantial contributions to the town charities.⁹

The Douglas company was allowed to perform in Philadelphia on the condition that they donate the proceeds of one performance per week to the town hospital. The permission granted by Governor Denny permitted Douglas to operate until January 1, 1760. Later, papers were issued which said donations were to be made to the Academy, the Charity School and the College of Philadelphia.¹⁰

David Douglas took advantage of the eight months given him by the Governor of Pennsylvania. During this period Shakespearean plays were given weekly. He provided professional entertainment for the Philadelphians as well as the students at the academy.¹¹

Between March, 1760, and the early part of 1762, Douglas took his company along the eastern seaboard from Massachusetts to South Carolina playing all the larger towns. During this long period, Douglas himself was absent often. During these trips away from his company, Douglas managed to recruit six professional actors from London.¹²

With the foresight of a genuine entrepreneur, David Douglas went to work to make his group of Thespians more appeal-

⁹Rankin, pp. 80-82, 118.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Dunlap, pp. 17-24; Rankin, pp. 92-107.

ing to his American audience. In the spring of 1763, Douglas renamed his company "The American Company of Comedians." They had previously been called the "London Company of Comedians." This is the first recorded instance of a professional company of actors taking the American colonies permanently as their home.¹³

After assuming a new name the Douglas group returned to Philadelphia. It had been nearly two years since Douglas had performed in Philadelphia on a regular basis. The troupe arrived in Philadelphia in time to open in the new theatre built some months earlier in Southwark, a suburb of Philadelphia proper.¹⁴

Several weeks after The American Company of Comedians returned to Philadelphia, some religious zealots demonstrated so that their business was severely damaged. These demonstrations, coupled with the political problems of the period, made it very difficult for Douglas to make ends meet.¹⁵

The unpopular Stamp Act created social, economic and political problems which hurt Douglas' company as late as the 1766-67 season. Most of the colonials resented that which represented England during this time. As a result, the theatre was less welcome. Much of their advertising had to be abandoned. Nearly all of the Philadelphians refused to spend money for things considered unnecessary. The entire group was watched by those who more violently opposed England. One such group was the Sons of Liberty. Douglas mentions their activities as being very worrisky.¹⁶

¹³Rankin, p. 93.

¹⁴Fox, p. 24.

¹⁵Dunlap, pp. 22-23.

¹⁶Ibid. pp. 22-50.

In order to make the theatre more acceptable to Philadelphians, Douglas decided to try some plays written by native Americans. He accepted a comic-opera from Thomas Forrest. Forrest was a twenty year old Germantown citizen. He submitted his play to Douglas under the pseudonym Andrew Barton. Forrest's play, The Disappointment: or The Farce of Credulity, was advertised on April 13, 1767, to be performed on April 20. This play has the distinction of being the first drama written by an American to be advertised for production by a professional company.¹⁷

The play itself revolved around a hunt for some of Blackbeards treasure which was supposed to be buried near Cooper's point on the Delaware River. In essence, though, it was coarse and reflected directly upon contemporary manners. Some important people in Philadelphia were directly singled out for criticism. Douglas made the mistake of having the play published before it was produced. As a result of this, much protest was voiced and Douglas was forced to withdraw The Disappointment on April 15, 1767.¹⁸

The withdrawal of Forrest's play forced Douglas to find an alternative quickly. Douglas had a play on hand which had been sent to him some four years earlier by a young author who he had met on his first tour to Philadelphia. Thomas Godfrey, Jr., who had since died, had hoped for Douglas to produce his play, The Prince of Parthia, during the 1759-1760 season. But Douglas

¹⁷Thomas Clark Pollock, "The Philadelphia Theatre in The Eighteenth Century" (unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1933), pp. 19-20. Hereafter cited as Pollock.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 20.

received the play too late for production and had since laid it aside. In truth then it was by accident that Godfrey's play was produced.¹⁹

The Prince of Parthia, a tragedy, was advertised for production on April 23, 1767. This fact makes Godfrey the first native American to have a play produced by professionals.²⁰

The work of the New American Company under David Douglas and the Lewis Hallam group gave the American colonies a basis for establishing a permanent theatre. Douglas' group performed for the academy in Philadelphia, and this gave young Thomas Godfrey an opportunity to see Shakespeare as well as other pieces of Elizabethan drama. This experience was undoubtedly fundamental in Godfrey's choice of subject and plot in his Prince of Parthia.

¹⁹Pollock, p. 21.

²⁰Pennsylvania Journal, Philadelphia , April 23, 1767.

Chapter II

THOMAS GODFREY, JUNIOR

Thomas Godfrey, Junior, was born in Philadelphia on December 4, 1736, and died in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1763. In a period of twenty-seven years Godfrey led a rambling career as an apprentice to a watchmaker, a scholar at the Academy in Philadelphia, a soldier in the French and Indian war, an agent for the planters in Wilmington, North Carolina, and the author of drama and poetry.

It was Godfrey's Prince of Parthia which was important in creating what may be called American drama. The play represented a departure from complete dependence of the colonies upon Europe for written drama. After Godfrey's play had been produced more effort was made by theatre groups to use native written drama.

Godfrey lived in a difficult period. The demands of the environment discouraged playgoing. He began his writing in a critical period in American history. The social preoccupation with war and political disputes with England made it difficult

for Godfrey to receive encouragement.

Godfrey first submitted his work to David Douglas, for production during the 1759-1760 season. Douglas was having so much success with his Shakespearean drama that he felt no need for original work such as Godfrey's. When troubles beset the American Company in 1767, Douglas turned to native drama. It was by chance that he chose The Prince of Parthia for production. Even if by accident, Godfrey's tragedy was given a permanent place in the roots of the American theatre.

I Family Background of Thomas Godfrey, Jr.

The earliest mention of the Godfrey family in the records of the colony of Pennsylvania is of a certain Thomas Godfrey, apparently a farmer, who purchased 153 acres of land from one Samuel Carpenter on the twenty-fourth day of August, 1697. The farm purchased by Thomas Godfrey, who is apparently the great-grandfather of the Godfrey about whom this study is being made, was located in Bristol Township, about one mile from Germantown. Surveys later made show that the farm adjoined Luken's Mill on the Church Lane.¹ Thomas Godfrey brought with him to the Bristol Township farm a son named Joseph and his wife whose name is unknown. Joseph was born in the Spring of 1697.²

Joseph Godfrey, who became a farmer and a maltster, was the father of another Thomas Godfrey who would be the father of Thomas Godfrey, Junior, the subject of this study. Joseph's

¹"Thomas Godfrey, the American Glazier," American Magazine, (September, 1758), Philadelphia, pp. 11-16. Hereafter cited as American Magazine.

²Ibid.

son, Thomas, became a Mathematician and glazier in Philadelphia. Thomas Godfrey, the son of Joseph, was born in 1704. Joseph died in 1705, only a year after the birth of his son.³ Joseph's wife remarried in 1712 when Thomas was only eight years old. She married a man by the last name of Wood, and soon after placed Thomas into an apprenticeship with a glazier in Philadelphia. Thomas Godfrey, Senior, as he should be called, learned the business of soldering glass into leaden frames and painting.⁴ Thomas, Senior, apparently learned the trade well, for he soon opened a shop of his own in Philadelphia. The records of the State House in Philadelphia show that a Thomas Godfrey soldered glass into the windows of the State House during the years 1732 and 1733.⁵ Andrew Hamilton, a prominent Philadelphian, hired the services of Godfrey for 6 10s, in order to have glass installed in his home at Bush Hill in 1740.⁶ With such business, he must have done excellent work.⁷

Thomas Godfrey, Senior, father of Godfrey, the poet and playwright, was obviously a remarkable man. He did not have the benefit of a formal education, save that learned in his trade, and yet he became an accomplished Mathematician. In the course of his work he met many learned individuals in Philadelphia. Through his conversations and the use of their libraries he became a master of Mathematics and Astronomy. The editors of

³American Magazine, p. 17.

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁵Cited from John F. Watson, Annals of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: N. P., 1850), I, pp. 520-528. Hereafter cited as Watson.

⁶Ibid.

⁷American Magazine, pp. 12-13.

the American Magazine did an article on the life of Godfrey and his family in the September, 1758, edition. In the following passage, a comparison is made between Godfrey, Senior, and his son Thomas, the poet:

Nature seems not to have designed the
 Father for a greater Mathematician, than
 She has the Son for a Poet. The former,
 was, perhaps, one of the most singular
 Phaenomena that ever appeared in the learned
 world. For without the least advantages of
 education, almost intuitively, and in a manner
 entirely his own, he had made himself a
 master of the abstrusest parts of mathematics
 and Astronomy.⁸

Godfrey, the glazier, apparently applied himself to Latin in order to read the great books of mathematics. He did a good job of educating himself. His greatest interest and ability were Optics and Astronomy.

Benjamin Franklin seems to have known Godfrey and his work. In 1727, Franklin formed a club made up of several of his intimate acquaintances, among them Godfrey. This was Franklin's famous "Junto". The object of this club was to promote queries on politics, morals, and natural philosophy by its members. Franklin described Godfrey:

A self-taught mathematician, great in his way, and afterwards inventor of what is now called Hadley's Quadrant, ... he knew little out of his way, and was not a pleasing companion; as, like most great mathematicians I have known, he expected universal precision in everything said, or was forever denying or distinguishing upon trifles, to the disturbance of all conversation.⁹

Thomas Godfrey's (the father) skill in mathematics is further illustrated by an invention of his. Thomas Godfrey, Sr., invented a nautical instrument called a quadrant. The invention

⁸American Magazine, p. 17.

⁹John Bigelow, ed., Works of Franklin (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), I, p. 142. Hereafter cited as Bigelow.

was apparently pirated by a man named Hadley. Hadley improved the instrument and gave it the name Hadley's Quadrant. The earliest mention of the work done by Godfrey on the instrument is found in an article in the Western Carolinian of Salisbury, North Carolina, dated August 28, 1821. The untitled article simply mentions the Quadrant and explains that the Royal Society of London paid Godfrey two hundred pounds sterling to be collected in household goods. The payment was to be made, according to the article, on a date two years prior to Hadley's first claim to the invention in 1732.¹⁰ So, Godfrey was an accomplished Mathematician as well as a tradesman.

Thomas Godfrey, Junior, was born in Philadelphia on December 4, 1736. The younger Godfrey's father died when he was thirteen, in 1749. Thomas' mother remarried soon after her husband's death. Thomas was apprenticed to a watchmaker at the age of thirteen. His master was Daniel Evans in Philadelphia. It was during this apprenticeship that Godfrey first showed promise of being a poet.¹¹

In addition to being a watchmaker, Evans possessed a fine library. His son, Nathaniel Evans, befriended Godfrey and the two often spent hours together perusing the elder Evans' library. Thomas must have been inspired by some things he read for he wrote a poem during his first year of apprenticeship which he

¹⁰The Western Carolinian, [Salisbury, N. C.] August 28, 1821, pp. 2-3.

¹¹Nathaniel Evans, Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1765), pp. iii-vii; Evans' work is the most complete collection of material on the life of Godfrey. There is only one remaining copy in fair condition found in the Wilmington Public Library in the North Carolina Collection. (See Appendix B). Hereafter cited as Evans.

titled "The Temple of Fame." He persuaded Nathaniel to have it published anonymously in a Philadelphia newspaper. William Smith, who was then the Provost of the College, the Academy, and the Charitable School of Philadelphia, read the poem and managed to find out through Nathaniel Evans that Godfrey had authored the work. Provost Smith, interested in the style of the poem, induced Daniel Evans to release Godfrey from the apprenticeship and had Godfrey enrolled in the Academy.¹²

And so, Thomas Godfrey, Junior, descended from the Godfreys of Bristol Township a few miles from Germantown in the colony of Pennsylvania, made his way from a watchmakers apprentice to a student in the Academy at Philadelphia. Godfrey's father had little to offer him except a profound interest in education and the acquaintance of Philadelphia aristocracy. His father was self-taught in the discipline of Mathematics with little or no formal education. It was Godfrey's stay at the College, the Academy, and the Charitable School that offered him the opportunity of developing a talent in poetry and drama.

II Godfrey's Early Life and Education at the Academy, 1749-1758

The greatest influence on the life of Godfrey came when he was placed in the Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia. For it was here that Godfrey was afforded the chance to cultivate his abilities as a scholar among those with similar interests. The young men with whom young Godfrey would associate were of excellent quality and great ability. Among those were Benjamin

¹²Evans, p. viii.

West, whose paintings would later earn the respect of the world; Francis Hopkinson, who later wrote "The Battle of The Kegs"; Jacob Duche, later rector of St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia and first Chaplain of Congress; Joseph Reed, military secretary and aide-de-camp for George Washington in 1775; John Green, portrait painter; and Nathaniel Evans. Evans would later collaborate with Provost William Smith in publishing an edition of Godfrey's poetry.¹³

One of the best descriptions of Godfrey while he was at the Academy is in the papers and letters of Provost William Smith and his son Richard Penn Smith. The notes and letters of both men are the most extensive available on life at the Academy. Provost Smith said:

...he discovered a strong inclination to Painting, and was very desirous of being bred to that Profession. But those who had charge of him, not having the same honorable idea either of the Profession or its utility which he had, crossed him in that desire; which affected him so nearly that it made him contract a sort of melancholy air and he chose to be much by himself; which was considered by many as sourness of temper and want of spirit....¹⁴

Richard Penn Smith said of Godfrey:

...every moment he could be absent from his business was employed in reading and writing, or in the company of certain painters....¹⁵

The rigors of the scholarly life at the Academy did much to instill respect for both order and beauty in an individuals

¹³Horace Wemyss Smith, Life and Correspondence of the Reverend William Smith, D. D. (Philadelphia: N. P., 1879), I, pp. 389-391. Hereafter cited as Smith.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 392.

life.¹⁶ In Godfrey's poem entitled "A Rare Piece" written during his second year at the Academy he paid a compliment to the Academy when he said:

What hand can Picture forth the solemn scene,
The deepening shade and the glimmr'ring light!
Or the dim beauties of the dewy night.¹⁷

Two rather intimate friends of Godfrey, Nathaniel Evans and Joseph Reed, have passed on accounts of young Godfrey and a few of his habits. Joseph Reed, a fellow classmate, called Godfrey, "...soothing to talk to in the heat of the day."¹⁸ Nathaniel Evans said Godfrey was, "Soft spoken and deliberate in his recitation of verses composed beneath the shade of trees... and called upon us often to listen as he read...."¹⁹

While Godfrey may have been soft spoken, he was often quite free with his closest friends. He would compose short pieces of poetry and dedicate them to his more intimate associates. A short poem entitled "To Mr. N. E." was undoubtedly to Nathaniel Evans, while his "Cantata on Peace" was for Joseph Reed. Both of these poems are short and seem to be more in elegy or memorium, although both of the men outlived Godfrey.²⁰

The closeness of Godfrey with some of his classmates at the Academy is further illustrated by some work done by Benjamin West, the painter. West painted portraits of all of his associates while at the Academy, including one of Provost William Smith.

¹⁶Evans, pp. xi-xii.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁸William B. Reed, The Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed (Philadelphia: 1847), II, pp. 119-120.

¹⁹Evans, pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁰Ibid., p. 36-37.

Smith's portrait is still in existence. Thus far no one has found that portrait of Godfrey even though the ones of John Green and Joseph Reed have been located in a collection once owned by Richard Penn Smith and now held by the Charles Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania.²¹

Aside from reading the Classics and other published works, the first contact that Thomas Godfrey had with the professional theatre came in June of 1754. Due to requirements of the Academy, Godfrey surely saw the American Company under the direction of David Douglas when they performed for the Academy with Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Romeo and Juliet, and Macbeth, beginning on June 1, 1754. Godfrey must have been impressed with the productions, for he sent a manuscript of The Prince of Parthia to Douglas some five years later. It is unlikely that Godfrey would have sent his manuscript if he had not at least met Douglas.²²

Whether or not Thomas Godfrey graduated from the College, the Academy, and the Charitable School of Philadelphia is not certain. Most of his classmates, with the exception of Nathaniel Evans, graduated in 1757. Since there is no other evidence available to show otherwise, it must be assumed that Godfrey did not graduate from the Academy.²³

²¹The portraits of these men, painted by Benjamin West, are held by the Rare Book Division, Charles Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, and may be seen upon request. The portraits themselves have not been well preserved and are severely cracked, faded, and water-damaged. Portraits and Paintings, (Philadelphia: Charles Van Pelt Library), Folio 7.

²²A letter written by Douglas to a Mr. Allyn, who later joined the American Company as an actor, dated December 17, 1759, reveals that Douglas did receive the play. The letter is in the Boston Public Library and I have seen only a photocopy of it. (Boston: Boston Public Library Archives, August-December, 1759), Vol. IX, Folio I.

²³Smith, p. 393.

Chapter III

THOMAS GODFREY'S LATER LIFE, 1758-1763

In March, 1758, Godfrey asked Provost William Smith to help him secure a place in the Pennsylvania militia. The Pennsylvania militia was engaged in protecting the western frontier against the French and the Indians in 1758. In May, 1758, the commission was granted to Godfrey. According to the Pennsylvania Archives, May, 1758, Thomas Godfrey was commissioned as an ensign in a campaign to be led against Fort Duquesne.¹

Several months after Godfrey had left the Academy, Provost William Smith wrote an article in the American Magazine entitled "Poetical Essays" in which he mentions Godfrey by saying: "...it was his Godfrey's lot and mortification to be left in Garrison at one of the out-forts, when his great desire would be the scene of action...."²

¹Pennsylvania Archives, (Harrisburg: 1936), May, 1758, II, p. 131.

²William Smith, "Poetical Essays," American Magazine, ([Philadelphia] August, 1758,) pp. 7-12.

Godfrey attained the rank of Lieutenant during the Duquesne expedition. He calls himself a lieutenant in a letter sent to his friend Nathaniel Evans, dated August 10, 1758. In the letter there was a short poem entitled "Epistle to a Friend from Fort Henry." The poem was signed in the following manner: "Wrote [sic] when the Author was a Lieutenant in the Pennsylvania Forces and garrisoned at Fort Henry."³ Godfrey was probably given the rank of Lieutenant once the campaign was underway.

While serving in the militia, Godfrey met Major Hugh Waddell who was from North Carolina. Waddell apparently took to Godfrey well enough to offer him a job. He asked Godfrey to come to Wilmington, North Carolina, and work as a factor. Godfrey accepted the offer and prepared to leave the militia in the spring of 1759. It was June before he arrived in Wilmington.⁴

The trip to Wilmington was made by coach or horseback, and by boat. In a letter to Major Waddell, Godfrey describes a trip across the Alligator River in what is now Washington County, North Carolina: "...waters were misty but we were ably led by a man named Macky [sic]"⁵ Here Godfrey must have been in error. There actually was a ferry being operated by a man named Mackey in the region Godfrey described, but Mackey's Ferry ran the Albemarle Sound from Edenton, North Carolina, across to the southern shore of the Sound. Since the Alligator River is sixty miles to the southeast of Mackey's Ferry, it is doubtful that

³A letter from Thomas Godfrey to Nathaniel Evans dated August 10, 1758, cited from Evans, pp. 30-31.

⁴Smith, pp. 420-421.

⁵A letter from Thomas Godfrey to Hugh Waddell, dated May 30, 1759. (Raleigh: North Carolina Society for the Preservation of Antiquities), 1700-1800, II, p. 146.

Godfrey was correct. The important thing, however, is that Godfrey did come this way in order to meet a vessel in New Bern, North Carolina, which would carry him to Wilmington. There is a North Carolina Historical marker placed where Mackey's Ferry was supposed to reach the southern shore of Albemarle Sound.

When Godfrey landed in Wilmington, he found a town similar to Philadelphia, save in size and preciseness. Peter du Bois, a visitor in Wilmington, gives a good description of the town less than a year prior to Godfrey's arrival:

...But the regularity of the streets are equal to those of Pheladelp ia and the buildings in General very good. Many of brick, two or three stories High with double Piazas wch. [sic] make a good appear. [sic].^o

In Wilmington Godfrey found a flourishing society not unlike that in Philadelphia. There were many in the town who enjoyed wit, humor, music, and poetry as a pastime. This section of North Carolina was described by a Royal Governor, Josiah Martin, as "... the region of Politeness and Hospitality."⁷

The society that Godfrey mingled with in Wilmington encouraged his creativity. In the circles frequented by Godfrey there were men educated at the colleges in America and the universities in Europe. The list of these acquaintances of Godfrey is too long to quote in entirety. However, several of these men are worthy of mention: William Hooper, a native of Boston, a graduate of Harvard College, and a former law student of James

⁶A letter to Samuel Johnston, Junior, from Peter du Bois, dated December, 1758. New Hanover County Records, (Wilmington: 1732-1864), Vol. V, p. 75.

⁷"Josiah Martin, Royal Governor," North Carolina University Magazine, (June, 1860), p. 30.

Otis; Dr. John Eustace, medicine and science, a student in France and Germany; Colonel Thomas Boyd, holder of one of the more complete collections of Classical Literature; Cornelius Harnett, President of the Provincial Council, learned in music and art; Adam Boyd, later editor of the Cape Fear Mercury; and William Pennington, comptroller of the customs. All of these men undoubtedly made Godfrey welcome and solicited his creativity in times of pleasure and conversation.⁸

And so, Godfrey found Wilmington a place where he could earn a living and pursue his desire to write. Godfrey enjoyed association with his acquaintances of the Cape Fear region. Nathaniel Evans, in his preface to Godfrey's "Poetical Works," describes Godfrey's manner by saying:

His sweet, amiable disposition, his integrity of heart, his engaging modesty and diffidence of manner, his fervent and disinterested love of his friends, endeared him to all those who shared his acquaintance, and stamped the image of him in indelible characters on the hearts of his more intimate friends.⁹

Thomas found himself on friendly terms with many different types of people in Wilmington. According to the monograph "Early History of the Lower Cape Fear" found in the James Sprunt Historical Monographs Godfrey frequently kept company with the Provincial Secretary, Commander of the Fort, the town engineer, and the Sheriff of the County.¹⁰

⁸Robert Andrews Marshall, "Early History of the Lower Cape Fear," James Sprunt Historical Monograph, IV (Chapel Hill, 1904), passim. Hereafter cited as Marshall.

⁹Nathaniel Evans, "Poetical Works of Thomas Godfrey" (Philadelphia: 1764), pp. ii-iv.

¹⁰Marshall, pp. 38-47.

Godfrey spent most of his leisure time in the summer colony of some of the more distinguished citizens of Wilmington located about seven miles below Wilmington on Masonborough Sound. The hamlet was so named because a number of Masons had earlier built there in a little village. Thomas lived with Cornelius Harnett and Colonel Alexander Lillington whose summer homes were nearly side by side along the waters of the sound. Godfrey befriended both of these scholars to such an extent that Lillington and Harnett may be called patrons of Godfrey. Harnett was a scholar and an accomplished artist. Lillington was a self-made man whose collection of the finest literature was excelled by none in the Cape Fear region. Both men encouraged Godfrey to come and work freely in their libraries.¹¹

Thomas wrote many pieces of poetry in which he described the locale in which he was living. Unfortunately, not all of these poems can be found. A notable exception to this is his poem entitled "The Piece Upon Masonborough." This short poem has been preserved, and it is quoted in entirety in Griffith J. McRee's article "History of the Town of Wilmington," published in the September 16, 1846, edition of the Wilmington Chronicle. Godfrey describes Masonborough as a "... pleasant Retreat nigh Cape Fear, in North Carolina."¹²

Godfrey was pleased by what he was able to do on his fortnightly visits to Masonborough. He more clearly reveals his

¹¹Thomas Wetmore, "Cultural Development of Ante-Bellum Wilmington" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Duke University, Durham, 1941), pp. 100-101. Hereafter cited as Wetmore.

¹²Griffith J. McRee, "History of the Town of Wilmington," Wilmington Chronicle, [North Carolina], September 16, 1846. Hereafter cited as McRee.

own feelings in a poem by saying:

O Come to Masonborough's grove,
Ye Nymphs and Swains away,
Where blooming Innocence and Love,
And pleasure Crown the day.

Here dwells the Muse, here her bright seat
Erects the lovely maid,
From noise and show, a blest retreat,
She seeks the sylvan shade.¹³

Other poems, such as this one describing Masonborough, were probably written, but they do not exist today. Cornelius Harnett quoted by McRee says: "Hardly a man lived in Cape Fear that could not quote the pen of Godfrey."¹⁴

Godfrey must have traveled some outside of Wilmington. There is in existence a list of subscribers to the book of poems by Godfrey edited by Nathaniel Evans which was published in 1765. The book, Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects, has a substantial list of subscribers outside of Wilmington. Some of these subscribers were:

James Baily, Alexander Chapman of Edenton;
Robert Johnson of Cross Creek [now Fayetteville];
Patrick Stewart, James Stewart, [and] William
Watkins of New Bern.¹⁵

Friends in Wilmington named on the list were:

Colonel Benjamin Heron, Provincial Secretary;
William Bartram, botanist and traveler;
Obadiah Holt, Sheriff of New Hanover County;
Colonel James Moore of Fort Johnson at the
Mouth of the Cape Fear; Alexander Martin
[later Governor of North Carolina]; Robert
Schaw, colonel of the artillery under
Governor Tryon.¹⁶

¹³McRee.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Nathaniel Evans Papers (MSS in the Charles Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia), Vol. I, pp. 236-241.

¹⁶Ibid.

It may be assumed that those who were named on the subscription list that did not live in the Cape Fear region had reasons to encourage them to request a volume. The subscription list is only partially complete and has been poorly preserved among the papers of Nathaniel Evans now held by the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia. The list contains more than one hundred names; some are not legible due to poor preservation.¹⁷ Another single request was found in the Boston Public Library written by a Mrs. Anne Nessfield.¹⁸

From the comments made about Godfrey by his friends and by Godfrey in the poems, it seems fair to say that Godfrey liked Wilmington, and that the people of Wilmington accepted him. Those with whom Godfrey associated were highly educated men and sympathetic with his attempts to woo the Muses.

Making comments about Godfrey's personality or his habits is difficult, but some things are outstanding. Godfrey was rather haphazard and somewhat cantankerous in pursuing both his education and his occupations. Godfrey's offense toward those who attempted to keep him from pursuing his interests as an artist at the Academy could mean that he was temperamental. Accounts from his associations in Wilmington indicate that he was an outgoing person. And, the apparent popularity of his works shows that he was a good writer.

Whatever Godfrey's personality traits, entries in the New Hanover County Records, Deeds, and Wills, July, 1760, indicate

¹⁷Evans, pp. 236-241.

¹⁸Letter written by Mrs. Anne Nessfield to Nathaniel Evans dated May 11, 1766, (Boston: Boston Public Library Archives, May, 1766), XIII, Folio 2.

that he had little regard for menial tasks. According to some of the early laws of the town of Wilmington, all taxable citizens were required to work from three to six days at a time on the streets and wharves, and on the roads from Point Peter to Mount Misery, several miles from Wilmington. This type of requirement was a common practice among most of the colonial towns and villages in America. Usually there was a long list of men who failed to turn out for their share of the labor. The month of June showed the number of those who defaulted at sixty-two. August had forty-eight who did not work on the roads.¹⁹ During the month of July, 1760, however, there was an unusually large turnout for the road work in the town of Wilmington. The number of delinquents for that month was very low. They numbered less than twenty for the entire month. Among the defaulters was Thomas Godfrey. The punishment for such an offense was one day and one night in the jail, or some similar structure. There is nothing to indicate that Godfrey was punished for his misdemeanor, and Godfrey never mentions it.²⁰

Given the proper setting, Godfrey was apparently able to do a large amount of writing. He did contribute to some of the monthly magazines of the day. The American Magazine, edited by his friend and former patron William Smith, accepted work from him. Comments made by the authors of the Monthly Review in London indicate that Godfrey may have submitted work to that magazine for publication. The editors of the Monthly Review

¹⁹New Hanover County Records, Deeds, and Wills, 1732-1864, (Wilmington: New Hanover County), VI, pp. 45-46; Hereafter cited as New Hanover County Records; George R. Taylor, The Transportation Revolution (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 16.

²⁰New Hanover County Records.

said of Godfrey: "He certainly has genius; and we are sorry that he had not the education to improve it."²¹

Perhaps Godfrey's three-year stay in Wilmington can best be summed up in his own words:

Then may we, in time, retreat,
 To some fair villa, sweetly neat,
 To entertain the Muses;
 And then life's noise and trouble leave
 Supremely blest, we'll never grieve
 At what the world refuses.²²

Godfrey appreciated the beauty in nature. His poems reflect that certain simplicity that he seemed to want from life. The esthetic value of his literature is too lengthy a subject to pursue here, but one needs only to read the work to see its value.

Godfrey left Wilmington in the Spring of 1763 and returned to Philadelphia. No reason has been given for his leaving Wilmington. He may have returned to see David Douglas about producing The Prince of Parthia.²³

While in Philadelphia, Godfrey signed out as a supercargo on a vessel bound for the West Indies. There is nothing which tells what he did in the West Indies. However, it is of significance to note that David Douglas was in Jamaica during this same period.²⁴ Since Douglas had not been able to use Godfrey's play The Prince of Parthia during the 1759-1760 season it is possible that Godfrey was in hopes of meeting him in Jamaica and persuading him to use the tragedy.

After his voyage to the West Indies, Godfrey returned to

²¹Smith, p. 400.

²²Evans, p. 41.

²³Ibid., p. 90.

²⁴Ibid., p. 92.

Wilmington in the Summer of 1763. From July until August nothing can be found concerning his work or intentions. The only remaining material on Godfrey is his obituary, and that came on the third day of August, 1763, scarcely a month after he had returned to Wilmington. The obituary was printed in the September 29, 1763, edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette and signed by, "a gentleman from Wilmington." It reads as follows:

It is with infinite regret I inform you that he, whom I esteemed one of the worthiest of Friends (Mr. Thomas Godfrey, or your Place) is no more. Thursday, 25th July, he and myself set out on a small journey into the country; the day being very warm and he not much used to riding, I imagine, overheated him, for the succeeding night he was seized with a most violent fever and vomiting, which desperately increasing, in seven days hurried him out of this mortal life. He left us at ten in the morning on the third of August.²⁵

Godfrey was dead at the age of twenty-seven.

The most descriptive memorium to Godfrey is found in the lines of "The Elegy" written by John Green, Godfrey's painter friend at the Academy. The poem is included in the collected edition of Godfrey's works and says of Godfrey:

Ye gentle swains of Carolina's shore
 Who knew my Damon, (Now alas! no more),
 By moonlight round his hallow'd grave repair,
 Strew sweetest flow'rs, and drop a sorrowing tear;
 With never-fading laurel, shade his tomb,
 And bid the rising bay forever bloom,
 Teach springing flow'rs their purpl'd heads to rise,
 And sweetly twining, write, Here Virtue Lies.
 Sing in sad strains each venerable name,
 In fortune's spite, that struggl'd up to fame;
 By Virtue led life's rugged road along,
 Their lives instructive as their sweetest song.
 Say, while their praises tremble on the tongue,
 Thus lived this youthful Bard, thus gentle Damon sung.²⁶

Godfrey was buried in the churchyard of the Old St. James

²⁵Pennsylvania Gazette, [Philadelphia], September 29, 1763.

²⁶Evans, p. 51.

Episcopal Church in Wilmington. There is a crude head-stone marking the place with the words: "Thomas Godfrey, 1736-1763," incised upon it. The grave and the marker are in poor repair. Weathering of the marker has made it very difficult to read.

Withal, Godfrey led a full life during his twenty-seven years, and especially the last fourteen years. From the age thirteen until his death he did live a varied life. He was a student, a soldier, and a factor, as well as, a writer. It would seem that he seldom wasted time on the menial things of life. His attitude toward those things he deemed necessary as a part of life was one of passing interest.

Godfrey's real joy and satisfaction came when he was writing, reading, or conversing with his acquaintances in Wilmington and Philadelphia. His work reflects that spirit of art for art's sake for he seemed to have little thought of publishing every bit that he wrote. Most of his work was not put into print until after his death, and little of his work has been given attention by scholars. Even after the production of his Prince of Parthia little attention was given to his life, except that done by his closest friends, Nathaniel Evans and William Smith. With the passing of time, much of the life and times of Thomas Godfrey, the playwright and scholar of colonial times is lost forever. The accounts which are available have been poorly preserved. The job of collecting his papers and letters has not been so fruitful.

Of Godfrey's works that have been published, The Prince of Parthia is the most important. The play itself should be regarded as his literary legacy to the American people.

Chapter IV

THOMAS GODFREY AND THE PRINCE OF PARTHIA

The plot and the setting as well as the style of The Prince of Parthia point to Godfrey's training while he was a student at the Academy. Much of his time at the Academy was spent in reading and studying the Ancient Classics. Also, Godfrey must have read many of the Elizabethan dramas and poems available to him. All of these things are reflected in The Prince of Parthia.¹

Structurally, the tragedy is remarkably similar to those of William Shakespeare. The play has five acts with a total of thirty-eight scenes. While the setting is near-eastern, it is based on historical fact like the tragedies of William Shakespeare.²

The plot of The Prince of Parthia is almost identical to Romeo and Juliet. Archibald Henderson in his book The Prince of

¹Smith, pp. vii-xiv.

²Archibald Henderson, ed., The Prince of Parthia, A Tragedy by Thomas Godfrey (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1915), pp. 30-39. Hereafter cited as Henderson.

Parthia, A Tragedy By Thomas Godfrey, compares Godfrey's play in great detail to Romeo and Juliet. Henderson cites the action between the hero of the play "Arsaces" and the heroine, "Evanthe" as being identical to that of "Romeo" and "Juliet". In Godfrey's play, "Arsaces" and "Evanthe" are about to marry against their parents wishes. "Arsaces" is forced to go off to war. A messenger comes to "Evanthe" and reports falsely that "Arsaces" has been killed. "Evanthe" drinks a goblet of poisoned wine and dies. The entire action of the play takes place in the kingdom of Parthia sometime between 60 B. C. and 45 B. C.³

The similarity of the plot and the action of Godfrey's play to Romeo and Juliet may reflect upon the work which David Douglas' American Company did while at the Academy. Romeo and Juliet was one of the plays performed.⁴

The only book written which actually examines The Prince of Parthia from a literary point of view is the volume done by Archibald Henderson. Henderson reprinted the play in 1915 for the first time since 1767.

Henderson evaluates The Prince of Parthia as the most important epic poem written before the American Revolution by a native American. Henderson comments directly on Godfrey's bold use of Shakespeare and says:

... This play contains enough original thought, for all its manifest derivations and enough poetic sensibility, for all its oblique reflections, to give it strength, beauty, and individual character.

In spite of these bold plagiarisms and appropriations, more or less justified,

³Henderson, pp. 70-72.

⁴Rankin, pp. 75-115.

from Shakespeare, Godfrey's work should testify to his diligent study of the greatest of all models, William Shakespeare.⁵

There is little doubt that Godfrey wanted his play produced. When he finished the play, soon after arriving in Wilmington in 1759, he sent David Douglas a copy of the manuscript. A letter written on November 17, 1759, addressed to Douglas reads as follows:

By the last vessel from this place, Wilmington I sent you the copy of a Tragedy I finished here, and I desired your interest in bringing it on the stage; I have not yet heard of the vessel's arrival, and believe if she is safe, it will be too late for the company Douglas' now in Philadelphia.⁶

Godfrey was correct in supposing that his play would reach Douglas too late for production. Douglas' company had made plans to leave Philadelphia on December 27, 1759. Their advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette on December 27, says that would be the last performance until November of 1760.⁷

Douglas did not attempt to use Godfrey's until April of 1767. He was having a good deal of success with his repertoire of English drama and felt safe in using them entirely. Apparently, he was afraid to experiment with unproven work.

In 1767, times had changed. The forced withdrawal of Forrest's play, The Disappointment, made Douglas turn to The

⁵Henderson, p. 69.

⁶Smith, p. 474.

⁷Pennsylvania Gazette, [Philadelphia], December 27, 1759.

Prince of Parthia. He advertised the play for production on April 24, 1767. The Pennsylvania Journal for April 23, carried the following announcement:

The Prince of Parthia, a tragedy, written in America, by the late ingenious Mr. Godfrey of this City, will be presented to-morrow at the New Theatre in Southwark, by the American Company.⁸

This same announcement carried a list of principal characters of the play. (See Appendix A).

Apparently, The Prince of Parthia was performed by the American Company only one time. Archibald Henderson says that the play may have been unpopular with the company itself. He attributes this unpopularity to the fact that the play required elaborate costumes and very complex scenery.⁹

Whether it was performed again by Douglas or not, The Prince of Parthia was an important contribution to American colonial drama. In a sense, it proved that a native American could write a play acceptable to the standards of a professional theatre company. Moreover, the production of The Prince of Parthia began a trend in American theatre.

After Douglas first use of original drama, he turned it more often. This is important because other writers began to turn out original work for production. Although events from 1770 until the close of the American Revolution in 1783 did not allow much playgoing, several original dramas were submitted and actually produced.

⁸Pennsylvania Journal, [Philadelphia], April 23, 1767.

⁹Henderson, p. 70.

On February 17, 1773, Douglas presented George Cocklings' The Conquest of Canada, or The Siege of Quebec. It was an original drama set in North America. In 1787, Royall Tyler wrote The Contrast, the first American comedy, and had it produced the same year. In 1789, another original comedy, The Father, was written by William Dunlap.¹⁰

Nearly all of the native dramas written after 1767 were comedies. Nevertheless, they all represented a change in the nature of the plays being produced in America during the colonial period. No longer did Douglas, for example, depend entirely on plays written in and imported from England. Moreover, The Prince of Parthia is important because it initiated this change.

The American Revolution may be credited with the interruption of progress in the colonial theatre. People had no time for such. Once the war was over, the Americans returned to their own affairs. The further growth of commerce, the relative political stability, and the further expansion of intellectual life, created a fertile field for the growth of the American theatre. After 1790, for example, the production of native drama increased.¹¹

¹⁰Rankin, pp. 117-200.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 189-200.

Chapter V

GODFREY'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN COLONIAL DRAMA

Thomas Godfrey has never been given the credit he deserves for the part he played in making a permanent native American theatre. The only study of Godfrey and The Prince of Parthia was done by Archibald Henderson in 1915. Henderson was more interested in the literary merit of the tragedy, however, than he was in showing how Godfrey helped to begin the American theatre. Moreover, Henderson does not examine Godfrey in the context of the age in which he lived.

The most serious fault in Henderson's book is that he does not show how Godfrey was influenced by the events of his time. He does not emphasize the influence of the touring companies, and he fails to point out the social and cultural changes which were taking place. Most other historians of the period, however, fail to even mention The Prince of Parthia aside from the author, date of production, and the nature of

the play.

William Dunlap, who is regarded as the first historian of the American theatre, published his three-volume History of the American Theatre in 1832. In his first volume he deals specifically with the theatre before the American Revolution. While he stresses the importance of The Prince of Parthia, he does not say much about Thomas Godfrey. The same treatment is given to Godfrey by other historians of the theatre such as Dixon Ryan Fox, Oral S. Coad, and Charles P. Daly.

The most recent study done on the colonial theatre was written by Hugh F. Rankin in 1965. Rankin's book, The Theater in Colonial America, gives excellent descriptions of the touring companies during Godfreys time. But again, there is no attempt to equate these things to the life of Thomas Godfrey.¹

Several historians, among them George C. D. Odell, have said that the first American play was Robert Hunter's Androboros [...]. Hunter, who was governor of New York in 1714, was not a native American and his play was never performed in public. Odell says Hunter's play should be regarded as the genesis of American drama.² Since Robert Hunter was an Englishman, his play cannot be given credit for being native drama.

Unlike Hunter, Godfrey was a native born American. Moreover, Godfrey's play was actually produced by professionals.

¹Rankin, passim.

²George C. D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (New York: privately published, 1927), I, pp. 3-4.

The Prince of Parthia was not performed again after 1767 until 1847. On June 11, 1847, the Wilmington Journal carries an announcement of the intentions of the Thalion Association, an amateur theatre group in Wilmington, North Carolina, to present the play.³

In 1908, the Enterprise Dramatic Club of Germantown, Pennsylvania, presented the first act of The Prince of Parthia. The performance was to be a part of a pageant honoring the heritage of Germantown.⁴

The next recorded use of Godfrey's play came in 1915. On March 26, the Zelosophic Society of the University of Pennsylvania gave a performance of the tragedy. The group gave the play without scenery, but with very elaborate costumes. Archibald Henderson quotes the director of the Zelosophic Society as saying:

We were a little uncertain as to whether the play would take well, but thought it worthwhile to try. Previously we had always given a modern comedy, but decided to try historic American drama, and so chose The Prince of Parthia. The interest shown was even above our expectations, and we consider that the play was the biggest success of any that we have given. The fact of the excellence of the lines themselves, as written by Godfrey, was something that impressed us particularly in working up the play.⁵

The most recent performances of The Prince of Parthia

³Wilmington Journal, [Wilmington], June 12, 1847.

⁴Henderson, p. 53.

⁵Cited from Henderson, pp. 54-55.

were done in the fall of 1962, and the spring of 1963. Students in the Wilmington College Department of Drama re-wrote the play and condensed it to three acts. The purpose in re-writing the script was to enable the play to be presented by a touring group of players. The play was presented to a number of Civic organizations in Wilmington, Whiteville, Mount Olive, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.⁶

And so, The Prince of Parthia has kept the legend of Thomas Godfrey alive for more than two hundred years.

Conclusion

Even though historians have failed to give Godfrey his place in American colonial social and cultural history, his life and his work bear witness to his importance and ingenuity. His life as an apprentice to a watchmaker, a student, a soldier, and an author reflect the changing social conditions during his time. His literary legacy, The Prince of Parthia, affords him recognition for his part in establishing the theatre as a permanent cultural institution in American life. Although his play does not reflect a topic of nativism as does the work of later American playwrights, The Prince of Parthia does represent a departure from dependence upon pure English drama. The fact that the play was written by a native American is definitely a departure from that which was commonplace in the colonial theatre in America.

⁶Statement by Douglas Wallace Swink, personal interview, March, 1968.

Archibald Henderson called Godfrey the American son of "art for arts sake".⁷ Godfrey's apparent disinterest in publishing the poems that he wrote may be attributed to this. Whatever Godfrey's own thoughts about the beauty of his work or its excellence, his friends had a good deal of admiration both for the man and his work.

I would only beg leave, therefore,
to remark of him Godfrey and the Tragedy
The Prince of Parthia, that there is possibly
some merit even in endeavouring to
overcome noble difficulties, though we
should happen to aspire after a flight
beyond our years; In great attempts 'tis
glorious e'en to fall.⁸

This last paragraph, written by Godfrey's devoted friend, Nathaniel Evans, is a fitting elegy to Godfrey. Death may have curtailed the ambition of Godfrey, but his work has left an impression in the story of the theatre in colonial America.

⁷Henderson, p. 4.

⁸Evans, p. 116.

APPENDIX A

Schooner Chatming Narrv. J. Malloway to Halifax.

By Authority.

NEVER PERFORMED BEFORE.

By the AMERICAN COMPANY,
At the NEW THEATRE, in Southwark
On FRIDAY, the Twenty-Fourth of April, will be
presented, A TRAGEDY written by the late ingenious
Mr. Thomas Godfrey, of this city, called the

PRINCE of PARTHIA.

The PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS by Mr. HALLAM,
Mr. DOUGLASS, Mr. WALL, Mr. MORRIS,
Mr. ALLYN, Mr. TOMLINSON, Mr. BROAD-
BELT, Mr. GREVILLE, Mrs. DOUGLASS,
Mrs. MORRIS, Miss WAINWRIGHT, and
Miss CHEER.

To which will be added, A Ballet Opera called

The CONTRIVANCES.

To begin exactly at Seven o'Clock. - Vivant Rex & Regina.

T O B E L E T T,

Two entire TOTTES situated near the Town of ...

This is a copy of the original advertisement of The Prince of Parthia which appeared in the Pennsylvania Journal on April 23, 1767.

APPENDIX B

JUVENILE POEMS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

WITH THE

PRINCE OF PARTHIA,

A

TRAGEDY.

BY THE LATE

MR. THOMAS GODFREY, Junr.

of Philadelphia.

To which is prefixed,

Some ACCOUNT of the AUTHOR and his Writings.

Poeta nascitur non fit.

Hoc.

PHILADELPHIA:

Printed by H.

MDCCLXV.

This is a copy of the cover of Evans book Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects, a composite of Godfrey's work Published in 1765.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Books

Bigelow, John. (ed.). Works of Franklin. 3 vols. Philadelphia: Harper and Brothers, 1887.

Evans, Nathaniel. Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects. Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1765.

Henderson, Archibald. (ed.). The Prince of Parthia, A Tragedy By Thomas Godfrey. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1915.

Watson, John F. Annals of Philadelphia. 10 vols. Philadelphia: n. p., 1850.

2. Collected Documents

New Hanover County. Records, Deeds, and Wills, 1732-1864. Vol. VI (1759-1764), Wilmington: New Hanover County Courthouse.

Pennsylvania Archives. 16 vols. Harrisburg: 1936.

3. Letters, and Papers

Douglas, David. "Letter to Mr. Allyn," in Boston Public Library Archives, IX (August to December, 1759), folio 1.

Godfrey, Thomas. "Letter to Nathaniel Evans," Cited from Nathaniel Evans, Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects. Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1765.

Godfrey, Thomas. "Letter to Major Hugh Waddell," in Collections Of the North Carolina Association for The Preservation of Antiquities, Wilmington Public Library (1700-1800), folio 5.

du Bois, Peter. "Letter to Samuel Johnson, Jr.," New Hanover County Records, Deeds, and Wills, V (1758).

Nessfield, Anne. "Letter to Nathaniel Evans," in Boston Public Library Archives, XIII (1766), folio 2.

Evans, Nathaniel. "Letters and Papers of Nathaniel Evans," in Collections of the Charles Van Pelt Library, 1 vol.

- Reed, William B. (ed.). The Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed. 3 vols., Philadelphia: n. p., 1847.
- Smith, Horace Wemyss. (ed.). Life and Correspondence of the Reverend William Smith. 3 vols., Philadelphia: n. p., 1879.

4. Pamphlets

- Evans, Nathaniel. "Poetical Works of Thomas Godfrey." Philadelphia: n. p., 1764.

5. Painting Collection

- West, Benjamin. Some portraits held by the Charles Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, Rare Book Division, (1740-1780), folio 7.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Books

- Bridenbaugh, Carl. Cities in the Wilderness; The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742. Second edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- Coad, Oral Sumner and Edwin Mims. The American State. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929.
- Curti, Merle. The Growth of American Thought. Third edition. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1964.
- Dunlap, William. A History of the American Theater. New York: J. J. Harper, 1832.
- Goldenweiser, Alexander. History, Psychology, and Culture. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933.
- Nettels, Curtis Putnam. The Roots of American Civilization, A History of American Colonial Life. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1938.
- Odell, George C. D. Annals of the New York Stage. 12 vols. New York: n. p., 1927.
- Quinn, Arthur Robson. (ed.). Representative American Plays, 1767-1923. New York: The Century Company, 1925.
- Rankin, Hugh F. The Theater in Colonial America. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965.

- Rourke, Constance. The Roots of American Culture. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1942.
- Taylor, George Rogers. The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1951.
- Wish, Harvey. Society and Thought in America. 2 vols. New York: David McKay, Inc., 1950.
- Young, Karl. The Drama of the Medieval Church. 2 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933.

2. Periodicals

- Coad, Oral Sumner. "The First American Play," Nation, CVII (August 17, 1918), p. 182.
- Fox, Dixon Ryan. "The Development of the American Theater." New York History, XVIII (January, 1926) pp. 23-40.
- "Josiah Martin, Royal Governor." North Carolina University Magazine, L (June, 1960), p. 30.
- Land, Robert H. "The First Williamsburg Theater." William and Mary Quarterly, (July, 1948), p. 362.
- Smith, William. "Poetical Essays." American Magazine, (August, 1758), pp. 7-12.
- "Thomas Godfrey, the American Glazier." American Magazine (September, 1758), pp. 11-16.
- Marshall, Robert Andrews. "Early History of the Lower Cape Fear," James Sprunt Historical Monographs, IV (Chapel Hill, 1904).

3. Newspapers

- Pennsylvania Gazette, [Philadelphia], December 27, 1759.
- Pennsylvania Gazette, [Philadelphia], September 29, 1763.
- Pennsylvania Gazette, [Philadelphia], April 23, 1767.
- Pennsylvania Journal, [Philadelphia], April 23, 1767.
- The Western Carolinian, [Salisbury, North Carolina], August 28, 1821
- Mc Ree, Griffity J. "History of the Town of Wilmington." Wilmington Chronicle, September 16, 1846.

4. Unpublished Materials

- Pollock, Thomas Clark. "The Philadelphia Stage in the Eighteenth Century." Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1933.
- Wetmore, Thomas J. "The Cultural Development of Ante-Bellum Wilmington." Unpublished Master's thesis, Duke University, Durham, 1941.
- Swink, Douglas Wallace. "Wilmington College Performances of The Prince of Parthia" (Conversation at Wilmington College, Wilmington, North Carolina, March, 1968).