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Introduction



The Actor

David Garrick died on 20 January 1779. In the days before his funeral, over fifty thousand people visited his home at Adelphi Terrace to see his remains. The funeral, celebrated on 1 February 1779, was a similarly elaborate affair. The procession of Garrick's body, from Adelphi to its final resting place in Westminster Abbey, was accompanied by "upwards of thirty mourning coaches, followed by twice the number of gentlemen's carriages," and the route of the procession was jammed with thousands upon thousands of spectators, "more people present . . . than were ever remembered to have been collected since the coronation."¹ As the comparison indicates, Garrick was interred with a pomp and circumstance worthy of kings: at the time when a poor person's funeral may have cost about £15 and one for the "middling sort" about £100, Garrick's funeral bill was rumored to exceed £1,500.²

But Garrick was no king. Instead, he was an actor, indeed the preeminent Shakespearean actor of his day. He was a theater manager, controlling from 1747 to 1776 one of the two major patent theaters in London, Drury Lane. He was a playwright, enriching the stage with such new compositions as *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) and *The Jubilee* (1769). He was a mentor to other aspiring playwrights and actors, such as the actress Mary Robinson and the playwright Hannah More, and sometimes the gatekeeper who kept others (such as Frances Brooke) from advancing

in their careers. As the scope of his funeral would indicate, he was no obscure figure, nor has he become one. He has been a popular biographical subject, from his own day to the present, and he remains much studied, especially by those interested in the history of the British stage.³

Yet if little about his life needs to be unearthed, returning to his death, and his career-long interest in Shakespeare, holds new potential for reshaping how we think about a struggle that obsessed Garrick while yet alive: the conflict he faced, as an actor, with the fleeting, ephemeral nature of his art. "Pity it is," the actor and poet Colley Cibber would write, a year before Garrick would make his theatrical debut, "that the animated Graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant Breath and Motion that presents them."⁴ This fact about actors had been mourned before Garrick took to the stage, by Cibber and his contemporaries, but also by Shakespeare in many of the same plays that Garrick would go on to reenact. Garrick, however, called attention to it in new and numerous ways. "But he, who struts his hour upon the stage," Garrick would later write, channeling *Macbeth*, "can scarce extend his fame thro' half an age."⁵ Acting in the era prior to any form of recording, and obsessed with fame, Garrick predicated his desire to live forever on an art form he knew could not be preserved.

For his fans, Garrick thus activated, as never before, the dynamic of desire and loss embedded in all acts of performance, and inspired spectators to respond to this dynamic in intense and varied ways. If audiences had long known that "all the world's a stage," eighteenth-century audiences and actors made much of the metaphor's dependence on evanescence, or, as articulated in one of my epigraphs, of how the ephemerality of theatrical performance stands in for "the shortness of human life."⁶ Beloved actors, writes William Hazlitt, teach us through their successes about "the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. . . . They are the links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; *their* bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence."⁷ Writing in the wake of Garrick, Hazlitt muses on what it will mean for other actors to leave the stage, yet he does so, I contend, because of how potently Garrick urged his spectators to sense the loss inherent in performance long before the celebrated actor actually retired or passed away.⁸ In performances such as those rendered by Garrick, loss itself becomes an inheritance to be experienced and passed on.

Such a response is retroactively enforced in the commentary on Garrick's death. Garrick might have merited funereal pomp worthy of kings,

but when he died, he died an actor, and he was mourned as an actor, too. Garrick's funeral conjures up memories of that mounted for the Restoration actor Thomas Betterton, Garrick's precursor in reputation and fame, an event that established the then-innovative idea that an actor, like a king, was worthy of great public grief.⁹ But whereas Betterton was mourned as what Joseph Roach has termed a surrogate monarch, indicative of the way that throughout his career his acting had channeled the dignity of kings, the eulogies that proliferated at Garrick's death focused instead on what it meant for an actor, as opposed to a poet, or painter, or sculptor, or even a king, to die.¹⁰

Take, as exemplary, an excerpt from "Verses to the Memory of Garrick," written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the actor who succeeded Garrick as the theater manager of Drury Lane:

The Actor only, shrinks from Times Award;
Feeble tradition is his Memory's Guard;
By whose faint Breath his Merits must abide,
Unvouch'd by Proof—to Substance unallied!
Ev'n matchless Garrick's Art to Heav'n resign'd,
No fix'd Effect, no Model leaves behind!¹¹

Sheridan, child of the theater, scion to the actor, playwright, and elocution specialist Thomas Sheridan, and playwright, actor, and theater manager in his own right, mourns in Garrick's passing a larger truth about theatrical life. As Sheridan's monody elsewhere stipulates, other figures, revered for their artistry or governance, leave behind traces of this skill and thus traces of themselves—books they have written, portraits they have painted, laws they have passed, buildings they have named. The actor, however, even a "matchless" actor such as Garrick, is revered for an artistry that cannot remain. He must therefore be mourned double: for his loss, and the loss of our ability to remember him through any surviving "effects."

Yet one model, of a sort, remained, and it resurrected for his mourners a central aspect of Garrick's career. As Sheridan recalls the circumstances of Garrick's funeral—"the general Voice, the Meed of mournful verse, / The splendid Sorrows that adorned his Hearse"—he indicates, too, one monument that now seems to commemorate Garrick: "Shakespeare's image from its hallow'd Base / Seem'd to prescribe the Grave, and point the Place."¹² Prior to housing Garrick, Westminster Abbey had since 1741 been the home to Peter Scheemakers's statue of Shakespeare,



Fig. 1. Peter Scheemakers, monument to Shakespeare in Westminster Abbey, 1740. © The Dean and Chapter of Westminster.



Fig. 2. J. Barlow. *Monument to the memory of David Garrick esqr.* (1797).
Folger Shakespeare Library Call #: ART G241 no. 43. Used by permission
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and it is at the base of this statue that Garrick's remains were ultimately interred. Though a separate funeral monument for Garrick himself was planned, it would not be installed until 1797, and so for nearly twenty years, as Michael Dobson has remarked, Shakespeare's statue served as the marker for Garrick's grave.

This statue, too, stood as a symbol of loss: a monument erected in place of the Shakespearean body that was not there, and a testament to the recovery of a playwright whose reputation, at the beginning of the Restoration, had been much in doubt.¹³ Garrick's placement at its base was a fitting tribute to his role in the recovery of this reputation, and a commentary on how he had worked to fill the voids (first of the work, now of the body) that the dead Shakespeare had left behind.¹⁴ That Garrick was not single-handedly responsible for reviving Shakespeare on the eighteenth-century stage has been granted by theater historians, but that he himself would have liked full credit for doing exactly this has been established by scholars of Garrick.¹⁵ As his career progressed, he worked increasingly hard to make his reputation inextricable from that of the playwright he would elevate, posthumously, to the status of Britain's "National Poet."¹⁶ And though his contemporary Charles Macklin played an equally important role in increasing the Shakespeare repertoire on the eighteenth-century London stage, it was Garrick who worked tirelessly—through the roles he played, the plays of Shakespeare that he rewrote and staged, and the images of himself and Shakespeare that he circulated and commissioned—to have his identity and Shakespeare's be considered as one and the same.

This book probes the implications of this desire, as layered against the acknowledgment that a dying actor leaves nothing of his art behind. By playing Shakespeare, Garrick raised the playwright to a position of new national importance, but in the process of doing so, he also activated Shakespeare as the social and cultural center around which he, and many other actors and even novelists, could work out questions about how to resist the evanescence of theater and life. How could the artist who stakes his fame on an ephemeral form of art be celebrated or preserved? How do approaches to commemoration change in light of these attempts? And how did Shakespeare become an emblem to other artists for how such preservation could be achieved? These are questions that Garrick, through Shakespeare, was able to ask, and questions that, thanks to Garrick, others would then take up. The chapters that follow tell the story of the answers they obtained.

Only a few turns of fate were responsible for making Shakespeare, and not, say, Christopher Marlowe or John Fletcher, the preeminent playwright of the British stage. With the closing of the theaters during the English Civil War, knowledge about all Jacobean playwrights suffered, and 1659—a time when performances, publications, and criticism of Shakespeare had almost wholly disappeared or not yet emerged—has been identified as the “nadir of Shakespeare’s posthumous history.”¹⁷ But with the restoration of the monarchy and the stage, Shakespeare started to reemerge. The Restoration theater manager William Davenant, young, energetic, and strapped for plays, successfully begged for a passel of “disposable” scripts by a then “second-string” playwright; the aforementioned Thomas Betterton, through his performances of roles such as Hamlet and Pericles, subsequently helped elevate this “Shakespeare” to a popularity on par with at least Francis Beaumont and Fletcher.¹⁸ Shakespeare received an extra boost in 1737 with the passage of the Theater Licensing Act, when theater managers, now required to submit all new plays to the licenser, found themselves turning for ease to the work of older playwrights and particularly that of Shakespeare.¹⁹ By the early 1740s, almost every known Shakespearean play was being staged for appreciative audiences, and performances of Shakespeare “constituted almost one fourth of London’s theatrical bill.”²⁰ In the 1740–41 season, for example, Drury Lane produced fourteen Shakespeare plays, for a total of eighty-five performances in a season of 192 acting nights, and from mid-December to the end of March there were only six acting nights without, at one of the operating houses, a production of Shakespeare.²¹

Of course, as critics such as Jean Marsden and Michael Dobson have discussed, the Shakespeare that eighteenth-century audiences were going to see was often heavily revised.²² If the eighteenth century welcomed the “full-scale canonization of Shakespeare,” it also, simultaneously, engaged in the “wholesale adaptation” of his works.²³ Examples of such adaptation range from John Dryden and William Davenant’s spectacle-filled *The Tempest; or, The Enchanted Island* (1667), to Nahum Tate’s “happy ending” version of *King Lear* (1681), to Garrick’s drastically shortened version of *The Winter’s Tale* (1756). While the Licensing Act prompted some managers to return to the original versions of Shakespeare’s plays (and indeed most of the “radical adaptations” of Shakespeare were composed prior to 1737), certain adaptations held the stage until well into the nineteenth century.²⁴ Those that did so tended to show audiences a “domestic Shakespeare,” one whom they could identify with “virtuous family life, vigorous trade, and British glory.”²⁵

In the Restoration and thereafter, in other words, British audiences and playwrights molded Shakespeare to reflect their own concerns: they made him hold “the mirror up to nature” and supported, by their attendance at these adaptations, the version of nature that they already knew. And yet, as the apt *Hamlet* quotation suggests, many Shakespearean plays also interrogate the issue of their reception. Though the discussion of eighteenth-century rewritings of Shakespeare’s plays focuses rightly on what the adaptation can tell us about “the values, the taste and theatrical conventions of the age” that is doing the adapting, it leaves out “the agency of Shakespeare’s plays themselves, their capacity to influence his later interpreters, editors, readers, and performers.”²⁶ No matter how heavily they were revised, Shakespeare’s plays inevitably influence, and sometimes even anticipate, their eighteenth-century revisions.

Nowhere is this dynamic better evidenced than in the relationship of Garrick, and those artists who orbited and informed him, to Shakespeare. One way to read Garrick’s investment in Shakespeare, and indeed the way that several of his contemporaries read it, was that it was motivated as much by his concern for his own posthumous reputation as it was by his love for the playwright. Staking his fame on the characters of Shakespeare he performed, the plays of Shakespeare that he cast or rewrote, and the adaptations of Shakespeare that he restored, Garrick sought to find in Shakespeare a model for his own endurance. And suggestively, many of the plays he excelled in, and occasionally plays in which he significantly failed, anticipated these very concerns: how can the artistry of life or theater, defined by its ephemeral and dynamic nature, be remembered or preserved? And what artistic medium is best suited to this act of commemoration?

Such questions persist. Even today, actors stake their reputations on Shakespearean roles, raising the question of how Shakespeare in particular became the node for anxieties about artistic transience and the benchmark for lasting success. But in eighteenth-century England, as the culture responded to a broader sense of loss (of a murdered king; of the missing years of the Interregnum, legally banished by the “Act of Oblivion” from time; and of the many pre-Civil War figures, such as Shakespeare, who ran the risk of being permanently effaced), Shakespeare provided the means by which anxieties about obsolescence could be both focused and redressed. In particular, this book emphasizes, and interrogates, the fact that in a time period replete with what Joseph Roach has termed “the iconography of visual remembrance”—a preponderance of commemorative statuary and portraiture dedicated both to

Shakespeare and those actors who would animate his works—such acts of remembrance were not seen by Garrick and his followers as sufficient.²⁷

Instead, Garrick's sought in his enactments of Shakespeare a complementary model for how his own career might be remembered and restored. In contrast to the classical model that would valorize as commemorative the material monument or printed text, Garrick found in his restitution of Shakespeare a way to imagine performance itself as a, and perhaps even *the*, preferable commemorative act. Similarly, instead of lamenting the evanescence that is the benchmark of the actor's art, Shakespeare's plays themselves often embrace this quality as precisely what enables performance's repetition and thus endurance. Hermione's moving statue, in *The Winter's Tale*, becomes an antidote to the static monument that commemorates her loss; Hamlet's Mousetrap play, in *Hamlet*, becomes an emblem for how performance can make history live again.

By playing Shakespeare, and by playing in plays such as these, Garrick would thus establish on multiple levels how performance emerges as an alternative and even an antidote to the commemoration associated with the monument, the portrait, the printed text. Whereas these alternate forms of memorialization testify by their very presence to the absence of that which they recall, Garrick sought to achieve through performance a fantasy in which the missing original could return to life. This was a potent fantasy, one predicated on a desire for immortality even more than commemoration. As such, it was doomed to fail.

In what follows, I illustrate the development of this fantasy through Garrick's engagements with select Shakespearean plays: *Othello*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Garrick acted in many other Shakespearean works, and other titles circulate throughout the book (*King Lear*, *Macbeth*) as they came to offer him occasions for working out concerns about memorialization and obsolescence on the stage. Two of the featured plays—*Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*—appear here in part because even as they reflect in fascinating ways on commemoration, and even as Garrick came back to them at various points in his career, he did not succeed in them, or refused to engage with them in a more than peripheral fashion. Other plays—*Richard III*, *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*—played obvious and influential roles in his career. *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, in particular, help him establish his counterintuitive model for commemoration: the actor as a living monument to Shakespeare.²⁸

Garrick's engagements with these plays also show that he was never

alone in addressing questions about the endurance of the actor's art. Theater is a famously collaborative space, and Garrick was always surrounded by a community of actors and artists from whom he took cues, and whose careers and lives he in turn shaped. While Garrick is the focus for this book, the locus point from which the other stories I tell emerge, several other artists play supporting roles: Aphra Behn, the Restoration novelist and playwright whose novella *Oroonoko* would form an important dramatic response (in its adapted form) to eighteenth-century stagings of *Othello*; Laurence Sterne, the ill and aging eighteenth-century novelist, who would find in Garrick's *Hamlet* an innovative model for his serially published novel *Tristram Shandy* and his life; Mary Robinson, the ingénue and protégée whom Garrick would train for the theater even after his own retirement, and who would find in the character of Perdita both an inspiration and a shackle for her subsequent career; Charles Macklin, the veteran actor, contemporary, and sometime rival of Garrick, who would play his own managerial role in getting more Shakespeare plays on the stage and would through his performance of Shylock enable new conversations about the accessibility of Shakespearean "ideals"; Catherine (Kitty) Clive, the comic actress who played opposite Macklin, and who would through her satirical impersonations challenge the idea of performance's ability to comment on anything beyond the present day; and finally, and most substantially, Sarah Siddons, Garrick's successor as the preeminent Shakespearean actor at the turn of the century, the protégée he initially rejected in favor of Robinson, and the actress who would, through her own aging and retirement, play a crucial role in shifting Romantic ideas about performance, and inciting interest in how one related to a Shakespeare who was read and not staged.

My investigation into the challenge of remembering what is staged begins with one of Garrick's very first onstage appearances, a supporting role in the play version of *Oroonoko*. To contextualize this challenge, I offer a reading of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) as rewriting the problem of memorialization put forward in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The novelty of both titular protagonists, I argue, flags the broader trial of how to remember the exotic subject, and also starts to explain how the exotic subject stands in the way of close associations, such as those seen in Garrick's performance of Richard III, between the actor and the part he plays. Behn draws on *Othello*'s indictment of visual memory as supporting her choice to commemorate such a protagonist not in drama but in prose, an indictment that then allows me to reinterpret Garrick's abysmal performances in eighteenth-century adaptations of these works, and

also to explain his corresponding success in *Richard III* and, later, *Hamlet*. For, as I argue in my chapter on Garrick's fascination with *Hamlet* and the importance of both Garrick and *Hamlet* to the eighteenth-century novelist Laurence Sterne, Garrick aspired not simply to commemorate but to revivify Shakespeare, and this was an aspiration that the part of Othello—a part that requires audiences to see the white actor as only ever an imperfect substitute for the character he portrays—could never let him fulfill. These aspirations are articulated instead through parts such as Hamlet and in Garrick's restitution of and Sarah Siddons's performances in *The Winter's Tale's* famous living statue scene (1756 and 1802–12, respectively).

This question of what it means to be a living monument to a dead author then motivates my fourth chapter, on eighteenth-century rewritings and performances of *The Winter's Tale*. Here, the living statue challenges the stasis of the typical memorial, which confirms the lost life it commemorates but cannot renew. But here, too, gender emerges as a significant factor, since the ability to play a living monument is in this play relegated to Hermione (and Siddons) alone. Garrick's struggles with this fact, and with Siddons, also inform the dynamic of my fifth chapter, featuring the performances that Garrick orchestrated of Charles Macklin and Kitty Clive in *The Merchant of Venice* (1741–59). Clive's potency as a satirical Portia, who confronts Macklin's serious and "Shakespearean" Shylock, accentuates a gendered bid for power that rests in performance's ability not to commemorate but to disappear. My final chapter, which juxtaposes the very different retirements of Garrick and Siddons, takes up this reassessment of performance in light of the preferential treatment given by spectators to Siddons's postretirement staged readings, and closes by reexamining the Romantic "inward turn" toward reading, individualism, and imagination as a response to the loss audiences experienced at Garrick's death and Siddons's decay.

All of these names and stories will circulate throughout this book, and, like Garrick, many of these authors and actors are already well known. But these figures look very different in the context of this discussion, and in the context of the discussion they had with each other about how the establishment of Shakespeare's afterlife could provide a model for their own. For example, Garrick's late-career excision of *Hamlet's* graveyard scene, discussed in chapter 3, looks different when read in the context of his interactions with Sterne and his career-long interest in performance's relationship to memory and death. Revisiting such historical "evidence" also often reveals slippages in the way that

anecdotes about these actors—such as Alexander Pope’s alleged quip in response to Macklin’s Shylock, or accounts of Garrick changing his facial expressions while having his portrait done—circulate and change even within contemporary reviews. These slippages then become evidence themselves: of the challenge posed to memorialization by performance, and the way that cultural memory responds, in the words of Rebecca Schneider, by “performing remains.”²⁹

Finally, though the chapter arguments narrated above may seem sequential, even teleological, the discussions that follow will rarely proceed linearly. Conversations about succession, death, memory, and reenactment circle back on themselves, playing with time in the very manner that they discuss. Just so, the chronology of this book will be wide rather than straight, a more theoretical commitment that I address in chapter 1. How might Garrick’s engagements with Shakespeare, and his potent and circulating fantasy that Garrick and Shakespeare could coexist, affect how we narrate theater history and the trajectory of any actor’s career? While the beginning of Garrick’s career features in my opening readings, and while the book ends with a meditation on the retirements of Garrick and Siddons, my chapters do not adhere to a strict chronology, and the featured actors and authors will emerge and resurface at various points in their careers. Siddons will appear in one of her final theatrical roles, before appearing in her first, and Garrick’s late-career adaptations of *Hamlet* precede in my chapters his midcareer changes to *The Winter’s Tale*. Such shifts are fitting, given that the rhythms and demands of performance modeled for these actors and authors a cyclic view of time. Performance recreates as it remembers, rendering, as I contend in my next chapter, any sense of absolute origin or absolute ending suspect. That is why I introduce Garrick, here, at his death: for it was his death, or at least the foreknowledge of it, that inspired his quest to make himself, through Shakespeare, live again.