

**“Magical Glasses”:**

**Shakespearean Character and Cultural Change in the Eighteenth Century**

Amanda Cockburn, Department of English, McGill University, Montreal

October 2011

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the exceptional guidance provided by my two supervisors, Paul Yachnin and Fiona Ritchie. Paul Yachnin's enthusiasm for this project always put wind in my sails. I invariably left our meetings with a clearer vision of my own argument, thanks to Paul's ability to help me untangle or articulate an idea with which I'd been struggling. I also left our meetings and took from our email exchanges a renewed determination and energy with which to approach my research. I am especially grateful for such a kind and generous mentor during my intellectual growth at McGill. I am also grateful for Fiona's expertise in shaping this dissertation. Her knowledge of the field struck me many times as dauntingly encyclopedic, and I am indebted to her learning and indispensable feedback. I thank her for consistently pointing me to articles and books that proved invaluable to the development of my argument. I also must thank both Paul and Fiona for their extraordinarily perceptive and meticulous editing.

I likewise thank members of the Shakespeare and Performance Research Team at McGill University, especially Michael Bristol for our conversations about Shakespeare and moral philosophy, and Wes Folkerth, whose graduate class on Shakespearean Character helped form the initial idea for this project. I am also deeply indebted to SPRITE for sending me twice to the Folger Shakespeare Library, that wonderful treasure trove, where I whet my appetite for archival work and afternoon tea. I also thank the Huntington Library for a research fellowship, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a Canadian Graduate Scholarship, both of which helped make this dissertation possible.

I extend my gratitude to all those friends and colleagues who offered encouragement and discussed my project with me, and I especially thank those who read drafts of my work, including Tara MacDonald, Robin Feenstra, Asa Boxer and Katie Harding-La. I particularly wish to thank the indispensable Jessica Riddell, whose feedback was invaluable and because she edited my introduction on her honeymoon. Most of all, I am deeply indebted to my parents, Michael and Ann Cockburn, for their endless support and for always warmly inviting me back into their cozy home for productive writing sessions—thank you!

## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the preoccupation with Shakespearean character in the middle to late eighteenth century. I argue that Shakespeare's art of characterization participated in shaping British culture and identity in this period. Recent scholarship on the history of Shakespeare's reception has concentrated on the appropriation of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century to demonstrate how his plays served ideological purposes, such as nationalism, imperialism, and bourgeois ideals of the autonomous subject. While such studies offer a valuable account of Shakespeare's promotion to canonical status, the focus on the historically contingent and socially invested readings of his works overstates the determined or constructed nature of literary meaning. I show that while eighteenth-century audiences sometimes interpreted Shakespeare to suit the values of their day, the complexity of his drama resisted easy appropriation and was formative of culture itself. A dialogic approach thus underpins my investigation of how Shakespeare's art of characterization raised questions and engaged audiences in a culturally productive way.

Onstage and in the world of print, Shakespeare's characters were often scrutinized and examined as though they were real people. They took part in a mimetic moral exercise that helped people navigate the uncertain atmosphere of a modern commercial world. To understand the eighteenth-century engagement with Shakespearean character more fully and historically, I argue for the importance of the relationship between the transformation of the social order and aesthetic discourse in this period. Chapter one examines how major shifts in social structures resulted in the blurred boundaries of private and public paradigms. The interplay of private and public characterized the social

order of the era and complicated ideas about morality and identity formation. This introductory chapter brings into focus anxieties about a newly commercialized public culture and the entertainment industry's potential either to cultivate or corrupt morality. It also highlights how aesthetic discourse emphasized the function of art in shaping conscientious citizens, and establishes the importance of aesthetic concepts, such as taste, the sympathetic imagination, and moral spectatorship in shaping the reception of Shakespearean character. Following this, I explore how reading and theatrical audiences productively interacted with Shakespearean characters: by using Shakespeare's characters as speculative tools that provided insight into human nature, readers and audiences sought to understand identity formation and morality as it occurred across shifting boundaries of private and public life.

To demonstrate the culturally productive nature of Shakespeare's plays, my discussion engages with a broad range of material. Examples include Samuel Johnson's *Preface* and notes in his edition of Shakespeare's plays, works by Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, William Richardson and Maurice Morgann, theatre reviews and acting treatises. At the same time, I underscore how creative new modes of literary and theatrical entertainment evolved from this focus on character. Examples include the theatrical criticism of Joanna Baillie, a broad range of innovative responses that remove characters from the confines of plot, the autobiography of George Anne Bellamy, and David Garrick's enterprising introduction of Shakespearean characters to fashionable forms of performance, such as pantomime. I conclude with a focused investigation of various treatments of Falstaff to highlight the resistance of Shakespeare's art to easy ideological appropriation. My approach to reading eighteenth-century Shakespeare

criticism is within the broader framework of the role and reception of literature in eighteenth-century society. Overall, this project explores the impact of Shakespeare's works in forming eighteenth-century culture and the role of aesthetic discourse in elevating Shakespeare to canonical status.

## **Resumé**

Cette thèse a pour objet l'étude des préoccupations entourant les personnages shakespeariens au milieu et jusqu'à la fin du dix-huitième siècle. Je soutiens que l'art de la caractérisation chez Shakespeare a influencé le développement de la culture et de l'identité britannique de cette époque. Les recherches récentes sur l'accueil réservé aux œuvres de Shakespeare à travers l'histoire portent principalement sur l'appropriation des œuvres shakespeariennes au dix-huitième siècle pour montrer comment elles servaient à des fins idéologiques comme le nationalisme, l'impérialisme et les idéaux bourgeois du sujet autonome. Il est vrai que ces études décrivent bien l'ascension de Shakespeare vers son statut canonique, mais elles sont basées sur des lectures influencées par des contingences historiques ou des significations sociales, ce qui tend à exagérer le sens littéraire déterminé ou attribué. Je démontre que même s'il arrivait que public d'interprète parfois les œuvres en fonction des valeurs de l'époque, la complexité des pièces shakespeariennes était telle qu'elles pouvaient résister à une appropriation facile et même contribuer à l'enrichissement de la culture. Par une approche dialogique, cette thèse démontre comment l'art de la caractérisation chez Shakespeare soulevait des questions et retenait l'intérêt du public d'une manière qui favorisait le développement de la culture.

Autant sur scène que dans la littérature imprimée, les personnages de Shakespeare étaient souvent été analysés comme s'ils étaient de vraies personnes. Les gens imaginaient ces personnages dans des exercices moraux mimétiques par lesquels ils pouvaient mieux se situer dans l'atmosphère incertaine d'un monde commercial moderne. Pour expliquer de façon exhaustive et d'un point de vue historique pourquoi les

personnages shakespeariens suscitaient autant d'intérêt au dix-huitième siècle, je présente des arguments pour souligner l'importance de la relation entre la transformation de l'ordre social établi et le discours esthétique de l'époque. Le chapitre un examine comment les bouleversements dans les structures sociales ont brouillé la démarcation entre les paradigmes privé et public et comment cette interaction entre le privé et le public a caractérisé l'ordre social de l'époque en plus de rendre plus de complexifier les notions de moralité et de formation de l'identité. Ce chapitre d'introduction met en évidence les craintes ressenties face à une nouvelle culture publique commercialisée et face à une industrie du spectacle avec assez d'influence pour promouvoir ou corrompre la moralité. Le premier chapitre explique d'abord comment le discours esthétique a révélé que l'art contribuait à la conscientisation des citoyens et explique ensuite à quel point des concepts esthétiques comme le goût, l'imagination sympathique et les différentes visions de la moralité ont influencé l'accueil réservé aux personnages shakespeariens. Par après, je décris dans quelle mesure lecteurs et spectateurs s'engageaient et interagissaient avec les personnages pour ensuite spéculer sur la nature humaine et chercher à comprendre la formation de l'identité et les questions de moralité dans un contexte de démarcation floue entre la vie privée et publique.

Pour illustrer comment les pièces de Shakespeare ont contribué à l'enrichissement de la culture, mon analyse prend en considération une grande variété de matériel incluant les exemples suivants: *Préface* de Samuel Johnson et les notes contenues dans sa version des œuvres de Shakespeare; les critiques d'Élizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffin, William Richardson et Maurice Morgann et, enfin, diverses critiques de pièces de théâtre et des traités d'interprétation. Parallèlement, je souligne comment de nouvelles formes



littéraires et de divertissement théâtral ont évolué à partir de cet intérêt particulier pour le caractère des personnages. Les exemples sont nombreux: des critiques de pièces théâtrales de Joanna Baillie; diverses nouvelles formes d'analyse critique qui dissocient et libèrent les personnages des intrigues qui les confinent; l'autobiographie de George Anne Bellamy et le travail ambitieux de David Garrick qui intégrait des personnages shakespeariens à des types de performances très prisées comme la pantomime. Je conclus par le traitement de différentes études de Falstaff pour souligner comment l'art de Shakespeare a pu résister à une appropriation idéologique facile. Mon analyse des critiques de Shakespeare au dix-huitième siècle est encadrée par un thème plus vaste, celui du rôle et de la réception de la littérature par la société de l'époque. Bref, cette thèse évalue l'impact des œuvres de Shakespeare sur l'évolution et le développement de la culture du dix-huitième siècle ainsi que le rôle du discours esthétique dans l'ascension de Shakespeare à un statut canonique.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction	1-29
Chapter One, Private Interests and Public Good: Shaping England's Moral Character	30-90
Chapter Two, Reading Shakespeare's Characters	91-155
Chapter Three, Shakespearean Character in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre	156-236
Chapter Four, Falstaff in the Eighteenth Century	237-281
Conclusion	282-290
Works Cited	291-309

## Introduction

During the eighteenth century, Shakespeare became fundamental to British cultural identity. His plays were frequently performed on stage—sometimes in adaptation and sometimes in their original form—and the era's most celebrated performers rose to stardom playing Shakespearean roles. Off-stage, his works were considered required reading for any literate English citizen, a common pleasure propelled and facilitated by the various editions of his collected works published throughout the era. Shakespeare's presence also thrived in popular periodicals like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, and his works were discussed in the energetic coffeehouse culture of the period. In 1741, a statue of Shakespeare was erected in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, and in 1769 a three-day festival was held in Stratford-upon-Avon to commemorate the playwright's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Characters in novels, the new and predominant genre of the eighteenth century, quoted from his works to demonstrate their literariness. So ubiquitous was Shakespeare as a literary icon in this era that by the end of the long eighteenth century, Henry Crawford quips in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, "Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is part of an Englishman's constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread about that one touches them everywhere, one is intimate with him by instinct" (390-91).

In the modern critical conversation about Shakespeare's reception in the eighteenth century, the appropriation of Shakespeare has become a commonplace topic: recent scholarship by Jean Marsden, Michael Dobson, Gary Taylor, to name but a few scholars, has contributed significantly to an understanding of the various and contesting ideologies

built into the mythologizing construction of Shakespeare and his plays.<sup>1</sup> Marsden's collection of essays on the appropriation of Shakespeare concentrates on "the ways in which post-Renaissance generations have imprinted their own ideology on the plays" as well as on the idea of Shakespeare as an important cultural symbol (1). Among the multitude of appropriations, Michael Dobson shows that Shakespeare was "assimilated to a common agenda of domestic virtue" and more specifically, was transformed into an exemplar of bourgeois morality (14). Taylor highlights the frequent servings of sagacious Shakespearean quotations in periodicals, especially the Whig-oriented *Tatler* and *Spectator*, and draws attention to the typical practice of altering passages of the plays to moral ends more suitably aligned with bourgeois ideology (63-68). This line of inquiry investigates how various interest groups with competing ideologies appropriated Shakespeare to suit institutional practices and promote authoritative values. In such readings, moral interpretations of Shakespeare's plays are read as the appropriation of the texts by a dominant group of people to achieve social regulation.<sup>2</sup> Much recent

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: a Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present* (New York, 1989); Jean Marsden (ed.), *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York, 1991) and "Daddy's Girls: Shakespearian Daughters and Eighteenth-Century Ideology." (*Shakespeare Survey* 2007): 17-27.

<sup>2</sup> To explain Shakespeare's meteoric ascendancy to the top of the literary canon and his central role in eighteenth-century cultural life, other scholars have explored such integral factors as commercial publishing, a new focus on textual revision, dramatic trends of the

criticism has also featured character as a target for arguments about appropriation in order to critique essentialist humanist readings of Shakespeare's plays. For example, Harold Bloom is often criticized for his claim that Shakespeare's characters are the source of modern identity. While such investigations have shed light on Shakespeare's enormous popularity, the focus on the historically contingent and socially invested readings of his work tends to overstate how determined or constructed literary meaning is. This critical strain does not effectively account for the aesthetic elements of Shakespeare's works that continue to produce meanings in the historical eras different from that in which they were created and to which they were initially directed. Moreover, scholars who discuss the appropriation of Shakespeare refer to the assimilating culture as though it were a complete, stable system or structure imposing itself on a text, rather than

---

English stage, an increasing presence of women in the marketplace, nationalism and bourgeois ideology. Along with my discussion of Marsden, Dobson, and Taylor, see also: Michael Bristol's *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London, 1996); Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765* (Oxford, 1995); Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790s Apparatus* (Oxford, 1991); Elizabeth Eger, "'Female Champions': Women critics of Shakespeare," *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (New York, 2010): 121-163; Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830* (Oxford, 1989); Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print* (Columbia, MO, 2006); Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven, 1993).

recognizing culture as a process of making meaning whereby Shakespearean plays and their various modes of dissemination played a crucial role in the reflection, shaping, and troubling of social identity in eighteenth-century England.

The aim of this study is to explain the formative participation of Shakespeare's plays, especially his art of characterization, in processes of shaping British culture and identity in the eighteenth century. Shakespeare became part of "an Englishman's constitution" through the engagement of audiences with Shakespearean characters as a means of navigating the moral uncertainties of modern life. This project focuses on character since it is where the most conversation between Shakespeare and the eighteenth century, where the social creativity of literature and theatre, is most evident. Indeed, the most prized component of Shakespeare's works in the eighteenth century was his art of characterization. The fictional characters populating his plays were viewed as realistic representations of their human counterparts, and contemporaries emphasized the emotions these characters provoked in readers and spectators, as well as the powerful and authentic feelings these fictional creations seemed to embody in the plays.

Shakespeare's masterful portrayal of the passions was crucial in this era because understanding the passions was viewed as foundational to moral development.

Understanding human nature, especially the basic components of that nature—the passions—was thought to lead to the development of social sentiments that functioned as the bulwark of eighteenth-century British civil society.<sup>3</sup> To understand human nature,

---

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Johnson defines 'passion' in his *Dictionary* as: "1. That about which any power or faculty is employed; 2. Something presented to the senses to raise any affection or emotion." Johnson defines "emotion" more in sense of how a passion affects the mind.

there was no better author to study than Shakespeare. Shakespeare was lauded throughout the century as a genius whose insights to humanity were unrivalled. In 1753, Samuel Johnson argued that Shakespeare's "chief skill was in Human Actions, Passions, and Habits," and that "his Works may be considered as a Map of Life, a faithful Miniature of human Transactions" (1753, 9-10). Taking Johnson's claims as a departure point, this project will examine how eighteenth-century audiences viewed Shakespeare's characters as a "Map of Life" that could help guide individuals to shape their own identity and make sense of their own culture. I will argue that readers and critics did not simply impose normative values and meanings on the plays; rather, their engagement with Shakespeare was a dynamic process of understanding their own values and of shaping their own culture and society. Shakespeare offered his eighteenth-century audiences a type of heuristic device insofar as his dramatic characters afforded them a window into their own processes of subject formation. My examination of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century will therefore argue that his works were a source of moral instruction, not simply because they were invested with moral meaning, but also because readers, critics, and theatre-goers recognized great value in the properties of the plays—most particularly his art of characterization—and participated in socially meaningful

---

He defines 'emotion' as "Disturbance of mind, vehemence of passion, either pleasing or painful." Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1755, repr. New York: AMS, 1964). There is an emphasis of the empirical idea that all knowledge is derived from experience in these definitions. Alan T. McKenzie shows that many of Johnson's *Ramblers* are devoted to the analysis of a single passion: "Hope (#67), Fear (#134), Grief (#47, 52), Greed (#58), Anger, (#56), Peevishness (#74)" etc (134).

conversations about Shakespearean character that opened up new forms of expression and actively formed public life.

This study thus seeks to show why in the eighteenth century characters were often scrutinized as though they were real people as a part of an exercise in navigating the uncertainties of eighteenth-century culture. Other scholars have also recently considered the connection between character and morality in this period. In his essay in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, Michael Bristol deftly explores the relationship between character criticism and developments in moral philosophy to account for the treatment of Shakespeare's fictional characters as moral agents, while in another essay in the same collection, Jean Marsden examines how contemporary moral-aesthetic theories of sympathy influenced the staging of various plays with a greater focus on domestic elements so as to elicit fellow feeling from an audience. My own study will draw on and expand upon the concept of sympathy and the practice of treating characters as moral agents, as such ideas were significant to the intersection of Shakespeare and moral practices of the mid to late eighteenth century. In the rapidly commercialized society of eighteenth-century England, as I will argue, Shakespeare's characters, especially the masterly expression of their imagined private lives and passions, were objects of a public investigation whereby readers and audiences sought to understand identity formation and morality as it occurred across shifting boundaries of private and public life. The dialogue inspired by Shakespeare's characters among his eighteenth-century reading and theatre-going audiences explores a fundamental tension embodied in the dual perception of a newly commercialized public culture and how the domestication of public culture (a concept my first chapter will explore more fully) affects identity formation and morality.



On one hand, there is an anxious perception of a burgeoning public entertainment industry that did little more than breed hedonism, aimless fashion, self-interest, and hypocrisy; on the other hand, there is an idealistic perception of the potential manifested in the newly democratized arena of the arts to refine and educate the moral character of England's citizens.<sup>4</sup> This education campaign was waged by the middle and upper ranks—members of society who could afford to participate in the new world of leisure and refinement. While I develop a cultural materialist approach in considering the social milieu in which Shakespeare's eighteenth-century audience operated, my study takes a crucial departure from cultural materialism by acknowledging the validity of eighteenth-century humanist approaches which sought knowledge in Shakespeare's plays, not simply as sources of universal wisdom, but as a body of work that both raised and helped answer salient questions of the era.

### **Critical Approach**

This project will illuminate how the engagement with Shakespearean character complicates what Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin call "the one-way narrative of

---

<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship has linked the democratization of the arts and culture in the eighteenth-century to a thriving consumer society that allowed for a broader patronage of the arts. See John Barrell, *English Literature in History: An Equal Wide Survey* (London, 1983); Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (New York, 1986); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2000); Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (New York, 2003).

ideological appropriation” that “flattens the controversial nature—and eradicates the ability to arouse controversy” of Shakespeare’s plays (4). My exploration of the treatment of Shakespeare’s characters stems from my essay on the eighteenth-century reception of Falstaff included in a volume of work edited by Sabor and Yachnin that investigates the “two-way traffic moving between Shakespeare and the long eighteenth century” to show not only that eighteenth-century culture shaped Shakespeare as a literary icon but also that Shakespeare significantly shaped eighteenth-century culture (5). This position echoes Michael Bristol’s views in *Big-Time Shakespeare* (1996). Bristol situates his argument in the controversial debate about Shakespeare’s cultural authority that informs even broader arguments about the literary canon, school curriculums, and the role of theatre and literature in sustaining ideas about the identity of Western civilization. In basic, polemical terms, the debate about Shakespeare’s cultural authority features two opposing views. On one side of the debate, critics argue that Shakespeare’s works affirm ideals and achievements of Western civilization, and these works contain essential and intrinsic aesthetic values that render their authority durable and justifiable; on the other side, critics believe there is no essential meaning in Shakespeare’s plays, but rather, claims for intrinsic meaning in the plays (or any literary work for that matter) is merely a screen for the covert affirmation of hegemonic values.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bristol looks at various cultural critics in his analysis of this debate, but he focuses particularly on Helen Gardner’s *In Defense of the Imagination* (Oxford, 1982), Richard Levin’s *New Readings vs. Old Plays* (Chicago, 1982), Brian Vickers’ *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven, 1993), and Graham Bradshaw’s *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca, 1994)

By bridging the gap between these two schools of thought, Bristol aims to show that the cultural authority of Shakespeare is not a zero sum game. Through a materialist approach to Shakespeare's artistic status, Bristol explores the centrality of eighteenth-century commercial publishing and market forces as integral to the promotion of Shakespeare in that era and beyond. He writes that "[c]ommercial profit rather than a wish to guarantee the durable public value of Shakespeare is the motive that best accounts for the diverse enterprises of book publishers, theater managers, film-makers and television producers" (x). However, Bristol also acknowledges that Shakespeare's works endure because of their aesthetic qualities and not simply because they are void of determinate meaning, making them ready material for appropriation by various contingent ideological camps. In fact, that Shakespeare's plays have a "striking adaptability" in the market and in the world of cultural goods suggests "a more durable basis for the value and authority of these artifacts" beyond market value and ideological agendas (xii).

In his exploration of "how the value of Shakespeare's works has been sustained and transmitted over time," Bristol explains that Shakespeare's "extraordinary cultural longevity" is not merely reliant on an "apparatus of legitimation and control" by a

---

as representative of viewing Shakespeare's work as binding of cultural authority. Bristol cites Terence Hawkes' *That Shakespeherian Rag* (London, 1986), and *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London, 1992), Graham Holderness' *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester, 1988), and Alan Sinfield's *Faultlines* (Berkeley, 1992) as representative of cultural critics whose "research focuses on the institutional provenance of Shakespeare and the ideological interests that motivate interpretation of his work" (16).

dominant group (viii; 129-131). Rather, Bristol's Bakhtinian reading of Shakespeare suggests that specific properties of the plays led to new understandings "across generational and cultural boundaries" so that meaning is effectively produced through dialogue between the properties of the cultural artefact and the culture in which it is received (14). This dialogue produces new meanings over time. Cultural production is thus diachronic as well as dialogic, as Bristol points out in connection with the process of theatrical production:

Every staging of a Shakespeare play results from a dialogue between the historical moment of its creation and the contemporaneity of the *mise-en-scène*. At the same time, the thought of the author and of his community continues to resonate even in the most self-consciously modernizing interpretation. The interpreted work thus takes on a double intention as it participates in dialogue about focal concerns and practical morality. (13)

Diachronic analysis of the plays reveals their rich cultural productivity born from the dialogue between Shakespeare's works and the society in which they are received. Shakespeare's plays do not serve an ideological agenda as much as they "widen and enhance democratic participation in our public culture," as do other great works of literature and art, not only in their own time, but also throughout the ages. This is largely because the works themselves are "richly dialogized" in that Shakespeare's plays borrow from "preceeding literary works and from an unselfconscious absorption of the speech types of common people" which makes them "answerable to unforeseen social and cultural circumstances" (11). Bristol writes:

Shakespeare's works are not closed discursive formations, nor are they limited

to expressing the concerns and interests of a narrowly circumscribed historical period. They have potential for generating new meanings in successive epochs. Bakhtin argues that there is something paradoxical in the way certain works exist in epochs far removed from the time of their composition. In effect, the works outgrow the meanings and purposes for which they may have been intended and acquire new significance during an extended afterlife. (11)

Herein lies the real aesthetic value of Shakespeare's works, or what Bristol elsewhere calls the "semantic potentiality" that allows his plays to accrue cultural authority through time as they interactively produce new significance and meanings for different audiences (24). Certain properties embedded in the plays' rich semantic potential are highlighted or simply receive more focus depending on the historical context in which they are read or performed.

Bristol also highlights how Shakespeare's plays were composed in the context of England's developing cultural industry that witnessed the advent of commercial theatre and an emerging book culture that took its full shape in the eighteenth century. The plays, according to Bristol, therefore embody the germinating anxieties of a commercial society:

By the time Shakespeare began his professional career in London there was already a very lively market for a diverse range of cultural products and services. This market offered an array of alternatives to the participatory and collective forms of traditional culture to a new constituency of consumers. The appearance of anonymous customers for these products marks off a specialized sense of culture as a sphere of activity separate from the social and religious imperatives

of the traditional community. (30)

The social concerns inherent to commercial society, such as social mobility or the nature of social performance in a market economy, were nascent in the time Shakespeare was writing his plays, so that it is hardly surprising that eighteenth-century audiences recognized familiar themes and concerns when reading or watching Shakespeare. The cultural continuities represented in the plays allowed audiences to make sense of their own unstable culture as they responded to Shakespeare's works through a diverse range of cultural productions, which included criticism, the various editions of his works, and also sequels, imitations, and adaptations. Such cultural productions were facilitated by an active development in technologies that emerged in an increasingly commercialized public culture. Moreover, Bristol adds "the civic institutions of London at this time also anticipate some of the typical features of the liberal political institutions that would emerge more fully during the eighteenth century" (35). Indeed, the reproduction and promotion of Shakespeare's work in this period are strongly tied to the evolving public sphere. Bristol writes: "Re-situated in the public sphere, Shakespeare's works are taken to be salient interventions in a practice of inquiry into the nature of the good life," so that "[l]iterary discussion and critical debate were valued as social experience by many of the individuals who attended performances of Shakespeare's plays and who purchased copies of the new editions" of his works (60). Indeed, discussion and debate were at the heart of the aesthetic experience in this era.

Like Bristol, I wish to emphasize that while Shakespeare was sometimes appropriated to serve a particular ideology, the relationship between Shakespeare's plays and their reception is more dialogical than appropriative. This is hardly surprising given

that few cultures are sufficiently self-confident simply to take over the cultural works of other traditions or times. Eighteenth-century Britain, while certainly a robust and energetic culture, was itself complicated, troubling to those inside it, and constantly in search of coherent ways to understand its own practices. The eighteenth century witnessed major shifts in traditional boundaries and ideas of what constituted public and private life, and with these changes came a new understanding not only of subjectivity and identity formation, but also of the transformations in the social world, like an increase of the middle ranks. The modern subject was seen as the site of various appetites and desires shaped by his cultural and social environment, which was increasingly commercialized. The growing public provision of luxury goods and a blossoming culture industry was paralleled by a concern for private cultivation and tutelage of appetites and desires. The question of the day was how to most effectively create moral citizens in the face of the hedonistic lifestyle of fashionable society. The question was addressed in aesthetic discourse of the period.

Since most of the work on eighteenth-century engagement with Shakespeare and his plays has favoured a cultural materialist approach, many nuances of Shakespearean reception and the role of aesthetics on identity remain unexplored. My analysis of the aesthetic paradigm of the eighteenth century and its influences on Shakespeare's formative role in shaping culture seeks to address this critical oversight and also aims to reshape the scholarly discussion of eighteenth-century aesthetics, which has traditionally viewed aesthetics in this period as merely a precursor of the Kantian critique of judgment. Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla argue that:

Such a story invokes a teleology, explicitly casting the British discussion

as a kind of dress rehearsal for the full-fledged philosophical aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and his heirs. This tradition, in its adoption of the Kantian formula, understands the aesthetic realm as ‘disinterested’, which is to say it adopts and adapts Kant’s thesis that judgments made about aesthetic objects are universal and without motivation. As a result of this, pre-Kantian texts are read through the lens of the third critique thereby dissolving the differences between the German and British traditions. The story ends, then, with a proclamation of the aesthetic realm as in some sense autonomous; constructed on rules internal to it, generating affective responses according to its own logic, and generally distinct from all other realms of experience. Consequently, the aesthetic, at least since Kant, has been understood as without political or ethical motivation since its *affective* registers are, according to the Kantian model, disinterested. (2)

My examination of Shakespeare’s reception in the eighteenth-century aesthetic paradigm departs from Kantian aesthetics and focuses instead on aesthetics as defined in the context of eighteenth-century cultural concerns. I will argue that the aesthetic experience in the eighteenth century was a part of practical everyday life. Aesthetics were considered inherently ethical and political, and literature and art were conceived as playing a crucial role in shaping culture and identity. My first chapter will outline how the aesthetic concept of taste had an important moral dimension as it sought to reconcile tensions between private interests and passions of the individual and broader public interests, mainly, a stable social order. Through an engagement with Shakespeare’s work, audiences could shape and refine their sense of taste and moral character, which was tantamount to regulating one’s private interests so that they corresponded to public



interests. Eighteenth-century aesthetic discourse, then, had a clear moral imperative and social function.

I am not disavowing the shoring up of power and ideological interests that are certainly inherent to aesthetics and the educational project of cultivating taste in this period; in fact, this dissertation will consider those interests, especially in terms of how Shakespeare's plays both conformed to and resisted ideological imperatives. However, I am arguing that the moral dimension of taste makes it more than merely a pursuit of social distinction. Though critics like Pierre Bourdieu examine the cultural politics of prominent eighteenth-century aesthetic concepts like taste, the emphasis on the socially legislative character of taste is overstated. Firstly, such readings of the discourse of taste do not take into account the agential, socially creative character of debates about taste. Secondly, Bourdieu focuses too much on cultural artefacts as passive objects of consumption without considering how cultural artefacts inspire debate, conversation, and the creation of other cultural products. Thirdly, he positions "legitimate culture" as a "separate universe" from ordinary life; in other words, he follows a Kantian model of disinterested aesthetics that really had no place in British discourse of the eighteenth century (7). John Brewer writes: "The realm of good taste, which was supposed to mark the extent of legitimate culture, was in fact extremely fluid and difficult to determine. As the culture itself acquired new forms and audiences, taste was always in the forefront of any discussion about how to defend the arts and literature" (*Pleasures of the Imagination*, 91). Above all else, taste depended upon the written and printed word, on the descriptions, criticism, and discussions of cultural activity that generated contesting ideas of what constituted tasteful cultural practices. For David Hume, taste is not simply

an organ of conformity; rather, the diversity of taste provokes conversation and debate so that standards are arrived at by consensus and over time. Meanwhile, Samuel Johnson, arguably the leading critic and quintessential “man of taste” in his time, chose the motto “We judge nothing by authority” for his periodical, *The Rambler*. In his notes to Shakespeare’s plays, Johnson similarly encourages his readers to think with independence and to struggle to understand Shakespeare’s difficult drama through their own capacities and knowledge before reading his critical notes. Though taste certainly had a legislative effect, it had a generative effect, too, as it promoted conversation and rational inquiry that resulted in the production of critical commentaries and creative works inspired by Shakespeare’s plays.

As an object of aesthetic study, Shakespeare provided one very important conversation partner to writers, thinkers, players, editors, readers, and audiences in this period as they grappled to make sense of their world. The semantic potential of Shakespeare’s plays enabled eighteenth-century audiences to map their questions onto them and enter into different kinds of interpretive and productive activities with his works. Cultural producers took cues from Shakespeare’s plays as they discovered elements that spoke to and shaped their own specific interests. Public opinion was formed in a dynamic interplay with Shakespeare’s works. Gender differences, domestic relations, and everyday social relations were examined, codified and questioned. The preoccupation with Shakespeare’s characters dominated conversations about the plays, and his characters were often analyzed with an ethical imperative. This is hardly surprising given that art had a clear function in this era: to cultivate moral subjects. My dissertation will thus explore both the ways in which audiences identified with various

Shakespearean characters and how the dramatic representations of these characters shaped the process of identity formation across private and public boundaries. The dual process of representation and reception helped audiences make sense of their place in the commercialized nature of social life. In fact, Shakespeare was praised in this period for his characterization more than for the beauty of his language or the complexity of his plot structures. His characters were treated as living, breathing entities no longer tied to plot structure or the worlds of the plays. Shakespearean characters starred in vulgar adaptations and spin-offs of the plays as much as they were objects of serious moral inquiry. By contextualizing the fixation on Shakespearean character within a dialogic theory of Shakespeare's cultural authority, this project aims to illuminate why Shakespeare's characters resonated in eighteenth-century culture.

### **Re-evaluating the History of Shakespearean Character Criticism**

Though scholarship that discusses the history of character criticism typically locates its most significant beginnings in Maurice Morgann's *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Falstaff* (1777), in which the author defends Sir John Falstaff against charges of cowardice, my dissertation will illustrate that a serious critical preoccupation with Shakespearean character developed over the course of the eighteenth century. I do not wish to diminish the importance of Morgann's influential essay. Instead, I will suggest in my fourth chapter that Morgann was participating in a critical conversation about character that had already been occurring for decades and that his essay is the culminating point of character criticism in this period. In his essay, Morgann imagines a background story for his favourite character, and he justifies his treatment of Falstaff in an oft-cited footnote: "If the characters of Shakespeare are thus *whole*, and as it were

original, [...] it may be fit to consider them rather as Historic than Dramatic beings; and when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed” (62). Morgann’s theory of latency suggests Shakespeare’s characters have hidden motives or motives that at least are not explicitly manifested in the plays’ language or textual cues. For Morgann, Shakespeare’s dramatic characters are to be understood by contextualizing them, by treating them as if they are historical figures with complete personalities and as moral agents who can be understood by reference to the general principles of human behaviour, so that readers might infer things about these characters apart from the information about them provided in the plays.

Scholars have treated Morgann’s influential essay as an early precursor to the character criticism that followed for more than a century. The fascination with Shakespearean characters as mimetic representations of imagined persons preoccupied Romantic critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and Anna Jameson, and remained a central approach in Shakespearean studies at the end of the nineteenth century with A.C. Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), which is often viewed as the critical pinnacle of reading Shakespeare’s characters as though they are real people with their own psychological depth. Such treatments as Bradley’s typically render the characters’ psychology as central to the meaning and action of Shakespeare’s plays. In his well known essay “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?” (1933), L.C. Knights launched the first major objection to what he viewed as the sentimental treatment of Shakespeare’s characters by nineteenth-century criticism, especially as represented by Bradley. Knights’ definition of character as “merely an abstraction from the total

response in the mind of the reader or spectator, brought into being by written or spoken words” dismisses a reader’s inclination to question whether or not Lady Macbeth had any children, as clearly she could not have since she is a fictional construct rather than a historical person (275). Knights does not entirely reject the analysis of literary character as a useful critical tool, but advocates rather that Shakespearean scholars undertake a more complete and complex textual analysis. In a critical movement in favour of formalist criticism, Knights advanced the argument that it was Shakespeare’s use of language, the organic unity of the literary artefact rather than just a focus on character, that enables audiences “to obtain a total complex emotional response” to his plays (6).

Knights was followed by New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Heilman, who also reacted to the long-standing concentration on character by importantly refocusing their attention on dominant imagery in the plays as it conveys unified, overarching themes.<sup>6</sup> By the 1980s, poststructuralist approaches took issue with character criticism for several reasons, namely that it does not take into account the social, linguistic, and ideological determinations of individual identity and instead wrongly assumes a universal, unified, inward, essential, agential self that is typically associated with bourgeois ideology. Through the following decades a political and historical focus on race, class, and gender became the main approach of viewing Shakespeare’s plays within the academy. As William Dodd notes, materialist critiques “of the ‘essential self’ of ‘liberal humanism’ brought a breath of fresh air to character

---

<sup>6</sup> See Cleanth Brooks’ essay on Macbeth, “The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness,” in *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York, 1947) and Robert Heilman’s *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in King Lear* (Seattle, 1948).

criticism by reminding us that *dramatis personae* are verbal constructs and by recasting their apparently unique features as manifestations of social forces” (62). Indeed, the focus on character creates blind spots in the play in which crucial meaning in historical context, language, and themes are overlooked.

A move away from character in critical analysis has yielded rich readings and new understandings of Shakespeare’s works. Recently, Margreta de Grazia’s sophisticated and deeply historical reading of *Hamlet* aims to counter the modernist tradition of focusing on what has been perceived in scholarship over the last two hundred years as “the phenomenon of Hamlet’s intransitive inwardness” (1). Her work questions “modern Hamlet”, the famously brooding character “distinguished by an inner being so transcendent that it barely comes into contact with the play from which it emerges” (1). Focusing on a character’s interiority, de Grazia argues, means treating the play’s structure as nothing more than an “inert backdrop to the main character,” a focus that overlooks other thematic preoccupations embedded in the language and matter of the play. In the case of *Hamlet*, for instance, it is not the prince’s psychological problems so much as the problem of his dispossession that is at the heart of the play’s meaning (3). Through a historically rigorous reading, de Grazia offers valuable new insights about the “centrality of land” in *Hamlet* by arguing that “the play situates the fall of Denmark within both an imperial history of territorial transfer (ancient and modern) and Britain’s own history of conquest in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by both Danes and Normans” (43). De Grazia’s formidable materialist critique highlights a new approach to the play: all the elements that have been hitherto read as an index of Hamlet’s interiority are freshly described in terms of Hamlet’s failure to inherit the throne. De Grazia’s shift away from

the question of Hamlet's interiority allows a deft reading of the play that demonstrates the complexities of Shakespeare's craft as a playwright. Although her research is historically meticulous, however, it does not adequately account for the affective response audiences feel for Hamlet and the play's other characters. As this project focuses on Shakespeare's popular reception and cultural authority in the eighteenth century, it is crucial to consider how people responded to Shakespeare's works outside of the academic institution in the more expansive public realm, where art had an important mimetic function of cultivating sympathy and moral judgment. Critical shifts away from characterological approaches basically position characters as formal or ideological constructs that function within the broader metaphorical or historical meanings of the play, and pay little heed to the emotional responses to characters as imaginary persons.

While the focus on character remains controversial, as De Grazia's impressive work makes clear, other recent scholarship demonstrates that character is central to the structure and meaning of Shakespeare's plays, so that the sheer force of Shakespeare's characterization demands attention above other elements of the plays. A volume of essays focusing on Shakespeare and character recently edited by Paul Yachnin and Jessica Slights suggests that "character is the organizing principle of Shakespeare's plays—it organizes both the formal and ideological dimensions of the drama and is not organized by them" (6-7). The editors point to Shakespeare's "reworking of traditional narratives," like the revenge tragedy in *Hamlet*, for instance, that advances the centrality of character over plot by influencing the sort of "elements we find in the play and how those elements are organized" (7). This is a crucial shift away from Aristotle's classical ranking of plot over character, whereby the structure of the play moves audience interest

away from how the revenge plot works out and instead guides readers to be more interested in “how the action of revenge seems to Hamlet” (7). Character functions as the organizing formal principle in other ways, too. Essays in this volume explore how the plays’ competing ideologies are embodied in character, so that a character like Desdemona can simultaneously speak from “about and within” an ideological system of gender as both its product and its challenger (9). Moreover, Yachnin and Slight argue “that character is the principal bridge over which the emotional, cognitive, and political transactions of theater and literature pass between actors and playgoers or between written texts and readers” (7). While various features of text and performance certainly constitute a sense of character (for example, soliloquies, dialect, bombastic gestures, the interaction between characters, how they challenge the very ideologies that shape them, etc.), so does the response these characters provoke in an audience.

By illustrating the link between the eighteenth-century enthusiasm for character and aesthetic discourse, in which affect plays a crucial role, I will move beyond the notion that such attention to character is simply naïve and lacking in theoretical rigor. I will provide a new way to understand Shakespearean character criticism and the reception of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century by attending to its connection with the moral aspect of taste. My dissertation thus aims to problematize the narrative that locates the beginnings of character criticism in the Romantic period with Maurice Morgann’s famous essay on Falstaff, especially as it is aligned with the promotion of unified subjectivity. In fact, I will demonstrate that identity formation in the eighteenth century was viewed as performative, unstable, and inter-subjective; I will show that the eighteenth-century fixation on character did not hinge on the idea that Shakespeare’s



characters possess interior lives. Neither was the focus on character and morality merely an appropriative means of asserting bourgeois claims for transcendent subjectivity; rather, Shakespearean characters embodied striking representations of identity formation that resonated in eighteenth-century commercial culture, and they functioned as heuristic devices to navigate the changing social and political dimensions of the eighteenth century.

The dialogic reception of Shakespearean character is most notable in the formation of new systems of ethical reading and modes of imaginatively understanding character in response to the complexity of Shakespeare's dramatic creations. Shakespeare's characters were investigated methodically in critical notes and essays, imagined in make-believe dialogues and situations outside of Shakespeare's plays, and they inspired new forms of dramatic theory and practice as eighteenth-century writers and thinkers sought to make sense of Shakespeare and make sense of their own cultural identity *through* Shakespeare's characters. My research thus draws from a broad range of sources and material to demonstrate the generative and widespread nature of the eighteenth-century conversation about Shakespearean character and its role in cultural and identity formation. I examine prefaces and notes written by leading critics of the age, a comparison of Shakespeare to French dramatists, treatises on moral character, an actress's biography, children's books, theatrical reviews, dramatic theory, pantomime, and re-workings of Shakespeare's characters in dialogues and drama, to name but a few genres.

My exploration of the connection between Shakespearean character and aesthetic culture of the eighteenth century is comprised of four chapters. In chapter one, I will

explore the philosophical and cultural conditions of the reception and use of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century. I will highlight the connection between character and identity formation in light of shifting paradigms of private and public life in order to establish the context in which Shakespearean characters were received. I will explore how classical categorizations associated the private sphere with feminine principles and domestic concerns, including household economy, separate from the political and masculine principles associated with the public sphere. By the eighteenth century, structural transformations of the social order led to the collapse of these classical distinctions, so that private and public interests became intertwined, resulting in what Michael McKeon calls the “domestication” of public life. This newly commercialized realm of public culture raised many questions for eighteenth-century contemporaries regarding the moral progress or decline of the nation. On one side of the debate, commercial society was negatively viewed as an effeminate world of unwholesome excess; it was a realm of luxury and fashionable consumerism that bred unrefined passions and encouraged self-interest and artifice that destabilized any sense of true moral worth. On the other side, modern commercial society was thought to contain the very antidote for the excesses and selfishness it was accused of breeding. The discourse of taste and sympathy posited that pleasures of the imagination, like the arts, literature, and conversation that flourished in commercialized culture, could potentially shape untutored passions into benevolent moral sentiments. Rather than viewing private and public interests as clashing, the process of cultivating taste and sympathy called for the imagined splitting of the self into private and public parts, whereby an internalized sense of public morality would theoretically regulate disruptive passions and direct them to socially benevolent ends. While this

discourse seemed simultaneously to reconcile private interests with the public good and legitimize certain cultural amusements by neatly uniting pleasure with morality, contemporaries nevertheless remained dubious as to whether people were actually internalizing a sense of proper duty and conduct or merely posturing by disguising selfish impulses. The social threat of hypocrisy only heightened the need to cultivate prudent judgment. I will conclude this chapter by establishing that Shakespeare's characters were viewed as ideal speculative tools as a means of cultivating moral judgment because they raised and answered questions faced by cultural consumers in the eighteenth century.

My second chapter will examine how the eighteenth-century reading public sought to make sense of this dualistic nature of commercialized society by deriving a moral education from Shakespeare's plays through various methods of engaging with his dramatic characters. I will examine how Shakespeare was promoted as the poet of nature whose "awful pomp and endless diversity" departed from neoclassical rules, most markedly from a didactic sense of poetic justice (Johnson, Works 7: 84). However, moral maxims and insipid didacticism were not required for a drama to have a moral end; instead, spectators were encouraged to develop an intrinsically benevolent moral sensibility simply through watching, sympathizing, and judging realistic characters, and in analyzing the passions that motivate them. I argue that eighteenth-century commentators deemed Shakespearean instruction effective since it demanded the engagement of the reader / spectator in actively sympathizing with a character, and because it also challenged the spectator by offering difficult moral lessons with which to wrestle. Unlike actual people, Shakespeare's characters candidly revealed emotions so that the passions and the actions they motivated were available for study and discussion.

As I will demonstrate, reading audiences not only grappled to understand characters within the context of the plays, but they also imagined Shakespeare's characters within the social context of their own world in order to better understand the tensions created within their commercial society. I will conclude this chapter by demonstrating that the relationship of Shakespeare's plays to the program of moral refinement inspired culturally derivative material, such as Joanna Baillie's dramatic theory.<sup>7</sup>

Chapter three examines the relationship between character criticism in Shakespeare commentary and the theatrical performances of Shakespeare's plays. At first glance, there appears to be scant connection between how Shakespeare was represented in print and the appearance of his works on stage, other than his ubiquitous presence in both. While Shakespeare's editors strove to elucidate the original meaning of Shakespeare's plays in the various editions published over the century, Shakespeare's works were adapted and rearranged in London's theatres, where they were sometimes presented as a main piece, and sometimes as musical afterpieces. Because of this seeming disparity between showbiz Shakespeare and the venerated "poet of nature" represented in popular editions of his original plays, the commonalities of eighteenth-century literary and theatrical cultures tend to be overlooked. This is in part due to the practice of positioning

---

<sup>7</sup> I use the term "culturally derivative" here and throughout this dissertation without any derogatory implication. I do not mean to suggest that such cultural material as Joanna Baillie's performance theory is unoriginal or uninventive; rather, I use this phrase to highlight that Shakespeare's characterization inspired Baillie's work, along with many other works that can be viewed as offshoots, evolutions, or embodiments of Shakespearean characterization and its eighteenth-century reception.

literary Shakespeare as “high” culture and stage Shakespeare as “low” culture, a dichotomy I hope to challenge by showing connections between the stage and page in my study of the literary and theatrical reception of the plays in this period. I aim to show a closer relationship between Shakespeare as he was represented in print and as he was represented in the theatre by highlighting a shared concentration on the passions and character formation along amorphous boundaries of the private and public. My second chapter on character criticism will elucidate that Shakespeare commentary of the period often reads like a study of emotions: how a passion affects a character, how the same passion influences characters differently, and how the passions are checked or regulated as a character is led to action are all aspects of affective response scrutinized in the study of the plays, and of a piece with educational project of cultivating taste. Just as literary critics like Samuel Johnson or Elizabeth Montagu helped guide readers through Shakespeare’s difficult plays, so actors and actresses, I argue in chapter three, were sometimes viewed as mediators of his genius in their portrayal of Shakespearean characters on-stage. Acting manuals, theater reviews, and periodicals reveal that players were praised for their sensibility of feeling and insight into human nature. In contrast, by virtue of their convincing performances and manipulation of audience emotions, players also represented anxieties about hypocrisy. As ambiguous figures, actors fascinated a theatre-going public that was eager to learn about their private lives as much as to come to know the lives of the characters they played. Some actors and actresses satisfied this curiosity by publishing autobiographies. I will show how George Anne Bellamy, an actress with a notoriously scandalous private life, aimed to save her reputation by aligning herself with the Shakespearean characters she performed in London theatres.

Similarly, David Garrick, arguably the leading Shakespearean actor and manager of his day, sought to overcome the divide between legitimate and illegitimate entertainment by incorporating Shakespearean characters into theatrical modes that were generally received as frivolous fun, such as the pantomime. Overall, this chapter will examine how new modes of theatrical entertainment evolved from the equation of Shakespearean character and the formation of moral character.

My fourth chapter will focus on one of Shakespeare's most beloved and vexing characters in the period: Sir John Falstaff. I argue that Falstaff embodied the tensions and anxieties of the era, so that making sense of Falstaff meant understanding contemporary society. Throughout this dissertation I argue that Shakespeare appropriated his eighteenth-century readers as much as they appropriated Shakespeare. This is perhaps most notable in the abundance of literature and theatrical pieces that featured Sir John, as well as the formation of systems of ethical reading to accommodate the delight and affection elicited from the notoriously depraved but lovable character.

My approach to reading eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism is within the broader framework of the role and reception of literature in eighteenth-century society. Overall, this project highlights how eighteenth-century cultural critics were consciously aware of their role in creating a modern era; moreover, they were aware of the amorphous boundaries between various ideas of "public" and "private" and the rich potential of this in shaping culture. The functional and aesthetic values of art were viewed in this period as fundamentally unified; therefore Shakespeare's role in raising questions, providing answers, and provoking conversation about morality and identity formation made him an agent of culture and lent his works authority. In this way, my

project explores the role of Shakespeare's works in forming eighteenth-century culture and the role of aesthetic discourse in elevating Shakespeare to canonical status.

## **Chapter One**

### **Private Interests and the Public Good: Shaping England's Moral Character**

Why were Shakespeare's eighteenth-century audiences and readers so keenly interested in his characters?

To explore more fully in subsequent chapters how Shakespearean character helped shape eighteenth-century culture, both on-stage and in print, this first chapter will take as its focus the centrality of "character" to the understanding and formation of identity as shaped by widespread public debates about a commercialized public sphere, moral-aesthetic education, and the public good. In what follows, I will explore the theoretical work of Jürgen Habermas and Michael McKeon in order to consider their insights into the shifting relationship between the "private" and "public" in the eighteenth century that relocated morality in the practice of "sociability," which called for the masking of inappropriate, uncivil passions as part of the process of cultivating moral sentiments. Acting other than one naturally feels in order to achieve social harmony is integral to this brand of moral development, and this kind of acting is inherent to ideas of politeness operating in a new social arena of civil society. As this chapter argues, the constant self-scrutiny implicit in cultivating taste and shaping character, and the exercise of the sympathetic imagination that places people in the situations of others, requires a constant negotiation between an imagined splitting of interiority into a private / public dyad.

Dror Wahrman takes the category of the interior "self" as a "self-evident category, and perhaps even an essential feature of human nature, that stands outside history" and looks specifically at "how and when the modern notion of identity came to be synonymous with such a self" over the course of the long eighteenth century (Preface xii). Wahrman makes a useful distinction between self and identity that reinforces the



relevance of this private / public dyad to eighteenth-century identity formation. He defines identity more specifically as having two fundamental meanings that embody “a productive tension between two contradictory impulses: 1) the unique, individual identity of a person; 2) a common identity that links individuals to each other as a group. There is a balance between these two meanings that is subject to historical change” (Preface xii).

Richard Sennett, in *The Fall of the Public Man*, likewise refers to this dyad as the “molecule” of an identity that comprises the interplay rather than a clear division between ideas of the private and public self. Sennett explains:

The line drawn between public and private was essentially one on which the claims of civility—epitomized by cosmopolitan, public behaviour—were balanced against the claims of nature—epitomized by the family. They saw these claims in conflict, and the complexity of their vision lay in that they refused to prefer the one over the other, but held the two in a state of equilibrium. Behaving with strangers in an emotionally satisfying way and yet remaining aloof from them was seen by the mid-eighteenth century as the means by which the human animal was transformed into a social being. The capacities for parenthood and deep friendship were seen in turn to be natural potentialities, rather than human creations; while man *made* himself in public, he *realized* his nature in the private realm, above all in the experiences within the family. (18-19)

Patricia Meyer Spacks notes this “molecule of identity” “speaks to an intrinsic bonding between the created public versions of self and the expressive private self,” but suggests this “bonding” is rather weak (8). Spacks’ work marks a distinction between “privacy” and

“private life” in order to highlight a “psychological privacy” that is “not immediately visible to others” (4). The subject of psychological privacy is the focus of her study, which she defines as “the ways people expose and guard themselves in relation to limited numbers of others. Within the private life—the life of people operating in the family, or in relatively small communities of friends—many forces impinge on the privacy of individuals, their capacity to protect themselves from others’ desire to know about them or to insist they participate in social activity” (7). In the eighteenth century, Spacks argues, people developed strategies to avoid public scrutiny and social pressure; for instance, people hid behind common rules of etiquette to mask their innermost feelings, a practice that heightened the social threat of hypocrisy (12). My consideration of identity formation in the eighteenth century will consider how contemporaries understood “character” as an expression of the potential fusion and separation of this private / public dyad.

Central to eighteenth-century moral life was the ability to decipher and articulate outward signs of character in oneself and others. In the meta-theatrical world of the eighteenth century, a person must perform character in the sense of legibly conveying inner moral worth to the public. The process of identity formation is at once private and public. At best, self-interest and private concerns are checked by an embodied idea, or “character,” of a broader, public conception of morality; at worst, self-interest is disguised by a performance of a public conception of morality. Edward Burns describes this process of character formation as a “two way process:” the “double articulation of character” is a “process of seeing, and a process of being seen, as a transaction between two human subjects” (2). According to the civilizing process articulated by writers like Adam Smith, acting and disguise were in some ways formative to moral life; for example, learning to control and temper one’s emotions meant

acting in a civil fashion even if one were furious. However, the idea of masking vulgar feelings and desires also suggested a feigning that could give rise to fears of hypocrisy. This chapter thus aims to lay the groundwork for an understanding of how the scrutiny of Shakespeare's characters as if they were real people became a mimetic moral exercise in the eighteenth century, an important way of navigating a changing and uncertain culture.

### **“Character” in the Eighteenth Century**

“Character” was a vexed and widely circulated concept in this era. In a literal sense of the term, “character” signified the external marks that rendered something recognizable, like a character of the alphabet or a hieroglyph stamped into a surface. This understanding links character to technologies of writing, typography and engraving, and stands for both the process of inscribing as well as the mark inscribed. Figuratively, “character” denotes a distinctive trait or quality, or, the aggregate of qualities that combine to mark the essence of something. Henry Gally's assessment of the art of characterization, first published in 1725 in an introductory essay to his translation of ancient character sketches, reveals key tensions embodied in the idea of “character”:

There is no kind of polite Writing that seems to require a deeper Knowledge, a livelier Imagination, and a happier Turn of Expression than the Characteristic. Human Nature in its various Forms and Affections, is the Subject; and he who wou'd attempt a Work of this Kind, with some assurance of Success, must not only study other Men; he has a more difficult task to perform; he must study himself. The deep and dark Recesses of the Heart must be penetrated, to discover how Nature is disguis'd into Art, and how Art puts on the Appearance of Nature. (29)

Gally points to the aforementioned meanings of character when he attributes to the skilled master of characterization the talent of legibly representing the “Forms and Affections” observed in human nature, so that the fictional portrayal of passions and personality traits convincingly resembles those the readers could identify in real persons. In addition to these definitions is the understanding of character as a person’s moral qualities, as the ethical core from which actions are motivated and moral choices made. Ideally, the two meanings should work together, so that a person’s ethical inclinations are identifiable in the marks of appearance or in everyday actions. For instance, the innocent and honest milkmaid would dress humbly and without artifice, a habit Samuel Richardson’s Pamela famously adopted to signify her virtue. However, just as readers like Henry Fielding interpreted Pamela’s show as a sham, Gally hints at the potential disjunction between the external signs and the actual ethos of a person when he warns against “disguise” and “appearance.” A person might artfully put on seemingly “natural” traits to conceal what actually rests in the “dark and deep Recesses of the Heart,” thereby creating a fissure between the outward, readable character and the inward character. The reason for this disconnect between inner and outer character, Gally explains, is part of human nature: the “secret Springs of Self Love” are the source of all our actions, so much so that we often deceive even ourselves to gratify self-interest (86). To overcome this egoism and to close the gap between being and appearing, Gally urges the writer of character sketches to engage in self-scrutiny, along with the observation of others. Only then can one become “a Master of the Science” of human nature, “and be able to lead a Reader, knowingly, thro’ that Labyrinth of the Passions which fill the heart of Man, and make him either a noble or a despicable creature” (31).

This call to study the “Labyrinth of the Passions” in oneself and others was a cultural preoccupation in this period because the passions were seen as the building blocks of a person’s character. The empiricist idea advanced by John Locke that knowledge is achieved through sensory experience of the world and by subsequent reflection on that experience undermined the idea that ethical action was governed by ideal metaphysical moral principles. Morality came to be seen as no longer bound to objective rational deliberation or regulated by theological authority; instead, philosophers posited that moral judgments are more subjectively based in the emotional nature of man and actively refined through practical and useful knowledge. On this account, individuals are shaped by their experiences; importantly, good education and a nurturing environment forge moral and intelligent citizens. Conversely, degenerate living leads to a more destructive outcome. William Hogarth expresses the anxiety around the malleability of the person in his powerful images, *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731-32) and *A Rake’s Progress* (1732-33), where pleasure seeking leads the subjects of the paintings to the terrible fates of venereal disease and the Bedlam hospital respectively. But even more worrisome than this obvious degeneracy was the notion that people could feign goodness through disguising their true “Nature” with “Art.”

The departure from dogmatic moral and aesthetic systems and the new emphasis on subjectivity meant that passions that were potentially disruptive to the social order had to be regulated and controlled in order to benefit the public good. On the one hand, unrefined passions represent unchecked self-interests that cloud moral judgment. On the other hand, when passions are refined, they become moral sentiments that are necessary to social cohesion in a changing commercial society, so that many eighteenth-century

theorists viewed passions as formative to social life.<sup>8</sup> The proper ordering of a subject's passions is foundational to character building—it means achieving harmony between the publicly legible identity of a person and a person's inner character. Although eighteenth-century contemporaries energetically participated in an educational program that sought to cultivate passions toward the development of moral character, the gap between being and appearing remained troublesome and persistent.

### **The Domestication of the Public Sphere: The Feminization of Culture**

Shakespeare was instrumental to making sense of an age undergoing fundamental changes. To begin, let us map the structural transformation of the social order and how cultural commentators of the period invoked concepts of the “private” and the “public” as organizing categories to make sense of these radical shifts. Categories of the private and the public are bound up with the epistemological changes that define modernity, and these spheres were in the process of reformulation in such a way that they elided any stable or precise differentiation. As this section will show, the eighteenth century thus saw the creation of a new kind of public / private paradigm, with amorphous and interpenetrative boundaries between public and private concerns that produced all sorts of anxiety about healthy character formation. Jeff Weintraub,

---

<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on the passions and senses is especially prominent in the social theory of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. While this chapter incorporates some thoughts of Henry Home (Lord Kames), Thomas Reid, Alexander Gerard, David Hume and others as a means of exploring the discourse of taste, the theory of moral sentiments articulated by Adam Smith will be more exhaustively explored for the sake of lending focus to my argument, and because his ideas of moral spectatorship connect his work most closely to dramatic arts.

in his introduction to *Public and Private Thought in Practice*, offers a deft conceptual analysis of the rich and complex meanings in competing public / private paradigms to show “the inadequacy of any single model” of the dichotomy (xiii). Weintraub conceives of four models of the paradigm that operate in modern societies. These models are 1) the liberal economic, which is the relation of the state to the market; 2) the classical republican (or civic humanism) which emphasizes the political community as opposed to the market and private life; 3) the public sphere of sociability in contrast to intimacy and domesticity; 4) the feminist approach, which critiques the distinction between the political and economic spheres and the sphere of the family and household. Eighteenth-century conversations about the private and public typically grappled with the divisions and connections of the various parts of society (the activity of the state, and the relationship between the state’s constituents in their social and individual interests) across these various models. What these relationships should or might be was a great point of debate in cultural commentary of the period.

Eighteenth-century thinkers saw themselves living through a period of sweeping change in England, and many conversations focused on ideas and embedded evaluations of what constituted the public and the private. The “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 curbed the authority of the English court and introduced a Parliamentary monarchy, and with it, more liberty for the English people. Old dogmas and models were scrutinized with new scientific methods and systematic observations; custom and tradition were often spurned as fusty and backward, and replaced with a hopeful commitment to mapping modernity by discovering the “natural” order of things. Along with these revisions, England had become an increasingly commercialized nation. Colonial expansion, as well as financial, commercial, and technical innovation, was providing a higher volume of commodities at better prices to greater numbers of people; in

effect, a blueprint was being drawn for a recognizably modern consumer society.<sup>9</sup> Booming mercantile capitalism led to increased wealth in all strata of society, which in turn led to increased class mobility. There was a metamorphosis amongst the ranks with a surge in numbers of the “middling sort,” and more wealth all around with which to enjoy life’s pleasures.

These social changes resulted in an important move away from traditional authority, as it was embodied by the public figure of the monarch, to the association of private individuals who constituted a new civil society, a sort of mediating public between the state and the private individual that represented collective private concerns in a public way. Jürgen Habermas describes the formation of the public sphere, or civil society, in eighteenth-century Europe and highlights its unique place in history. He shows how eighteenth-century ideas of the private and public evolved from the classical Aristotelian concept of society, which conceives of the public and the private as categorically opposed. In this Greek model the *polis* (the public realm of politics) consisted of citizens (male heads of households that comprised the political community) who were free to engage in political activity amongst other citizens with the aim of guiding the *polis*, and in this political engagement, actualizing

---

<sup>9</sup> See Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800* (London, 1995); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999) for the economic state of England in the eighteenth-century.



their selfhood, or humanity. The *oikos* (the private realm of the household) consisted of noncitizens who were not politically free; rather, they were bound by necessity to labour for the private interests and sustenance of their household's economy, thereby liberating the head of the household, the property-owner, to participate in politics. Economic production and everyday private interests were thus theoretically separate from politics in the classical public / private model of society. In the Habermasian reading of the modern public / private paradigm, however, capitalist market economies formed the basis of a new sphere of civil society. Moreover, the intimate sphere of the household was crucial in preparing and shaping people for engagement in civil society, rather than being aligned with the fulfillment of basic needs, as it is in the classical model.

Habermas describes civil society as the organization of private, atomized individuals through shared cultural interests and political assumptions:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in a basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this public confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason. (27)

As this excerpt suggests, Habermas' narrative of the formation of the public principally focuses on how bourgeois subjects opposed political regulation by forming a public of freethinking, private citizens. Necessary to this development, Habermas asserts, was "a public sphere in apolitical form" that "provided the training ground for a critical public

reflection still preoccupied with itself—a process of self-clarification of private people focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness” (29). Habermas stresses that art and literature no longer singularly represented the public interests of Church and state, but rather, they became cultural commodities privately produced and consumed as part of a broader and more accessible market economy. Habermas especially focuses on the prevalence in the period of novels and memoirs, forms that particularly focus on the interior, subjective life of individuals. Though often written and read in private, these creations inspired public conversation and lent new credence to public opinion as people came together to rationally determine the meaning and worth of cultural commodities (94). According to Habermas, such public engagement might occur in physical places where people gathered to engage in critical debates, like literary coffeehouse society, or salons, as well as more inclusive virtual places, like the realm of printed literature and letters. Whatever the medium, a new focus on privateness—the self and subjectivity—was a crucial precursor for the growth of a public self-awareness that laid the condition for, and led to the development of, a politically engaged civil sphere separate from the state.

In keeping with the classical model, Habermas categorizes the home and work as part of this private sphere; however, he makes a crucial distinction between the two. In contrast to the classical notion of the *oikos*, the home was separate from work and economic interests. Habermas argues that the conjugal family, with its “self-image of its intimate sphere,” was a vital “agency of society,” especially in mediating the “strict conformity with societally necessary requirements” that the larger public required (47). Subjective autonomy is fostered in this intimate sphere of private and domestic experience, and qualifies people to meet and practice publicly. For it is in the intimate sphere, Habermas suggests, that members of the

bourgeois public sphere view themselves as human beings *per se* rather than simply economic and political actors, thus establishing the principle that the public sphere is universal and inclusive, open to all members of humanity. It is in this domestic realm that the bourgeoisie ultimately forged its' self-awareness and sympathy, capabilities necessary for effective rational-critical debate in the public sphere (51). The cultivation of self-awareness and sympathy, as I will argue later in this chapter, was crucial to assuring that private fulfillment did not undermine public order.

Recently, scholars have complicated Habermas' neat claims about the transformation of the public sphere, most generally because of its exclusionary nature: inclusion in the public sphere ultimately depended on education and property, to which many women and members of the lower classes did not have access.<sup>10</sup> However, scholars have also shown that women and members of the lower classes played important public roles in eighteenth-century civil society, despite its ideological limits, and especially since the division between politics and the intimate domestic sphere became increasingly elided. Michael McKeon cautions against focusing exclusively on the narrow bourgeois interests of property owners implicit in

---

<sup>10</sup> See Dena Goodman, "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical approaches to the Old Regime" (*History and Theory* 31, 1992): 6-7; Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988). Two illuminating collections of essays that complicate Habermas' claims are Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1992) and Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts, *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Oxford, 2004).

Habermas' model of the public sphere. To do so, he argues, is to miss the real point of Habermas' work:

The public sphere ideal of inclusiveness is not the ideological formation of a self-conscious class strategically concerned to universalize its own interest. It is the discovery, in a society stratified by status, that the idea of the public interest (or the national interest, or the commonwealth) has meaning only if it is premised on the conviction that interests are multiple and that no single interest—not even that of the monarch—is universal and 'absolute.' (75)

This discovery, according to McKeon, is one of the many instances of tacit ideas and societal practices becoming explicit in an unprecedented way; this process (McKeon calls it "explicitation") is really what is central to Habermas' theory of the public sphere.

While Habermas' telos retrospectively identifies the early eighteenth-century civil society as a fleeting, idealized point of liberal democratic practice, McKeon deftly explores the historical concepts of the public and the private as they transformed with the emergence of modern from traditional forms of knowledge and experience. In his influential work, *The Secret History of Domesticity* (2006), McKeon distinguishes between modern and traditional knowledge whereby the latter is "tacit" and impenetrably saturates social practice, whereas the former is "[d]isembedded from the matrix of experience that it seeks to explain" and is "defined precisely by its explanatory ambition to separate itself from its object of knowledge sufficiently to fulfill the epistemological demand that what is known must be derived from the process by which it is known" (xix). Rational inquiry, the foundation and driving force of the Habermasian public sphere, is fundamental to this process of rendering the tacit explicit in

eighteenth-century civil society; however, McKeon asserts that the foundations for the modern public / private paradigm were laid much earlier than Habermas suggests. McKeon also traces this transformation more comprehensively; his analysis identifies ideas and events, like Protestantism, the Renaissance interest in Machiavellian political thought, or the English civil war, as key ideological breaks from tradition, especially as they resulted in what McKeon calls the “devolution of absolutism.” This conceptual process is the disembodiment of power from the monarch (who represents the public), and its broader relocation in society; McKeon writes: “absolute, self-justified authority” becomes separated from “the absolute monarch and embodied elsewhere: in the courtier, in Parliament, even in the common people,” as a “consequence of opening up sovereignty to debate” (5).

The devolution of absolutism began, according to McKeon, with the Renaissance state’s interest in Machiavellian thought and Florentine civic humanism, especially as it emphasized the classical public / private paradigm in which the public and the private were exclusive of each other: political action (freedom) was theoretically separate from household business (necessity).<sup>11</sup> Until this point in English history, McKeon argues, the public and the private were not thought of as separate entities; rather, they were thought of as distinct, in more or less analogical terms (9). Of particular importance, Machiavellian thought separated the public affairs of state from religious and moral concerns, so that a monarch might act unethically (or at least contrary to Christian principles) in order to secure state power. The

---

<sup>11</sup> McKeon makes sure to note that there was not one watershed moment in which all that was once tacit was made explicit: “The ongoing process by which the tacit becomes explicit is a local, multiple, reversible, overlapping, and uneven development that differs according to a wide range of variables” (14).

monarch came to be understood as the embodiment of state power rather than of grace, metaphysical principles, and morality. This shift separated the subject from sovereign more than ever before. The “political subjects” of a monarch took on a new role as “ethical subjects”: McKeon describes this process of reflecting upon one’s relation to power as a “separation out” of the “political subject” under sovereign rule into an “ethical subject.” McKeon defines the political subject as one who “undergoes subjection to royal authority,” whereas the ethical subject is one who “reflects upon his or her condition of ‘subjecthood’ and thereby lays the ground for the growth of a reflexive and autonomous ‘subjectivity’”(12). In other words, the private individuals that comprised society were invested with a new moral authority and identity separate from the rule of state, effectively differentiating two realms of authority: the public (the state) and the private (the family, or more broadly, all the families that make up society).<sup>12</sup>

While this discrimination between the realms of the private and the public seems in keeping with the classical categorical paradigm, McKeon highlights resistance to this separation. The medieval analogy between state and household remained, though it was transformed in a new and contradictory way. The modern public / private divide was produced as a result of the “explicitation” of traditional, tacit knowledge; by this process, absolutism devolves and public authority shifts “from greater to lesser spheres [...] from the political to the economic, from the economic to the domestic, from the domestic to the female, the subjective, and the sexual [...] A process of ‘privatization,’ this is also one of ‘internalization’”

---

<sup>12</sup> McKeon notes that Protestantism was important in explicating tacit, traditional knowledge, and locating authority in the private home, and more importantly, by locating salvation in the individual’s conscience rather than in the authority of the priest (34-35).

(323). In other words, the public and private, once divided, are subjected to further analogous (though complicated) divisions. McKeon calls this a “dialectical recapitulation” that suggests the public and the private are resistant to separation (323). For example, the management of household economy defines the classical conception of the private. However, in the modern configuration, the category of the private is transformed. The economic production of the private household is further separated to become a more public concern of the market; the *oikos* is transformed into political economy. In place of the household’s economic function, the idea of the “domestic sphere” (here again McKeon’s thinking is in line with what Habermas calls the “intimate sphere”) emerges. The new function of the domestic sphere, according to McKeon, coincides with Habermas’ own analysis: “it gradually became the seat of primary socialization, of Puritan discipline and gentle cultivation, through which it took on those non-private values that we associate with the ethos of the domestic sphere” (10). McKeon thus theorizes this emergence of the domestic sphere as part of the larger process of “formal domestication,” which flips the medieval state / family analogy on its head by comparing the great to the small, the public to the private, the economic to the domestic, and so on, so that private and public interests are intertwined as much as they seem to be in opposition.

This structural transformation of the social order became an object of contemplation, and cultural commentators of the period struggled with how moral character might be formed within these amorphous conceptual frameworks of the “private” and “public.” The domestication of the public sphere and the simultaneous collapse of traditional ideas of the private and public generated anxiety around Britain’s moral status as a nation, as the next section will illustrate. There was a concern that private interests would trump concerns for the

public good of the nation, especially with the self-indulgence and pleasure that accompanied a commercial society. Conversely, the social exchange that occurred in a sphere of commercial exchange was considered ideal for civilizing selfish passions into social sentiments. Either way, the shift in ideas of the private and the public, and how to form moral character along these slippery boundaries, is a salient concern in the eighteenth-century reception of Shakespeare. Eighteenth-century audiences recognized in Shakespeare's works nascent tensions between public and private life, especially in the vivid representation of his characters and how conflicting public and private components shape their identities. Moreover, Shakespeare so vividly represented the human passions that his characters were an ideal means of understanding human nature. Shakespeare's realistic characters invited moral inquiry and conversations about how to reconcile individual interests with the broader interests of society, and the imaginative act of identifying with these characters helped foster sympathy that was foundational to the new social order. Below, I will explore the anxieties that arose alongside the domesticated public sphere in order to later consider how contemporaries engaged with Shakespeare's works to make sense of the times.

### **The Duality of Commerce: Fashion and Virtue in a Consumer Society**

As commerce increasingly became a public concern compared to its classical containment within the household, the interests of getting and spending collided with republican notions of private and public interests, raising all sorts of questions. For answers, as we will see, many turned to Shakespeare's works. Traditional writers who viewed commercialism as a sign of decline often gendered the fashionable world of commercial enterprise as "effeminate" and "weak" in comparison to their civic humanist ideals. As a result of this clash, there was a prevalent equation in this period of the financial world and commerce



with irrational, unstable female principles and untutored passions associated traditionally with women and the domestic sphere. For example, because “Stock jobbers” and men of business depended on such tenuous values as creditable worth and opinion in the financial market, just as women relied on unmarred reputations and dowries in the marriage market, the new “commercial man” was perceived by some as effeminate in his indulgence of desires, his dependence on the opinion of others, and his participation in the world of money and the private pursuit of pleasure (Ingrassia 22).

E.J. Clery draws a helpful distinction between “feminine” and “effeminate” as used in this period: “effeminate” represents the derogatory aggregate of ideas that are associated with women, like corruption, luxury, vanity, and self-indulgence—qualities typically ascribed to the world of fashion and pleasure-seeking (9-10). This was the side of a domesticated public life that was, as Robert Jones writes, “the work of weak, unregulated passions, womanly cravings after fripperies, fancies and all manners of Chinese trash” (7). On the other hand, “feminine” was sometimes used positively in eighteenth-century discourse to signify characteristics like sociability, civility, compassion, and refinement, all qualities that would befit men and women equally since they are attributes constitutive of sociable behaviour—what McKeon terms the non-private values associated with the ethos of the domestic sphere. Indeed, a new moral authority was invested in women and the domestic sphere, the source of selfhood and moral cultivation, and writers who viewed commerce as a sign of progress championed a “sensibility” of feeling typically ascribed to women as a civilizing force. Women thus held a dual position in society as both agents of corruption and as civilizing agents. Indeed, both luxury and British identity itself were figured as women in this period:

“Lady Alurea” represented frivolous foreign fads such as the Italian opera and pantomime and was depicted in satirical prints wearing the latest and most ridiculous fashions, while “Britannia,” in her simple white toga with only martial accoutrements for accessories, acted as the symbolic protector of liberty and democracy. Woman, traditionally considered a “private” being, represented the moral health of the British state. The domestication of public culture is particularly evident in these opposing personifications.

Gillian Russell usefully labels this tension produced by the commercialization of culture the “duality of commerce” (3). Russell theorizes these excesses of what she labels “fashionable society” in the period after the Seven Year’s War and recuperates the centrality of women in public culture to focus on their power as cultural consumers and producers. There was certainly an unprecedented participation of women in financial ventures and the literary market that served to enhance this feminized characterization of certain commercial and social activities—women had never before been more prominent in the public eye. In this period, Russell writes, the “booming economy seemed to turn in on itself, producing a profound anxiety about the practice and ideology of civility and commerce, the bulwarks of British identity” (3). The focus of this anxiety was all the fashionable pleasure that a commercialized, metropolitan society offered; Russell notes that “fashion epitomized both the acquisitive dynamism of a commercializing culture which was necessary for the progress of civilization and the inherent tendency of that commerce to corrupt its subjects” (3). The main concern was that the social world of fashion and luxury encouraged excess, a lack of self-restraint, and hypocrisy that would undermine harmonious social order at the same time as it offered positive pleasures that reinforced social cohesion. As Dror Wahrman also argues, the discourse of

fashion that arose in a feminized, commercial society embodied a concern with the “protean nature of humankind,” the notion that personal identity and virtue is malleable, mutable and unfixed as trends of the day (169).

The moral progress or decline of Britain was energetically disputed, some cultural commentators viewing the shift in categories of the private and public as a destabilizing force in society, some paradoxically condemning and condoning in playful satire the nature of commerce and luxury, and some endorsing this shift as the heart of British liberty and enlightenment. Gender and the domestication of public culture, and their relationships to the blurring of boundaries between the private and public, were at the center of this debate. More traditional commentators condemned the irresponsible, private pursuit of modern commercial pleasures as dangerous seductions that bred pernicious, selfish passions destructive to the social order. The changing fashions and artifice of modern times, pleasurable though they may be, distracted people from their proper civic and domestic duties for which people are naturally bred. John Dennis and John Brown were avatars of nostalgia for the simpler pleasures and order of Britain’s earlier halcyon days. In their works, the simplicity of rural life was sometimes championed above the vain, over-refined manners of the town. John Brown wrote such an analysis in 1757; his *Estimate on the Manners and Principles of the Times* was so popular it earned its writer the nickname John ‘Estimate’ Brown. His predecessor, John Dennis, wrote *An Essay Upon the Publick Spirit; being a Satyr in Prose upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times* (1711) to emphasize the need for sumptuary laws. Dennis figures luxury as a pandemic, “the spreading Catagion of which is the greatest Corrupter of the Public Manners” (vi). He distinguishes between the arts, so wisely fostered by royal and ecclesiastical powers in the Renaissance, and the “soft, luxurious, effeminate arts” which he aligns with

commerce and foreign imports (9-10). The association Dennis makes between luxury and effeminacy is typical in this line of invective in which women are depicted as slaves of both fashion and of their own capricious desires. In other instances, women are portrayed as brutish and masculine to illustrate the startling move away from traditional social distinctions.

For instance, both writers employ “unnatural” images to imply the apocalyptic nuances of modernity. John Dennis warns that gaming will overcome woman’s inherent inclination to please men:

The Women lock themselves up at Cards whole Days and Nights  
successively, and forget their natural pleasure of being seen, and of  
being admir’d; and Avarice gets the better of their Pride, as Luxury  
in some of them had done before; and gets the better of their Pleasure  
likewise, gets the better of that Pleasure which is so natural to them,  
and makes them shew a stronger Passion than that which they have  
for Men (17-18).

This passage is almost comically foreboding with its emphasis on sin and pleasure, the women’s forgetfulness over their nighttime card games transmogrifying them into greedy monsters. Dennis claims that women are more “Masculine in their desires, and Masculine in their Practices” in order to spite the “Men that are soft, more languid, and more passive than Women.” Both these transformations are a result of impassioned financial speculation and the tender manners and principles of the time (15). There is a tone of moral hysteria threaded through this discourse, as well as a lament for the public good.

While Brown's style is slightly less bold than Dennis', with acknowledgement of a few good qualities of the age, he nevertheless censures commercialism and its evil effects on the English people and prophesies the inevitability of cultural decline. Brown writes prophetically, "we are rolling to the Brink of a Precipice that must destroy us" (15). He compares the decline of the British Nation to the fall of the Roman Empire, and invokes a sense of heroism by portraying the "Spirit of Liberty" struggling with the "*Manners and Principles*, as formerly it struggled with the *Tyrants* of the Time" (18). In contrast to this heroic language, Brown adopts an ironic pose to delineate the degeneracy of the aristocracy. Once a brave warrior class, "Youth of Quality and Fortune" are raised as weaklings, unable to endure the "natural Rigours of [their] own Climate" (30). Decline is associated with privileging the city, surrounded by a cluster of commercial implications, over an idealized rural and natural climate. Brown disdainfully catalogues the "fashionable Ambition" of London. He elaborates on the effeminate ritual of Dress, and wistfully compares this effeminacy to a more rustic time when Queen Elizabeth rode to St. Paul's on horseback (34-38). The commercial world and a life of virtue are opposing forces in Brown and Dennis' descriptions of luxury. In both, private vice threatens the public good.

In contrast to these concerns about the blending of private and public interests, Bernard Mandeville controversially presented the private vices associated with luxury and commerce as public virtues. His widely circulated *Fable of the Bees*, a version of the traditional allegory of human society as a beehive, promoted luxury as a civilizing force, an idea Mandeville initially developed in his 1705 poem *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*, wherein he shows that envy and vanity drive people to industry, and that

“[...] Luxury / Employ’d a Million of the Poor / And odious Pride a Million more” so that Britain’s lowest ranks could live in more ease and comfort (12). The same vices Brown and Dennis deplore, Mandeville shows stimulate commerce and are therefore beneficial to the nation’s poor. Moreover, these vices are natural: Mandeville views people as inherently self-interested, vain, envious, and avaricious; people seek all the pleasures luxury can offer and strive to avoid the pains that are associated with want and need. Mandeville argues that we are taught to deny these natural impulses in a hypocritical way. This hypocrisy in affluent commercial societies is the reason for the advancement of modern manners. According to Mandeville, the chief aim of a “refined education” is not to sharpen moral judgment, but is rather the procurement of “as much Ease and Pleasure upon Earth, as that can afford.” For this purpose, “Men are first instructed in all the various Arts of rendering their behaviour agreeable to others,” without causing any notable disturbance to their own self-interest. Prudence and other social virtues are taught only because “the pursuit of pleasure is more possibly achieved by avoiding differences and turmoil with other people” so people can enjoy as much of the world as possible with little opposition. Thus, “everything ought to be banish’d from Conversation, that can have the least Tendency of making others uneasy” (Preface, x-xi, *Fable II*).

Hypocrisy, as Mandeville sees it, is also implicit in a consumer society because people constantly fantasize about having more than they have and being more than they are. Mandeville argues that social power in an enlightened commercial society does not derive from the capacity to forcibly subdue one’s competitors or from the primitive belief in a divinely ordered status system; rather, social power is achieved through “Marks and tokens”

of distinction, such as “costly Equipages, Buildings, Titles of Honour, and everything that Men can acquire” (*Fable II* 126). Man’s natural propensity to envy others their riches and comforts induces industry and consumption of goods in emulation of those who luxuriate in wealth and power. This performance of one’s desired identity and character through the display of mobile property is a salient feature of a changing society. Mandeville writes that this behaviour is most evident in commercial centers that foster anonymity:

People, where they are not known, are generally honoured according to their clothes and other accoutrements they have about them. From the richness of them we judge of their wealth, and by their ordering of them we guess at their understanding. It is this which encourages everybody who is conscious of his little merit, if he is anyways able to wear clothes above his rank, especially in large and populous cities, where obscure men may hourly meet with fifty strangers to one acquaintance, and consequently have the pleasure of being esteemed by a vast majority, not as what they are, but what they appear to be (*Fable I* 127-28).

Earlier sumptuary laws in Britain had proscribed that only the highest ranks could wear fine cloth, like velvet, silks, lace and embroideries, whereas lower orders were limited to more modest apparel (Berg and Eger 8). Such rich costume, once worn as a display of privilege and status, now adorned many an upwardly mobile merchant who proudly aped their aristocratic betters. Mandeville viewed people as concerning themselves more with shaping the outwardly legible signs of character without embodying the ideological ethical imperative of those with high rank.

Indeed, Mandeville goes so far as to compare ethical standards to changing fashions by portraying virtue as something that might be casually thrown on and worn to garner esteem, as easily as one throws on sumptuous dress. He calls virtue “a very fashionable word” that really means nothing “but a great Veneration for whatever is courtly or sublime, and an equal Aversion to everything, that is vulgar or unbecoming” (Preface, *Fable II* xii). His is a world completely removed from any sort of traditional commitment to morality. In fact, he writes that “the silly and capricious invention of the Hoop’d and Quilted Petticoats” helped Britain flourish as a nation as much, if not more, than the Reformation (*Fable I* 356). Ultimately, Mandeville vividly depicts society as entirely constituted of commercial practices and unstable market values: people are driven by pleasure principles like avarice, and this selfish vice carries with it the unintended promotion of wealth throughout the nation. Sociability between people exists only because it is necessary to market exchange and the continual consumption of goods, and identity is cast as the unstable role-playing and social emulation of changing morals and fashions achieved through the accumulation of luxury objects.

In contrast to Mandeville’s portrayal of newly moneyed merchants desperately dressing above their station to ape their betters in appearance only, without any of the traditional moral responsibilities that supposedly belonged to the upper ranks, other writers suggested “the middling sort” were in an ideal position to act as virtuous moral agents. Nicholas Hudson notes that the idea of the middle class “concealed deep fissures and conflicts,” and “denominated a range of groups and interests”; authors who employed this classification, according to Hudson, “anxiously sought unifying values and practices in order to provide the sense of unity upon which a range of material, national, and imperial interests depended” (43). As part of this program of class identification, David Hume describes men of the middling



station as having the greatest opportunity to exercise virtues since they have both the leisure to contemplate and the ambition to attain. The middle class can exercise every form of virtue, from deference to their superiors to charity towards the lower class (“Of the Middle Station of Life” 546).

Luxury is also addressed in positive terms, and it is affirmatively connected to social development. Theorists aimed to show that a sense of beauty was bound to morality, so that the pleasures produced in a world of commerce moved beyond base acquisitiveness. As Lord Kames illustrates in his dedication to George III in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), pursuing particular kinds of pleasure can be good because it refines moral judgment. He posits that the finer arts are especially beneficial to society in promoting order and empathy. Kames also suggests literature is beneficial as an instrument those in power can use for social conditioning:

The Fine arts have ever been encouraged by wise Princes, not simply for private amusement, but for their beneficial influence in society. By uniting the different ranks in the same elegant pleasures, they promote benevolence: by cherishing love of order, they enforce submission to government, and by inspiring a delicacy of feeling, they make regular government a double blessing.

Kames continues to argue that the promotion of the arts is especially crucial in a land as rich as Britain because “commerce begets opulence” which arouses the “appetite for pleasure.” If this appetite is satiated by sensual gratification, then,

selfishness rears its head; becomes fashionable; and infecting all ranks, extinguishes the *amor patriae*, and every spark of public spirit. To prevent or retard such fatal corruption, the genius of an Alfred cannot devise any means

more efficacious, than the venting of opulence upon the Fine Arts; riches employed, instead of encouraging vice, will excite both public and private virtues. Of this happy effect Ancient Greece furnishes one shining instance; and why should we despair of another in Britain?

This warning against the perils of luxury participates in the discourse of civic humanism, but Kames is simultaneously progressive in his assertion that the selfishness encouraged by commerce can be curbed by the promotion of the arts and literature, so that private and public virtues alike are cultivated. Literature and the arts are appropriate outlets for the luxury that can contaminate society. As we will see in the chapters that follow, Shakespeare, Britain's poet, was central to the project of refining "public and private virtues" and of cultivating moral judgment through the critical engagement with his characters.

Hume, who was convinced that the arts could transform wealth into virtue, also made this argument. Like Kames, he celebrated the positive link between commerce and culture in this period. He highlights the positive connection between private interests and the public good. Hume asserts that "the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men" ("Of Commerce" 255). Moreover, the private industry of the middling rank is inextricably meshed with the public good; the industrious "spirit of the age" improves society, banishing ignorance to cultivate "the pleasures of the mind." When such advances in the arts flourish, people "flock into cities [...] to receive and communicate knowledge" resulting in an "encrease [sic] of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other's pleasure and entertainment" ("Of Refinement in the Arts" 270-271). This sociable conversation acts as a civilizing force in society. In *The*

*Spectator*, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele give voice to an ambition to bring “philosophy out of closets and libraries [...] to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffeehouses” (no. 10). Their assemblage of fictional persons who comprise “The Spectator Club” at Will’s Coffeehouse include a baronet “of ancient descent” and a London merchant, which shows that the pleasures of commerce not only inspire civilizing conversation, but also alleviate differences of rank.

In his self-prescribed role as an “ambassador” between what he calls this “Conversable” world and the solitude of rigorous learning, Hume constructs a world of exchange that is cultural as well as commercial, feminine as well as masculine. In fact, the company of women in polite society is essential. In contrast to the brutish rusticity of the ancients, Hume claims, manners have since been invented to render conversation and the exchange of ideas more agreeable. Women, naturally inferior to men, inspire a polite deference and complaisance from men, and the “female softness and modesty must communicate itself” to admirers in the mutual desire to accommodate (“The Rise of Arts and Sciences” 132-4).

Women allow men the opportunity to accommodate their passions:

Wherever nature has given the mind a propensity to any vice, or to any passion disagreeable to others, refined breeding has taught men to throw the bias on the opposite side, and to preserve, in all their behaviour, the appearance of sentiments different from those to which they naturally incline. (132)

For Hume, the presence of women in public culture becomes a condition for the moral progress of the nation, rather than the cause of its decline. The link between commerce and women was sometimes an empowering one; as morality was honed with a greater value on the domestic and social world, rather than in a political realm, women gained an

authority as critics and cultural producers. As we will see in the following chapters, women participated in Shakespearean character criticism and played a vital role in elevating Shakespeare to his status as a national playwright. Nevertheless, the feminization of the public sphere still produced feelings of anxiety. Again, the apparent contradiction between the rise of women as cultural agents and the anxiety about the feminization of culture can be traced to the domestication of the public sphere.

Household oeconomy, traditionally a female sphere, became a model for the broader social sphere, and “feminine” virtues became foundational to sociability and the stability of the nation. Yet, the connection of women with the nation’s economy also raised concerns about the “effeminate” nature of the public sphere, especially because Britain’s booming economy made an abundance of luxury goods available to a broader range of consumers as never before. Luxury, and its association with beauty, pleasure, indulgence, and excess, was also traditionally linked to women in a derogatory way, so that the increasing public presence of women as cultural agents raised concerns about the feminization of culture.

As an antidote to the excess and selfishness bred within modern consumer society, eighteenth-century thinkers posited a sense of taste and sympathy as a new source of morality. Within the discourse of taste and sympathy, Mandeville’s brutal assessment of man’s selfish nature was tweaked so that it would fall in line with the enlightenment project of the age, which promoted positive views of human potential and progress, in moral as well as material terms. Our contemporary understanding of the term “taste” connotes a subjective, almost whimsical preference, but in the eighteenth century, the concept of “taste” played a key role in public debate. As Jeremy Black writes, taste at once “legitimated consumption at the same

time as it criticized its excesses” by linking morality to pleasure (5). Though taste was a widely contested term that assumed various qualifications and redefinitions, there was one aspect of taste everyone agreed on: it was an affective mode of evaluation requiring tutelage and able to shape moral subjects. The education of public taste consequently became a cultural preoccupation in the eighteenth century.

Building upon Gillian Russell’s claim that commercial culture was perceived in this period as simultaneously moral and immoral, I would like to suggest that a “duality of taste” in this era arose alongside the duality of commerce explored above. I will argue that there was a double-edge to the discourse of taste in this period. As the next section outlines, the idea of taste was central to the idea of how character was shaped. On the one hand, taste, especially as it was linked to the sympathetic imagination, was the foundation for the ideology of sociability and politeness that located morality in the relaxed distinctions between the private and the public, the feminine and the masculine. This connection between taste and sympathy was established early in the century in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, as we shall see. In later writers, taste and sympathy became the foundation for the sociability that located morality in the relaxed distinctions between the private and the public, the feminine and the masculine, as we shall see the work of David Hume and other Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. On the other hand, taste was linked to Mandeville’s brand of hypocrisy, of disguising vulgar, selfish qualities under a mask of refinement and manners, so that apparent politeness and sensibility was not actually internalized but performed for approval and social status.

## **The Duality of Taste: Negotiating Private and Public Interests in the Cultivation of Character**

Taste was a concept that first arose in aesthetic studies of the era. Aesthetic inquiries were viewed as a science grounded in human nature: as in the Newtonian practice of arriving at general laws of nature by observing its parts, philosophers believed that by studying the smaller components of man, general conclusions could be drawn about human nature. Aesthetics in eighteenth-century Britain developed to empirically explore the psychological effects of the material world on the human mind. Rather than applying to the rules and practices of the ancients when evaluating art, the modern imperative called for the discovery of the principles based on a detached, scientific observation of mental phenomena. The new rationale of artistic discrimination was grounded in an understanding that people shared common feelings and perceptions. Generally speaking, aesthetic principles are rooted in Locke's assertion that the mind is a *tabula rasa*: there are no innate, pre-existing ideas in the mind. Rather, external objects and events make impressions on the senses, which are then imprinted on the mind; from different associations of these impressions, ideas are formed, such as what affords intellectual pleasure or pain. Beauty and deformity are not qualities of objects themselves, but qualities of passions and ideas aroused by the perception of external stimuli. Joseph Addison, in his famous essays *On the Pleasures of the Imagination*, published in *The Spectator* in 1712, was one of the first writers to explore the distinct emotions, like feelings of the beautiful or sublime, provoked in the mind by certain objects. Whatever the object, the focus was on the perception of the observer. Addison concludes that "[t]here is not perhaps any real beauty [...] more in one piece of matter than another" and that beauty—and other aesthetic categories—exists merely as an idea (no. 412, 413). Just as there was no

external idea of beauty, morality was no longer conceived of as a fixed system of rules.

Objective, external commands and ordinances, whether by king or God, were replaced by the natural functions of inner powers and senses of the mind, which were formed and shaped by experience.

Aesthetic affect is linked to moral conduct, and the two were elegantly connected in the doctrine of “taste”: in its most characteristic form, taste represented moral and aesthetic judgments as initially perceptive or emotive rather than rational. Taste is, metaphorically, a sense. Morality and beauty were not only determined by how one subjectively *feels* in reaction to something; they are importantly conjoined in the concept of taste, so that beauty is distinguished in the same manner as “the good.” Theorists emphasized that aesthetic preferences and morality were psychologically dependent on each other; the enhancement of delicacy in one precipitates growth in the other, and likewise, the corruption of one augments the decline of the other. Taste was thus a complex concept: though it was fundamentally intuitive, persons required education and shaping in order to feel moral sentiments fully and productively.

The discourse of taste was especially complicated, if not defined, by all the new luxuries and public leisure inundating a wider section of society. As noted in this chapter’s section on Habermasian social transformation, the shift away from private or royal patronage of the arts to a world of cultural entrepreneurs patronized by a broader public market meant that public opinion mattered more than ever in determining what was tasteful. The advancement of an increasingly commercial sphere, with its attendant interests of getting and spending, clashed with republican notions of private and public interests. In London especially, the culture industry thrived: periodicals and novels, coffeehouses, theatres, gardens, lectures, concerts, art

galleries, imported fashions, foods, and novelties all proved new venues and subjects for the debates around taste and morality. This dynamic energy of artists and entrepreneurs, along with the public's avidity for novelty and entertainment, constantly challenged a stable and fixed idea about the useful role of pleasure in society as arguments abounded over what was educative, tasteful pleasure or merely aimless, vulgar entertainment.

In theory, then, the concept of taste was quite democratic (and potentially subversive) insofar as it was a sensory experience available to everyone. In practice, however, the idea of taste was much more complex and problematic: "taste" in the eighteenth century was an unstable term with a diverse set of interpretations that sometimes legitimized a particular set of judgments or class allegiances. Taste thus had a regulatory and legislative function, especially in the sense that taste had to be cultivated and refined to make sound judgments possible: one had to learn to distinguish baser, sensual pleasures produced by luxury from the pleasures of the imagination evoked by tasteful objects of contemplation. For instance, Alexander Gerard's 1759 *Essay on Taste* begins by highlighting the importance of improving the faculty of taste:

A fine taste is neither wholly the gift of *nature*, nor wholly the effect of *art*.

It derives its origin from certain powers natural to the mind, but these powers cannot attain their full perfection, unless they be assisted by proper culture. Taste consists chiefly in the improvement of those principles, which are commonly called the *powers of the imagination*, and are considered by modern philosophers as *internal* or *reflex senses*, supplying us with finer and more delicate perceptions, than any which can be properly referred to our external organs. (1-2)



Gerard's term "proper culture" is a loaded phrase, and one that brings to mind Pierre Bourdieu's sociological study that focuses on the relationship of "taste" and "power" across a wide range of cultural products. A key term in Bourdieu's work is "cultural capital," the value placed on education and the acquired knowledge of cultural things—like art, literature, and music—which confers power and status on an individual within particular social formations. Class, Bourdieu argues, is not determined only by economic factors, but also by cultural factors. To acquire cultural capital, one must know the difference between "proper culture" and otherwise; one must have a sound judgment of taste. To make a judgment of taste that differentiates between legitimate culture, what Gerard calls "proper culture," and illegitimate culture is thus an act of social positioning. However, Bourdieu's Marxist emphasis on taste and status is overstated. He concludes that cultivated pleasure in art and criticism is basically a matter of exclusion, of keeping the vulgar and uninitiated out and of addressing only those who can follow the game of taste and its allusions. While the cultivation of taste in art and literature certainly has a social dimension and certainly partakes in the social dynamics of exclusion and inclusion (the satire of gauche equipage and architecture in literature of the period is solid enough evidence of this), this is a reductive way of looking at the role of taste in the eighteenth century, especially when Bourdieu overlooks the philosophical basis of affective evaluation, the moral element of aesthetic judgment, and when he fails to take into consideration the ways in which good taste is a matter of public concern and debate rather than a rigid structural element of social formation. The basic distinction underlying my argument about the reception of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century is between the idea of appropriation and the idea of dialogue between great literary works and the society in which they are received. This project aims to demonstrate that Shakespeare's cultural authority, his status as "cultural capital," was

not simply produced through the appropriation of his plays. Rather, Shakespeare's plays provoked debate and resisted ideological appropriation; in fact, they were agential in shaping eighteenth-century culture.

Raymond Williams traces the etymology of the word "culture" and reminds us that it has verbal roots: it refers to the physical process of cultivation—in its oldest usage, this meant caring and tending to the physical growth or improvement of plants and animals (77). A more modern usage of the word, and a more useful definition for exploring cultural formation in the eighteenth century, is what Williams defines as: "a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development" (only later did "culture" become a noun associated with the material products of this process, like literature and art) (80). Culture is thus a practice of making meaning; it is not a system of stable normative standards. The active process of cultivating character within the discourse of taste is tantamount to shaping culture in this period: taste was energetically discussed in periodicals and coffee houses; discussions of taste sprung into conversations of how to act, what to buy, and what to read. A main topic of aesthetic conversations in the period was the value of Shakespeare's art. Many lauded Shakespeare as a natural genius; the study of his characters was thought to potentially shape the nation's moral character. Others disagreed. The idea of taste encouraged multiple perspectives, dissent, and dialogue, so that the rich semantic potential of Shakespeare's plays made them ideal objects of conversation.

To highlight culture as a practice of producing meaning, I turn to Russell as a counterpoint to Bourdieu: she shows that despite the sometimes exclusionary nature of what were deemed tasteful pleasures and activities, and even in competitive spirit *against* and *because* of this exclusionary nature, women of rank governed a range of activities, like

masquerades, balls, and other sociable entertainments that “constituted an alternative authentic public sphere and hence a threat to the coffeehouse, the club, and the republic of letters” (12). Russell’s study elucidates how the exclusionary practices of taste, as they were established along prescribed ideas of what should constitute public and private culture, inspired culturally derivative activities that allowed women of fashion to create public spaces and practices of their own, along with competing ideas of what is tasteful. Like the discourse of taste itself, Shakespeare generated a spectrum of new cultural and literary practices, some deemed tasteful and others not.

Whether merely show, a matter of social inclusion or exclusion, or a genuine cultivation of morality, the engagement with art and literature was crucial to the formation of eighteenth-century British identity and culture. As we will see, taste, especially as it served to cultivate sympathy, was an answer to the problem of connecting individual desires to the collective benefit of society. The following section will trace the evolution of taste and sympathy from its more exclusionary roots in civic humanism to its broader (though still ideologically exclusive) application and adaptation of the rising middle class.

### **The Civic Humanist Ideology of Taste**

Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury was the first moral philosopher to link moral and aesthetic judgment in the concept of taste, endowing this faculty with the crucial role of refining passions into sympathy that acted as a social bond. Shaftesbury united aesthetics and ethics by suggesting that the appreciation of order and harmony in nature and the arts ultimately serves the public good. “The admiration and love of order, harmony, and proportion,” he wrote, “in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affection, and highly assistant to virtue,

which is itself no other than the love of order and beauty in society” (*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* 191). Shaftesbury’s idea of beauty is a classical one: he associates beauty with harmony, order, and other formal qualities, like symmetry and design. Richard Glauser writes that beauty for Shaftesbury “is thus a complex property, for harmony and proportion imply relations of different parts and elements to each other [...] beauty lies in the proportion and arrangement of their respective parts” (27).

Analogously, Shaftesbury also concentrates on the arrangement and parts of man: he looks at man as an individual being, as a complex of appetites, passions, and affections ideally guided by reason; and he looks at man as a social being, who must check his own self-interest in order to interact harmoniously with the rest of society. Being aware of divine goodness and order in art and nature (for, according to Shaftesbury, all beauty ontologically depends on God’s beauty as the maker of things) prepares men for communal life and encourages a well-ordered state.

Shaftesbury’s idealized notion of communal life, however, is narrow and exclusive, and one not actually realized in eighteenth-century society. As John Barrell and others convincingly argue, Shaftesbury’s aesthetic ideas are rooted in the ideological tradition of “civic humanism”, a concept described above and elaborately theorized by J.G.A. Pocock, in which the aristocratic landowner of feudal England, like the self-sufficient and autonomous Aristotelian citizen, was supposedly devoted to the public good above and detached from any factious private interests represented in the world of exchange (Pocock 431).<sup>13</sup> Vassals were

---

<sup>13</sup> The key work of modern scholarship on the forms and functions of civic humanism in eighteenth-century Britain remains J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975). On the transformation of “public virtues” into “social virtues” see

bound to their lords in military efforts just as lords were bound to their king, and in this balance public virtue and liberty were preserved (Pocock 429). However, an increase of trade and luxury, which Pocock equates with having more than one needs, led to the exchange of freedom and virtue for commodities, in particular, the introduction of a standing army. Civic virtue recoiled into the past and commerce evolved into “the active form of culture itself” (Pocock 431). In contrast to the ideologically stable and paternal world of landed citizenship, Pocock describes a commercial society in a moral vacuum with plenty of space for social mobility. Civic humanists like Shaftesbury viewed the commercial realm as one of superficial and ephemeral vanity, fashion, novelty, and materialism.

For Shaftesbury, then, the idea of taste was discussed in a regulatory way: only the landed aristocracy could hold the legislative claim to what is tasteful. Shaftesbury defines taste as an innate sensibility, a judgment of what is “harmonious and proportionable” and therefore “agreeable and good” (*Miscellany III* 415). When beauty is perceived through taste, one feels a beneficent sort of pleasure that strengthens self-regulation, the “natural affections,” (or sympathy) and provides a basis for social cohesion (*Miscellany IV* 432). Shaftesbury describes the nature of the delight produced by the exercise of taste:

When we have thoroughly searched into the nature of this contemplative delight, we shall find it of a kind which relates not in the least to any private interest of the creature, nor has for its object any self-good or advantage of the private system. The admiration, joy or love turns wholly upon what is exterior and foreign to ourselves. And though the reflected joy or pleasure which

---

John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven, 1986).

arises from the notice of this pleasure once perceived, may be interpreted as self-passion or interested regard, yet the original satisfaction can be no other than what results from the love, proportion, order and symmetry in the things without.

*(An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit 202-203)*

In this very interesting passage, Shaftesbury highlights that taste is not a passive sense; rather, the sense of taste, though initially a feeling or sensation, forms a rational judgment. The pursuit of beauty and goodness thus involves a “disinterested” sort of contemplation. By “disinterestedness,” Shaftesbury means self-regulation and control, while “interest” (or fancy) he connects with the unguided passions. The internal sense of beauty or moral value can be obscured by interest or fancy, so that the sense of taste is sometimes misdirected. Indeed, Shaftesbury asserts that particular interests and personal gratification are necessarily denied in order to think and act freely for the public good: “real virtue and love of truth [are] [...] independent of opinion and above the world”, especially the world of commercial exchange (*Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* 117).

Shaftesbury is not advocating a complete withdrawal from society in favour of rigorous self-discipline; on the contrary, society is key in blazing the path to virtue. To be virtuous, one “must have all his inclinations and affections, his disposition of mind and temper, suitable, and agreeing with the good of his kind” (*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* 192). To foster a generous public spirit—the foremost goal in Shaftesbury’s philosophical inquiry—one must feel sympathy for his fellows. As stated above, the appreciation of beauty increases the “natural affections,” or sympathy. Sympathy is enhanced as taste is refined; in this way, cultivating taste means increasing social feelings, which benefits the public good. While sympathy

increases with the exercise of taste, the natural affection of sympathy begins with the most primal of instincts in the private sphere and ultimately spreads to the public sphere:

If eating and or drinking be natural, herding is so too. If any appetite or sense be natural, the sense of fellowship is the same. If there be anything of nature in that affection which is between the sexes, the affection is certainly as natural towards the consequent offspring and so again between the offspring themselves, as kindred and companions, bred under the same discipline and economy. And thus a clan or tribe is gradually formed; a public recognized.

*(Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour 51)*

Here, Shaftesbury is saying that sympathy provides the foundation for a harmonious society. However, it is not by the inherent capability of sympathy and taste alone that Shaftesbury builds his philosophical system of moral consciousness and aesthetic perception. Though taste is what gives us our natural disposition to apprehend beauty, it requires refinement and training. For Shaftesbury, the main objective in life is to perfect one's taste in order to improve one's character: "the taste of beauty and the relish of what is decent, just and amiable perfects the character of the gentleman, and the philosopher" (*Miscellany III* 407). As Dabney Townsend notes, Shaftesbury's moral objective "is consistently to discover and improve the individual; the aesthetic objective is to discover and represent the true form instead of the fancied form of outward appearance" (207). Essentially, the main aim of Shaftesbury's system of thinking is to publicly express inner, private character. A man's "character", then, reflects the degree to which he has cultivated his taste, which is expressed in the inhibition of his own inner passions and interests so that he is motivated instead by a passion for the public good.

Shaftesbury further suggests that social bonds and mutual understanding must be refined and strengthened by “sharing contentment and delight” in contemplating what is “just in society and beautiful in nature” through the art of polite conversation, just as the ancient philosophers pursued truth through philosophic dialogues (*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* 204; *Miscellany III* 407). Shaftesbury continues to equate the figure of the gentleman and the philosopher, and philosophy with good breeding:

To philosophise [...] is but to carry good-breeding a step higher. For the accomplishment of breeding is to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in the arts, and the sum of philosophy is, to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature, and the order of the world. [...] Both characters [the well-bred man and the philosopher] aim at what is excellent, aspire to a just taste, and carry in view the model of what is beautiful and becoming. (*Miscellany III* 407)

This comparison of philosophy to good breeding, or politeness, particularly reveals the elitism inherent to Shaftesbury’s ideas, for he limits the capacity for public virtue and action exclusively to the well-bred, aristocratic gentleman. John Mullan concisely describes the virtue of politeness ideally embodied by Shaftesbury’s “man of character”: “the cultural skills of taste and manners [...] distinguish the polite members of that society, and [...] inoculate them against the more excessive passions generated by a commercial economy” (12). Only those men of high social position and landed wealth are thus capable of the disinterested virtue and public spiritedness that is integral to governing wisely. It was their task, as John Barrell notes, “to regulate or subdue the variety of different passions or interests” that are divisive in society, and particularly present in a commercial society (Barrell 22).



As the category of the “public” became increasingly more concerned with privatized interests, Shaftesbury’s patrician ideas of “public virtue” were reformulated to promote a narrative better suited to the realities of a commercial world. David Solkin identifies some of the important ideas that later philosophers held onto from Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury was the first thinker to emphasize the social importance of taste. However, his idea of “public” was exclusive. As his notion of the public expanded to include private citizens, the ideas surrounding taste had to become more inclusive to do any good at all in shaping morality. The civic humanist vocabulary of taste was therefore transformed into a more democratic social practice in periodicals and polite literature. Solkin notes that traditional distinctions between the private and the public already begin to disappear in Shaftesbury’s philosophy, as “family sympathies have now become a source of civic virtue” (93). Also important was Shaftesbury’s emphasis on the necessity of education and refinement, “whether by means of instruction or involvement in good company, Shaftesbury made it possible to imagine that nurture, not nature, could hold well the keys to virtue” (93). Central to Shaftesbury’s moral system was the notion that virtue was advanced through exchange and conversation, a means of cultivating taste that was crucial to the evolving social sphere (93). Just as important for cultivating taste, and therefore virtue, was the idea of pleasure.

In response to the idealized remodeling of a residual past in which virtue belonged to the leisure class alone, other authors establish commerce, and its conflation of the public and the private, as a civilizing force that fosters feelings of humanity. As I have illustrated earlier in this chapter, commercial practices were linked to social refinement, the middling class was a driving force in eighteenth-century culture, and the feminized,

commercial world inherited the moral authority of England's landed estates. The polite society and gentility of the middle class was as exclusionary as Shaftesbury's model and there still remained a dichotomy (at least ideologically) in the world of pleasure. Amidst all the dizzying production and consumption of the age, David Hume acknowledges the crucial importance of redefining a "delicacy of taste" as the foundation of manners. Like Shaftesbury and previous aesthetic theorists, Hume defines taste as an ineffable faculty—a sort of sense. When excited by the perception of beauty, this sense produces exalted feelings, what Addison famously called "pleasures of the imagination." Again, this ennobled pleasure was distinguished from the sensual and epicurean delights bound to desire and the body; in fact, theorists of taste typically differentiated a carnal, active external sense from a tasteful internal sense. Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Taste* (1759) makes a similar distinction and recalls Kames' assertion that the promotion of the arts is the promotion of virtue. In defining taste, Gerard states: "Taste stamps a value upon riches, as the procuring its gratifications is the great end for which they are desired and the worthiest use to which they can be applied, the execution of benevolent and virtuous designs alone excepted" (35-36). Through the "innocent" pleasures of taste, the mind is inclined to moral goodness, and strengthened "to disregard the calls of appetite." It can therefore only be a corrupted or uncultivated sense of taste which gives rise to hedonistic passions associated with a luxury economy (198, 192, 203). Having a refined sense of taste was equal to embodying refined passions that are beneficial, not dangerous, to the social order—this was not disputed so much as which pleasures were and were not tasteful. Theorists of taste thus aimed to show that a sense of beauty was bound to morality, so that the pleasures produced in a world of commerce move beyond base

acquisitiveness, as Mandeville held. Rather, appreciation of arts and literature helped shape moral subjects.

In David Hume's theory, exercising the sense of taste improves our sensibility to tender and agreeable passions, and calms rougher, boisterous, selfish emotions. Taste enables us to judge the characters of men, compositions of genius, the productions of the nobler arts, and in general helps us make discriminating consumer choices. Yet this apprehension of beauty is vague and undefined and a diversity of opinions on what is tasteful makes a true standard of taste difficult to establish. For the most part, subjective taste is dismissed and what has customarily been considered great literature or art prevails, not because of some mysterious authority, but because certain customs have withstood the test of time and are enduring.

However, Hume does note that there are critics who possess such a fine taste as "to establish their own sentiment as the true standard of beauty" ("Of the Standard of Taste" 228). Usually, Hume argues, such rare men of taste (and for all his praise of women as a refining influence in society, he is clear that the ideal critic is male) are distinguished in society by the general approbation they receive; their virtue is not signified by their aristocratic status, but by the recognition and the praise of others ("Of the Standard of Taste" 242). While certain critics were distinguished as possessing impeccable taste, my investigation is more concerned with the cultural activity the discourse of taste and the sympathetic imagination inspired. Taste is not demonstrable or scientific, but shaped by practice and experience in evaluating art and people. Hume stresses that repeated perusals and immersion in reading, interpreting, and appreciating art will form the organs of taste. Refined taste is achieved through dialogue, an exchange of different perspectives, and this is taste's most important role in producing and shaping culture in the eighteenth century and, the focus of my research, the relationship

between taste and Shakespeare in this era. Various perceptions and interpretations are required to arrive at a consensus of what is moral and beautiful; whether a beautiful object or moral choice is tasteful or not, the culture of taste requires conversation as part of the process of judgment. As we shall see in the moral theory of Adam Smith, imagining one's self in various moral situations and consideration of other peoples' perspectives similarly hones the sympathetic imagination.

Praise and approbation, experience and practice were equally important to Adam Smith. In his popular and widely influential work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith examines human nature in order to understand a common core of sympathy and self-interest. He provides a rigorous account of the passions; central to his theory is the notion of sympathy, a word Smith uses to "denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever" (10). The general issue of harmonizing the passions of self and other is fundamental to Smith's work; this is reflected in the actor-spectator dichotomy around which his theory of moral development is oriented. The ordinary spectator, Smith explains, does not immediately experience another person's feelings; instead, he imagines being in the actor's situation and he responds accordingly. Smith writes: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (12). Just as Shaftesbury advocates a "disinterested" contemplation after one feels the pleasure of beauty through taste, Smith likewise urges that sound judgment is not merely an instantaneous, sympathetic, subjective response, but requires objectivity to arrive at a standard of what is appropriate. Entering into another person's situation rather than simply entering into a person's feelings allows a measure of objectivity and detachment that is integral to ethical judgment. It also suggests that we approve of certain

behaviours not only because they result in good but also because imagining oneself in another's position teaches how to pursue good and avoid evil in particular *circumstances*. This soon develops in what in one sense is a central and often repeated thesis of the book: "if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them" (27).

According to Smith's depiction of natural sociability, the actor's innate desire for approval inspires self-command over selfish passions so that harmony is achieved between the actor and spectator by the toning up or toning down of emotions (22). Smith thus depicts a natural sociability (as opposed to complete selfishness) of human beings rooted in our natural dependence on each other for self-perception. People see themselves through the eyes of others and act as mirrors to each other. We cannot see and judge ourselves unless we assume the privileged position of the spectator, the stand-in, as it were, for the public (112). This is the beginning of a "reflective refinement" that takes place in the exchange of ordinary moral life. As we practice the toning up and toning down of passions, we begin to internalize the objective moral entity represented by other people to "correct misrepresentations of self-love" so that we aim always at a perfect ideal of action and virtue (136). Smith names this objective moral entity the "impartial spectator." This internalization becomes a sort of self-command that requires us to "divide" ourselves in two in order to self-reflect from a critical and detached perspective. This is not to say that Smith disregarded entirely the customary practices, traditions, and institutions of society. Moral evaluation typically begins with established rules and standards that are already woven into the world. Indeed, Smith turns to custom and tradition in order to provide a moral framework from which we can distinguish between what

is trivial and what is noble without losing all sense of order and structure. The “judge within” ultimately defines and refines moral standards, but only after a process of reflection on, and refinement of, what is already given as custom.

Taste and sympathetic imagination in the eighteenth century functioned to overcome the gap between self and other in order to achieve a sense of commonality, of consensus, in society. Eighteenth-century people were pressed to scrutinize their own character in order to overcome self-interest by imagining others’ responses to them. This practice of self-scrutiny called for a division of the self into private and public components that alleviates the anxiety of hypocrisy operating in society and simultaneously shows that character, or selfhood, was conceptualized as inter-subjective in nature. Interiority was not conceived as something unified and stable, and it was certainly not viewed as independent and transparent. The blurred boundaries and interplay of private and public paradigms that defined the social order in this era are thus reflected in processes of character formation. As the final section of this chapter will illustrate, the social world of the eighteenth century was imaginatively folded into inward individual life by the study of one’s own character and the examination of fictional characters.

### **“Magical Glasses” and The Cultivation of Character**

Both Lord Shaftesbury and Adam Smith relied on the idea of splitting the self in two, or doubling oneself, to exercise one’s moral character in their systems of refining unruly passions to achieve social order. With both authors, we see McKeon’s “devolution of absolutism” at play: in the portrayal of the “divided self,” one half of the self is portrayed as a powerful ethical authority, whereas the other half is imagined as representing selfish impulses and desires that need to be controlled, so that an imagined dynamic between the inner “ruler” and the inner “subject” is what refines moral

character. Moreover, there is a theatrical dimension in both the work of Shaftesbury and Smith that naturally connects their theories to drama. I will demonstrate in my next chapter and throughout this dissertation how these theories were applied in the reception of Shakespeare's plays.

As illustrated above, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* requires people to divide themselves in two to achieve moral self-consciousness. In Smith's actor / spectator dichotomy, the standpoint of the "impartial spectator" is ethically definitive. Smith explains that in the initial stages of socialization, the spectator stands for other people. Smith's theory of moral sentiments allows that one could sympathize with an agent's selfish passions but not approve of them. The actor's innate desire for the fellow feeling of the spectator leads the actor to adjust his responses to a level that the spectator can approve of and sympathize with (22). Not only is this an exercise in self-command, but the idea of the spectator also elevates the actor above his consuming passions. Eventually, this moral force of the community becomes internalized as one's own inherent impartial spectator. The actor sees himself in the "candid and impartial light" of the imaginary spectator, his self-love is humbled, and he begins to evaluate himself as he imagines others would evaluate him (22). This is part of Smith's depiction of the natural sociability, as opposed to selfishness, of human beings, and our natural dependence on others for self-conception.

According to Smith, in everyday life we see ourselves through the eyes of others and act as mirrors to each other, so that subject formation is an interdependent process. In turn, we cannot see and judge ourselves unless we assume the privileged position of the spectator, the stand-in, as it were, for the public: "We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own

behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct” (112). Smith intends this self-reflecting process to provide critical perspective and detachment from oneself. As we shall see, the idea of doubling and the metaphor of spectatorship, of looking inward by gazing into a mirror, are central ideas in Shaftesbury’s own work. This process embodies the idea of “reading” one’s own character in order to achieve moral refinement.

In both writers, there is a clear sense of absolute authority in one part of the divided self. Any reader who crosses one of Smith’s charged passages about the “inhabitant of the breast,” our conscience, so to speak, might cower at the authoritative diction and threatening tone evoked by the writer, and it reminds the reader of McKeon’s theory of the devolution of absolutism, as the power and authority of the monarch comes to be embodied in the common subject over time. For example, Smith discusses the arts practiced by princes to make subjects submit to authority; mainly, he concentrates on the “air,” “manner,” “deportment” that “mark the elegant and graceful sense of superiority” in a monarch. Smith describes a worthy General trembling humbly before the majesty of Louis XIV (54), and one is reminded of this General made timid before the Sun King when Smith describes the impartial spectator. He writes, this “great arbiter of our conduct [...] calls to us, with a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions [...] when we prefer ourselves so shamefully and so blindly to others, we become the proper objects of resentment, abhorrence, and execration.” The guilty conscience is jolted by this stern monarchical moral voice within: “it is from him only that we learn the real littleness of ourselves, and of whatever relates to ourselves, and the natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of



the impartial spectator” (136-37). In other instances, Smith refers to this impartial spectator as a demigod, or judge; indeed, such compelling language reminds the reader of the magnificent anger of a great king, or the vengeful wrath of an angry God. This impartial spectator is the authority embodied within the ethical subject, and functions to check selfish, unrefined impulses and passions.

Shaftesbury likewise advocates a doubling of self in which one part of the self is a symbol of authority and the other part is in need of control and instruction. The division of self he proposes, however, is not that of a humble subject and his imperious monarch, but it is a pedagogical split between the stern teacher and inexperienced student. In *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*, Shaftesbury argues that it is imperative for authors to know themselves before they can possibly create convincing characters. Authors need to understand the “counterpoises and balances of the mind and passions” (86). Shaftesbury continues to warn authors that it is better to engage in this “self-converse” on one’s own rather than in indulgent memoirs and essays so popular in the day, which are chiefly unrestrained exhibitions of “frothy distemper” (74). Instead, he turns to the soliloquy and dialogue as theatrical and literary devices on which to model a more rigorous method of self-examination. He writes of the soliloquy:

A person of profound parts, or perhaps of ordinary capacity, happens,  
on some occasion to commit a fault [...] He comes alone upon the stage,  
looks about him, to see if any body be near, then takes himself to talk  
without sparing himself in the least. You would wonder to hear how close  
he pushes matters and how thoroughly he carries on the business of  
self-dissection. By virtue of this soliloquy he becomes two distinct persons.

He is pupil and preceptor. He teaches and he learns. (72)

Shaftesbury thinks people should use the method of soliloquy in their private regimen of character cultivation, and he continues to stress that one strictly practice this technique when alone so as not to open oneself up to the world in vulnerable moments. He therefore advises the “probationer upon his first exercise to retire to some thick wood or, rather, take the point of some high hill” where he can freely rant at himself, for “it comes across as a sort of raving to understand one’s character” (73). He compares this “raving” to artistic composition, which is an excruciating exercise rather than a systematic approach of “airy speculation” (73).

Shaftesbury’s idea of self-converse is more a performance (or rather, interrogation) than speculation. Shaftesbury notes that how we think of ourselves can be obscured if we cannot find the most distinct, exact words with which to articulate an honest sense of who we are. “For this reason,” he writes, “the right method is to give ’em voice and accent,” to “hold out a kind of vocal looking-glass”, “draw sound out of our breast” and “personate ourselves, in the plainest manner” (78). With the use of some powerful rhetoric, one can imagine and confront one’s feelings honestly without “the least ceremony or respect” (84). Shaftesbury offers a harsh example to his readers of what this soliloquizing might look like. One can easily detect the connection to the Calvinist practice of self-scrutiny here, as Shaftesbury raises terrible imaginary specters:

Tell me now, my honest heart, am I really honest and of some worth,  
or do I only make a fair show and am intrinsically no better than a rascal?  
As good a friend, a country-man or a relation as I appear outwardly to the  
world, or as I would willingly perhaps think myself to be, should I not in

reality be glad they were hanged, any of them, or broke their necks who happened to stand between me and the least portion of an state? Why not? Since it is *my interest*. (78)

It is little wonder that Shaftesbury guides his followers deep into a lonely forest to engage in soliloquy: his brand of self-examination is an incriminating confrontation with one's darkest thoughts, a brutal exploration of the recesses of the self. In essence, Shaftesbury here is confronting any feelings that might make him a hypocrite. This presents a paradox: hypocrisy is both the product of dividing oneself, and at the same time, dividing oneself is the cure for hypocrisy.

But how does one learn to interrogate oneself effectively, so as to recognize hypocrisy and distinguish virtue from vice? Shaftesbury posits that Platonic dialogues are helpful tools by which to hone one's understanding because "these pieces treated fundamentally of morals, and in consequence, printed out real characters and manners: they exhibited them alive and set the countenances and complexions of men plainly in view" (87). Most importantly, these dialogues feature an exemplary character: Socrates. Though readers should obviously look to Socrates as an ideal example of a man who knows himself, most people are more like his struggling and dumbfounded interlocutors, the secondary characters in Platonic dialogues, in whom it is possible "to discover ourselves and see our minutest features nicely delineated and sated to our own apprehension and cognizance" (87). Familiarization with Platonic dialogues will produce a beneficial division of the self, as one part would act the role of Socrates, and the other his less enlightened student, so that when a person gazes inward, or into the "mirror," one would see two faces:

[...] one of them, like the commanding genius, the leader and chief above-mentioned; the other, like that rude, undisciplined and headstrong creature whom we ourselves in our natural capacity most exactly resembled. Whatever we were employed in, whatever we set about, if once we had acquired the habit of this mirror, we should, by virtue of the double reflection, distinguish ourselves into two different parties. And in this dramatic method, the work of self-inspection would proceed with admirable success. (88)

Shaftesbury thus describes characters as “magical glasses” that reveal what is in our own hearts. After routinely inspecting these characters, readers would develop a “speculative habit” so that they would in their own reality “carry about with them a sort of pocket-mirror” (87). This mirror stands as a metonymy for the practice of self-examination. Studying these characters teaches people how to understand human nature, specifically, what makes people virtuous or vicious, and in this examination, dedicated readers will learn how to understand themselves in order to overcome hypocrisy and more truthfully represent themselves to the world.

Aesthetic affect and moral conduct were thus elegantly connected throughout eighteenth-century discourse. W. Jackson Bate asserts that by the midcentury in Britain, critics began to equate the sympathetic imagination and the idea of taste “so that the two became nearly inseparable” (113-14). We distinguish between good and bad artwork in the same manner that we make ethical judgments, and moral and aesthetic standards are achieved in the same way, too. The diversity of subjective tastes and autonomous judgments is overcome by modifying personal, egocentric feelings and preferences to a kind of consensus of what affords pleasure and what causes pain. A subject’s passions are therefore not threatening to the order of

society; actually, they are the very source of morality, and if properly educated, they are the foundation of a harmonious social order. Moreover, art and imaginative literature could teach people how to be virtuous and sociable, which suggested that cultural pleasures were more than empty amusements.

But the civilizing process advanced by thinkers like Adam Smith and David Hume, as adapted from Shaftesbury, had its pitfalls and paradoxes. John Brewer insightfully notes the tensions that this civil culture begot. “In order to create a story in which art, virtue, and politeness could possibly be united,” Brewer writes, “there was much that had to be masked or suppressed” (341). Adam Smith is aware of the tensions surrounding the problems of selfishness that serves as the bedrock of his philosophy. Smith remarks that men, “though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for one another, with whom they have no particular connection, in comparison to what they feel for themselves” that without a constraining sense of justice they would “like wild beasts” be at all times ready to attack one another. Without institutions of justice governing society, “a man would enter an assembly as he enters a den of lions” (86). Smith later emphasizes the limits of fellow feeling in *The Wealth of Nations* when he describes a system in which people are not connected by sympathy, but from a basic need to succeed in life:

Man has almost constant occasion for help from his brethren, and it is vain for him to expect it from benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them [...] It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. (9)

As Smith shifts from social to economic discourse, it becomes clear that “fellow-feeling is, more than anything else, a mark of the immense distance that separated individual minds rather than a sign of their commonality” (Agnew 178). In Shaftesbury’s representation of a virtuous political republic, social affection flourished amongst citizens because they share the common character, interests and responsibilities of public men; whereas, in a society organized by the division of labour, the interests of individuals are only loosely connected, and their experiences different, so that an imaginative act is necessary for individuals to identify with the passions of those with whom they share so little in common.

The eighteenth century thus imaginatively engaged with fictional characters in the process of shaping their own moral identity; characters were employed as speculative instruments in understanding human nature and the passions because public virtue was supposedly bred from fine-tuning private passions. Character writing was a popular genre in the eighteenth century and played a key role in the recognition and formulation of identity. Catherine Gallagher argues that fictional characters in the eighteenth century “were uniquely suitable objects of compassion” because their immateriality posed fewer boundaries in feeling another’s passions as though they were one’s own (168-169). Basking in the enlightenment project of the age, eighteenth-century writers compiled collections of characters to create a comprehensive book of human nature. These “characters” are short, prose sketches of fictional individuals that also represent different vices or virtues, or social, moral, and psychological types.

Though collections of characters flourished in the eighteenth century, they were certainly not unique to this era. Theophrastus first compiled his characters in the fourth century B.C., Joseph Hall produced his influential *Characters of Vices and Virtues* in 1605, and Thomas

Overbury followed suit with his *New and Choise Characters, of Severall Authors*, published posthumously in 1615. Christy Desmet briefly examines formal character criticism of the Renaissance to suggest that this genre operates “somewhere between dialogue and drama, it is less a self-sufficient description of social, moral, or psychological type than a rhetorical exemplum that calls for active readers” (37). Turning to the highly popular form of early character descriptions exemplified by Thomas Overbury and Joseph Hall, Desmet notes the obvious ethical function in representing virtue and vice as a generic collection of qualities in English characters. As didactic as these early descriptions may seem (Hall strips down Vice and Virtue so readers can discern their merits without the distractions of finery), Desmet discusses the “opacity” of these characters that requires active engagement of the judging reader: “human nature is not only variable but opaque, masked both by false exteriors and by the writer’s stylistic ornament” (42). Desmet illustrates that these early characters are read only with difficulty by drawing particular attention to Overbury’s description of the “Very Woman,” who paints her face and is “deliberately opaque” (42). Consequently, the reader must carefully read and rewrite characters to arrive at knowledge of human nature.

Though Desmet highlights that these character sketches are more demanding of readers than they may initially appear, some characters were valued as more useful than others in providing a moral education. Galley argues that the “Excellency of *Characteristic-Writings* must consist in exact representations of human Nature,” a point he insists on throughout his treatise (37). Of course, “nature” is a multivocal word that embodies opposing meanings. Walter Jackson Bate notes that the concept of nature in neoclassical thinking is conceived of as the “ultimate standard, as the essential meaning and final aim of life,” and underlies the doctrine that the aim of art is to reveal a model of ideal perfection to its audience (9). In the

eighteenth century, however, “nature” came to signify realism. Mimesis in art is especially valued because the aesthetic philosophy of the day sought to derive an extensive understanding of humanity by observing the effects of natural phenomena on the mind. “Nature” is meant to represent general and transcendent truths with little dependence on local and temporary customs, but these truths were by no means idealized. Leo Damrosch notes that, in keeping with this empirical function of art, it was the poet’s task to describe the general properties of things “because the reader gives imaginative existence to a poetic description with details drawn from personal experience” (385). Within a social context, manners and propriety were sometimes aligned with “art” in the pejorative sense that they masked unacceptable feelings; nature, in contrast, was connected with “sensibility,” the natural display of the heart’s deepest genuine feelings. The passions of men were thought to be “natural,” universal and uniform, while their customs and manners were considered changeable and artificial.

For a reader to “discover himself” in a fictional character, Gally urges writers to strike an equilibrium between particular and general qualities in their literary creations. He writes that characters designed must be of a “general nature” and not too particular; there must be a balance between “strokes” so that they are “not too faint, nor yet too strong” (38). It is necessary not to impart too many particular qualities to a fictional person or a writer will create a grotesque caricature with whom nobody can relate. This is the main problem Gally finds with most character-writing; in particular, he attacks the work of the French author Monsieur de la Bruyere, who “carries almost everything to Excess,” “represents the Irregularities of Life as downright Madness,” and by “his false Colours converts Men into Monsters” (67). In short, de la Bruyere offers “Characters of Men, who are not to be found in Nature” (67). Thomas Overbury’s creations are also read as caricatures: “A continual Affection of far-fetched and



quaint Simile's, which runs thro' almost all these Characters, makes 'em appear like so many Pieces of mere Grotesque." Rather than finding characters as imitations of people as they are in nature, Overbury presents persons as "what they are thought to be like" (89). Theophrastus, Gally claims, has outdone all these moderns in character writing. However, at the end of his essay, the author calls for a collection of characters that are more contemporary, and that reflect the rich diversity of men found in Britain. Shakespeare's characters suited just this purpose.

In contrast to the writers of moralistic or artificial characters Gally derides, and as the following chapter will outline in detail, Shakespeare was considered above all other writers a genius in his empirical observation of human nature and his creation of realistic characters. Reading such polyvalent, realistic characters, Deidre Lynch argues, was deemed a respectable pleasure in this era, whereas the overdone nature and grimaces of caricatures were for more indiscriminating audiences (57). Shakespeare's characters were valued because they were thought to be functional in shaping the taste of England's citizens, to make people better moral individuals. Lynch writes:

[P]eople's transactions with books came to be connected in new ways, first to their endeavors to find themselves as 'individuals' and to escape from their social context, and, second, to their endeavors to position themselves within an economy of prestige in which cultural capital was distributed asymmetrically and in which not all who read were accredited to 'really read' literature." (6)

Lynch points to the excessive nature of caricatures and highlights their symbolic representation of luxury and equivalence in association with the world of exchange. This is in line with

Gally's assessment that some books of character drawings are better than others on the basis that people can gain a moral education from reading realistic characters.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century, many critics of the age viewed Shakespeare's characters as useful tools in the sort of moral education proposed by Hume, Smith and others. Shakespeare was especially admired in the later eighteenth century for his accurate and moving representations of human passions and the psychology these passions constituted. In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Samuel Johnson wrote:

His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species. (7: 62)

Johnson thought Shakespeare's insight and art in portraying human nature so powerful that by reading his plays even "a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world and a confessor predict the progress of the passions" (7: 65). For William Warburton, one of Shakespeare's several editors, literature that allows an audience to "knot a knowledge" of human nature is the most morally effective. Other works might exercise reason, amusement, or the imagination, but only works that delineate human nature "can improve the heart, and form the mind to wisdom." Shakespeare occupies "the foremost place" in this type of writing, "whether we consider the amazing sagacity with which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action; or his happy manner of communicating this knowledge" of all our "passions, appetites, and pursuits" embodied in his "lively paintings" (1: xxiv). Elizabeth Montagu writes that "we are apt to consider Shakespeare only as a poet; but he is certainly one of the greatest

moral philosophers that ever lived” (59). William Kenrick, in his “Introduction to the School of Shakespeare”, lavished similar praise on Shakespeare as a moral philosopher whose works contain “a practical system of ethics.” Kenrick emphasizes the use of Shakespeare in moral improvement and in shaping character. He suggests that Shakespeare’s plays “perhaps contributed more to form our national character, for humanity, justice, and benevolence, than all the theoretical books of morality which have appeared in our language” (15).

As chapter two will illustrate, lessons were sometimes drawn from the plays and applied in a prescriptive manner that is reminiscent of the conduct book. But, much as they are today, Shakespeare’s characters were valued for their psychological complexity that required discussion about motives and moral agency. In many instances, eighteenth-century critics and readers carefully speculated on the private lives and inner passions of the characters and meditated on the right course of moral action within the imagined context of the play. In contrast to Lynch’s assertion that reading such characters afforded pleasure because it allowed eighteenth-century audiences to escape a sense of social context with a purer focus on the autonomous individual, I will argue that eighteenth-century audiences imagined characters beyond the confines of plot structure and within the eighteenth-century context of the domesticated public sphere so that they might better understand their own moral positions and equip themselves to better navigate the shifting boundaries of “private” and “public” life. Shakespeare’s characters were thus used as educative tools for shaping moral character *because* they were read within an imagined social context. The following chapter will also examine how characters’ passions were analyzed to educate readers in the editorial notes of prominent critics like Samuel Johnson, and in nationalistic and moral essays, like those of Elizabeth Griffith and Elizabeth Montagu. I will also examine a more playful mode of

character criticism that was prominent in the era by exploring how Elizabeth Montagu and Sarah Fielding create lives for Shakespearean characters beyond the dramas to which they were born in order to understand their motivation or reveal a clearer understanding of more obscure, complex characters. Furthermore, the critical focus on Shakespeare's characters and the passions that motivate them also inspired the dramatic theory of Joanna Baillie. These writers imaginatively situate their work within the domesticated public sphere and suggest the social and personal processes that shape character outlined in this chapter. Finally, this character-oriented criticism also reveals the contemporary assessment of a newly commercialized public culture's dual potential to simultaneously cultivate or corrupt moral character. In other words, eighteenth-century character criticism registers anxieties about the feminization of public culture as much as it reflects the emphasis on domestic life and "feminine" virtues as foundational to national stability. Studying Shakespeare's reception in this framework highlights how his plays shaped eighteenth-century culture by provoking conversations and questions about his characters whereby preoccupations with identity formation and morality might be addressed.

## Chapter Two

### Reading Shakespeare's Characters

In his 1777 *Addresses to Young Men*, James Fordyce highlights how the commerce and social exchange of the newly domesticated public sphere were promoted as civilizing forces:

When wealth employs genius, dexterity, or diligence, to contrive and heighten innocent amusements, none but the illiberal or the gloomy can be displeased: trade and manufacturers are promoted; skill is exercised and improved; social delight is varied and exalted; Piety is not offended or forgotten; the Virtues and the Graces go hand in hand. (2: 136-37)

As traditional boundaries of the private and public collapsed and fused, the idea of virtue had been ideologically relocated from the exclusive, landed estates of the aristocracy so that it became more accessible in the commercial world of a burgeoning middle class. As Fordyce here outlines, the private pursuit of wealth and pleasure is potentially beneficial to the public interest. Yet, despite his praise for the civilizing potential of commerce, Fordyce claims, “the strongest characteristic of the present age, considered at large, is a predominant love of show, dissipation, and revelry” (136). Such an evaluation reflects the “effeminizing” effects that were ubiquitous with shifts in boundaries between the private and the public. As traditional boundaries of the private and public collapsed and fused, the commerce and social exchange of the newly domesticated public sphere were sometimes viewed as detrimental to social order because they encouraged excessive pleasure and self-interest. Fordyce illustrates the threatening connection between private behaviour and the public good of the nation as he catalogues the destructive potential of a luxury economy when it is not directed to social ends:

But when application, taste, and talents, are prostituted to such as can buy them,

for the purpose of devising, without limitation and without end, new modes of pleasures ruinous by their expense, inflammatory to the passions, productive of softness, idleness, sensuality, debauchery; tending to alienate the heart from the company of the wise and worthy, from the duties and joys of domestic life; to indispose it for the sentiments and offices of devotion; to beget a disrelish for virtuous attachment in those that are not married, to supplant affection in those that are; and thus to undermine the very foundations of private, and consequently, of public happiness;—when this is the case, can you easily conceive a more alarming symptom, or a more fatal perversion? (140-141).

Even moral philosophy bred a general anxiety that people were only pretending to have an upright moral character rather than cultivating good character—a form of hypocrisy conceivably inherent to a socializing process in which people are constantly accommodating others and masking what they truly feel. The practice of accommodation and performing what is generally agreed as appropriate, polite conduct gave rise to the suspicion that people were not cultivating a *true* sense of duty and morality but were only presenting an artificial show of moral refinement to gain approval. This was, after all, an era which Addison famously called a “polite age [...] in danger of becoming the most vicious” (*Spectator* no. 6).

To overcome this distance between being and appearing, the ideology of good taste and sympathy triggered a rigorous practice of self-scrutiny in order to understand and refine the passions that motivate human action in such a way that one’s true feelings correspond with how one presents oneself socially. To be a person of character in the period meant refining selfish passions in order to express authentically one’s private self publicly. Moreover, knowledge of the passions meant people could identify their own feelings with the feelings of

others in a truly sympathetic way. At a time when understanding human passions and the psychology they constitute was considered essential to the moral development of individuals and the public good, eighteenth-century audiences recognized real value in Shakespeare's art of characterization. The playwright's ability to create "magical glasses," as Shaftesbury would put it, resulted in psychologically complex characters whose passions, motives, and circumstances helped form prudent judgment in the observer. This chapter will thus examine how the eighteenth-century reading public gleaned a moral education from Shakespeare's plays through different modes of engagement with dramatic characters. As we will see, contemporaries imaginatively treated characters as though they were real people in this era. In keeping with the aesthetic philosophy of the day, the realistic portrayal of characters allowed the audience to identify and sympathize in an immediate and emotional way.

Michael Bristol argues that Shakespeare's characters provoke in the reader a curiosity about motive and intention that imposes "an additional burden of moral judgment" ("Vernacular Criticism" 102). We are equipped to form such judgments by making inferences about a fictional character's moral disposition, motives, beliefs and desires "that derive not from explicit textual cues but from everyday background knowledge of how the world generally works," a background knowledge Bristol generally refers to as "folk psychology" (89). This idea of folk psychology is key to what Bristol describes as "vernacular criticism": "It is at home with, or indigenous to a contemporary idiom of assumptions and presuppositions about how to account for the actions of ordinary people. And perhaps more important, vernacular criticism is an attempt to find an orientation in a space of moral questions" (91). This concept of vernacular criticism is certainly at home with the eighteenth-century common-sense theory of moral and aesthetic development explored in the previous chapter. It is also

coherent with the Shakespearean critical project of Samuel Johnson and other commentators, who treated Shakespeare's characters as real people. This type of moral stance towards Shakespeare is often associated with Johnson, whose highly influential critical edition of Shakespeare's works was published in 1765, a period in which Gillian Russell claims eighteenth-century fashionable society, with its dual perception of commerce as either corruptive or educative, effeminizing or feminizing, was at its peak, and this chapter will focus on the work of Johnson and other writers of his era.

This chapter will show that eighteenth-century audiences read characters within the social context of a domesticated public sphere in an effort to come to terms with a newly complicated relationship between ideas of private and public selfhood. By studying Shakespeare's portrayal of the passions and their effects, readers ideally hone their sense of taste and sympathy and grow more experienced at making moral and aesthetic judgments. Unlike actual people who cloaked their feelings for the sake of civility, Shakespeare's art of characterization produced characters with vividly real and candid emotions that made them ideal speculative instruments with which to explore human nature. Indeed, this chapter will illustrate how Shakespeare's characters were perceived as natural and sublime representations of their human counterparts, terms meant to indicate a sense of enduring and general truth as opposed to impermanent social conventions and fashion. The alignment of Shakespeare with nature elevated the playwright as a figure of beauty and as a raw sourcebook of human nature—a kind of social primer whence an ethical education might be derived.

While Shakespeare's insight into human nature seemed to offer the ideal fit for ethical instruction, the morality, and sometimes the quality, of his art was hotly contested—his works were valued for their realism but were sometimes considered coarse and mundane. Charlotte



Lennox's *Shakespear Illustrated* (1753-54) prefers Shakespeare's source materials for their morality to the indecencies of Shakespeare's reconfigurations of these stories; Lennox particularly focuses on the immodest, indecent female and upper-class dramatic characters that consistently defy standards of eighteenth-century feminine propriety. For example, Lennox approves of Isabella's virtue in rebuking Claudio's request that she consider sleeping with Angelo in order to save the former's life. However, Lennox suggests the heroine is a "mere Vixen in her Virtue" because in redressing her brother, Isabella's behaviour reveals "coarse and unwomanly reflections" and "exulting Cruelty" rather than the sentiments appropriate for a "pious, innocent and tender Maid" (33-34). Though eighteenth-century audiences sometimes interpreted Shakespeare to suit the values of their day, the complexity of his characters and the quality of his drama often resisted easy appropriation, so that Shakespeare also shaped eighteenth-century culture by inspiring a broad range of conversations and creative responses.

For instance, while Samuel Johnson also famously objected to Shakespeare's insufficient morality and violation of poetic justice, the critic nevertheless recognized great moral value in the portrayal of human passions, the knowledge of which was key to moral refinement. The complexity of Shakespeare's characters (and sometimes the opacity of his language) required intense scrutiny that generated important debate and conversation about what constituted beauty and morality. This chapter will explore how Johnson's *Preface* and notes to his edition of Shakespeare position the critic-editor as a sort of impartial spectator or man of taste. Johnson plays a crucial role in establishing an ordinary and democratic moral force by drawing his community of readers to exercise their judgment of characters' actions and feelings. He situates the evaluation of characters within the social context of his own time, with a focus on the inner and private

passions of the characters in order to form his readers' own "domestic wisdom" (Johnson, *Works*, 7: 61). I will also examine how the criticism of Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Griffith similarly participated in this same critical project. Along with this more formal criticism, I will discuss how Sarah Fielding and Elizabeth Montagu sportively imagine characters outside of dramatic plot structure in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the characters' psychology more freely within the context of contemporary society. Finally, this chapter will examine how the preoccupation with Shakespearean characters inspired culturally derivative works and theories, with particular emphasis on Joanna Baillie's dramatic theory and her *Plays on the Passions*. This broad range of innovative response to Shakespeare all shared one thing in common: a preoccupation with shaping moral character.

### **Reading and the Project of Moral Refinement: Evaluations of Shakespeare**

Reading was considered a central activity in the eighteenth-century program of moral refinement. The action of sympathy, the entering into and adoption of sentiments presented to the mind, is frequently used in descriptions of the activity of reading. Reading passions and understanding a person's moral character in actual social exchanges thus became analogous to reading a text, so that the skills of a good reader could be applied in real interactions in the commerce of everyday life. As James Engell notes, literature in this period was perceived as possessing the power "to open up problematic moral perspectives, areas with unclear or debatable answers, where justification is not only difficult, but not assured" (150). Literature clarified observations, it broadened ethical views, and it helped refine choices. Reading during this period was also more widespread than ever before. Circulating libraries and the production of cheap editions increased access to books for a growing class of readers,

including an expanding public of women readers. A growth in reading coincided with the arrival of new genres of literature, such as periodicals like *The Spectator*, and of course, the novel. As the reading public grew in Britain, reading became a more socially significant activity.

There were ardent debates within the discourse of taste evaluating different literary forms. Writers like John Brown worried that people might not be reading the kind of literature able to create healthy moral citizens (or might be reading good literature the wrong way).

Brown writes in his *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*:

Reading is now sunk at best into a morning's *amusement*; till the important hour of dress comes on. Books are no longer regarded as the repositories of taste and knowledge; but are rather laid hold of, as a gentle Relaxation from the tedious round of pleasure [...] Thus it comes to pass, that weekly essays, amatory plays and novels, political pamphlets, and books that revile religion, together with a general *hash* of these, served up in some *monthly mess of dullness*, are the meager *literary diet* of town and country. (17)

Brown's assessment ironically suggests that the "important hour of dress" is the main event of the morning, so that the exercise of reading and critical thinking, which have the potential to shape moral character, are trumped by a more superficial self-fashioning. As Brown's lamentation about reading reveals, novels and romances were particularly targeted as frivolous, corruptive entertainment in contrast to more instructive literature. Those who aimed to legislate reading practices suggested that novels had the habit of exciting private passions

without tutoring them for public benefit; on the whole, novels were not considered tasteful literature.<sup>14</sup>

Novel reading was therefore considered an unmanly pursuit that was tied to the idea of rapid and indiscriminate consumption.<sup>15</sup> As Douglas Lane Patey shows, the gendered distinction of high and low literature is part of the process of the critical public's almost simultaneous expansion and contraction: the idea that taste belongs to everyone qualifies everyone as a critic, yet ideas of taste remain exclusive as some forms of literature became associated with commerce and effeminate licentiousness, especially the novel (5). Novel reading was thus viewed as a frivolous activity, and the gentler sex was particularly warned against it. Hannah More cautions women against reading novels in her *Strictures on the modern system of female education*:

[...] however unexceptionable they may be sometimes found in point of expression, however free from evil in its more gross and palpable shapes, yet from their very nature and constitution they excite a spirit of relaxation, by exhibiting scenes and suggesting ideas which soften the mind and set the fancy at

---

<sup>14</sup> In opposition to the eighteenth-century rhetoric that novel-reading was a transgressive practice, Nancy Armstrong argues for the emergent novel's singular concern with presenting and policing female behaviour according to "domestic ideology."

<sup>15</sup> The classic formulation of the English reading public in the eighteenth century is offered by Richard Atlick and Ian Watt. Atlick and Watt propose that along with the expansion and hegemony of the "middle-class" grew a larger and more inclusive reading public, aided by the circulating library and the novel.

work; they take off restraint, diminish the sober-mindedness, impair the general powers of resistance, and at best feed habits of improper indulgence, and nourish a vain and visionary indolence, which lays the mind open to error and the heart to seduction. (1: 180-181)

While More, Brown and others assert that novels and romances excite the sense of taste but do nothing to refine it, the notion that healthy reading habits produced a healthy society became an increasingly common conception in the period.

As criticism opened up to a broader range of people, authors and critics wanted to influence and form the reading habits of a public mostly unfamiliar with Greek and Latin—languages in which England’s learned, aristocratic classes were educated, but not the middle-class men and women of the domesticated public sphere. The goal of shaping the critical judgment of the “common reader” to form a more inclusive public of critics replaced a more exclusive idea of criticism that was rooted in knowledge of classical traditions. John Brewer notes that Addison and Steele, in their respective periodical projects, championed imaginative literature *in English* as the best means of stylistic and moral instruction, and certainly the best means of educating a growing reading public (Brewer, *Pleasures*, 476). In his treatise, *British education: Or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain*, Thomas Sheridan affirms that reading can be as edifying for a nation as the oration of ministers and politicians: “Whereas amongst [literate people], by means of the press, and the cheapness of books, there are hardly any so low who may not acquire knowledge by the eye, as well as by the ear” (249). Sheridan also promoted Britain’s own literary heritage in place of ancient works, and here speculates on the fate of Britain’s cultural inheritance:

As models of style, Milton in the poetic, and Shakespeare in the dramatic,

Swift, Addison, Dryden, and Sir William Temple (in some of his works) in prose, may be considered as truly classical, as the Virgil, Caesar, Tully, and Sallust of the Romans; nor is there any reason that they should not be handed down as such equally to the end of time [...] And shall we not endeavour to secure to future generations, entire and unchanged, their birthright in Shakespeare, in Milton, in Addison, and Swift? Or shall we put in the power of a giddy and profuse age to dissipate, or render of no value, the heaps of treasure now collected in the many excellent books written by English authors? (241; 257-258)

Whereas the “giddy and profuse” novel represented the problem of a larger reading public and a commodified exchange of texts, Shakespeare signified the high vernacular tradition, separate in time and value from mass-cultural and “effeminate” forms (de Bolla 268).

Though many cultural critics considered Shakespeare as ideal reading for strengthening the moral fabric of the nation and the ethical uprightness of individuals, others criticized Shakespeare because he departed from neoclassical tenets of art. Amongst other guidelines, neoclassical criteria prescribed a decorum separating tragedy and comedy, bawdy and noble language, and the behaviour of high and low characters. This last tenet of neoclassical thinking holds that characters should be portrayed according to their station or “type”; writers should focus on the general “legible” nature of characters, their social roles, and not the individual and particular, so that kings act kingly and soldiers soldierly. Shakespeare broke all of these rules. For example, Francis Gentleman, a theatre critic and advocate of neoclassical principles, enforces the guidelines of type portraiture in questioning the representation of Macbeth: “The expressions he uses to the servant or officer who enters with intelligence of the English army are low and gross, far beneath even a private gentlemen; and why Shakespeare should make a

monarch run into such vulgarisms is not easy to guess” since the “rage or grief of a king should always preserve dignity, without which the author cannot boast a chaste preservation of character” (1. 99-100). Charlotte Lennox similarly comments on the “un-soldier-like” traits of Iago (130), while Rymer, years earlier, thought Othello’s jealousy unbefitting a brave soldier (93-94). Such critics focused on the *public* role of characters: how kings and soldiers should behave publicly, rather than the private passions of anger, ambition, malice or jealousy that motivate their behaviour.

Shakespeare’s morality was also considered less than ideal and was vehemently attacked within the neoclassical framework, especially his failure to reward virtue. Some critics stubbornly sought clear moral instruction and poetic justice in drama. Dryden’s essay “The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy” is the neoclassical theoretical foundation for attacking Shakespeare on this point. For Dryden, catharsis operates in a didactic way: tragedy arouses fear and pity because we see that “the most Virtuous, as well as the Greatest, are not exempt from [...] misfortunes” (viii). It is from this fear and pity that we derive pleasure in a play. To feel genuine pity for characters, however, the characters must “have virtuous Inclinations, and Degrees of moral Goodness in them” that outweigh any bad qualities (viii). For Dryden, the moral is the central element of the play: “When the Fable is design’d then, and not before, the Persons are to be introduc’d with their Manners, Characters, and Passions” (xi). Similarly, characters who have acted immorally must be punished accordingly within the drama; that Cressida is not punished for being false is thus viewed as a weak spot within *Troilus and Cressida* (ii). R.D. Stock notes that even Samuel Johnson, one of Shakespeare’s greatest champions, seems torn throughout his life’s works over whether art should imitate life realistically or improve it in such inexact but didactic representations as Dryden prescribes

(119). In some instances, Johnson seriously objects to the poet's insufficient morality and violation of poetic justice, as in the following drawn from his *Preface* to Shakespeare's works: "His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose" (7: 71). In defense of Shakespeare's artlessness, on the other hand, Johnson challenges the revered and ancient unities that had shaped drama for centuries, and he quips that neoclassical regulations "have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor" (7: 76). The affective mode of criticism that linked pleasure to beauty and morality was not a rule-governed science but one governed by feeling. Johnson's *Preface* and his critical notes, as this chapter shall outline, promote the realism of Shakespearean drama rather than the idealism of neoclassical works because this realism allowed for the empirical study of the passions and of human nature that was at the heart of moral refinement in the period. As a natural genius and a sublime poet, Shakespeare defied all the rules of neoclassical art; instead, his works were perceived as embodying the rules of human nature and the conditions of life.

### **Shakespeare as "The Poet of Nature"**

This connection of Shakespeare to nature and the sublime is crucial in that it links Shakespeare to eighteenth-century aesthetic ideas and highlights the distinction of his art from the affected refinement and artifice of which the age was often accused. The experience of the sublime—along with its causes, ends and effects—was ardently debated throughout the period. While there were many distinct conceptions of the sublime, the aesthetic value of sublimity was given special prominence first in the renewed interest in Longinus' rhetorical treatise, *On the Sublime*, in which the idea of sublimity is linked to invigorated passions like astonishment,



enthusiasm, ravishment, and transport, and then by Edmund Burke, in what became the most famous treatise of the eighteenth century, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In keeping with the era's empirical examination of the human passions and how they are influenced, Burke distinguishes between the emotional responses to the beautiful and the sublime, the first associated with delicacy, smoothness, and brightness (all qualities suggestive of refinement), and the second with the infinite, boundless, diverse, and terrifying. Along with this vastness and immensity, the sublime was also related to spirituality, the natural world (especially its more magnificent wonders, like mountain ranges and vast oceans) and the idea of "natural" genius that is, as Addison puts it, "never disciplined and broken by the rules of Art" (*Spectator* no.160).

The association of Shakespeare with sublime genius transformed his faults into evidence of his greatness. In his *Preface* Johnson anoints the playwright as "the poet of nature," though Shakespeare is often viewed in the period as a metaphor for nature itself (7: 62). The conceit that compares Shakespeare to an idealized description of an unchanging, enduring natural world, along with the powerful emotional affect he elicits from his audience, was a correlation that was prevalent in Shakespeare criticism throughout the eighteenth century. Johnson evokes the "natural" quality of Shakespeare's genius with a garden metaphor that was typical of the age:

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and roses; filling the eye with awful pomp,

and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. (7: 84)

Johnson continues to liken Shakespeare's plays to a mine rich and abundant in jewels though they are unpolished and "mingled with a mass of meaner minerals" (7: 84). Elizabeth Montagu, in a letter to Lord Lyttelton, playfully compares the nature of Shakespeare's works to those of the French, and similarly employs the metaphor of an untended, wild garden:

Shakespeare's lot fell into so luxuriant a soil, it produced the finest  
flowers and the rankest weeds; you would see a Cedar of Lebanon  
and a shabby bramble in the same spot. Here trees whose Heads reached  
the Heavens, there vile shrubs that deform'd the ground. From want of  
skills in gardening he suffer'd them all to grow and flourish together.<sup>16</sup>

The unaffected, genuine quality of Shakespeare's work arouses a sense of wonder in those who behold it because "it is enriched with all the pride, and excellence of nature, her most beautiful and vigorous productions"; however, it sometimes calls for "regrets and indignation at the neglect and ignorance of its owner" which beckons for rigorous critical engagement. In Montagu's essay on Shakespeare, explored in more detail below, she compares Shakespeare's plays to the sublime mystery of Stonehenge. The author boldly lavishes praise on his creations as "the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature." Just as people "view other prodigies" of nature "with an attention to and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of Greatness," so should people admire Shakespeare's works (11). As an artist who broke the rules, Shakespeare was seen as appealing to a higher form of truth in nature.

---

<sup>16</sup> Huntington Library, Montagu Collection, Correspondence and papers, Oct. 20, 1765.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Montagu's letters in this chapter are based on my own transcription of materials in the Huntington library's Montagu collection.

Gefen Bar-On argues that Shakespeare's genius was linked to the genius of Isaac Newton in the eighteenth century. Newton revealed "the previously hidden principles that govern physical reality, making it subject to analysis and technological manipulation as never before," and Shakespeare too shared Newton's "extraordinary capacity for understanding nature" in an unprecedented way (152). While Newton discovered principles that govern the physical world, Shakespeare's superior understanding was of human nature. Bar-On's work focuses on the Newtonian pursuit of Shakespeare's editors to discover the underlying unifying principles of character within the heterogeneous confusion of the playwright's language and his defiance of neoclassical principles, though their attempts to find coherence often failed because Shakespeare's characters (Bar-On uses Hamlet as test case) are too ambiguous to be reduced to any one underlying principle. However, this sublime nature of Shakespeare's characters—their reflection of what people are actually like in real life as complex, confusing beings whose motivations are not easily decipherable—provided ideal material for moral training within a broader reading public.

Many critics, participating in the moral project of the mid-century and after, thought moral maxims and insipid didacticism were not required for a drama to have a moral end; instead, spectators and readers could develop an intrinsically benevolent moral sense simply by imagining, scrutinizing, judging, and sometimes sympathizing with realistic characters. Shakespeare's plays focused on the inter-subjective relationship between private and public identity formation—kings were fathers and husbands, soldiers were lovers—and characters shared identities with the reading public. There is an appeal in these examples to a broader, more diverse and inclusive public drawn in Shakespeare's plays that better represents the shifting social structures of contemporary Britain. In Shakespeare's art of characterization, the

expression of a character's private nature was emphasized as much as that character's public role within the play. Johnson praised the playwright for his mimetic representation of *real* people with whom readers can identify and relate: "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion" (7: 64). Shakespeare did not represent an ideal neoclassical world, but "engaged in dramattick poetry with the world open before him; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few" (7: 69). Other critics likewise attacked rigid neoclassical rules of decorum and praised Shakespeare for portraying characters that did not conform to an ideal but artificial type. Compared to the "real men" of Shakespeare, Montagu writes, "French characters are like flawless, lifeless puppets" (80). Lord Lyttelton, meanwhile, posited: "If human nature were quite destroyed, and no monument left of it, except his Works, other beings might learn what man was, from those writings" (ix-x). Moreover, Shakespeare's creations come from all walks of life, drawing his examples not from portraits "of the Grecian or Roman school," but from "the street, the camp, the village" (Montagu 18). Elizabeth Griffith similarly praises Shakespeare because his *dramatis personae* "seem to be *our acquaintance and countrymen*," making them ideal objects of practical study (xi). By the evaluation of most contemporary critics, no artist had a greater talent in copying human nature so close to its actual form, though his editor Alexander Pope would balk at the use of the verb "copy." He viewed Shakespeare "not so much as an Imitator, as an Instrument of Nature," who speaks through the poet, so that "Shakespeare's characters are Nature herself; and that it is a Sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her" (1: ii). Though some of his characters may seem "unpolished or uncouth," they are in fact faithful representations of real life (Montagu 18).

The sublime nature of Shakespeare's characters meant they were sometimes "unpolished and uncouth"; the sublime, after all, connotes untamed, wild nature. Johnson describes Shakespeare's flaws as part of the author's sublime craft, as part of his realism: "their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable" just as "the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with perturbances and cavities" (7: 70-71). Maurice Morgann also refers to Shakespeare as a sort of poet-god who effortlessly "scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action" in his works, whence spring forth primordial and true representations of nature (66). The fat knight Falstaff is such a representation: Morgann likens him to "some old fantastic Oak, or grotesque Rock" that stirs excitement in an otherwise ordered and picturesque countryside (4-5). Falstaff was an obsession in eighteenth-century drama and literature; my fourth chapter will demonstrate how Falstaff seemed to live a second life in the eighteenth century outside of Shakespeare's plays.

At first glance, the eighteenth-century treatment of Falstaff and other characters as sublime would fall in line with Harold Bloom's argument that Shakespeare's characters are "free artists of themselves" with the power to change themselves through their inward and reflexive consciousness, detached from any sort of social structure that produced them. In a similar vein of thinking, Peter De Bolla argues that the latent agenda of eighteenth-century inquiries into the sublime was the self-determined subject *unbound* from traditional institutional and social legislation. He writes:

The power of self-determination at this time was seen as socially disruptive.

Without society, and the rules of decorum upheld and inscribed within its institutional practices, the subject would become licentious, corrupt, and depraved.

[...] The sublime experience is the self recognizing itself as subject, it is

the mind becoming overwhelmed with a sense of its own power. (43)

De Bolla explores the “discursive excess” produced by the discourse of the sublime. He demonstrates that eighteenth-century descriptions of the sublime spilled over into neighbouring discourses (ethics, oratory, painting, etc.) to suggest that the discourse on the sublime, like its very topic, has no boundaries or limits but is endlessly self-reflexive, like the self-sufficient universal subject.<sup>17</sup>

De Bolla’s idea of the sublime is somewhat exaggerated, especially as the term was applied in the descriptions of Shakespeare’s art. Key to this period’s conception of Shakespeare’s characters as sublime creations is how local, accidental and changing institutions and customs do not confine the passions that are the heart of these fictional characters. The passions exhibited in Shakespeare’s characters are not to be confused with fashionable manners or the artificial civility ubiquitous in society; rather, these passions are perceived as universal qualities that motivate all human action, beyond a particular time and place. This is why Johnson calls them “general passions” by which “all minds are agitated.” Above all, critics approved of Shakespeare’s characters because, as Johnson writes, they embody true properties of human nature, they are “just representations of general nature,” and the “genuine progeny of a common humanity” (7: 61-62). His characters are ordinary, but not *too* ordinary, not as ordinary perhaps as actual people who are “modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or

---

<sup>17</sup> De Bolla analyzes a particular moment of the sublime in British history (the 1760s). He limits his investigation to a pre-Kantian subjectivity, thereby rejecting those like Samuel Holt Monk who would unify the eighteenth-century British school through the lens of the Kantian critical project.

professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions” (7: 62). Nevertheless, Shakespeare’s art achieved a sense of individuality in the portrayal of character. Indeed, the greatest aspect of Shakespeare’s characters is that they are individuals, “diversified with boundless invention,” who endure universal passions that can be commonly imagined by a reading public (7: 135).

Like real individuals, Shakespeare’s sublime characters are not entirely unbound and detached from the regulation of fictional social structures within the plays; eighteenth-century readers did not view them as totally self-reflexive, as Bloom or De Bolla might posit. When Maurice Morgann analyzes Falstaff, for example, he wonders whether the character received the proper education and discipline as a youth (18). Not only were characters imagined within the social and institutional structures of the plays, but readers also considered Shakespearean characters within the social and institutional structures of their own society as they struggled to make sense of the tensions and uncertainties bred therein. Specifically, readers analyzed a character’s passions within their own experience of a domesticated public sphere. By studying the passions represented so masterfully by Shakespeare, audiences could learn how to refine their own emotions to accommodate their private desires and interests to the public good.

The capacity for engaging audiences emotionally hinged on Shakespeare’s knowledge of human nature, down to its basic components, the passions. In the practice of character formation considered in the previous chapter, refining one’s passions was akin to shaping moral character. Shakespeare was celebrated for his power to move the passions across the whole range of experience. Alexander Mackenzie pointed out that Shakespeare’s genius “gives him an opportunity of delineating the passions and affections of the human mind, as they exist in reality with all the various colourings which they receive in the mixed scenes of

life,” whereas most poets only describe “one great undivided impression” (*Mirror*, No. 100, April 22, 1780). Shakespeare combined “all the possibilities of human action with all the varieties of situation and passion” (Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 2: 288). Francis Gentleman found Shakespeare “minutely correct in mental operations” (no. 243, note 47), and George Steevens celebrated Shakespeare’s “intimate acquaintance with every passion that soothes or ravages, exalts or debases the human mind” (no. 265, note 7). Similarly, Pope contends that Shakespeare’s characterizations embody “that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends” (1: iv). Johnson writes of Shakespeare’s art of portraying “genuine passions”:

As his personages act upon principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places; they are natural, and therefore durable; the adventitious peculiarities of personal habits, are only superficial dyes, bright and pleasing for a little while, yet soon fading to a dim tinct, without any remains of former lustre; but the discriminations of true passion are the colours of nature; they pervade the whole mass, and can only perish with the body that exhibits them. (7: 69-70)

Here, Johnson distinguishes “genuine passions” as universal and natural rather than belonging to a particular society, polished by an aesthetic system, or the quirky traits of an individual. While Shakespeare’s characters were viewed as socially grounded, as explored above, the universal quality of the passions nevertheless suggests a shared humanity that allows for the development of sympathy, and which makes it easier for readers to imagine characters within the social context of their own period.



Though Shakespeare's art of characterization was lauded as possessing universal qualities that reached across time and culture, he was also praised for his success in creating the impression of unique individuality, as much as people are unique in real life. Warburton writes that Shakespeare, "[w]ho widely excelling in the Knowledge of Human Nature, hath given to his infinitely varied Pictures of it, such Truth of Design, such Force of Drawing, such Beauty of Colouring" (1: xiii). Theobald highlights Shakespeare's original characters when he claims: "What Draughts of nature! What Variety of Originals, and how differing each from the other!" (1: iii). For Pope, each Shakespearean character "is as much an Individual, as those in Life itself" (1: iii). While Shakespeare seemed to create unique, individual characters, his genius rests in his ability to portray characters with this fine balance of the unique and particular qualities on one hand, and shared universal qualities on the other.

Shakespeare's creations are ideally located between the generalized types and particularized caricatures commonly found in eighteenth-century character-essays. In portraying individuals, Shakespeare moves beyond the simplistic portrayal of social, moral, or psychological types, but creates beings whose identity is as unfixed and changing as those in real life. Elizabeth Montagu especially focuses on this quality of her poet's characters. In her investigation of Henry IV, for example, she writes: "The peculiar temper and circumstances of the person, and the exigency of the time, influence the speaker as in real life. It is not only the king and parent, but Henry Plantagenet, that chides the Prince of Wales" (96). Here Montagu points to Henry's various private and public roles and acknowledges that each of these contributes to the king's identity as a whole. He is "the affectionate father, the offended king, the provident politician, and the conscious usurper" all united in one (97). Shakespeare's characters are not "formed on one simple principle" that is steady and undeviating. Like his

eighteenth-century counterparts, Henry IV changes as his passions are “controlled and forced into many deviations by various incidental dispositions and humours” (112). The peculiar features of Shakespeare’s characters make them more than types; rather, their characters shift into various roles that were sometimes private and sometimes public in their definition, just as eighteenth-century audiences were building character across ambiguous boundaries of shifting ideas of the private and public.

Shakespeare’s characterization thus lent itself to eighteenth-century conversations about moral development that occurred within the social context of a commercialized domestic sphere. The natural and sublime qualities of Shakespeare’s authentic representations offered access to a powerful portrayal of the raw passions that motivate human action. In real, everyday life, these passions might otherwise be hidden under a mask of politeness, or a person’s own self-interest might obscure a careful study of their own passions. In Shakespeare’s drama, however, the passions were ripe for scrutiny. Moreover, since Shakespeare’s works often lacked clear moral messages in accordance with neoclassical criteria, the motivations and actions of characters provoked closer study and conversation by which readers might hone their sense of taste and grow more experienced in making their own moral judgments. The next section will focus on the criticism of Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Montagu, and Elizabeth Griffith to illustrate how the dialogue inspired by Shakespearean character registers contemporary ideas about identity formation and morality in eighteenth-century commercialized public culture.

### **“Oeconomical Prudence”: Shakespeare’s Characters in the Domestic Public Sphere**

Samuel Johnson’s *Preface* and *Notes* to his edition of Shakespeare’s works (1765), Elizabeth Montagu’s *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, Compared With the*

*Greek and French Dramatic Poets* (1769), and Elizabeth Griffith's *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775) are all works that closely examine Shakespeare's plays and are formatively influenced by the positive socializing processes that ideally sought to refine and educate the moral character of England's citizens. These works reflect various elements of Hume's "conversable" world in which tastes are improved and moral judgments formed; in fact, these three authors even play the role of the impartial spectator or man of taste (or woman, in the defiant cases of Montagu and Griffith) in guiding the reader's taste. They all aim to educate the common reader, regardless of class or gender, in the circumstances of a new commercial society. These works also register the anxiety associated with luxury, especially the problem of hypocrisy that was such a predominant topos in the literature of the era. When evaluating Shakespeare's characters, the commentators tend to focus mostly on the passions and the behaviour they inspire in order to establish acceptable standards of social conduct. Shakespeare's critics thus located their author's works in the everyday life of the domesticated public sphere with its interconnection of private and public interests.

The rhetoric used to describe the moral potential of Shakespeare's plays suggests the "formal domestication" of morality, to return to McKeon's theory. As a result of the interconnection of private and public values in this period, public morality became rooted in the ethos of the domestic life. Indeed, Johnson, Montagu and Griffith all point to the "practical axioms" and "domestick wisdom" that abound in Shakespeare's opus; Johnson even claims that a "system of civil and oeconomical prudence" might be collected from the plays (7: 62). Griffith highlights the domestic nature of her criticism when she extends Johnson's allegory of Shakespeare as a wild forest. She likens his plays "to an intermixture of the physic with the kitchen garden, where both food and medicine may be culled from the same spot" (ix). This

metaphor is telling of Griffith's own code of morality; she offers wisdom found in her own backyard—she analyzes characters' behaviour and interactions not to form an ethical system but to highlight the “general oeconomy of life and manners,” and most especially, those “moral duties which are the truest source of mortal bliss—domestic ties, offices and obligations” (xii-xiii). Johnson attributes this brand of morality to Shakespeare's learning. The author's genius was not pedantic or formed in a library; his knowledge “was such as books did not supply” (in fact, the playwright's scant knowledge of Latin and Greek was a shortcoming eighteenth-century critics never tired of citing). Rather, in a Lockean fashion, his knowledge of human nature came as a result of his experience in the world, by “mingling as he could in its business and amusements,” or what was referred to by David Hume as the “conversable world” of eighteenth-century society (7: 88). Johnson explains that Shakespeare's language and style also arises from the “common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood, without ambition of elegance” (7: 70). His conversation is described as any person's of the middling rank might have been: it was “above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides” (7: 70).<sup>18</sup> In his work, Shakespeare made private, domestic concerns public.

Appropriately, the business and amusements of common life and common people, rather than what is particular to kings and princes, are central to Shakespeare criticism of this period. For example, Johnson asserts that *Timon of Athens* is especially gripping, that it “strongly fastens on the attention of the reader,” because it is a domestic tragedy (8: 745). Elizabeth

---

<sup>18</sup> This biographical approach to Shakespeare seems odd to us today and shows that he was evaluated as a character in his own right, just as much as the characters in his plays were.

Griffith frequently expostulates on the state of marriage, “the dearest and most social connection of life” (524); in fact, she spends most of her commentary on *Othello* elucidating what went wrong with the tragic couple and how the same fate might be avoided in luckier unions. Education is also the “first” and “*principal* [...] concern in life,” a matter Griffith discusses with considerable detail in the context of reading *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and *Two Gentleman of Verona* (69). She lectures on various aspects of education: tutors should not only instruct children, but offer a living example of how to act (6-7); men should spend more time educating themselves and their families than training their horses and hounds (69); education alone “forms the different manners allotted to the sexes, rendering men brave and preserving women chaste,” so much so, that if the point of honour between them was exchanged “you will fill the world with amazons and dastards,” a reversal of gender roles that was considered especially enervating to society in the eighteenth century (31). Griffith even offers advice on polite conversation between generations. In her examination of *2 Henry 4*, Griffith reprimands Hotspur for rudely dismissing the conversation of Shallow and Silence as “bold unjointed chat.” She encourages the young to be more patient with their “time-honoured” elders when they indulge in “the fond and vain boastings of their youthful frolics” because this habit is “charactersitical [*sic.*] of old age” and not peculiar to any specific person. At the same time, she warns the older generation about “rendering themselves too tedious” (242-43).

Johnson and Montagu also discuss Shakespeare within a domesticated context. Both critics argue that the betrayal of Lear by his own family is the main reason audiences sympathize with this character; the downfall of a king and the loss of royalty are secondary in evoking an audience’s compassion. Johnson writes: “Lear would move our compassion but

little, did we not rather consider the injured father than the degraded king” (8: 705). In an examination of Oedipus Coloneus against King Lear under the rubric of filial ingratitude, Montagu concludes that Lear elicits more sympathy and affection than his classical counterpart: “Sophocles makes Oedipus expostulate with his undutiful sons. The injured parent exposes the enormity of filial disobedience; sets forth the duties of this relation in a very strong and lively manners,” but he is so violent that audiences feel more indignation than sympathy; whereas Lear immediately exposes to us his own feelings by which we perceive how deeply his paternal affection is wounded (34-35). Lear’s private role as father is given more prominence in this criticism than his public role as king. This focus is important to the educational project of shaping a morality of everyday life for a reading public that included predominantly private people: in order to improve tastes, readers must be able to imagine and identify with the emotions of the person concerned in the action. Although few could sympathize with the plight of toppled royalty, many well knew the bite of ungrateful children.

Samuel Johnson was more concerned than previous editors in asserting the democratic nature of taste and in cultivating judgment in his readers. In his edition of Shakespeare’s plays, he acknowledges the reader’s capability of exercising and improving the aesthetic sense, while simultaneously offering himself as a guide to less-experienced readers:

Judgement, like other faculties, is improved by practice, and its advancement is hindered by submission to dictatorial decisions, as the memory grows torpid by the use of a table book. Some initiation is however necessary; of all skill, part is infused by precept, and part is obtained by habit; I have therefore shewn so much as may enable the candidate of criticism to discover the rest. (7: 104)

Following this pedagogical principle, Johnson encourages his “candidates of criticism” to avoid his notes altogether on their first perusal, to “read on through brightness and obscurity” the sublime qualities of Shakespeare’s work, so that they might enjoy “the highest pleasure that the drama can give.” Only after the “pleasures of novelty” subside should the readers engage with the text and its notes in a rational way (7: 111). The movement from immediate pleasure to a more elevated sense of pleasure is the very activity of a person’s taste, a movement Johnson subtly encourages throughout his commentary. Johnson claims that he will only lend the reader his assistance when a passage is obscure, yet he unreservedly hints at what readers should feel and think when reading certain passages, thereby regulating their reading habits. In response to Angelo’s escape from punishment in *Measure for Measure*, for example, Johnson confidently deduces that “every reader feels some indignation when he finds him spared” (7: 213). Though Johnson admits that every reader possesses the faculty of taste to enjoy Shakespeare’s works, his critical practice acknowledges that the common reader’s emotions require guidance “in the improvement of [...] moral sentiment” (8: 944).

Such instruction is offered the reader in a familiar and easy conversational style. As noted earlier, conversation and the exchange of opinions helped refine the passions and nurture social affections in civil society of the eighteenth century. Nicholas Phillipson writes: “Conversation was the essential skill Mr. Spectator sought to inculcate, of as much importance to his conception of moral education as eloquence had been to Cicero and to Renaissance humanists” (234). Shakespeare commentary of the period can also be read as a sort of social exchange between the critic and the reader. For instance, each of these commentators adopts Hume’s ideal position of the ambassador who shifts between the rigorous learning of the academic study and the social and “conversable” world. Johnson especially constructs an

authorial image of the “man of sympathy” in his writing, and he even champions a more civil and sympathetic approach to the tradition of editing Shakespeare’s texts. The second half of the *Preface*, in which Johnson reviews the works of earlier editors, is dedicated to proper methods of editing Shakespeare. Generous credit is given to Rowe for his insightful emendations whereas other critics before Johnson “clamorously blamed [Rowe] for not performing what he did not undertake” (7: 93). At the same time, previous editors are chided for being indecorously self-congratulatory after emending passages. Johnson is particularly indignant at the “triumphant exultations” and “spontaneous strain of invective and contempt” that critics exercise in correcting their predecessors (7: 96, 7: 102). In contrast, Johnson promotes himself as an editor of more even and delicate sensibilities when he assures readers of his own civil behaviour towards his colleagues:

They have all been treated by me with candour, which they have not been careful of observing to one another. It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed. The subjects to be discussed by him are of very small importance; they involve neither property nor liberty; nor favour the interest of sect or party. The various readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage, seem to be questions that might exercise the wit, without engaging the passions. (7: 102)

As a gentlemanly scholar, Johnson invites his readers to participate in a textual conversation. He coolly offers his colleagues’ editorial decisions to the reader along with his own, so that the reader “may have the means of better chusing for himself” from this collation the true explanation of Shakespeare’s meaning (“Proposals,” 7: 55). This posture of objective benevolence and self-command, which Johnson adopts throughout his Shakespeare project,



also reminds the reader of Smith's impartial spectator: in his project of shaping better readers, Johnson helps develop fellow-feeling and taste by example, so that his own editorial practices reflect the broader project of forming moral character.

Elizabeth Montagu's *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, Compared With the Greek and French Dramatic Poets* (1769) particularly evokes the language of the sympathetic imagination. As a female critic, Montagu treads carefully in the male-dominated field of Shakespeare studies; she humbly lauds the editorial and critical pursuits of her colleagues. However, Montagu's work is a direct challenge to Voltaire, who infamously rejected Shakespeare as an ignorant and barbaric writer "of monstrous farces" (2). Montagu's defense of Shakespeare is also a patriotic defense of England's national taste. Crucial to her argument for Shakespeare's superiority to French neoclassical drama is the moral efficacy of his art of characterization. Since Shakespeare's characters "are men" who "speak with human voices, are actuated by human passions, and are engaged in the common affairs of human life," Montagu concludes that we naturally take an interest in these characters, who are themselves "an instruction, their fates and fortunes an experience, their testimony an authority, and their misfortunes a warning" (81). Compared to Shakespeare, the declamatory, highly rhetorical style of French drama is unaffecting. Drama, says Montagu, should be "addressed to the imagination, through which it opens a communication to the heart, where it is to excite certain passions and affections" so that spectators "sympathize with the representation" (29-30). This is her ultimate defense of Shakespeare: "that to acquire an empire over the passions, it was well worth to relinquish some pretensions for excellencies of less efficiency on the stage" (277). "Pretensions" and "bon mots" are pejoratively linked to a perverse sort of reason throughout Montagu's invective, as she impresses upon her "attentive reader" the moral reasoning in

Shakespeare's works (114). She especially appreciates Shakespeare's capacity to teach by delighting; the poet's moral and aesthetic achievements are described as something *felt*, they do not fall neatly into any reasonable and systematic standard of measurement, but arise from the genuine sympathy agitated by the free expression of the passions.

In *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*, Elizabeth Griffith scours Shakespeare's plays in search of lessons to display before her readers. Sometimes she clarifies the moral meaning of a character's speech or action; at other times, she quotes a lengthy passage and faithfully leaves it to the reader to "separate or distinguish" useful reflections and precepts (183). Throughout her hunt for moral instruction, Griffith articulates some of the anxieties of the age, and especially voices concern over excessively refined behaviour and the disguise of genuine emotions and sentiments, in order to emphasize the urgency of studying the passions to create better readers:

The world at present is held more in trammels, than it formerly was.—

From our modes of education, policies, and breeding, our conduct and demeanour are become more sophisticate, our minds less candid, and actions more disguised. Our modern literary painters represent us such as we appear; but the genuine unadulterate heart can be moved by no affection, allied by no sympathy, with such factitious personages, such puppets of polity, such automata of modern refinement. (x)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the disparity between the appearance and the reality of people's moral character was a major anxiety of the era, and one Griffith brings up constantly. For example, Griffith voices her concern for this same problem when evaluating *Timon of Athens*. She quotes a line muttered by Apemantus upon witnessing an affected exchange of

friendship between Timon and Alcibiades: “that there should be small love amongst these sweet knaves, and / all this courtesy!” In response to this scene, Griffith quotes Sterne:

Sterne said of French politeness, that *it might be compared to a smoother coin; it had lost all marks of character*. To which I think we may add, that courtesy, like counters, by having attained a currency in the world, have come at length to bear an equal rate, we might say, a superior one, with pieces of intrinsic value; so that one who should make a difference between them in the *modern* traffic of life, would be looked upon as a mere *virtuoso*, who preferred an Otho to a Georgius. (383)

Here, Griffith points out how difficult it is to judge people’s true characters from how they represent themselves: determining someone’s inner qualities from outward show is like distinguishing between two seemingly identical ancient, worn coins that are actually of unequal value. There is no stable relationship between signifier and signified in a society where the mere performance of courtesy is tantamount to genuine affability.

In her review of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Griffith further indicates the complicated nature of the tension surrounding social performance. Griffith asserts that the achievement of virtue would be impossible without the niceties of social conduct: performance was a cause for anxiety, yet performing manners was necessary for the harmony of the social order and in the cultivation of taste and moral sympathy. Griffith points this out when she refers to Octavius’ dismay upon witnessing his sister’s modest return to Rome. Octavius is disappointed because he is unable to offer Octavia a suitable welcome. He laments that his sister has “prevented the ostentation of our love; / which, left unshewn, / Is often left unloved” (3.6.55-56). Griffith comments that a “warm affection within, naturally inspires correspondent emotions without,” and compares this show of feeling to “a sort of *setting* of the jewel, which not only ornaments,

but helps preserve it” (470). She explains that such “nice observances” can “be almost deemed *petites morales*” because they increase the mutual pleasures and confidences of love and friendships” that are the foundation for moral action. They are “the *comets* which feed the *sun*. Even virtue itself, all perfect as it is, requires to be inspirited by passion, for duties are but coldly performed which are philosophically fulfilled” (470). Here, Griffith is reiterating the notion that sympathy, and its expression through polite conduct, is the foundation of moral action. Of course, in order to be *really* virtuous, one must actually feel the passion that inspires virtue; in the same vein, one must understand the nature of passions in order to recognize true virtue.

For this reason, Shakespeare commentary of the period often reads like a study of emotions: how a passion affects a character, how the same passion influences characters differently, and how the passions are checked or regulated as a character is led to action are all aspects of affective response scrutinized in the study of Shakespeare’s plays. In an empirical mode, Johnson determines the most basic principles of the passions. In his notes on *Coriolanus*, he deduces that “the first emotions of nature are nearly uniform” and that “one man differs from another in the power of endurance, as he is better regulated by precept and instruction” (8: 813). The passions act as “agents” that provoke certain behaviour when felt, so that they require prudent guidance (8: 964). In examining *Othello*, and the intense love that drove Desdemona and Othello to a hasty marriage, Johnson observes that, when overwhelming passions are unregulated by a character, it is likely “the same violence of inclination which caused one irregularity” may produce another; those who have shown “their passions are too powerful for their prudence, will, with very slight appearances against them, be censured, as not very likely to restrain them by their virtue” (8: 1033). In this explanation, Johnson

accounts for Othello's unrestrained jealousy. The critic also points to Shakespeare's illustration of the false show of passion. In his notes on *Macbeth*, Johnson cites Macbeth's description of Duncan's murder: "—Here lay Duncan, / His silvery skin laced with his golden blood, / And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature, / For ruins wasteful entrance; there the murderers / Steep'd in colours of their trade, their daggers / Unmannerly breech'd with gore" (2.3.111-116). Macbeth's unnatural and forced use of metaphor is viewed as a sign of "artifice and dissimulation" that Shakespeare constructs in order to highlight the difference between "the studied language of hypocrisy" and "the natural outcries of sudden passion" (7: 23).

Johnson also explores how one passion, as it acts on an agent, can provoke various reactions. For instance, Johnson looks at different characters as they experience the complex emotion of grief. After the devastating loss of her son Arthur in *King John*, Constance laments that better comfort is not given her: "Had you such a loss as I" she says to her interlocutors, "I could give better comfort than you do" (3.4.99). Johnson writes: "This is a sentiment which great sorrow always dictates. Whoever cannot help himself casts his eyes on others for assistance, and often mistakes their inability for coldness" (7: 422). Yet, Richard II endures his grief in an entirely different manner: he vows to "hate him everlastingly / That bids me be of comfort any more" (3.2.207). In response to this, Johnson declares: "This sentiment is drawn from nature. Nothing is more offensive to a mind convinced that his distress is without a remedy, and preparing to submit quietly to irresistible calamity, than these petty and conjectured comforts which unskillful officiousness thinks it virtue to administer" (7: 441-442). Meanwhile, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Leonato is so overwhelmed by grief at his daughter Hero's disgrace that "a thread may lead him" (4.1.258-9). Johnson comments:

How is it that grief in Leonato and Lady Constance, produces effects directly opposite, and yet both agreeable to nature. Sorrow softens the mind while it is yet warmed by hope, but hardens it when it is congealed by despair. Distress, while there remains any prospect of relief, is weak and flexible, but when no succour remains, is fearless and stubborn; angry alike at those that injure, and at those who do not help; careless to please where nothing can be gained, and fearless to offend when there is nothing further to be dreaded. Such was this writer's knowledge of the passions. (7: 415)

Johnson helps the reader understand the various dimensions of grief experienced by characters in their different circumstances. He teaches the reader that passions operate diversely, so that when making moral judgments, one must remember to consider the situation of the principal person involved, just as Isabella articulates to Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, when she reminds him: "we cannot weigh our brother with yourself" (2.2.126).

While passions vary with particular circumstances, they also combine and conflict within individuals, making the study of emotions no easy task for the uninitiated reader, as Montagu notes:

In human nature, of which Shakespeare's characters are a just imitation, every passion is controlled and forced into many deviations by various incidental dispositions and humours. The operations of this complicated machine are far more difficult to trace, than the steady undeviating line of the artificial character formed on one simple principle. (112)

Characters in the works of other authors turn "on the same hinge" and describe "like a piece of clockwork a regular circle of movements" (112). Such characters are formed predominantly of

one passion; they are “always the patriot, the lover, or the conqueror” (112). Shakespeare, on the other hand, depicts his personages in the style of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary definition of character: “a representation of any man as to his personal qualities; the person with his assemblage of qualities.” For example, the roles of “the affectionate father, the offended king, the provident politician, and the conscious usurper” are all united in the character of Henry IV (96). Each of these roles brings with it attendant passions and concerns that are sometimes in conflict with each other. Montagu reflects the composite nature of character when she compares Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to Corneille’s *Cinna*. Brutus and Cinna are drawn in the same situation (they are both conspiring against their leader) but, Montagu argues, Shakespeare limns Brutus so that he “excites the sympathies and concerns proper to the story” where Corneille fails. While Brutus is not a paragon of virtue, his role in the play strikes the reader as more than vicious assassin. The art of Brutus in killing Caesar was more ambiguous than simple ambition:

Our author, therefore, shews great judgment in taking various opportunities to display the softness and gentleness of Brutus: the little circumstance of his forbearing to awaken the servant who was playing to him on the lute, is very beautiful; for one cannot conceive, that he whose tender humanity, respected the slumber of his boy Lucilius, would from malice or cruelty, have cut short the important and illustrious course of Caesar’s life. (275)

In this instance, Montagu encourages the reader to judge Brutus in his private role as the benevolent master as the real projection of his moral character rather than in his public role as a rebellious citizen.

In her own turn, Elizabeth Griffith condemns Brutus for adhering to the stoical virtues of a public citizen, or what she later pejoratively calls “metaphysical braveries,” in his decision to assassinate Caesar (462). Her logic follows the hypothesis of Hume and other eighteenth-century moral philosophers: if something does not *feel* right, then it is probably wrong. Within the system of stoical virtues, Griffith decides: “The sympathy of nature is wanting, and true philosophy has good reason to suspect every principle or motive of action to be sophisticate, that bears not this *original impression*,” refined as that feeling may be (462). Had Brutus heeded his sense of doubt in conspiring against his leader, his actions would have been otherwise. Similarly, Montagu proposes that “sentiment” is what weakens Lady Macbeth’s resolve to kill Duncan when she sees a resemblance between the sleeping king and her father. Despite her exaggerated fierceness, a “sudden impression” is made on her that has “an instantaneous effect” of returning her to the proper “line and limits of humanity”; however, because her sensibility is not properly tutored, she “may relapse into her former wickedness” and is “by the force of other impressions,” driven to desperate madness (200). This is a prevalent point brought up time and again in the evaluation of Shakespeare’s characters: in making moral judgments, people must depend, to a degree, on their moral sentiments, their feelings of right and wrong. When passions are misguided by sophistry, characters make inappropriate judgments. People must therefore also rely on each other for self-perception, or at least on the idea of an impartial spectator or stand-in for the public when determining the proper course of behaviour.

Johnson describes the passions as a force that impels people to act in certain ways. Reason helps guide the passions, though at times selfish passions mislead the rational faculty into sophistry, the sort of self-delusion Shaftesbury warns of and suggests requires brutal self-



scrutiny to vanquish. Consider Claudio's conduct when Isabella informs him of Angelo's ultimatum: if Isabella accedes to Angelo's sexual advances, he will pardon Claudio. Claudio is initially indignant at Angelo's proposal, but "the love of life being permitted to operate, soon furnishes him with sophistical arguments, he believes it cannot be very dangerous to the soul, since Angelo, who is so wise, will venture it" (7: 196). Don John of *Much Ado About Nothing* is especially self-deluded when he asserts: "I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure" (1.3.11). Johnson lauds Shakespeare for this "natural touch" in describing "an envious and unsocial mind, too proud to give pleasure, and too sullen to receive it," that "always endeavours to hide its malignity from the world and from itself, under the plainness of simple honesty, or the dignity of haughty independence" (7: 362). In summarizing the character of King John, Johnson expounds on this theme: "[...] bad men use all the arts of fallacy upon themselves, palliate their actions to their minds by gentle terms, and hide themselves from their own detection in ambiguities and subterfuges" (7: 425).

This type of sophistry is especially elucidated in the art of Shakespeare's soliloquy, in which "one sentiment produces another" so that the reader may candidly witness the passions' effect upon the mind (8: 981). This is also Shaftesbury's purpose in advocating the use of soliloquy in exercising self-scrutiny. The same process of overcoming self-delusion is clear in Johnson's examination of Posthumus' soliloquy of uneven self-recrimination. In this speech, which "seems to issue warm from the heart," Posthumus "first condemns his own violence" but his own self-interest leads him to "disburden himself, by imputing part of the crime to Pisanio" after which he tries to coax "his mind to artificial and momentary tranquility, by trying to think that he has been only an instrument of the gods for the happiness of Imogen"; as he continues

the soliloquy, Posthumus thinks on his standing among men: “Let me make men know / More valour in me, than my habits show” (8: 902). By the end, he has “grown reasonable enough to determine, that having done so much evil he will do no more” (8: 902). In this instance, the reader first witnesses Posthumus as he *feels* the wrongness of his actions, after which he falls into sophistical arguments before arriving at the truth of his situation. Since our selfish passions are prone to mislead us, the general opinion of others (even if only an imagined impartial spectator) is crucial in forming moral judgments.

Griffith reiterates this in her reading of *The Comedy of Errors*. When Antipholos is barred entry from his home because of a misunderstanding with his wife and servants, he is cautioned by his friend not to angrily force his way in. Griffith writes: “In a passage here, there is a sentiment of great propriety and delicacy argued upon; in the dissuading a person from the commission of an unseemly action, even though the thing itself might be sufficiently justified in one’s own breast. A respect to decency, and the opinion of the world, is an excellent bulwark to our virtues” (144). Harmonizing the passions of self and other is also essential to educating the passions. In a note on *2 Henry IV*, Johnson writes: “Those who are vexed to impatience are angry to see others less disturbed than themselves, but when others begin to rave, they immediately see in them, what they could not find in themselves, the deformity and folly of useless rage” (8: 590). This is reminiscent of Smith’s actor / spectator dichotomy—moral refinement is an interdependent activity in which one must imagine oneself through the eyes of another objective party.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Even Shakespeare’s motivations are treated like those of his characters. In response to the skepticism of Theobald and Warburton, who suspected the *Henriad* was not Shakespeare’s, Johnson argues otherwise. He gathers evidence from within the plays

At first glance, this mode of reading might suggest that critics imbued Shakespeare's plays with their own bourgeois morality. In some instances, this is certainly the case. When Elizabeth Griffith pauses in her work to assess the banquet scene in *Macbeth*, she does not highlight the fact that the guilty Macbeth is beginning to receive retribution when Banquo's ghost appears. Instead, she praises Lady Macbeth, who beautifully demonstrates "the true spirit of hospitality" in chiding her husband's neglect of his dinner guests (416). Griffith also oddly focuses on "a just and spirited maxim" picked from the passage that details the murder of the two young princes in *Richard III*: "in difficult matters, quick resolves and brisk actions generally succeed better than slow counsels and circumspect conduct" (319). The *frisson* elicited in these haunting descriptions of ghosts and murder is left unmentioned by the critic who professes to depend so much on emotional judgment. In fact, there is a tension in Griffith's decision to ignore the horror of these scenes in order to focus on polite conduct. Here interpretation resembles the broader practice of downplaying the base qualities of commerce in order to highlight its civilizing potential.

Though there are certainly instances of blatantly ideological appropriation of Shakespeare's meaning, his plays also inspired important conversations about morality, the

---

themselves and considers this testimony enough that they were indeed Shakespeare's.

For further corroboration, Johnson reminds the dubious critics that his first editors had ascribed these plays to Shakespeare, and he reminds them that Shakespeare makes allusions to these plays in others. He also notes: "If it be objected that the plays were popular, and therefore he alluded to them as well known; it may be answered, with equal probability, that the natural passions of a poet would have disposed him to separate his own works for those of an inferior hand" (7: 611-612).

passions, and private and public character. Johnson, Montagu and Griffith drew readers into a virtual conversation about moral agency within a domesticated public sphere and encouraged readers to cultivate their own taste and sympathetic imagination.

### **“Imaginary Expansion” and Shakespeare’s Cleopatra**

While Johnson, Montagu, and Griffith imagined characters according to their own contemporary experience, as well as within the dramatic structure of the play, other writers removed characters completely from Shakespeare’s plays. This allowed Shakespeare’s eighteenth-century audiences to evaluate his characters according to the idiom of their own time without any resistance from the original text. This form of Shakespearean character criticism also demonstrates a motivation to arrive at a comprehensive view of the psychology of Shakespeare’s characters. Eighteenth-century readers often invented additional stories and performances for some of the most celebrated characters of the period, including many of Shakespeare’s own creations. In his fascinating book, *The Afterlife of Character*, David Brewer coins this practice “imaginative expansion”: “an umbrella term for an array of reading practices in eighteenth-century Britain by which the characters in widely successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all” (1). In this practice, readers remove characters from the plays and novels to which they were born to explore their motivations in new situations and circumstances. While the speculation of what motivates character and how a character should properly behave shares much in common with the examination of character in the commentary of Shakespeare’s plays, this mode of reading allows readers to evaluate characters playfully in other life experiences. Brewer emphasizes how this trend of “imaginative expansion” suggests the sociability in reading practices. Thus, reading characters is not a solitary activity, but is social and public in its own way: “far from

being essentially alone, many of these readers seem to have readily imagined themselves as part of a larger virtual and occasionally *actual* community devoted to the sharing and circulation of these further adventures” (5).

The practice of imaginative expansion reads as a fanciful, creative pursuit rather than serious criticism. Nevertheless, it empowers readers to imagine characters within the context of the anxieties of their own age. As “presentist” Shakespeare criticism has recently shown, the critical idiom of the present is stored in the critical idiom of the past. This means that rather than reading Shakespeare historically and limiting interpretations to the conditions of a literary text’s production, presentist criticism argues for the importance of engaging with literature in relation to current affairs. Eighteenth-century readers desired to understand Shakespeare in his own context, as the myriad scholarly editions devoted to excavating the meaning of his plays within an early modern context demonstrate, but they also sought to understand Shakespeare’s characters in their own social context to help them navigate the anxieties that accompanied modernity. Certain Shakespearean characters lent themselves more readily than others when readers confronted their own apprehensions about modernity. For example, Falstaff was arguably Shakespeare’s most popular character in the eighteenth century; chapter four will provide an extensive examination of this character’s reception and meaning in the period, especially as he represented the problem of arousing pleasure and admiration in his audiences, despite his cowardice and deceit. Eighteenth-century audiences likewise viewed Cleopatra as a character that symbolized anxieties of a commercialized public sphere.

Shakespeare’s famously passionate queen is perhaps more prominently known than Shakespeare’s other characters for unfixing any stable sense of gender roles. Cleopatra

represented the sort of fashionable lady who, as critics like John Brown and John Dennis lamented, had a dangerous effeminizing effect on society. After all, it was she who took Mark Anthony, “the greatest soldier in the World,” “the demi-Atlas of the World,” indeed, the very embodiment of manhood operating in the political public sphere, and reduced him to “a strumpet’s fool” (1.3.38, 1.5.23, 1.1.13). Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is vivacious and intoxicating, but she is also self-indulgent and frivolous. She cares more for her own romance, billiards, fishing, and music, than for the good of her people (2.5). Such private passion and self-interest were conceived as potentially beneficial to the public order *if* they were properly directed. A character like Cleopatra represents the anxiety of what might befall a nation overwhelmed with pernicious pleasure and narcissism.

Sarah Fielding’s *The History of Cleopatra and Octavia*, published in 1757, explores ideal female conduct by creating “the strongest Contrast of any Ladies celebrated in History,” demonstrating to her readers the danger of effeminate self-interest and luxury to a nation (41). In this account, the theatricality of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra lends itself to an exploration of artifice and false display sometimes associated with luxury, whereas Octavia represents an ideal character because there is no distance between her inner self and public expression; rather, her self interests and passions are directed toward social ends. The anxiety created by the fusion of private and public is apparent throughout this narrative. Fielding’s dedication to the Countess of Pomfret flags Cleopatra as an egoistic vixen: “Cleopatra presents us with the abandoned Consequences, and the fatal Catastrophe, of an haughty, false, and intriguing Woman; whose only Views were to exert her Charms, and prostitute her Power, to the Gratification of a boundless Vanity and Avarice, without Regard to the Ruin of her country, or the Sufferings of others” (41). Octavia, on the other hand, is a model woman. With dignity

and a “Delicacy of [...] Manners,” she is also “of a truly *Roman* Spirit, in sacrificing her private life to the public Good” (41). Fielding hopes that by studying these characters, her readers will learn about “the secret Springs and Motives of their Actions,” and “the Manners of human Nature, and customs of the World” without having to sully themselves in “the Intrigues of Policy” or the “Arts of Lovers” (54). She prizes the realism of her characters, and echoes Shaftesbury and Adam Smith in evaluating them as “true Mirrours” that “reflect the real Images of our Persons” (55). However, “real” people are prone to self-deceit and partiality in recounting their own stories. For this reason, Fielding uses an interesting narrative technique to arrive at an illusion of verity in her characters’ accounts. She suggests that, because Octavia and Cleopatra are long dead and have had time to reflect as shades in the Underworld, they would likely reveal their true characters, their secret motives and actions.

Indeed, Cleopatra confesses at the beginning of her narrative that she was blinded by her passions, though she has achieved a sense of clarity in her death: “I am at present possessed of this Knowledge, and shall obey your irresistible Command, in giving you a true Picture of myself” (56). Having cast off her earthly vanity, Cleopatra proceeds to regale the reader with a true account of her life. It is clear from her early upbringing under the rule of a doting father, who did little to curb her naturally selfish disposition, that Cleopatra’s lack of a sympathetic education is the root of her tragic flaw. She claims: “The Pleasures and Pains of others were to me of so little Importance, that I lived as if I had been the only Creature on Earth who had any Sensation” (56). Along with this stunted sense of sympathy, Cleopatra’s “darling Passion” was pride, which caused her to indulge in artifice and luxury so that “No art, no Ornament, no Grace was omitted, that might leave a strong Impression of my Accomplishments” (57, 60). Her pride and self-interest grew beyond the bounds of admiration at court, and gave rise to

more political ambitions: “Kings and Emperors, who could lay at my Feet Crowns and Sceptres, were the sole Objects of my elevated Spirit and boundless Ambition” (60). To convey the spirit of the Egyptian queen’s “manly” and public ambition, Fielding uses a military trope when describing Cleopatra’s “Artillery of Love” against Anthony (60). By enervating the passions of her prey with luxury and pleasure, Cleopatra provokes the desires of great men and so controls them in their state of weakened reason. Fielding’s Cleopatra thus transgresses the domestic duties associated with eighteenth-century femininity: rather than acting as an agent of moral improvement in the domestic sphere, her untutored self-interest fosters effeminacy in the public sphere. Furthermore, Cleopatra is a master of deception: “by Tricks and Deceit,” she says of Anthony, “I should rule him for the Remainder of his Life” (62).

Fielding seems to delight in Cleopatra’s decadence and her artful seduction of the hearts of men. The author dwells on famous instances of Cleopatra’s theatricality, such as her concealment in a featherbed to pass through the castle gates to Julius’ Caesar’s apartment, or her dress-up games with Anthony (2.5.18-35). Any doubt Shakespeare’s Cleopatra might have about Anthony’s love is in Fielding’s text presented merely as a false display of jealousy to convince Anthony of her emotions. Anthony, in his turn, is a dupe for these artifices. Cleopatra describes Anthony as an easy mark: “He was naturally sincere, though somewhat slow of Apprehension,” and honest, “naturally of a very open Disposition” without any fear of deceit (63-64). Moreover, Anthony had a “greedy Love of Pleasure,” and serves as a warning for Fielding’s readers of what befalls a man who gratifies his desires “without any Regard to the Justice or Injustice of his Actions” (65). As a man guided wholly by his passions, Anthony was ripe for manipulation, a sport Fielding’s Cleopatra delights in. While Shakespeare’s Cleopatra might be forgiven her faults and tantrums for the wonderfully intoxicating love she



bore Anthony, Fielding's queen claims she has no affection at all for her Roman soldier, but only puts on an "appearance of Fondness" (64). She coldly confesses: "I had, in plain Truth, no other value for this great Hero, than as he was the means of my Power, and the Instrument of my Ambition" (64). Moreover, unlike so many representations of a jovial and benevolent Falstaff in the eighteenth century, and certainly unlike Shakespeare's own Cleopatra, Fielding's character exhibits no *joie de vivre* in her theatricalities and game-playing—everything is a calculated ruse to keep Anthony from reflecting reasonably on his proper duties. Indeed, Fielding re-envision the famous lovers' story so as to reveal Cleopatra motivated at every turn by her ambition for power, not by her love for Anthony. Only after Octavius defeats Anthony does Cleopatra realize "with horrid Reflection" that "Infamy and Scorn were like to be the Reward" if she betrayed Anthony openly in seeking clemency, rather than her favourite title as "Mistress of the World" (121). Thus Fielding rewrites the end of Shakespeare's play as Cleopatra laments: "my only Refuge was to die with *Anthony*, and to glory in the Appearance of being faithful to him; though my Life had been One continued Series of Treachery and Deceit (120). In contrast to the heightened drama and emotion of Shakespeare's own final scenes, Fielding's narrative ends rather anticlimactically as Cleopatra succinctly and rationally declares: "I wrote a Letter to Caesar, most earnestly entreating that I might be buried in the same Tomb as Anthony; for I imagined this would preserve the Appearance of my dying for Love of him. I then invited the welcome Serpent to execute its friendly Office" (125). In the context of eighteenth-century practices of sympathy and sensibility, Cleopatra's propensity to place her own self-interest and desire for political power above all else is deplorable and unwomanly.

As Cleopatra retreats, Dido-like, into the shades of the Underworld, Octavia steps forth to present herself as a virtuous foil to the Egyptian Queen. In contrast to the theatricalities and deceit of her rival, Octavia is a sincere woman “of the greatest Simplicity imaginable” (76). Moreover, she is truly Roman in her capacity to control her passions, an important lesson taught her from childhood (126). Unlike Cleopatra, who revels in altering public affairs to her own ends, Octavia speaks of her girlhood dread that politics would trespass on the tranquility of her domestic life. She confesses, “My predominant Passion was Love; and the highest Notion I could form of Happiness, was a private Life, with a Husband who was agreeable to my Inclinations, and capable of a reciprocal Affection” (126). Octavia expresses no ambition but to create a peaceful domestic life, and she describes her ideal first marriage to a moderate, tasteful and sympathetic man, Marcellus, who “never hurried into those Transports or Excesses, which distract the Mind, and discompose the Tranquility of human life,” and whose amusements always stimulated his imagination (128). Fielding provides a foil to Anthony in this more upright Roman. Tragically, the happy union ends when Marcellus dies of fever. Fielding creates a poignant contrast between Octavia and Cleopatra as they respectively reveal their true feelings at the death of their beloveds. Cleopatra is full of artifice and cunning and thinks only of how she might preserve her reputation; any sadness expressed for Anthony is a display of crocodile tears. Octavia, of course, is earnestly devoted to her husband and heartbroken at his passing; she expresses her desire to retire from public life to take care of her children, again reinforcing prescribed female roles. However, Octavia’s personal desires are sacrificed to the public good when she marries Anthony, at her brother’s request, to bring harmony and peace to Rome by creating a stronger alliance between the two men. This union makes Octavia an object of pity as she endures Anthony’s mistrust, surliness, and abuse as he

pires for Cleopatra. Despite this ill treatment, Octavia ends her tale with the announcement that she properly reared all of Anthony's children by Cleopatra and loved them well.

Fielding's Octavia is an honest woman with simple tastes, preferring domestic responsibility to pleasure, and holding her role as mother and wife as her greatest duty to the nation.

This character's artful manipulations are likewise explored by Elizabeth Montagu in "A Dialogue Between Bérénice and Cleopatra," written in 1760.<sup>20</sup> Like Fielding's playful history of the character's life, Montagu shows Cleopatra as a shade in Hades in conversation with Racine's Bérénice. The two women share a significant connection in that they are both foreign queens to Roman rulers. Though Titus is in love with Bérénice, the Queen of Palestine, he rejects her out of a sense of duty to the Roman people, who disapprove of their leader's union to an outsider. Montagu's dialogue begins with Bérénice inquiring of Cleopatra what she had done differently to win over her Roman lovers. Cleopatra responds with the same self-awareness allotted Fielding's character in Hades: "The scorns of Octavius, the bite of the asp, & the waters of Lethe have so subdued my female vanity, that I will own to you I greatly suspect my better success with my Lover did not arise so much from my charms being superior to yours, as my skills in the management of them." Bérénice confides that she truly loved Titus, and that all her "qualities and accomplishments" were dedicated to her lover, yet she was "sacrificed to low murmurs of the people, and the cautious counsels of grey-headed statesmen." Cleopatra responds with the regret that she could not assist her interlocutor so many years ago: "I would have taught you those arts by which I enslaved the soul of Anthony,

---

<sup>20</sup> All quotes in this section are drawn from "A Dialogue Between Bérénice and Cleopatra." C. 1760. MO 2998 (box 37). Huntington Library. I have not found any other critical analyses of this unpublished manuscript.

and brought ambition and the Roman Eagles to lye at my feet.” Compared to Cleopatra’s coquettish nature, Bérénice declares herself incapable of artifice in love:

From Titus’ perfections one learn’d to love in reality beyond whatever fiction  
pretended; no feign’d complaisance could imitate my sympathy: if he sigh’d I  
wept, if he was grave I grew melancholy, if he sicken’d I dyed. My heart echoed  
his praises, it beat for his glory, it rejoiced in his fortune, it trembled at his dangers.

Racine’s heroine experiences passions that respond to her lover’s own feelings because she is so earnestly in love. Cleopatra derides this sort of behaviour as more becoming “a shepherdess than a great Queen” for there “was too much of nature and too little art” in Bérénice’s conduct with the powerful Titus. When Bérénice rejects the idea of deceit in capturing a man’s heart, Cleopatra curtly points her to “Aeneas, Theseus, Jason, and the infinite multitude of faithless lovers” who left behind virtuous women. While nature was always championed over artifice in eighteenth century codes of behaviour, Montagu points to the irony of her era as she shows “the faithful and fond Bérénice discarded,” and the “gay, vain, and capricious” Cleopatra utterly in control of Anthony.

These depictions of Cleopatra place her within debates about the dangerous effects of fashion, luxury, and artifice associated with commercial culture. Cleopatra participates in transformational and inventive social performance, not for the public good, but to gratify her own self-interest, which according to Fielding is a misplaced ambition to participate in the traditionally masculine world of politics. Cleopatra’s deceptive hypocrisy and gender bending has an effeminizing effect on Anthony, whose taste for pleasure is read as licentious (when with Cleopatra) or tastefully and aesthetically directed (when with Octavia in Athens). A dangerous transgression of private and public boundaries is illustrated in Cleopatra’s character,

whereas Octavia embodies more traditional ideals of woman's place in the domestic sphere, where she has a civilizing effect on her husband and encourages him to perform his proper duties. Each character, then, represents one side of the dual nature of commerce and taste that emerged with the domesticated public sphere: Cleopatra symbolizes the effeminizing effects of commercial culture, while Octavia symbolizes the feminine virtues that are beneficial to the social order. In Montagu's dialogue, Cleopatra's artifice and the natural affections of Bérénice are contrasted. Both imaginings of Shakespeare's Egyptian queen highlight the negative connotations of performance and theatricality as it is associated with a false display of sympathy and fellow feeling.

While theatricality and acting had their negative connotations, it is crucial to remember that the moral dimension of acting is essential to the socializing process: one must cloak selfish feelings that are damaging to social relations until one actually internalizes a sense of proper conduct. Drama itself, as Joanna Baillie argues later in the century, has a moral purpose in that it allows people to observe and learn about human nature and the behaviour of others; performance on-stage can help audiences to identify hypocrisy in society. The final section of this chapter will examine Baillie's dramatic theory and *Plays on the Passions* as an extension of the eighteenth-century conversation about Shakespearean character and morality.

### **Joanna Baillie's *Plays on the Passions***

The study of character and the passions that form character continued through the last half of the eighteenth century and was especially prominent in the plays and theater theory of Joanna Baillie. The engagement with Shakespeare and his characters as a means of forming morality in the eighteenth century was an on-going, dynamic, productive conversation that shaped culture. Though Baillie's work was written at the close of the century, years after

Johnson's edition of Shakespeare's plays was published, her work participates derivatively in the conversation inspired by Shakespeare's characterization and its capacity to shape moral character in his readers. Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* included three plays first published in 1798 along with an "Introductory Discourse," which served to outline the social function of her drama by drawing on the moral discourse of the day.<sup>21</sup> As this section shall outline, Baillie's works share much in common with other earlier responses explored in this chapter, and her theatre theory can be situated within the broader social project of refining taste and the passions (which Baillie charmingly calls "strokes of nature") in an era anxious about shifts in private and public being, hypocrisy, and the equation of fashion and virtue. Character, not action, is central to the *Plays on the Passions*. Her plays offer a way of working through social problems by closely examining passions that are detrimental to social harmony. An important point of departure that distinguishes Baillie's work from Shakespeare's art of characterization is her focus on one singular passion and how it affects a character rather than an examination of various emotions. For instance, each of Baillie's plays isolates an unrefined passion as it destructively affects characters; her plays aim to "trace [the passions] in their rise and progress in the heart," and her plot structures are ordered with the purpose of revealing a single passion as it most balefully overwhelms its host character (91). Though Baillie's dramatic experiment is different from earlier Shakespeare criticism, her project shares the centrality of studying the

---

<sup>21</sup> There are subsequent volumes of *Plays on the Passions* published offering different plays, each tracing a passion and its influence on characters. *Plays on the Passions II* was published in 1802, with plays exploring hatred and ambition. *Plays and the Passions III* was published in 1812, in which Baillie offers a comic, tragic, and musical-dramatic treatment of one passion, hope.

passions, and the characters they shape and influence, as the best means of achieving an ethical education. In fact, as M. Norton notes, the protagonist who suffers an unrefined passion is so central to Baillie's plays that "all other characters are deliberately subordinated lest they distract attention from the central figure" (138). Baillie's intention in crafting her plays around the delineation of the passions is in line with what she considered the instructive purpose of drama: to improve "by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to look into the thoughts, and observe the behaviour of others [...] it is only from the enlargement of our ideas in regard to human nature, from the admiration of virtue, and the abhorrence of vice which they excite, that we can expect to be improved by them" (90). Following the example of Shakespeare commentators of her era, Baillie championed the study of realistic characters as a means of refining moral judgment.

For Baillie, Shakespeare is the only playwright capable of producing such realistic copies of nature. She writes in her final footnote that Shakespeare "never wears out our capacity to feel," she is indebted to earlier Shakespeare criticism for her own notions of characterization, and she includes several allusions to his plays in her treatise (in an especially long footnote, Baillie discusses the most effective means of eliciting sympathy from an audience in a historical tragedy by describing a scene identical to King Henry's St. Crispin's Day Speech from *Henry V*, and she often quotes from Hamlet in her footnotes, too). Moreover, Shakespeare's influence is evident in Baillie's own plays. For instance, *The Tryal* is an inverted *Taming of the Shrew*, in which the protagonist, the heiress Agnes Withrington, directs her cousin and a servant in a plot formulated to determine the motives of her suitors. She decides to test their true characters by feigning temper tantrums and acting peevishly with the hope that the object of her own desire, the perfectly tasteful (and thus modestly dressed) Mr.

Harwood, will still love her, even at her most shrewish. Like Petruchio and Kate, Agnes and Harwood share a snappy exchange of name-calling (4.2.62-66). However, the fun for Agnes is brought to a close by her guardian, Uncle Withrington, who points to a logical flaw in her ruse by explaining that Harwood could not truly have a virtuous character to love such a cruel and despicable woman. Harwood must then be classified as one of those “men whose passions are of such a violent over-bearing nature, that love in them, may be considered as a disease of the mind; and the object of it claims no more perfection or pre-eminence amongst women, than chalk, lime, or oatmeal may do amongst dainties, because some diseased stomachs do prefer them to all things” (5.1.41-47). Baillie paints another mind diseased with overwhelming love in *Count Basil*.

*Count Basil* features Basil, a military general typically surrounded by a masculine world of duty and heroism in war, and the woman he loves, Victoria, whose feminine charms madden Basil to the point that he fails to lead his troops into a crucial battle to help defend an ally. The exploration of masculine and feminine spheres in this play shares an affinity with *Antony and Cleopatra*. For example, various members of his male social group, who try to remind him of his duty and manliness, address Basil throughout the play. Thomas C. Crochunis compares a charged argument between Basil and his friend Rosinberg in 4:3, in which the two men provocatively debate Basil’s debilitating obsession with Victoria, to the passionate disputes of Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, and M. Norton compares Basil’s speech to his rebellious soldiers to Anthony’s funeral oration (178, 141). Frederick Burwick points to a critical comparison between Baillie’s later play, *Romeiro*, and Shakespeare’s *Othello* because both characters are obsessively jealous, while Catherine Burroughs notes the similarities between Macbeth and Baillie’s *Ethwald, Part Two* (64-65, 130).



Moreover, Baillie's call for realistic characters in drama echoes the praise lavished on Shakespeare's own characters; in fact, the playwright uses the same botanical rhetoric employed by Johnson and Griffith in comparing natural characters to characters formed of "delicacies, embarrassments, and artificial distresses of the more refined part of society" found in sentimental novels:

The one is a dressed and beautiful pleasure-ground, in which we are enchanted for a while, amongst the delicate and unknown plants of artful cultivation; the other is a rough forest of our native land; the oak, the elm, the hazel, and the bramble are there; and amidst the endless varieties of its paths we can wander for ever. (79)

Baillie lauds the educative potential of sublime characters that are varied, rude, and unpolished, in whom audiences can trace the gradual progress of a passion. Like Johnson before her, she lauds the depiction of general nature in characterization and a departure from characters that are too highly individualized or that are predictable caricatures and types. Dramatists should draw upon their "general observations" of mankind rather than portray "with senseless minuteness the characters of particular individuals," and tyrants and villains should not be depicted as "monsters of cruelty, unmixed with any feelings of humanity" (100, 89). Nor should characters be drawn according to their station in life, as dictated by the rules of neoclassicism: "Above all it is to be regretted that those adventitious distinctions amongst men, of age, fortune, rank, profession, and country, are so often brought forward in preference to the great original distinctions of nature; and our scenes so often filled with courtiers, lawyers, citizens, Frenchmen" (100-101). Rather, Baillie acknowledges the democratizing nature of the passions and affirms that this leveling quality should be applied to dramatic representation of

people: “Those strong passions that, with small assistance from outward circumstances, work their way in the heart, till they become the tyrannical masters of it, carry on a similar operation in the breast of the Monarch, and the man of low degree” (94). Possibly inspired by Shakespeare’s insight to human psychology, which was the main success ascribed to his work in this period, Baillie aspires to create “real men” because it is “only from creatures like ourselves” that moral instruction might be gleaned (87). Commonality between the audience and the fictional person overwhelmed by passion is required for the operation of what Baillie terms “sympathetic curiosity,” a concept that shares much in common with the idea of Adam Smith’s “sympathetic imagination.”

As much as Baillie’s works theoretically correspond to how Shakespeare was read in the second part of the eighteenth century, her theory and characters were generally criticized on the aspect for which Shakespeare was praised: her characters hinged too much on one passion, which many critics thought destroyed the play’s realism and hindered any genuine sympathy for her heroes. Of all Baillie’s works the tragedy *De Monfort* received the most critical attention, likely because it was staged with the title role filled by such famous actors as Edmund Kean and John Philip Kemble. Yet, even these actors could not keep the play in London’s theatres. One critic writes: “The narrow and objectionable system upon which her plays are based—viz. That of restricting their design to the elucidation and development of a single passion—necessarily renders them destitute of all the great requisites for sustaining the interest of an audience.” The overwhelming hatred that consumes *De Monfort*, for example, “takes the form of disease rather than of a passion” (*The Life of Edmund Kean*, vol. v. Art Vol. b11 Folger). Elizabeth Inchbald similarly assesses that *De Monfort* is “more a pitiable maniac, than a man acting under the dominion of natural propensity” because Baillie fails to present

“those diminutive seeds of hatred” leaving the auditor of her plays to ask what would cause such rancor in a man (4). She further chides Baillie for writing her plays as a reader rather than as spectator; “and it may be necessary to remind her—that Shakespeare gained his knowledge of the effect produced from plays upon an audience, and profited, through such attainment, by his constant attendance on dramatic representations” (5). While Baillie portrays characters overcome with passion, the main flaw in Baillie’s design is a failure to display clashing passions, and more specifically, how they motivate action. Despite the perceived failure of her dramatic experiment, it is nevertheless interesting to consider her work as a cultural activity that is derived and extends from earlier Shakespearean character criticism to highlight the continuous, creative, dynamic interplay of Shakespeare’s art of characterization and its eighteenth-century audience.

Baillie begins her “Introductory Discourse,” which outlines her views and aims as a dramatist, with an overview of the moral mechanism of “sympathetic curiosity” that is inherent to human nature. Baillie writes: “From that strong sympathy which most creatures, but the human above all, feel for others of their kind, nothing has become so much an object of man’s curiosity as man himself” (67). Everyone “who is not deficient in intellect” is occupied in interpreting, understanding, and discussing the characters of other people (67). In her initial discussion of character, Baillie crucially distinguishes between fashion—the dress and manners by which people are sometimes mistakenly defined—and “character” in the sense of a person’s essential virtue. Lamentably, fashion is the more common subject of conversation because “[i]t is easier to communicate to another how a man wears his wig and cane, what kind of house he inhabits, and what kind of table he keeps, than from what slight traits in his words and actions we have been led to conceive certain impressions of his character” (68). To move

beyond the appearance of how people present themselves in terms of their taste in dress and architecture in order to arrive at a more profound understanding of a person's taste, as the term signifies the governance of passions and impulses, is difficult work. It is especially challenging because people cloak their true character by acting politely without feeling any real benevolence for their fellows. A person's character is thus best deciphered by reading the "natural language" of the countenance, which serves as a register of emotional impulses. For Baillie, this is the instructive purpose of drama: to teach her audience the meaning behind "even the smallest indications of an unquiet mind, the restless eye, the muttering lip, the half-checked exclamation, and the hasty start" (73). Baillie's ideas thus connect to earlier practices of reading Shakespearean character in order to better read actual people who might be hiding their true feelings or intentions.

Although sympathetic curiosity is excited in the "ordinary intercourse with society" during the "common occurrences of life," it is even more aroused by the exceptional situations drawn on the stage, especially in tragedy (69).<sup>22</sup> In daily life, Baillie reminds her readers, all sorts of virtues and vices intrigue our "sympathetick propensity" as people endure small and common trials, but to witness people in extraordinary circumstances is even more engaging. "What human creature is there," Baillie queries, "who can behold a being like himself under the violent agitation of those passions which all have, in some degree, experienced, without feeling himself most powerfully excited by the sight?" (72). The desire to witness others in extreme states of duress, Baillie claims, is a universal human trait. One desires "[t]o lift up the

---

<sup>22</sup> Baillie's theory of "Characteristic Comedy," on the other hand, is a genre that represents "this motley world of men and women (...) under those circumstances of ordinary and familiar life most favourable to the discovery of the human heart" (98).

roof of his dungeon (...) and look upon a criminal the night before he suffers,” Londoners flock to public executions, and North American tribes, she surmises, torture and observe captives taken in battle, not out of cruelty, but curiosity:

the preparation of such hideous cruelty could never have become a permanent national custom, but for this universal desire in the human mind to behold man in every situation, putting forth his strength against the current of adversity, scorning all bodily anguish, or struggling with those feelings of nature, which, like a beating stream, will at times burst through the artificial barriers of pride. (70-71)

Baillie stresses the moral purpose of this curiosity by coupling it with sympathy to impress that it is no mere callous fascination that draws spectators to suffering; in fact, “[d]elicacy and respect for the afflicted will, indeed, make us turn ourselves aside from observing him, and cast down our eyes in his presence” (72). Sympathy thus serves to check and balance the vulgarity of gawking at a miserable person; Baillie writes: “often will a returning look of enquiry mix itself by stealth with our sympathy and reserve” (72). Moreover, Baillie claims that this sympathetic curiosity is a God-given trait implanted in people “for wise and good purposes.” “It is our best and most powerful instructor. From it we are taught the properties and decencies of ordinary life, and are prepared for distressing and difficult situations. In examining others we know ourselves” (74). Her idea of sympathetic curiosity thus coordinates with theories of sympathetic imagination and sociability outlined in the previous chapter. Like Adam Smith’s own theory of sympathy that influenced Johnson and other Shakespeare critics, Baillie treats moral knowledge as situational and instrumental rather than abstract and theoretical. Learning about the passions as they influence people in various situations allows readers and spectators

to imagine their own reactions in similar circumstances, so that they might more easily order their own passions, which is tantamount to developing character and shaping taste.

Indeed, Baillie locates the source of her dramaturgical instruction as one operating in the relatively new space of commercial and social exchange, in which traditional boundaries of the private and public are elided, and conventional masculine and feminine spheres collide. For example, Baillie advances her defense of drama as the best mode of moral instruction in part by suggesting that drama offers a “more large and connected view” of “the varieties of the human mind” that leave a more “permanent impression” than other genres, like historical writing. Historical writing, Baillie claims, focuses too much on the public character of its heroes and villains, so that “Great and bloody battles are to us battles fought in the moon, if it is not impressed upon our minds, by some circumstances attending them, that men subject to like weaknesses and passions with ourselves, were the combatants” (76-77). Rather, audiences desire “to know what men are in the closet as well as the field, by the blazing hearth, and at the social board” (78). Drama has the power to present the most private, self-interested emotions that are usually masked in the polite world of eighteenth-century society. Baillie summarizes the moral efficacy of drama in bringing private passions to public view:

Those passions which conceal themselves from the observation of men;  
which cannot unbosom themselves even to the dearest friend; and can, often  
times, only give their fulness vent in the lonely desert, or in the darkness of  
midnight. For who hath followed the great man into his secret closet, or stood  
by the side of his nightly couch, and heard those exclamations of the soul which  
heaven alone may hear, that the historian should be able to inform us? (86)

Not only does Baillie eschew the facts and deeds of history in favour of drama, which is more familiar and domestic in its representation of great figures, but she also removes the masks of polite sociability by portraying characters unrestrained by self-command. The soliloquy is her main vehicle for displaying those passions typically veiled or controlled in society: “Soliloquy, or those overflowings of the perturbed soul, in which it unburthens itself of those thoughts, which it cannot communicate to others [...] must necessarily be [employed] often, and to considerable length, introduced” (105). The use of soliloquy in refining a moral sense was not only appreciated by Shakespeare commentators, but is reminiscent of Shaftesbury and Adam Smith, who favoured this literary device as a means of self-scrutiny, as I discussed in my first chapter. By focusing on the private passions of great men, audiences can sympathize and refine their own passion more effectively. This study of the private emotional nature of great men, rather than their public actions, is especially beneficial in educating those who hold important public positions in society: “He will prove for it the better Judge, the better Magistrate, the better Advocate; and as a ruler or conductor of other men, under every occurring circumstance, he will find himself better enabled to fulfill his duty and accomplish his designs” (76).

Although Baillie primarily focuses on an enfranchised governing class of men, several critics have already convincingly established how Baillie fuses the realms of the public and the private, the male and the female, to complicate traditional gender roles, in the same vein as the Shakespeare critics who preceded her. For example, Ann Mellor situates Baillie as one of the founders of a Habermasian public sphere. She argues that by putting the private, psychological feelings of the domestic closet on the public stage, Baillie advances a “women’s realm” of feelings as the foundation of political culture (563). Greg Kucich, meanwhile, explores how

Baillie “re-engenders” drama and history through her dramaturgical practice of highlighting the pathos of domestic history through her pictorial mode of representation. In Baillie’s *tableaux vivants*, action on stage is arrested to highlight the affective stances and emotional states of her plays’ characters, often in a highly charged political moment, to punctuate rational politics with a “re-engendered historical outlook on the inner life of sympathetic human relations” (118). Kucich argues that this “sequential tableau of living affect particularly forwards the progressive elements of Baillie’s gender politics in its recurrent display of equalizing sympathies between the sexes” (118-119). Catherine Burroughs’ groundbreaking study of Baillie’s dramatic theory shows how the playwright’s dramaturgy envisions an intimate, “experimental theater” that allowed women to cultivate identities that both adhered to and broke away from conventional gender norms and that served to politicize domestic space in a way that created “unstable boundaries between the private and the public” (11, 30). Burroughs focuses on Baillie’s work as “closet drama,” plays that are better read than performed. Though Baillie’s plays were widely read in her time, her dramaturgy is in direct response to the physical conditions of the Romantic theatres, which had evolved into gigantic auditoria that sat thousands of people, making an intensely psychological experience difficult. In contrast, Baillie’s “closet” theatre called for “a smaller stage to permit the subtler dramatization of both public and private realms; a more emotionally expressive, less exaggerated acting style to counter the stasis of neoclassicism; and a lighting design that would allow audiences to read the psychological shifts being performed by actors” (87). In essence, Baillie weds the more intimate experience of reading with the social space of theater. Just as Baillie’s works blur the gendered boundaries of public and private spheres, they also complicate the opposition between reading (associated with the private) and theatrical performance (associated with the public). Though



often categorized as closet drama, her dramaturgy embodies meta-theatrical conceits that speak to potential performance, such as soliloquies, pageants, processions, and masquerades. On the other hand, Baillie's plays also manifest reading practices. For example, the "natural language" of gesture and facial expression, along with their movements and inflections, are integrated into the stage directions and dialogue as characters observe and interpret the passions. These stage directions might be written for performance; Baillie could simply be instructing how characters should be embodied on the stage and demonstrating that she is familiar with Romantic acting practices. However, as Thomas C. Crochunis notes, Baillie's plays also invite "readers to simulate its theatre" because of the "interplay between projected theatricality and silent reading" (168).

Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" and her *Plays on the Passions* participate in the modern domesticated public sphere that contains both the political and the private, in which social and personal processes shape character. Curbing unruly passions associated with private and individual vices was necessary for the preservation of virtue in a commercial civil society, and educating the public about these passions is Baillie's main aim. Like the Shakespeare criticism that so influenced her, Baillie's theater theory and plays also pervasively register the anxiety in the eighteenth-century discourse of taste and sympathetic sociability concerning the potential divide between the exterior appearance and interior emotion that breeds imposters. As the previous chapter explored, sociability is bound to the sense of taste, the source of moral and aesthetic judgment. Refining a sense of taste was meant to bridge the gap between exterior and interior; in other words, a refined sense of taste theoretically checked the excessive self-interest associated with the marketplace. Moreover, fashionable consumerism was often viewed in opposition to good taste, so that a preference for the "natural" eclipsed all things

modish, particularly fashion's signifying function. Baillie makes this distinction, as noted above, in her assertion that her contemporaries are often misguided when they judge people based on what they wear instead of their true character: how well they command their passions.

In fact, Andrea Henderson deftly argues that Baillie's "conception of human nature is structured in terms of a competition with fashion" (200). The logic of Baillie's work, though in opposition to the marketplace, is significantly structured by consumer practices and the discourse of taste that evolved alongside eighteenth-century consumerism. Henderson elucidates how Baillie figures the passions as objects of tasteful consumption in opposition to marketable items associated with "quick turnover and extravagance" (205). For example, Baillie describes a man overwhelmed by uncontrolled anger and equates his wrath to a display of bad taste when she writes, "the unpleasing and distorted features of an angry man will be more eagerly gazed upon [...] than the gaudiest equipage" (72-73). Here, the brazen demonstration of ostentation is likened to ungoverned, high-pitched passion that is the very picture of unrefined taste. Moreover, Baillie asserts the primacy of studying character and the passions in satisfying sympathetic curiosity by suggesting it affords more delight than any luxury: "Children in their gambols will make out a mimick representation of the manners, characters, and passions of grown men and women, and such a pastime will animate and delight them much more than a treat of the daintiest sweetmeats, or the handling of the gaudiest toys" (83). Finally, Baillie disparages the artificial portrayal of characters in the fashionable plays of her day compared to more natural representations found in Shakespeare.

Aside from bearing a resemblance in plot, incident, and character to Shakespeare's plays and the preoccupations of eighteenth-century criticism, Baillie's *Plays on the Passions* address the tensions inherent to contemporary sociability and moral refinement. Count Basil's

downfall rests on his incapacity to read Victoria's feigned feelings of love as nothing more than a counterfeit performance. In the eponymous play, the tragic hero De Monfort fails to temper his feelings or cloak his disdain for his insincere but sociable nemesis Rezenfelt merely for the sake of social performance. Catherine Burroughs elegantly describes De Monfort's effect in the play:

De Monfort's an interestingly uncomfortable character primarily because he will not let others forget that they have adopted performance modes that allow them to glide by each other without the trauma of confronting their closeted selves, their secret longings, their hidden responses to a power structure at odds with unmediated expression. (126)

De Monfort's supposed friends, the carousing Frebergs, act as foils to De Monfort: "Theirs is a world of flattery, of false, feigned, and indiscriminate friendships, of hyperbolic and superficial discourse" (Burroughs 121). In fact, only Jane de Monfort, the hero's virtuous and sympathetic sister (a character played and adored by the famous actress Sarah Siddons), possesses any true virtue in this play. Meanwhile, the entire plot of *The Tryal* is structured around a series of tests meant to reveal its characters' true colours. In all of these plays, other characters act as influential social forces that inspire protagonists to check their emotions. Although Baillie's dramas embody lessons on Smithean sociability, they simultaneously reveal the cracks and fissures inherent to his moral system.

## **Conclusion**

The eighteenth-century textual engagement with Shakespearean character helped contemporaries understand the tensions of a commercial society. Shakespeare's characters were considered useful tools for exploring identity formation in this period because

Shakespeare so masterfully expressed the passions. His characters were lauded as “natural” and “sublime,” and with careful study, they could reveal truths of human nature. The imperfect, sublime quality of Shakespeare’s creations renders effective moral instruction because they demand close scrutiny in order to uncover difficult moral lessons. In the case of Johnson, Montagu, and Griffith, it fell upon the literary critic, with a keen and delicate sense of taste, to help steer the reader in perceiving those moral lessons underlying the crude and undigested material of primary emotional experience. The conversational style of these works, along with a focus on the common passions and sympathy, helped establish a public of readers who collectively examined Shakespeare’s characters. Other writers borrowed characters from Shakespeare’s plays and placed them in new situations or in imagined conversations with other characters in order to explore their psychology more fully. Cleopatra, as I argue above, represented the fear of hypocrisy, fashion, luxury, and self-interest that was the darker side of the democratizing and socializing aspects of the period’s commercial culture. Fielding’s and Montagu’s Cleopatra suggest that these writers recognized in Shakespeare’s heroine elements that characterized their own era, like the performance of identity, and the effeminizing threat of women in the political sphere. Shakespeare and his relationship to the program of moral refinement also inspired Joanna Baillie’s dramatic, empirical investigation of the passions, and her writing can be considered as an extension of the tradition of eighteenth-century character criticism. All these texts reveal a creative interplay between art and life in this period: when not engaged in actual social relations that call upon a person to perform good moral behaviour, people could read and imagine characters in particular circumstances or situations as practice in addressing moral questions. This engagement with Shakespeare reveals the dialogic, rather

than the appropriative, nature of Shakespeare's reception: his plays inspired cultural activity and conversation that was formative of eighteenth-century public life and British identity.

Just as it was in the literary world, the idea of character in eighteenth-century thought was central to how Shakespeare's plays were received on stage. His characters were recognized as realistic representations and functioned as a means of moral reflection; eighteenth-century audiences could sharpen their moral judgment by examining passions, motives, and actions as characters reacted to the exigencies of the play. The finest Shakespearean actors and actresses of the era were praised for their capacity to convey the passions to audiences, as though they were channeling Shakespeare's insightful understanding of human nature. In some instances, Shakespeare's expert art of characterization inspired eighteenth-century audiences to imagine how characters might respond to circumstances outside the confines of the dramatic structure and within a more contemporary social context. Indeed, the robust entertainment industry of the era offered new ways of exploring characters as they were given second lives in sequels and spin-offs; Shakespeare's characters, widely recognized as tools of moral speculation, were even used to legitimize what was considered illegitimate entertainment, like pantomime, spectacle, and the titillating autobiography of a famous actress. The following chapter will thus continue to explore the culturally productive nature of Shakespeare's plays by focusing on their reception in the eighteenth-century theatre.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Shakespearean Character in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre**

The near obsession with character in the eighteenth century reflected a paradigm shift in traditional boundaries and evaluations of private and public life that resulted in the “domestication” of the public sphere: ideologically feminine principles, like private interests, passions, and the classical economic function of the household, became inseparable from the concerns of public life. Debates about the moral decline or progress of Britain were animated by this interplay of competing concepts of the private and the public, and there was particular concern about how to encourage morality amidst the inundation of luxury that was part of a flourishing commercial realm. On one side, commercial culture was condemned as “effeminate” and was viewed by some as a world of transitory fashion and excess. As such, commercial culture was thought to incite elements of decadence, self-indulgence and hypocrisy enervating to virtue and social harmony. Though aesthetic theory linked pleasure and morality in such a way that certain enjoyments of the commercial world were thought to transform selfish passions into social virtues, the ideology of taste also condemned other amusements bred by commerce as harmful diversions that appealed to baser senses and aroused hedonistic passions. Moreover, there was a possibility that people were merely pretending to have good taste rather than actually shaping moral character, and this remained a key point of tension; hypocrisy and false display were commonly portrayed in literature and drama of the period as a reflection of this anxiety.

On the other side, the ideology of taste suggests that a commercial society could shape passions into moral sentiments: arts, literature, and conversation flourished in the world of exchange and were praised as pleasures of the imagination that cultivate morality and social

cohesion. Conversations evaluating the arts encouraged a variety of opinions and a dynamic growth of ideas while aiming to arrive at a consensus of what is good and what is beautiful. To exercise one's sympathetic imagination by studying Shakespearean characters was to develop empathy, to broaden one's moral perspective, and to sharpen one's sense of socially appropriate behaviour. Performance was imperative to this process of cultivating character in everyday life: in order to eventually achieve a unified sense of private and public identity, one learned to temper emotions to meet social approval in such a way that theoretically disjoined one's inner and outer character. To express the private self in an authentic way, a person would internalize an idea of a broader, public conception of morality, what Adam Smith called the "impartial spectator." According to Smith, this imaginary impartial spectator functions to check self-interests and tutor passions, so that behaviour that is harmful to the public good is masked and repressed. With practice, which included the study of Shakespeare's characters, a person sharpens moral judgment so that all interests and desires become socially oriented.

The domesticated public sphere's potential as both a civilizing and debilitating force sharpened the focus on Shakespearean character in this era on stage as much as it did in the world of print. In the theatrical world of eighteenth-century London, especially in the years that witnessed what theater historians mark as a Shakespeare revival from the early 1740s and beyond, Shakespeare was publicly sanctioned as legitimate, socially useful entertainment by which the integrity of the theatre was preserved from the incursion of sensational spectacles, like pantomime and rope-dancing, and foreign entertainments, like opera. Whereas Shakespeare represented good sense and manly virtue, "*Italian Opera*" John Dennis cautions, threatened to drive out "Poetry from the Nation, and not only Poetry, but the very Taste of Poetry, and the Politer Arts" (*Works* 2: 301). Scholars like Michael Dobson argue that

Shakespeare was instrumental to the construction of national identity in this period, which is clear by the vigorous nationalist component evident in the overwhelming public enthusiasm for his plays. Though Shakespeare helped buttress patriotism through his assigned role as the national poet, his drama was also valued because it could provide a moral education in a way that fashionable entertainment could not: Shakespeare's characters corresponded to nature rather than the artificial dazzle of extravagant spectacles. The presentation of the psychological intricacy of Shakespeare's characters initiated conversations and triggered debates about imagined motives and intentions that were of a piece with the project of cultivating the nation's moral character.

This chapter will explore how actors began to focus more on character in their performances, and how the best players were deemed as sharing Shakespeare's genius in their capacity to convincingly portray the passions. By mid-century, performance theory highlighted the affective potential of actors to engage an audience's sympathetic imagination in such a way that the theatre became a microcosm for benevolent society. As players were valued for their sensibility of feeling and insight into human nature in a way that paralleled Shakespeare's own achievements, acting was transformed into a respectable vocation; just as literary critics like Samuel Johnson helped guide readers toward perceiving important lessons within Shakespeare's difficult works, actors helped form the audience's capacity for sympathy as mediators between the spectators and Shakespeare's texts. Outside the theater, these performances inspired a literary industry, like theatrical reviews and periodicals, which rigorously evaluated and discussed various players and their interpretation of characters.

This chapter will likewise investigate how actors and actresses became figures of interest in the cultural imagination because their profession articulated ideas of identity formation and



enacted the construction and communication of performed, public character. Players had a dual role in this period that was concomitant with the duality of commerce. On one hand, the actor was an important figure in shaping public taste by conveying the passions of Shakespeare's characters to the audience, thereby offering points of study and enabling sympathetic responses to drama; on the other hand, the idea of the actor in this period also profoundly threatened ideals of moral cultivation by highlighting the gap between being and appearing. Players boldly illuminated the problem of posturing in society; as a result of this, their own identities became ambiguous. The public presence of the actor on stage raised a curiosity about their private lives as much as the characters they played raised questions about motives and intentions. Consequently, some actors and actresses wrote memoirs to express to audiences their "true" public identities. This chapter will examine the autobiography of George Anne Bellamy, an actress who lived a life of notorious extravagance and license. In her memoir, Bellamy aims to recuperate her blemished reputation by constructing a public image that links her private life to the imagined lives of the Shakespearean heroines she played on-stage. Bellamy suggests that performing Shakespeare's characters effectively shaped her moral character, highlighting a dynamic interplay between art and life in this period.

This chapter will conclude with an examination of how the commercial theatres creatively tweaked "illegitimate" performance practices by the incorporation of Shakespearean character in a manner similar to Bellamy's more private attempt to mitigate her own flaws by implying a profound sense of sympathy and connection with Shakespearean dramatic figures. In some instances, such as the parade of characters in Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee or the incorporation of Shakespeare as a signifier of legitimate drama in the pantomime, *Harlequin's Invasion*, spectacles aim to unify fashion and taste by capitalizing on the equation of

Shakespeare with the formation of moral character. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate the eighteenth-century theatre's productive interaction with Shakespeare by examining how actors and audiences engaged with characters as a means of forming moral identity, while at the same time underscoring how creative new modes of theatrical entertainment evolved from this preoccupation with character, whether in the genre of autobiography, or in the enterprising introduction of Shakespeare's characters to other popular forms of performance.

### **Spectatorship and the Project of Moral Refinement**

The theatre as a public forum was central to debates about morality, and some critics were utterly hostile to the stage. John Brewer notes the aversion to performance was rooted in the English Protestant consciousness: "The stage was viewed as a place of trickery and deceit, full of illusions and magic similar to those which the Roman Catholic Church had raised to bamboozle ignorant observers into becoming credulous believers" (*The Pleasures of the Imagination* 333). Critics like Jeremy Collier believed the theatre had the potential for moral efficacy but that trends of the early eighteenth-century stage were fundamentally immoral. In 1698, Collier wrote a vitriolic treatise, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage*, which catalogues the theatre's many faults, such as the custom of polluting the stage with libertine characters so popular in Restoration drama. Collier also viewed the mockery of religion and the clergy, along with lewd language, as abominations in the theatre. Such practices undermined the didactic purpose of the theatre:

The business of *Plays* is to recommend Virtue, and to discountenance Vice;  
To shew the Uncertainty of Humane Greatness, the suddain Turns of Fate,  
and the Unhappy Conclusion of Violence and Injustice: 'Tis to expose  
the Singularities of pride and Fancy, to make Folly and Falsehood contemptible,

and to bring every Thing that is Ill Under Infamy, and Neglect. (1)

In Collier's analysis, the theatre's capacity for moral instruction was in its clear representation of virtue rewarded and vice punished. The spectators' emotional reaction to the drama was not yet considered formative of sympathy and social sentiments; rather, Collier cautions against the easy provocation of "those Passions which can neither be discharged without trouble, nor satisfied without a Crime: "'Tis not safe for a Man to trust his Virtue too far, for fear it should give him the slip" (4). Collier has little faith in defenses against the passions and baser appetites, and his invective provoked other pamphlets that either defended or attacked the stage, and the moral efficacy of theater was an energetically explored topic.

The Licensing Act of 1737 simultaneously cemented the status of Shakespeare's traditional plays and created a space for foreign and "low" entertainments that only served to heighten debates about the corruptive potential of some stage entertainments. Contemporary theater critics viewed diversions like operas, pantomimes, puppet shows, ballets and circuses as decadent and effeminizing compared to virile, traditional English drama, of which Shakespeare was considered exemplary. This act inadvertently promoted Shakespeare for several reasons. It reinforced a duopoly that confirmed royal patents on only two theatre houses (Drury Lane and Covent Garden) and required these houses to secure approval in advance from the Lord Chamberlain on all new plays and additions to old plays. The Licensing Act not only discouraged new talent, but it also dissuaded managers from venturing risks on new scripts and encouraged them instead to recycle older, safer plays. The patent houses had a responsibility to stage performances that would not oppose the government, but rather that would instill a patriotic spirit in the audiences. As Gillian Russell notes, the Licensing Act identified the theater as "the defender of national integrity and manliness, and as the proper home of

canonical drama, particularly that of Shakespeare” (120). However, while spoken drama required endorsement from the Lord Chamberlain, dance, pantomime, and other more physical, speechless modes of entertainment did not require approval, and therefore remained prominent in eighteenth-century culture. John Brewer claims that music, spectacle, and dance were essential to the repertory of London theaters. Rather than merely relying on comedy and tragedy, Brewer writes that a typical evening’s performance “ran for three or four hours and usually consisted of an overture played by the theater’s orchestra, a main piece—a play, musical, or opera—followed by an interlude (music or dance) and then a short afterpiece” which was often farcical (330).

In the face of these foreign incursions, excessive entertainments, and corruptive, effeminizing pleasures, Shakespeare rose to unprecedented popularity on the London stages in answer to the concerns for public taste. Theatre historians typically point to the 1740-41 seasons as marking a surge in Shakespeare’s popularity on-stage; in fact, there was an unprecedented number of performances at this time. Michael Dobson notes that at least one in four of all theatrical performances given in London in the 1740-1 season was Shakespearean, a record that was not matched throughout the century (“Improving on the Original” 66).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> See Fiona Ritchie’s “The Influence of the Female Audience on the Shakespeare Revival,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century* (Burlington, 2008). Ritchie illustrates that the groundwork for Shakespeare’s eruption of popularity was prepared for by a rigorous campaign of the Shakespeare Ladies Club (which she views as a “fluid organization” of female playgoers) and locates the beginning of the movement to restore Shakespeare to the stage as around 1736. Other theatre historians mark the 1741-42 season, the year in which Shakespeare’s statue was erected in Poets’ Corner at

Contributing to Shakespeare's popularity was a surge of editorial labour and critical interest in the playwright's works. Rowe edited his complete works in 1709, Pope in 1725, Theobald in 1733, and Warburton in 1747. Shakespeare had already been exuberantly present in the literary and theatrical worlds earlier in the era by the time Johnson's popular *Preface* and edition of Shakespeare's plays was published in 1765. These editors were reputable literary critics cunningly solicited by the publisher Jacob Tonson to lend their names (and their cachet) to Shakespeare's plays. As I explored in my last chapter, an increase in literacy among the middle classes and the promotion of Shakespeare as ideal reading for strengthening the moral fabric of the nation and the ethical uprightness of individuals meant more readers would be familiar with Shakespeare in print; if the expensive complete editions were beyond a reader's financial means, individual copies of the plays were also published. These editions were particularly affordable because of a copyright war raging between Tonson and his competitor, Robert Walker, which resulted in a massive publishing of the plays for low prices. As more people were reading Shakespeare, there was an increased desire to see the actual texts of these plays performed.<sup>24</sup>

---

Westminster Abbey to signify his status as national playwright, and in which Garrick made his famous debut as Richard III, as the beginning of a Shakespeare revival.

<sup>24</sup> See Arthur Scouten's "The Increase in Popularity of Shakespeare's Plays in the Eighteenth Century: A Caveat for Interpretors of Stage History" (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1956): 189-202. More recently, Don-John Dugas' *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (Columbia, 2006) explores this phenomenon.

Though Shakespeare had been popular onstage since the reopening of the theatres in the Restoration, his works were usually radically altered. Scholars attribute the practice of adaptation to various causes. Brian Vickers argues in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* that drastic changes were unreservedly made to Shakespeare's plays in the period between 1690 and 1730 in order to uphold neoclassical principles. A number of changes were made to tailor plays to neoclassical standards: quibbles, puns, and lower class characters were expunged, language was sanitized, and new characters were sometimes introduced to make plays more symmetrical. For example, more prominent and didactically moralizing roles were given to Lady MacDuff and Octavia to balance the cruelty and wanton liberality of Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra. Jonathan Bate has also emphasized the adaptation of Shakespeare plays to incorporate caricature and other forms of satire that suit political and ideological agendas, while Michael Dobson examines select adaptations to illustrate the association of Shakespeare and nationalism. Katherine Scheil's study of Shakespearean adaptation illuminates how shifting theatrical fashions and audience preferences must be accounted for to understand changes to Shakespeare made by playwrights; for instance, she examines how characters in certain plays are embellished to showcase the talents of specific actors. Jean Marsden has also extensively examined Shakespeare adaptations of the eighteenth century to highlight ideologies of domestic virtue in connection to nationalism, so that dutiful daughters like Cordelia represented onstage the ideal British citizen.<sup>25</sup> While the analysis of adaptations is not within the scope of my

---

<sup>25</sup> See Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, (Oxford, 1979); Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions*, (Oxford, 1996); Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, (Oxford, 1992); Katherine Scheil, *The Taste of the Town* (Lewisburg, 2003); Jean

study, it is crucial to note that altering Shakespeare's plays was a practice that continued throughout the eighteenth century alongside the restoration of the original works to the stage.<sup>26</sup>

During the late 1730s and early 1740s there was an unprecedented demand to view more Shakespeare onstage. Among other reasons for Shakespeare's revival, Emmett L. Avery's frequently cited scholarly work on the Shakespeare Ladies Club tells the story of a group of women who encouraged London's theatre managers to present Shakespeare's unaltered plays more frequently in place of the adaptations that had drastically distorted Shakespeare's original texts.<sup>27</sup> Avery writes that such requests made by the Shakespeare Ladies Club emerged in tandem with "numerous writers of prologues, epilogues, essays, and periodicals" who regretted that "tragedy lay dying, that pantomime and spectacle had threatened to banish Shakespeare and Jonson and that Italian opera, with an almost hysterical adulation of foreign singers [...]

---

Marsden, "Daddy's Girls: Shakespearian Daughters and Eighteenth-Century Ideology" (*Shakespeare Survey*, 2007): 17-27.

<sup>26</sup> Nahum Tate's adaptation of *King Lear*, for example, first produced in 1681, was effectively to replace Shakespeare's original on the English stage until Garrick's version in 1756, which retained Tate's controversial innovations, such as the introduction of a love affair between Edgar and Cordelia and the expunging of the Fool. See Sandra Clark, ed., *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (London, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Michael Dobson and Fiona Ritchie expand on Avery's investigation of the Shakespeare Ladies Club. See *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992), and "The Influence of the Female Audience on the Shakespeare Revival of 1736-1738: The Case of the Shakespeare's Ladies Club," in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century* (Burlington, 2008).

had feminized the robust English spirit of earlier days” (153). While fashionable entertainment was derogatively labeled as effeminate (which was also often equated with all things French), women were often credited as promoting Shakespeare as a means of preserving masculine British virtues on the stage. Citing a fictional letter written by William Shakespeare to “the Fair Supporters of Wit and Sense, the Ladies of Great Britain” that appeared in the *Daily Advertiser* in March 1737, Avery highlights the alignment of these supporters of Shakespeare with good taste, morality and common sense against what were considered the more effeminate entertainments of the stage (155). A prologue spoken before George Lillo’s *Marina*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, which had not been acted in the eighteenth century, also pays tribute to the ladies:

But, Sirs, what e’er’s your fate in future story,  
Well have the British Fair secured their glory,  
When worse than barbarism had sunk your taste,  
When nothing pleas’d but what laid virtue waste,  
A sacred band, determin’d, wise, and good,  
They jointly rose to stop th’exotick flood,  
And strove to wake, by Shakespeare’s nervous lays,  
The manly genius of Eliza’s days. (qtd. in Avery 157)

Here, Shakespeare is set in opposition to frivolous entertainment presented on the London stages, and the Shakespeare Ladies Club is credited for reforming public taste by restoring Shakespeare, and virtue, to the public.

The analysis of critics like Michael Dobson ascribes Shakespeare’s rise in popularity on the English stage to nationalist impulses and empire-building, which are clearly embedded in



the rhetoric pitting the bard against enervating foreign entertainments and in the praise bestowed upon the Shakespeare Ladies Club. Such distinctions between Shakespeare the national poet as legitimate pleasure and “exotic,” “barbarian” entertainment as illegitimate pleasure is certainly a particular feature of nationalist discourse. However, the playwright’s advancement in London theaters was also informed by a growing interest in his art of characterization, perhaps influenced by a growing exposure in society to the availability of Shakespeare’s original works in print, and also in connection with the practice of studying character to refine taste and moral judgment. As eighteenth-century reading audiences scrutinized characters, there was a call for the stage to mirror the complex inner lives of the imaginary but realistic people who were shaped by Shakespeare’s sublime poetry.

Henry Gally’s critical essay on character (discussed in the first chapter) held that there is little difference between characters as they are represented onstage and in writing: “For in reality, the essential Parts of the Characters, in the *Drama*, and in *Characteristic-Writings*, are the same: They are both an image of one Life; a Representation of one Person: All the Diversity lies in the different Manner of representing the same Image” (98). There is an erasure of difference between the experiences of watching and reading character, according to Gally, as the imagination can sympathize with a character in both mediums, as long as the representation of human nature is imitative of real life:

The *Drama* presents to the Eyes of a Spectator an Actor, who speaks and acts as the person, whom he represents, is suppos’d to speak and act in real Life.

The *Characteristic* Writer introduces, in a descriptive manner, before a reader,

the same Person, as speaking and acting in the same manner: And both must be perform'd in such a natural and lively manner, as may deceive the Spectator and Reader, and make them fancy they see the Person represented or characters'd. (98)

According to Gally, the realism of characters created a link between the moral efficacy of reading and theatre-going, and characters had a moral function in both mediums: to teach about human nature. There was also a link between the theatrical and literary reception of Shakespearean character in terms of how reading was theorized in this period. Lord Kames located reading practices within the phenomenon of “ideal presence,” which he described as an imagined vivacity sufficient to allow the reader to conceive every incident as passing in his presence, as if he were an eyewitness” (1: 112). The reader is thought to give imaginative existence to a poetic description with details drawn from personal experience or through the powerful fictional representation of the literary work. When a reader “entirely occupied with some event that had made a deep impression, forgets himself, he perceives everything as passing before him, and hath a consciousness of presence similar to that of a spectator” (1: 108). Similarly, Johnson asserts in his *Preface* to Shakespeare’s plays that “a play read affects the mind like a play acted,” and that a play is merely “a book recited with concomitants that encrease or diminish its effect” (7: 79). Johnson praised Shakespeare for holding up a “faithful mirrour of manners and of life” that allowed readers to imagine they were witnessing the action of the play as spectators (7: 62). In this formulation of reading constructed by Gally, Kames, and Johnson, there is no distinction between how one might respond to a character onstage or in print.

William Kenrick responded directly to Johnson’s comments about the power of theatre in raising an audience’s sensibilities. In contrast to Johnson, Kenrick posited that playgoers are

more emotionally moved to sympathy by what they see directly on-stage than play-readers are involved in what they read. For instance, Kenrick concedes that while audiences realized that “the stage is only a stage,” spectators are nevertheless “so intent on the immediacy of a scene that they are absent from anything else” (Vickers 5: 190). A spectator properly affected by a dramatic representation makes no reflection on the fiction or reality of it since his attention is fully engaged to the fable and his passions affected by the distress of the characters. Indeed, Kenrick’s main argument is that watching a play unfold in the theater arouses the passions in a way reading cannot. Spectators “are moved by mere mechanical motives; they laugh and cry from mere sympathy” whereas the reflection required in reading “would very often prevent them from laughing or crying at all” (5: 192). Kenrick asserts that spectators are “merely passive, our organs are in unison with those of the players on the stage, and the convulsions of grief or laughter are purely involuntary” (5: 192). While the audience is “unquestionably deceived” by the “theatrical magic” of a play performed, “the deception goes no further than the passions, it affects our sensibility but not our understanding” (5: 190-191). In this claim, Kenrick raises a key point of eighteenth-century dramatic theory: drama’s powerful capacity to move an audience is connected to the *embodiment* of these characters by actors and actresses.

The 1740s saw a shift in acting theory whereby sympathetic identification with character and an understanding of the passions became central to performance. The principle asset of the theatre was its status as a mimetic art that allowed people to make believe they were identifying with real people. By the mid-eighteenth century, social interaction became modeled on theatrical representation. As identities were rehearsed and refined, performance became a ubiquitous theme in the eighteenth century. Indeed, periodicals frequently discussed theatre as a metaphor for society. Joseph Addison explains this trope to his community of readers:

“Consider all the different pursuits and Employments of Men, and you will find half their Actions tend to nothing else but Disguise and Imposture; and all that is done which proceeds not from a Man’s very self is the action of a Player. For this reason is it that I make so frequent mention of the stage” (*Spectator* no. 370). Civil society became what Addison called the “fraternity of Spectators” consisting of “every one that considers the World as a Theatre, and desires to form a right Judgment of those who are the Actors in it” (*Spectator* no. 10). Performance was inherent to the development of sympathy, which Adam Smith explains is a kind of imaginative act whereby one exchanges places, and even character, with another in order to achieve a sense of identification. Smith writes:

When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such character and profession should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters. (317)

There is an element of acting expressed in this passage that links the process of the sympathetic imagination to the moral efficacy of attending the theatre. Indeed, Jean Marsden discusses Adam Smith’s “debt to drama” in constructing his theory of social sentiments: “Given his model of the emotional connection between the spectator and object, it is not surprising that Smith turns frequently to the theater to illustrate his argument” (“Shakespeare and Sympathy,” 32). Meanwhile, William Worthen similarly argues: “The actor’s performance becomes a model for social activity outside the theatre, and acting theory, by voicing an account of meaning in performance, defines the meaning both on and off stage” (95). I illustrated in my first chapter how Shaftesbury early in the century advocates the employment of dramatic

techniques like soliloquy to rout out self-delusion in order to shape moral character. As a prototype of social interaction, the theatre could cultivate active moral spectatorship and educate the public: by studying character, one learned about the source of human action, and by sympathizing with characters onstage, one exercised the faculty of moral sense.

Acting theory influenced and anticipated moral philosophy so that the spectators' emotional sensibility in feeling the passions is the foundation for developing moral sentiments and a refined sense of taste in and outside the theatre. In the poem "The Actor" (1760), Robert Lloyd approved of the theatre's tendency to stimulate an emotional response in an audience. He decries "effeminate" entertainment for a more natural depiction of character in order to encourage moral refinement: "More natural uses to the stage belong, / Than Tumblers, Monsters, Pantomimes, or Song. / For other Purpose was that Spot design'd / To purge the Passions and reform the Mind, / To give to Nature all the Force of Art, / And while it charms the Ear to Mend the Heart" (17). In *The Dramatic Censor* (1770), Francis Gentleman called the theatre "a profitable school of moral instruction" in its operation on an audience's emotions (1: 2). Tragedy, Gentleman contended, presents "elevated passions and incidents" that "warm, melt, and astonish our feelings"; while comedy "exhilarates our spirits, puts judgment in good humour, and pleasantly prepares us to receive some occasional necessary lashes of correction, applied to our vices and our follies" (1: 15). Aaron Hill, who wrote prolifically about the theatre and contributed to shaping the century's understanding of acting, similarly viewed the theatre as contributing to the public good through affective performance. He wrote in "The Art of Acting" (1746):

The time *shall come*—(not far from destin'd Day!)

When Soul-touch'd *Actors* shall do more, than *play*:  
When Passion, flaming, from th' asserted Stage,  
Shall, to taught Greatness, fire a feeling Age:  
Tides of strong *Sentiment* sublimely roll,  
Deep'ning the dry Disgraces of the Soul;  
*Pity, fear, sorrow*, wash'd from Folly's Foam  
Knock at Man's Breast, and find his Heart at Home. (8)

Hill's assessment of morally efficacious drama does not rely on the aesthetic principle that art should please and instruct as Collier earlier in the century contended; rather, drama's morality is found in its ability to provoke emotions that lead to sympathy. If the stage were to convey a moral message, Hill suggested that moral message would come through the actor's ability to establish an emotional connection with the audience.

In this period, the ideal actor, like Shakespeare, would be a master in delineating the passions and representing human nature through performing Shakespeare's characters onstage. As my first chapter outlines, the passions were central to eighteenth-century moral philosophy. Passions, when refined, become moral sentiments that are necessary to social cohesion in a changing commercial society. Many eighteenth-century theorists, such as Shaftesbury and Adam Smith, viewed them as formative of sympathy, and therefore, fundamental to social life. As the foundation of a larger moral system, the essence of individual passions, like love, esteem, contempt, or grief, were energetically and intricately defined in periodicals and treatises of the period, and part of the project of moral refinement was learning about the passions as the foundation to understanding human nature. Reading passions was key to making clear evaluations of other people, while at the same time, one had to recognize passions

as they came to represent, or give rise to, “self-interest” in a way that distorts calculations and estimates of the mind in oneself. As Alan Mackenzie notes: “The process of estimating accurately [...] is perhaps the most essential, and the most difficult, of the numerous moral duties in the creed of Augustan humanists” (143).

In theories of moral spectatorship, the realism of the emotions portrayed by an actor was central to arousing sympathy in the audience. To evoke an emotional response in an audience, there was an insistence that the actor must actually empathize with the feelings of his character; as Charles Churchill proclaims in his poem “The Rosciad” (1761): “those who would make us feel, must feel themselves” (28). The capacity to enter into another’s emotions and feel empathetically was referred to as “sensibility,” a concept linked to taste and the sympathetic imagination: as outlined in chapter one, Hume posits sensibility as the principle whose development or suppression accounts for differences of taste. Joseph Roach argues that sensibility was rooted in a Cartesian explanation of the body as a mechanism animated by the soul and that this understanding of human physiology was influential to theories of acting in the eighteenth century. According to the mechanical paradigm, the heart was viewed as the seat of the passions; when an idea or object is heard, seen, or contemplated by the imagination, the heart produces passions in reaction to the object beheld. The heart would “fill” with a passion and then pump it through the body’s nerves, which were conceived of as fine, hollow tubules that ran throughout a person, and which act upon the muscles that govern smiles and frowns and other expressions.<sup>28</sup> The force and heat of this spirited coursing depended on the passion

---

<sup>28</sup> While this Cartesian theory is evident in acting theory of the eighteenth century, Shearer West draws attention to the inherent disputes about what caused the muscles and

aroused. Roach thus defines sensibility within this Cartesian discourse as “an inherent bodily capacity, differing markedly between individuals, that registers and communicates feelings” (*Players’ Passion* 95). An acute sensibility was revealed by the manifestation of emotions in the body; signs of sensibility might include weeping, blushing, fainting, or crying. Psychological phenomena thus produced physiological effects: passions, quite literally, move people.

Acting theory charged the players with the task of exercising their sympathetic imagination in order to identify with their characters in the same way as Adam Smith articulates the average person’s role in the process of moral development: one must imagine the situations, passions, and inner lives of other people in order to achieve sympathy and make sound moral judgments. Along with his publications in *The Prompter*, Aaron Hill wrote a number of works incorporating ideas of sensibility into acting theory. In his *Essay on the Art of Acting* (1746), Hill systematized his theatre criticism, in which the passions and their effects on the body are central. He divided acting into four basic steps:

1<sup>st</sup> The imagination must conceive a *strong idea* of the passion.

2<sup>nd</sup> But that idea cannot be *strongly* conceived, without impressing its own form upon the muscles of the *face*.

3<sup>rd</sup> Nor *can* the look be muscularly stamped, without communicating instantly, the same impressions to the muscles of the *body*.

4<sup>th</sup> The muscles of the body (braced or slack, as the idea was an active or a passive one) must, in their natural, and not to be avoided consequence,

---

voice to correspond with passions. She implies that this was not a key issue for those in the trade of acting (95).



by impelling or retarding the flow of the animal spirits, transmit their own conceived sensation, to the sound of the *voice*, and to the disposition of the *gesture*. (*Works* 4: 340)

For Aaron Hill, there was no need for a student of the passions to practice expressions and postures in the mirror in order to master the art of imitation. Hill focused on the importance of training the imagination so that eventually the mere mental conception of a passion will force “animal spirits” into action, coursing through the nervous system to form the body into its appropriate posture and expressions, and the voice into an accordant modulation. An actor’s sensibility could thus be refined by identifying with a character so that he or she could effectively feel the same passions and react in the same way a character would were he or she an actual person.

John Hill was another important theorist in the art of natural acting that dominated the second half of the eighteenth century. In his introduction to *The Actor* (1755), Hill described playing as a science that should be studied systematically. Hill’s treatise highlights the theatre’s capacity to evoke and refine sympathy in an audience through the practice of spectatorship, and he also acknowledges the audience’s role in shaping theatrical culture. His project aimed to “reduce to rules a science hitherto practiced almost entirely from fancy” in order to “assist certain performers to attain perfection in it, and some parts of an audience how they may regularly judge it” (1). Hill’s treatise on acting encouraged audiences to evaluate performance in order to enhance the quality of the theatre: “The better an audience judges, the better the performers will act: perhaps, to the present good taste in the public is in a great measure owing the excellence of the principal among the present performers” (2). The theorist suggests a dynamic interplay not only between audience and actor, but also between actor and

author as characters are brought to life first in the author's written creation and then in the actor's physical expression of that character. It is the "business of a dramatic writer," Hill asserts, "to excite the passions," and it is the business of the player "to represent in the most forcible manner what the author has written." To achieve this, the actor must first "understand what the author means," and then he has to feel the passions "to assist the author in exciting, and this is the work of sensibility" (49). John Hill elucidates again the conflation of actor and author when he describes an audience's spontaneous sympathetic reaction as a player brings to life the passions conveyed in the language of a play: "[We] pay an involuntary tribute to the author and the player; we glow with their transports, the very frame and substance of our hearts [...] 'Tis thus we feel, as if they were our own, the sentiments and passions represented by a good writer, and animated by a performer who has judgment and genius" (10).

For John Hill, the "two capital qualities of an actor are understanding and sensibility," and an actor must rely on both in order to achieve excellent "judgment and genius" (49). In close relation to the idea of sympathy, Hill defined sensibility as the "disposition to receive those impressions by which our own passions are affected," a disposition that differs amongst people, some of whom "possess this in greater, some in lesser degree, and some scarce at all" (49). Some actors have a native sensibility (for example, a person might be more melancholy by nature and another high-spirited and jolly), and Hill believed this made some actors predisposed to playing characters who exhibit the same range of passions. For instance, players with a bent towards the romantic should play lovers (113-115). The ideal actor, however, "should be susceptible of all emotions, and of all equally; he should be able to express all, as well as to feel all in the same force; and so to make them succeed to one another ever so quickly; for there are characters which require this" (59). Like Aaron Hill before him, John

Hill stresses the importance of the sympathetic imagination in arousing passions, rather than merely mimicking behaviour. In understanding and sympathizing with the feelings and situation of a character, “action and the expression will arise from the occasion, unstudied, unpremeditated, and as it were natural to him; and being natural as well as great it will affect everybody: And this is the character of sensibility” (97). The best actors thus possess a “general sensibility,” an exceptional nervous system that allows for a recreation of the whole gamut of feelings. One might glean such an understanding of the passions from books, like acting texts and educational treatises on elocution, which offered visual taxonomies of the passions. Joseph Roach notes that as early as 1710, Charles Gildon recommended that actors make a practice of studying moral philosophy, and specifically, the passions, as they “produce various Appearances in the Looks and Actions, according to their various Mixtures” (*The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton, the Late Eminent Tragedian* 36-37). Such works were highly influenced by Charles LeBrun’s compilation of plates portraying the expression of the passions that was popular in England after it was first published in 1701 (West 92). LeBrun’s portraits of the passions are accompanied by simple explanations describing the muscular motion that defines each feeling. In other works, this delineation of the passions was sometimes constructed in an empirical, scientific manner, including tables illustrating how one passion relates to another, or offering measurements and explanations accounting for various intensities of emotion. Most frequently, this genre consists of simple illustrations and guidelines sufficient to instruct a common reader in mastering the imitation of different feelings. George Taylor observes that the main focus of these texts was to teach “how to perform a public persona, to teach inflexions of voice and the accompanying pauses and emphasis” by offering “the just delineation of the passions” (54, 56). It was in participation of the scientific spirit of the age,

Taylor adds, that elocutionary writers were working. Part of the project of coordinating inner passions with legible gestural expressions was also part of the program of moral refinement. In order to perform a public persona convincingly, a person must make publicly legible the private passions.

As a component to the concept of taste, sensibility could thus be improved if one were not inclined to feel all the passions easily. As a means of refining one's natural sensibility, Hill advocated studying human nature, and practicing expressions of the passions in front of a mirror, though he insisted that an actor cannot rely on imitation alone. This practice contradicts the usual emphasis on inward feeling, and Hill pressed the importance of understanding nature rather than simply mimicking what one observes:

It will be said, that imitation will supply the place of understanding, and that having observed in what manner another pronounces any sentence, the performer may give it utterance in the same cadence; an ear answering the purpose of understanding. Too many players are of this opinion; but it is setting their profession very low, it is reducing that to a mechanical art which was intended to exert all the force of genius; but as it is contemptible, it is also imperfect. (21)

Like Shakespeare, powerful actors did not mechanically imitate nature, but rather such actors drew their characters from an insightful understanding of humanity. Many accounts describe Garrick's trips to Bedlam to study madmen in preparation for his role as King Lear, and later in the century Sarah Siddons observed a somnambulist in preparation for her captivating portrayal of Lady Macbeth. However, artifice was infamously used on stage to effect a natural reaction: Garrick wore a mechanical wig whose hydraulic apparatus he manipulated in such a way that

his hair would stand on end like a porcupine's quills when, as Hamlet, he was frightened by his father's ghost.

Denis Diderot was importantly influenced by the artifice and illusion of Garrick's craft. Diderot's widely circulated *La paradoxe sur le comédien* (1773) suggested that Garrick's skill as an actor was rooted in the emotional distance from the part he was playing rather than in acutely feeling those emotions onstage. In his discussion of acting and emotionality, Diderot asserts, "extreme sensibility makes middling actors; ... in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor"; (qtd. in *The Player's Passion*, 117). Diderot says that the actor must maintain distance and not feel the passion in order to represent it successfully. Joseph Roach summarizes Diderot's theory on acting in the following:

Diderot believed [...] that the actor begins to approach perfection according to the degree to which he can train himself to overcome the influence of sensibility onstage, to discipline his gestures and expressions to the threshold at which their sensible content ceases to register on his consciousness, in short, to strive for the regularity of a mechanism [...] Diderot variously saw the actor as a blank slate, an automatic instrument waiting to sound the notes composed by other men's feelings on the strings of his own neutral memory [...] He saw the actor as an empty vessel filled by observation and emptied by performance or as a machine for the fabrication and demonstration of inner models. (134-36)

Great actors should be in absolute control of their "nervous sensibility"; they should not allow their own irregular emotions to intrude in performing a role. Roach explains: "When the flesh comprising the actor's bodily mechanism is carefully controlled, expressive possibilities unfold; when it is weak and abandoned to the momentary fluctuations of its sensible fibres, the

opportunity to create artistic illusions recedes accordingly” (133). An exemplary actor must learn a character and rigorously train and control the emotions, expressions, gestures, tones that define that character to create what Diderot calls the “modèle idéal,” a sort of inner template of a role, until acting the part becomes almost mechanical, like playing a difficult piano arrangement (133).<sup>29</sup> As a matter of technique to create emotional effect, a fine actor must remain neutral in his feelings and only feign emotions—he or she acts from memory by practising the part repeatedly, so that the part might be reproduced exactly. According to Diderot, David Garrick was exemplary in this (134). Though this technique created the illusion that an actor was actually experiencing emotions on stage, which in turn elicited sympathy from the audience, it also perpetuates ideas about the moral ambiguity and deceit of performance that remained prominent throughout the era because the outward signs of expression were divorced from real, sincere affect.

Acting became naturalized in this period compared to what were termed the more artificial styles that had been practiced previously, and this innovation in acting techniques was considered a great advancement for the stage in this period. The science of acting was rooted in theories of how the human mind and emotional responses operated; the movement from the

---

<sup>29</sup> Roach writes: “Diderot’s examples reintroduce, in a somewhat startling context, the encyclopedist’s enthusiasm for technical craftsmanship, and they recall at the same time his account of the *salon* exhibition in which Garrick put his head between two screens and in a few seconds ran his face back and forth through nine distinct passions like a pianist playing arpeggios: “Can his soul have experienced all these feelings, and played this scale in concert with his face? I don’t believe it; nor do you” (*PC*, 33; qtd. in *Player’s Passion*, 138).

idea of feeling from the actor's imagination to the actualization of these feelings on the body was considered a "natural" progression. In the early acting theory of John Hill and Aaron Hill, the idea of realism was bound up with actually feeling the part. For Diderot, a great actor had the mental agility to control emotions in order to create the illusion of actually feeling what their character feels. Actors like David Garrick were considered "naturalistic actors" despite the highly stylized practice of performance, because of the sympathetic nature of his performance: his body indicated (whether illusively or not) that he actually felt the emotions of the character, which sparked these emotions in the sympathetic imagination of his spectators. Denise Sechelski advances the argument that "through his acting, Garrick's body incorporates 'the people,' the body of the audience" so that his acting symbolizes and demonstrates how sympathy functions as a binding force in society (379). Despite the many differences produced amongst people in eighteenth-century commercial society, passions and emotions are universally felt and shared, and were thus conceived of as the foundation of a benevolent society.

### **Actors as Avatars of Shakespearean Character: Embodying "the Opinions and Instructions of Shakespeare"**

The idea of the actor is central to the discussion of Shakespeare onstage in the eighteenth century as the actor is a medium between the text and the audience and therefore a facilitator in the process of moral cultivation. The actor, by grounding his gestural signs in actual feeling, can navigate the different emotional responses and motives by which an author means to lead the passions and the imaginations of his audience. The alignment of Shakespeare with nature promoted his characters as objects of raw beauty and as specimens that, when carefully analyzed, revealed truths about humanity. Through the study of the playwright's realistic

portrayal of the universal passions, and through the emotional responses characters evoked in an audience, an ethical education could be derived. Just as the literary critics and commentators scrutinized characters to illuminate intentions and motives for a reading public, actors uncovered the primary emotional experience embedded in Shakespeare's plays and performed Shakespeare's meaning for their spectators.

Theories of natural acting that dominated the stage by the second half of the eighteenth century emphasize the gestures and expression of the actors almost more than Shakespeare's own words. William Worthen suggests that eighteenth-century acting theorists felt that gestures more than words were universal to human nature. Gestures, John Hill writes in *The Actor*, "are dictated by nature's self, and are common to all mankind. The language of signs we all speak without having been taught it" (qtd. in Worthen 78; Hill 232). According to prevailing performance theory of the day, gestures and expressions that coordinated with and indicated passion constituted a universal language with which an audience could more immediately identify. Just as Shakespeare's art of characterization was appreciated for exhibiting universal qualities that reached across time and culture, the new method of natural acting was valued for its physical conveyance of common passions. In the theatre, it was the actor's job to arouse sympathy in an audience by closely understanding his characters and even experiencing the emotions Shakespeare conjures in his sublime language. In the world of print, as I explored in the previous chapter, Shakespearean character criticism of the period often reads like a study of emotions: how a passion affects a character, how the same passion influences characters differently, and how the passions are checked or regulated as a character is led to action, are all aspects of affective response scrutinized in the study of Shakespeare's plays, and of a piece with the educational project of cultivating taste. Moreover, contemporary



text-based character criticism also focused on the private lives of characters. They were easy to identify with and they therefore helped to cultivate a morality of everyday life. This practice of portraying the private lives of Shakespeare's characters was also prevalent on-stage—Lear, Hamlet and Macbeth were typically fathers, sons, and husbands before they were kings, princes, and thanes. Eighteenth-century interpretations read Shakespeare's characters as shifting into both private and public roles within the plays, similar to the way contemporaries viewed the formation of identity as occurring across shifting boundaries of the public and the private. It was the actor's job to reveal the various dimensions that constitute a character's identity. The important role of the actor in disseminating Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature was championed by theatre critics who were dissatisfied with the misrepresentation of Shakespeare's characters in performance.

William Popple, a minor dramatist and poet who worked with Aaron Hill in publishing the theatrical periodical *The Prompter* from 1734-36, underscored the distinction between characters "as they were originally DESIGN'D by the poets who *drew* them, and as they APPEAR to an Audience from the manner in which the Actor *personates* them" (Vickers 3: 22). By offering critical observations on how the customary performance of Polonius is discordant with Shakespeare's actual rendering of the character, Popple aims to encourage actors to more carefully study, understand, and perform the complex nature of Shakespeare's fictive people. For example, Polonius had been reduced in modern productions to a one-dimensional "Fool and Idiot" who "never fails to excite laughter" (3: 27). Polonius on the contemporary stage "never *looks* or *speaks* but the Fool *stares* out of his *Eyes*, and is *marked* in the *Tone* of his *Voice*" (3: 24). The "true Character of *Polonius*," though, is no idiot, but a wise man whose wisdom appears clouded by the "visible Affectation of *Formality* and *Method*" and

courtly wit “that makes the old Man appear ridiculous at the same time that what he says has all the Probability in the World of being the Truth” (3: 24). The author demonstrated this by considering Polonius’ social and domestic roles in the play. Polonius, at least in his younger days, “had acquired the Reputation of being *cunning* and *politick*” and he still remains a trusted advisor to the King; moreover, Polonius also displays the “Prudence of a Parent giving Advice to his Daughter how to receive the Addresses of a presumptive Heir of a Crown” (3: 27; 3:25). Popple does not blame any one particular actor for reductively misreading and misrepresenting Polonius; instead, he attributes the “false Edition of *Polonius*” (a phrase which neatly connects the examination of character onstage with the editorial project of restoring Shakespeare’s true meaning through the various editions of his collected works) to the practice of perpetuating stock performances of a character “which Time has given a *Sanction* to” (3: 22). Were a player to more accurately present the actual complexity of Shakespeare’s characters onstage, Popple speculates, they might be crowned “with *deserved Applause*, and make their Penetration, like the Sun *long eclips’d, break out* to the *Admiration* of the *present Age* and the *Comfort of Posterity*” (3: 23).

Aaron Hill likewise anoints players with the responsibility of honouring “the Opinions and Instructions of Shakespeare” in the performance of his characters rather than imitating the misguided interpretations of their predecessors (Vickers 3: 29). Hamlet, Hill argues, would affect an audience more successfully were he “as strongly *represented as written!*” (3: 35). Hamlet is described as multi-dimensional, and Hill praises Shakespeare for creating such a complex figure: “The *Poet* has adorn’d him with a Succession of the most *opposite* Beauties, which are *varied*, like *Colours* on the *Cameleon*, according to the *different Lights* in which we behold him. But the *Player*, unequal to his *Precedent*, is for-ever *His unvaried SELF*” (3: 35).

Hill reads Hamlet within a domestic context rather than as a Prince robbed of his throne by a usurper: Hamlet is a character who “*assumes* what he pleases” but he *is* what He ought to be: the Lamentor of his murder’d *Father*, the Discerner of his *Mother’s* Levity, and the Suspecter of his *Uncle’s* Baseness” (3: 36). Not only does Hill read this character with a focus on what would traditionally be cast as Hamlet’s private role within a family, but he privileges the passions as a guide to understanding the melancholy avenger, and Shakespeare’s characters generally. Rather than embracing all the conflicting and changing passions produced from the rich inner life of this character, actors tended to portray the Prince of Denmark as either gay or solemn. To deliver a successful performance, an actor had to work to express the passions that the playwright so accurately represented. Hill concludes this installment of *The Prompter* with a nautical metaphor wherein the passions, “in their Powers and Changes,” are like the winds that should steer the course of an actor’s performance.

The study of the passions and human nature was central to what contemporaries considered the realistic manner of performance (advocated by Aaron Hill, Popple, and others) that captured the London stage by the second half of the eighteenth century. Of course, many theatre cultures promote “natural” acting that is only a certain style of acting that looks more natural than an earlier form—Hamlet’s instruction to the players is evidence enough of this. The acting advocated by theorists like Hill and Popple was a new, particular style that was deemed more natural than the acting of their predecessors. Before this naturalistic acting style achieved acclaim, the prevailing style of acting, especially in tragedy, was declamatory with rigorously standardized gestures. Lily Campbell usefully classifies this tradition of acting as falling within the “classical period,” which extends from 1690 to 1741, and which she characterizes by “the following of tradition and by the acceptance of conventionalized tone and

gesture on stage” (163). As William Popple laments above, classical actors were expected to follow the tradition of acting a character so that a younger actor would study and imitate the style, gestures, and expression of his or her predecessor. The interpretation of a character was transmitted from actor to actor with the assumption that the play’s author originally instructed how the role should be performed, and that performance became fixed in tradition. “Mrs. Betterton,” Campbell writes, “is said to have been famed for her acting in Shakespeare’s plays, particularly for her Ophelia, of which character Sir William Davenant gave her some idea from his memory of the boy Ophelias who acted before the civil wars” (165). Theatre gossip held that William Davenant knew Shakespeare, and therefore understood how characters should be performed from conversations with the playwright. He passed his expertise to Thomas Betterton, who in turn passed it to James Quin, who continued with the hereditary, conventional traditions that were believed to have persisted onstage since Shakespeare.

Rather than concentrating on interpretations of a character’s emotions and the manifestation of the physical expression of the passions, this mode of acting was highly oratorical with a focus on voice and postures. Thomas Davies describes the trademark style of this early generation of actors who pleased their audience by “elevation of voice, with a sudden mechanical depression of its tones, calculated to excite admiration and to entrap applause” (*Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* 1: 40). Underlying this method is a neoclassical theory of dramatic character and decorum that was thought to enhance the dignity of tragic characters. Colley Cibber described the formal restraint with which Thomas Betterton, a prominent Restoration actor, played Hamlet encountering his father’s ghost:

This was the light into which *Betterton* threw this Scene; which he  
open’d with a Pause of mute Amazement! Then rising slowly to a solemn,

trembling Voice, he made the Ghost equally terrible to the Spectator, as to himself! And in the descriptive Part of the natural Emotions which the ghastly Vision gave him, the boldness of his Expostulation was still govern'd by Decency, manly, but not braving; his voice never rising into that seeming Outrage, or wild Defiance of what he naturally rever'd. (61)

Betterton's declamatory style of acting was more reserved with a measurement in voice and step, and a neoclassical concern for the preservation of dignity and propriety appropriate to the tragic genre. As Cibber wrote, in its own time this method was considered natural insofar as it followed the classical ideal of responding as a prince would to the "rever'd" ghost of his kingly father. However, as the study of Shakespeare's characters became more prevalent, a more realistic, interpretive acting style was required in London theaters, and the classical, declamatory method became commonly aligned with artifice compared to the more modern performances. Robert Lloyd, for instance, mocked the austere and deliberate movements of actors portraying royalty: "Theatric Monarchs in their tragic Gait / Affect to mark the solemn Pace of State. / One Foot put forward in Position strong, / The other like its vassal dragged along. / So grace each Motion, so exact and slow, / Like wooden Monarchs at a Puppet Show"

(6). Aaron Hill likewise criticized the declamatory style of acting in *The Prompter* for its failure to represent the passions realistically:

the Player (blindly ignorant, or arrogantly Obstinate) presumes to imitate these Whirlwinds of the Soul, with all the Calmness of Stupidity! Let the Scene-man sweat, a solemn Silliness of Strut, a swing-swig Slowness in Motion of the Arm, and a dry, dull, drawing Voice that carries Opium in its detestable Monotony,--These are the graces of the modern Stage! These are the Fruits of the

two Royal Patents! (315)

This opposition between the artificiality of the declamatory style and the naturalism of a new style is especially clear in the many comparisons of James Quin, Betterton's predecessor, who was famous for his solemnity and his slow, sonorous delivery, with the younger players who departed from tradition and adhered to the new, innovative method. Writing in mid-century in praise of the naturalism of David Garrick, Charles Churchill pointed to Quin's artifice in "The Rosciad": "His words bore sterling weight, nervous and strong; / In many tides of sense they roll'd along. / Happy in art, he chiefly had pretence / To keep up Numbers, yet not forfeit Sense, / No actor ever greater heights could reach / In all the labour'd artifice of speech" (27-28). In 1746, James Quin and David Garrick both took the stage to perform Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, each actor representing a different method of acting. Richard Cumberland wrote of the contrast between Quin's "dignified indifference" compared to the energy and realism of Garrick's performance: "little Garrick, then young and light and alive in every muscle and in every feature, came bounding on the stage [...] It seemed as if a whole century had been stepped over in the transition of a single scene" (qtd. in Stone, "David Garrick's Significance," 187). Just as Shakespeare was praised as a natural poet whose sublime characters were realistic representations of actual people, the best actors and actresses of the era were lauded for the natural, physical expression of the passions and their understanding of a character's inner life.

Players thus began to focus on understanding the passions as the basic components of Shakespeare's characters. By scrutinizing Shakespeare's meaning, players offered new interpretations of their roles that departed from the tradition of imitating the performances that came before. Shakespearean characters were an ideal fit for the new natural method of acting

which sought to create sympathetic identification by revealing the imagined inner lives of characters, and the careers of the century's most prominent actors and actresses were launched by performing such roles. Reviews and periodicals recounting their performances reveal a two-fold analysis of how successful players aroused emotional responses from the audience. First, writers emphasized how a performer embodied aspects of Shakespeare's art of characterization through their physical expression; second, theatre-goers commented on how actors conveyed the impression that their characters are shifting between roles that are sometimes private and sometimes public, just as eighteenth-century audiences were building character across the boundary between the private and public. These recorded responses to Shakespearean character in performance did not focus primarily on Shakespeare's language, though it was sometimes praised for its sublime beauty; instead, attention was directed to the crucial role of the player in channeling Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature through the body. It is important to note that the prominence of Shakespearean character in the theatre prompted conversations in the world of print, so that characters were considered beyond an actor's ephemeral performance in a culturally productive way. Moral instruction first occurred in the theatre as spectators sharpened their moral sense by watching, evaluating, and sympathizing with characters, but the practice of examining characters continued as reviewers compared players' interpretations with their own appraisals and effectively re-enacted the passions displayed onstage by decoding actors' gestures for reading audiences. In the following, I will consider the performances of Charles Macklin, David Garrick, and Hannah Pritchard in Shakespearean roles as these players helped shape and define the new method of natural acting that prevailed throughout the eighteenth century.

While David Garrick receives much of the critical acclaim for executing the natural style of portraying the passions and truly understanding Shakespeare's characters, Charles Macklin championed this method first, and his experimentation influenced Garrick and other actors. Lily Campbell notes that as early as 1725 Charles Macklin "made an unappreciated effort to introduce his natural style of acting upon the stage;" however, it was not until years later that the public warmly embraced Macklin's acting methods when he played Shakespeare's Shylock for the first time onstage in 1741 in a revival of *The Merchant of Venice* (178). Until this point in stage history, London audiences were accustomed to witnessing George Granville's 1701 adaptation, *The Jew of Venice*. Thomas Davies writes of Macklin's triumphant performance of Shylock as a reformation in acting techniques:

Macklin looks the part as much better than any other person as he plays it. In the level scenes his voice is most happily suited to that sententious gloominess of expression the author intended, which with a sullen solemnity of manner marks the character strongly. In his malevolence there is a forcible and terrifying ferocity. In the third act scene, where alternate passions reign, he breaks the tones of utterance, and varies his countenance admirably, and in the dumb action of the trial scene he is amazing beyond description (qtd. in Downer 1013).

Contemporary audiences felt that for the first time, Shakespeare's sublime and natural character was brought to life in London's theatres according to the tenets of the natural method of acting. Davies credited Macklin's performance because he illuminated the truth of human nature embedded in Shakespeare's work; the actor's performance corresponded with the complexity of character "the author intended." Macklin departed from the declamatory style of acting by breaking "the tones of utterance" to convey a sense of emotional experience, and the "sullen



solemnity” with which he portrayed Shylock was toned down in contrast to the bombastic delivery of his predecessors, who had adapted and reduced Shylock to a comic vice figure.

Cecil Price remarks that for Macklin:

the usurer was no figure of fun but a bitter man reacting fiercely against the scornful treatment he had received from the Venetians. Macklin wore a ‘piqued beard’ and loose, black gown, and gave local colour to the production by donning the red hat of the Jews of Venice. In the third act, he reported: “I threw out all my fire, and as the contrasted passions of joy for the Merchant’s losses, and grief for the elopement of Jessica, opened a fine field for the actor’s powers, I had the good fortune to please beyond my warmest expectations.

(From W. Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin* 92-94, qtd. in Price 34)

Here, Macklin points to the emotional complexity of Shylock in acknowledging the competing emotions that stem from Shylock’s multiple and comingling public and private roles. For instance, the actor aims to highlight the conflict between the feelings born from a betrayed father and from a bitter moneylender abused by the Christian community of the play. The “contrasted passions” with which Shakespeare gives variance and depth to characters like Shylock “opened a fine field” by which players like Macklin could showcase what John Hill called “general sensibility”—an expansive sympathetic imagination that could physically register a range of human emotions.

Moreover, Macklin augmented the realism of his portrayal by dressing in the sort of costume Shylock might have worn, as though he were an actual historical figure, which added to the natural effect of the performance. This delicate blending of general passions and particular qualities was an aspect of characterization for which Shakespeare was likewise

praised (as my previous chapter illustrates). Shakespeare's characters were considered, as Samuel Johnson wrote, "just representations of general nature" at the same time as they were "diversified with boundless invention" (7: 61; 135). Macklin managed to embody a balance of unique individuality on the one hand and the universal qualities of the passions on the other. This located Shylock between the generalized types and particular caricatures ubiquitous in literature and drama of the era, rendering the merchant a more realistic character, and therefore more useful to the process of moral spectatorship.

The celebrated actor and theatre manager David Garrick was especially lauded in this period for channeling Shakespeare's art of characterization onstage. Garrick's seemingly charmed career was launched during the Shakespeare revival of 1740-41 in the lead role of *Richard III*. Following Macklin's lead, Garrick played Richard as a human being and not as a monster, a narrow interpretation London audiences had come to expect. Roger Pickering praised Garrick for enacting the passions that overwhelm Richard in the tent scene at the end of the play when "that Monster in Blood and excessive Villainy wakes in all the Terrors of an Imagination distracted by conscious Guilt":

*Richard.* Give me a Horse—bind up my Wounds! Have mercy, Heav'n!

What *masterly Expression* has the great Shakespeare shewn in these eleven Words!

The rapid incoherence of the first Line, presents strongly to us the guilty confusion of Richard's Senses, scarce yet awake, at the Eve of Battle, which might bring him a full Punishment for his enormous Crimes; and, for the first Time forces him to address that Heaven which, he believed, he had offended beyond *Forgiveness*...

But, to bring a remorseless Wretch to *Feeling*, and from *Feeling* to *Pray*, requires a Pause indeed. Exquisitely just and beautiful is Shakespeare's *Expression*;

exquisitely just and beautiful is Garrick's *Action*, in so small a Compass.

(*Reflections upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy* 50)

Just as Macklin's Shylock was considered "amazing beyond description" in the "dumb show of the trial scene," Garrick is praised for conveying a sense of character through "action." Here, Pickering locates Garrick's talent in his capacity to embody Shakespeare's intended delineation of the passions not through declamation, but rather, through his gestural expressions and breaks in speech, as though Garrick was physically enduring the same passions as Richard III. This visible manifestation of the passions on the actor's body suggests a refined sensibility and sound judgment that marks Garrick, and Macklin, as men of taste. Moreover, there is a sense of partnership between the playwright and the actor in conveying a realistic character onstage through the embodiment of expressive language. In this passage, Shakespeare is not acknowledged for the poetry of his language; rather, his words are perceived as stage directions by which an actor might bring a character to life. The parallel phrasing in praise of both Shakespeare and Garrick casts player and playwright as equals in their respective crafts. Not only was Pickering affected during the actual performance, but in this review he also measures Garrick's acting techniques against the "masterly expression" by which Shakespeare reveals a sense of Richard's inner, emotional experience. In the process of analyzing theatrical performances according to how well actors channeled the "real" essence of Shakespeare's characters, spectators are further called to scrutinize and contemplate these fictional people, so that moral engagement continues beyond watching and sympathizing with the characters onstage.

Theatergoers even had the opportunity to appraise performers' interpretation of their roles before it was acted. Garrick published *An Essay on Acting in which will be considered the*

*Mimical Behaviour of a certain Fashionable Faulty Actor* (1744), in which he humorously postured as his own critic as he discusses how Shakespeare's poetic expression of Macbeth's character should be embodied onstage. Such a publication speaks to the professionalization of actors; it positions Garrick as a man of understanding and judgment as he investigates the essential nature of Macbeth and how he should be corporeally represented before actually performing the role on stage. Garrick also associated with scholars and editors of Shakespeare's plays who informed his interpretations. Peter Holland writes: "In a way that marked an unprecedented collaboration between the theatre and the new traditions of textual scholarship, Garrick paid minute attention to the opportunities offered by the latest scholarly research" (87 "Age of Garrick"). When Garrick appeared as Macbeth in 1744, he followed Lewis Theobald's scholarly version of the play, the most recent version available, rather than William Davenant's reworking of Macbeth that had held the stage for many years, with its neoclassical symmetry between the Macbeths and the Macduffs. Holland also notes that Garrick consulted other scholars, such as Samuel Johnson, and William Warburton, the latter of whom was working on his own edition of Shakespeare's plays. Garrick's familiarity with theories of physiology is also evident as the actor illuminates for his readers his approach to his character and Macbeth's motivations in the dagger scene. Macbeth, Garrick explained, is divided by his conflicting private and social obligations; as a subject to the King, he realizes "the Horror of the Deed," while simultaneously he is driven by his own personal ambition and an obligation to his wife (Vickers 3: 131). This conflict causes Macbeth's senses to fail so that he fixates on the imaginary dagger:

Now in this visionary Horror he should not rivet his Eyes to an *imaginary*  
Object, as if it *really* was there, but should shew an *unsettled Motion* in his

Eye, like one not quite awak'd from some disordering Dream. His *Hands* and *Fingers* should not be *immovable* but *restless*, and endeavouring to disperse the Cloud that over shadows his optick Ray and bedims his Intellects. Here would be Confusion, Disorder, and Agony! *Come let me clutch thee!* Is not to be done by *one* Motion only but by several *successive Catches* at it, first the same Time with his Feet like a Man who, out of his Depth and half drowned in his Struggles, *catches* at *Air* for *Substance*. (Vickers 3: 131)

Garrick offers a psychological rendering of Macbeth that deciphered for his reading audience the meaning underlying the set of gestures he used to convey the king's emotions and private thoughts. The actor prepared for his role by imagining Macbeth as a real corporeal person governed by laws of optics and as he might react physically to his overwhelming conflict in the play.

Hannah Pritchard offered her own powerful performance as Lady Macbeth. Pritchard was a force to be reckoned with in the London theatres: she was often praised in her day for the realism of her characters. In various instances she is connected with Shakespeare's natural and sublime art—both in her debut role as Rosalind and later as Lady Macbeth. Michael Dobson advances the argument that the 1740 production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* particularly “marked the rediscovery of a ‘natural’, pastoral Shakespeare—Shakespeare's sublime, natural imperfections were embraced rather than viewed as in need of correction” (“Improving” 67). Dobson also importantly notes that Hannah Pritchard was especially lauded for her brilliance in delivering a realistic imitation of character in this production and deftly examines how Pritchard's discovery as an extraordinarily gifted actress in her mimetic abilities was enacted in the play itself as Pritchard, performing as Rosalind, moved from the “constrained, artificial

banter” of Duke Frederick’s court to the lively, energetic dialogue of Arden (68). Thomas Davies commented on her “sprightliness” and her “various attitudes,” while John Hill crowned Pritchard “the best actress on the British stage” after Pritchard played this role (Davies, 1780, 2: 177-78; Hill, 1755, 195). Davies points to the sublime elements of Pritchard’s performance of Lady Macbeth:

Mrs. Pritchard’s action, before and after the commission of the horrid deed, was strongly characteristical [sic]: it presented an image of a mind insensible to compunction, and inflexibly bent to cruelty. When she snatched the dagger from the remorseful and irresolute Macbeth, despising the agitations of a mind accustomed to guilt, and alarmed at the terrors of conscience, she presented to the audience a picture of the most consummate intrepidity in mischief. When she seized the instruments of death, and said, ‘GIVE ME THE DAGGERS!’—her look and action cannot be described, and will not soon be forgotten by the surviving spectators. (*Memoirs*, 1780, 2: 182-83)

This account records the awestruck reaction of the spectators as they witness Lady Macbeth’s absolute fearlessness. Davies’ use of the phrase “strongly characteristical” to praise Pritchard’s performance suggests that she is accurately mediating the art of Shakespeare’s characterization. The notion that the actress and actor physically interpret the essence of Shakespeare’s characters is also highlighted when Davies struggles to describe the Macbeths after Duncan has been murdered, a scene which “can no more be described than I believe it can be equaled”: “The beginning of the scene after the murder was conducted in terrifying whispers. Their looks and action supplied the place of words. You heard what they spoke, but you learned more from the agitation of mind displayed in their action and deportment” (*Dramatic Miscellanies*, 1784,

2: 93). In this evaluation, Shakespeare's language is subsumed in the embodied characterization of the players: the playwright, like Davies himself, is rendered almost speechless. Davies continues to shower Pritchard with praise for her naturalism in the banquet scene, and even more so in her sleepwalking scene, where Lady Macbeth's guilty conscience and vulnerability are impressed upon the audience: "In exhibiting the last scene of Lady Macbeth, in which the terrors of guilty conscience keep the mind broad awake while the body sleeps, Mrs. Pritchard's acting resembled those sudden flashes of lightning, which more accurately discover the horrors of surrounding darkness" (*Memoirs*, 1780, 2: 183-84). The comparison of Pritchard's acting to "sudden flashes of lightning" marks her style as a force of nature akin to the sublime and natural genius of Shakespeare.

The sleepwalking scene became a key moment in the play for an actress to display her talents and force of emotion. In print, a critic like Johnson could highlight for the reader how a passion operated within a character. A theatrical practice that emphasized a particular expression of a passion was called "pointing": an actor would conjure and transmit a particular emotion in the delivery of a poignant part of the play, like a soliloquy or a death speech, that would provoke the audience to respond with applause for such a moving representation, or, as William Worthen has noted, sometimes the audience answered with tears, and sometimes abuse (72). This method of pointing demanded the actor present a specific moment of intense passion to the audience with the aim of harmonizing the emotions of character, actor, and audience. This reaction is different from our modern reception of performing a character in that modern audiences do not isolate singular passions for appreciation, but, as George Taylor notes, modern spectators withhold applause "until the whole process, or life of the performance had been completed" (60). A perfect example of a famous "point" or "hit" in performance,

according to Taylor, was Garrick's surprised reaction as Hamlet seeing his father's ghost: "He was not concerned primarily with the significance of the ghost of his murdered father, but with the expression of the passions of fear and amazement. It was these that convinced the audience that he saw a ghost, not his overall interpretation of the prince of Denmark" (60). In its emphasis on technique, this tradition of pointing provided a moment in the drama by which to compare different actors who played the same parts. For instance, Hannah Pritchard made an impact on her audience as she walked about the stage with a candle in hand to illuminate her haunting expressions. However, later in the century, Sarah Siddons broke with this tradition by rubbing the blood Lady Macbeth imagined had stained her hands (Kliman 30).

Audiences also appreciated the transition that actors of high caliber like Macklin, Garrick or Pritchard could make between one passion and another, or even give the impression that a character was enduring a multitude of emotions that implied a complex interiority. Thomas Davies wrote in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*: "We should reflect that Lear is not agitated by one passion only, that he is not moved by rage, by grief and indignation singly, but by a tumultuous combination of them altogether, where all claim to be heard at once, and where one naturally interrupts the progress of the others" (2: 180). The trick in these transitions from one passion to the next is to maintain consistent characterization while simultaneously keeping the passions distinct so that audiences could recognize and identify them (Taylor 61). Taylor points to John Hill's comparison of acting and painting in *The Actor*: "as the painter's principle skill is to mark distances, the player's is to shew the removes thro' which the transitions are made from one to the other: and great care is to be taken with another, because they happen to succeed" (36-37). Garrick's major talent was in displaying quick transitions from one passion to another. He modulated the emotions in a way that was much subtler than the more formal



classical style had permitted. Shearer West notes that Garrick was typically praised for his astonishing muscular control, which allowed for a series of quick and fluid expressions (99). Samuel Foote gives modern day readers a sense of Garrick's quick physical transitions from one passion to the next with evocative detail. Below is a description of Garrick as King Lear<sup>30</sup>:

You fall precipitately upon your knees, extend you arms, clench your hands, set your teeth and, with a savage distraction in your look, trembling in all your limbs and your eyes pointed to heaven (the whole expressing a fullness of rage and revenge), you begin "Hear, Nature, dear goddess!" with a broken inward eager utterance.

From thence rising every line in loudness and rapidity of voice until you come to "and feel / How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, / To have a thankless child."

Then you are struck at once with your daughter's ingratitude and, bursting into tears, with a most sorrowful heart-breaking tone of voice, you say, go, go my people.

(qtd. in *Age of Garrick* 85)

Davies writes that as King Lear, this was Garrick's great talent: "he had, from the most violent rage, descended to sedate calmness; had seized with unutterable sensibility, the various impressions of terror, and faithfully represented all the turbid passions of the soul" (1784, 2: 208). Garrick's success, Worthen argues, resided in his technique of balancing "a deft use of pictorial acting conventions with the appearance of immediate inspiration;" he represented "a suggestive equipoise between formal convention and individual expression" (71). In other words, Garrick was perceived as a master of creating a balance between privately felt passions and their formal, public expression. The balance of feeling and form on stage is similar to the

---

<sup>30</sup> This refers to Garrick's role in his 1756 adaptation of Tate's version of King Lear that moved closer to Shakespeare's text, but still kept Cordelia alive.

public expression of private feelings, of refining one's self-interests yet presenting one's character authentically that was so central to discussions about identity.

However, some critics suggested that Garrick concentrated too much on the common, private nature of Lear as an old man betrayed by his daughters in order to arouse sympathy in an audience, rather than demonstrating, as Samuel Foote judged, the "Portrait that *Shakespeare* has given us of *Lear*." Foote described Shakespeare's Lear as "a good-hearted Man, easily provoked, impatient of Contradiction, and hasty in Resolution" (*A Treatise on the Passions* 1747. Vickers 3: 211). Shakespeare "seldom fails to direct the Actor" in Lear's real "moral Character," but Garrick, nevertheless, often "overlooks the rage of a proud monarch and favours too much the aggrieved father" (3: 211-12). The "Mixture of Anger and Grief" Garrick displays when he curses his daughters at the end of the first act is especially "unnatural", according to Foote's reading, and rather "should be utter'd with a Rage almost equal to Phrenzy, quick and rapid as a Whirlwind, no Mark of Malice, no Premeditation, no Solemnity" (3: 212). In the king's overwhelming sorrow in this scene, Garrick would produce a handkerchief and weep, an act audiences today might view as a stock effect to evoke sympathy, but in the eighteenth-century, as Cecil Price notes, "the handkerchief might appear too trivial in a display of the King's overwhelming sorrow, yet its use could be defended on the ground that it was so ordinary and commonplace that it became a symbol of great weakness, bringing the audience into closer touch with him" (22). Foote suggested that Garrick's "unmanly Sniveling lowers the Consequence of *Lear*" and is behaviour more in "Imitation of a vex'd Girl" than an "enraged Monarch" (3: 212). Peter Holland offers a part of Garrick's correspondence where he divulges his reading of Lear as a broken-hearted old man and father rather than a king. Garrick wrote to his correspondent:

Lear is certainly a weak man—it is part of his character: violent, old and weakly fond of his daughters ... His weakness proceeds from his age ('fourscore and upwards') and such an old man, full of affection, generosity, passion and what-not, meeting with what he thought an ungrateful return from his best beloved Cordelia and afterwards real ingratitude from his other daughters, an audience must feel his distress and madness which is the consequence of them. (qtd. in *Age of Garrick* 85)

Rather than portraying the complexity of Lear's character as a contest between various private and public roles, Garrick's performance of Lear suggests he privileged a narrower reading by focusing on Lear's domestic, private role as a father in order to achieve the desired effect of arousing pity in the audience. Thomas Wilkes thought Garrick's interpretation moving, and he imagined himself in Lear's place in the last act:

I never see him coming down from the corner of the stage with his old grey hair standing, as it were, erect on his head, his face filled with horror and attention, his hands expanded, and his whole frame actuated by a dread solemnity, but I am astounded, and share in all his distresses ... Methinks I share in his calamities, I feel the dark drifting rain, and the sharp tempest ... His leaning against the side of the scene, perhaps for want of breath, as if exhausted, and his recollecting the feat, and replying to the fellow who observes, that the good old King had slain two of them, *Did I not, fellow?* Have more force, more strength, and more propriety of character, than I ever saw in any other actor. (234-235)

Wilke's attention is focused on the spectacle of Lear and the physical hardships the king endures as he catalogues the ways in which he sympathetically identifies with this character.

Samuel Foote likewise acknowledged that this scene is indeed effective due to the “soldier-like and manly Pleasure” Garrick expressed in mixture with his “tincturing all the Passions with a certain Feebleness suitable to the Age of the King, the Design of the Author, and the raising in the Minds of the Audience a stronger Feeling and Compassion for *Lear*’s Sufferings” (3: 214-215). Though Foote found Garrick’s portrayal of Lear too pitiable and undignified, he nevertheless thought that this point hit the mark, showed understanding of Lear’s character, and elicited strong sympathy from the audience.

Just as Shakespeare was viewed as a genius because he broke from the rules of tradition to follow the rules of nature, actors from the 1740s on were similarly praised for their natural method: actors were credited (and encouraged) for their departure from a declamatory tradition to deliver more realistic representations of Shakespeare’s complex characters. Samuel Johnson remarks that Shakespeare above all other authors is “the poet of nature [who] holds up to his readers a faithful mirror” of life (7: 62-63). Lloyd, meanwhile, writes in his poem *The Actor* that the ideal performer holds “the faithful Mirror up to Man” by tracing “the Passions from their rise” in order to “teach the Mind its proper Force to Scan” (18). In the same poem, he praises the players’ capacity to evoke sympathy in an audience: “‘Tis thine to lead with more than magic skill, / The Train of captive Passions at thy Will; / To bid the bursting Tear Spontaneous flow / In the Sweet sense of sympathetic woe” (2). Players mediated Shakespeare’s knowledge of human nature, and they focused on the composite private and public elements that were central to the conception of how identity was shaped in their own time to facilitate sympathetic identification. The individual performances of players became objects of taste as spectators evaluated and felt with characters in the theatre, an engagement that was sustained when, in periodicals and reviews, writers publicly measured these

performances against their own understanding of motivations, psychology and identity. As an actor's public craft of constructing character became an object of taste in this period, so too did their private lives.

**Character Offstage: *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy***

Actors and actresses were prominent figures in the cultural imagination of the eighteenth century, especially because they represented onstage the process of identity formation that so fixated their audiences in real life. Onstage, players negotiated between private and public roles under the close scrutiny of spectators. While actors performed the morally edifying task of representing Shakespearean characters and refining sympathy through their affective art, their performances also boldly emphasized the problem of posturing in society. On one hand, acting theory and theatrical reviews credited actors for their refined sensibility and powerful sympathetic imagination in identifying with their characters. As noted above, if an actor were to imagine himself in the place of his character, then the passions that constituted that character would naturally affect the player's body and reveal themselves to the audience. On the other hand, sensibility was also a term in the eighteenth century that carried negative connotations related to a misleading display of feeling connected to false taste. Just as someone might dress "tastefully" or claim appreciation for pleasures of the imagination without actually being morally oriented, a person could also feign to react emotionally for approval. Questions arose as to whether actors genuinely entered into the emotions of the characters they performed, or if they were experts in posturing and merely pretended to feel emotions presented onstage. This uncertainty had broader implications as it was applied to social interactions outside of the theatre, for if actors could so easily master the bodily representation of the passions, then anyone may, as Hamlet laments "smile and smile and be a villain" and feign the passions in

their turn (1.5.108). The display of feeling became ubiquitous in this era, and the cult of sensibility was often parodied, especially in the later eighteenth century when sensibility was particularly faddish and more regularly viewed as nothing more than artfully sustained emotional response.<sup>31</sup> An actor's sensibility was evaluated by how convincingly his body registered the emotion; a spectator's sensibility was measured by the same capacity. In the social space of the theatre, audience members were establishing their own character for others to read; if spectators did not react appropriately to a moving moment in a drama, they might be thought to lack moral character. The overwhelming display of tears and emotions in theatrical audiences is well documented. For instance, in 1756, Frances Brooke recorded an evening spent at the theatre with her nieces where she took "great pleasure" in crying (Vickers 4: 247). Brooke wrote of her experience watching Spranger Barry perform as *King Lear*:

I went with three of my six critical virgins into a part of the house  
where we enjoyed the double advantage of seeing the play and observing  
upon the audience, and I had the satisfaction of finding we were accompanied  
in our tears by almost the whole house. The young people, especially, showed  
such a becoming sensibility as gives me hopes virtue has a stronger party  
in the rising generation than those of my age in general are inclined to allow.

(Vickers 4: 247)

Brooke's account suggests an element of self-conscious display; she and her nieces consider it an "advantage" that they can simultaneously watch Lear suffer and witness who in the audience responds to the stirring pathos of the drama. While Brooke attributes this flood of tears to

---

<sup>31</sup> See John Mullan, "Sensibility and Literary Criticism," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, 1997).

moral fitness, there is also a suggestion that these obvious emotional reactions are a fashionable trend embraced by the younger spectators in the audience. On the one hand, then, a display of sensibility signified authenticity and natural feelings of benevolence; on the other, it was feared that a display of such emotions was an empty performance.

An actor thus had a dual role as a public arbiter of morality and as a figure of display and hypocrisy. Since actors' identities were so ambiguous, and because they were publicly scrutinized onstage, there was a heightened curiosity about their private lives. Biographies and memoirs of theatrical celebrities were a popular genre in this period because they fed readers' curiosity about the private lives of actors. Theophilus Cibber justified his practice of transforming the private lives of his colleagues into commodities in his *Lives and Characters of the most Eminent Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753):

However unimportant these Anecdotes may appear to some, I need not apologize for giving them to the Lovers of the Theatre, who are fond of looking into the little Springs that move the whole Machine, and are pleased when they can step behind the Scenes to take a nearer View of those Performers in private Life, whom they can never be well acquainted with, from their assumed Characters in public. (65)

At first, Cibber implies that the interest in actors and actresses offstage is linked to the general interest in character. In many instances, however, these tales from the theatre revealed scandalous stories of rivalries between players or titillated readers with details of romantic liaisons that reinforced old perceptions of players as social misfits—it was in defense of such a biography that the scandalous actress George Anne Bellamy wrote her own memoir.

The private lives of actresses were especially scrutinized for any sort of sexual misconduct. The focus on the actress's sexuality was rooted in the traditional association of the private, domestic sphere with women, so that an actress whose trade it was to practice public self-display transgressed ideological norms and was sometimes associated with prostitutes.<sup>32</sup> This sexuality was showcased rather than cloaked on the Restoration stage especially, but also throughout the eighteenth century. Actresses were often portrayed in vulnerable and suffering roles that were intended to titillate the audience. For example, Elizabeth Howe argues that the frequent representations of rape in the drama of the period exploited the actresses' sexuality "which was clearly intended to provide a sexual thrill for spectators" (42). Restoration prologues and epilogues were unabashedly bawdy, while breeches roles tantalized audiences with glimpses of actresses' legs. However, as the boundary between public and private spheres was shifting, actresses functioned onstage just as women generally did in the broader cultural imagination: actresses maintained a dual role as sexual objects associated with luxury, fashion, and indulgence, and as embodiments of domestic virtue.

Although the reputations of actresses and the theatres themselves improved over the course of the eighteenth century, the actress / whore conflation remained current throughout the period. Kristina Straub argues that the actress "figures discursively as the site of excessive sexuality that must be—but never fully is—contained or repressed" (89). Elizabeth Eger also notes that "women writers and actresses never became free of the public's fascination with their

---

<sup>32</sup> Felicity Nussbaum suggests that it was the ambiguous class position of the actress "that brought into play the sign of the 'actress-as-whore'" especially because actresses were seemingly disconnected from the fathers and husbands who define their social status (152).



private lives”; however, Eger adds that “publicity could be manipulated both for and against women’s interests” (“Spectacle, Intellect, and Authority,” 39, 41). For example, instead of downplaying her public role, George Anne Bellamy drew on her professional experience as a Shakespearean actress to solicit approbation from her contemporaries. Bellamy constructed a narrative in which her private character was directly shaped by her study of the Shakespeare characters she performed, so that her public life as a woman was portrayed as both damning and redemptive—as roundly human as one of Shakespeare’s own characters.

In the public imagination, George Anne Bellamy embodied just the sort of scandalous behaviour that Kristina Straub demonstrates was often associated with eighteenth-century actresses. According to Straub, actresses resisted emergent middle-class ideals of respectable and domestic femininity through their public spectacle of stage performance. Consequently, the public made a commodity and spectacle of their private lives. Straub comments on this voyeuristic impulse and explores how it strains the public / private dichotomy on which female sexuality was constructed. Cheryl Wanko likewise notes that “stage performers had always experienced public exposure through their nightly performances, and print increased their availability for consumption as commodities” (3).<sup>33</sup> The public certainly had an appetite for Bellamy’s messy private affairs. A 1761 memoir, falsely promoted as autobiography, chronicled her notorious private life, and portrayed her final years of impoverishment as a necessary consequence of her exhibitionism and defiance of sexual norms. This false account

---

<sup>33</sup> Shearer West notes that actors and actresses were not only transformed into a type of commodity as their memoirs circulated in the market, but by the mid-eighteenth century the print trade and the market for oil painting also increased the public presence of players. See West, *The Image of the Actor* (London, 1991).

of her life prompted Bellamy to self-representation in her own memoir, *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*, published first in 1785, after which followed three more editions. Though the *Apology* was popularly associated with George Anne Bellamy, and the assertion “Written By Herself” stands as a bold claim to authenticity on the first page, some believe the autobiography was ghostwritten by Alexander Bicknell in co-operation with the actress (Straub 114). I accept Kristina Straub’s point that our uncertainty about authorship might limit what we can say about Bellamy’s apparent self-representation; however, it does not preclude a reading of the cultural tropes available to the author or authors (114). Moreover, while autobiography, especially one written in the epistolary mode, as is Bellamy’s, might be conceived as an act of self-representation, it can also be read as reaching past the boundaries of the individual to a broader public. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that autobiographical writing is also part of “a process of identity formation that extends beyond individuals to the group or community to which they belong” or to which they want to belong (83). Viv Gardner suggests this requires a “polyvocal” reading of actress-autobiography, and alertness to both the social and theatrical context, to genre and production.

Straub shows how Bellamy drew on elements of the sentimental novel to construct a narrative in which she is portrayed as a victimized heroine, a trope frequently used in actresses’ biographies throughout the century. Indeed, Straub highlights the explicit connection between theatrical memoirs and novels: they are both narratives that make the personal public and reveal the “secret histories” of their subjects, with all sorts of adventurous melodrama (110). As one might read in a sentimental novel, predatory men constantly besieged Bellamy’s virtue as she naively navigated a backstage world of pleasure seeking and seduction. Moreover, like the sentimental heroine, Bellamy gushed about her female friendships (115). Bellamy’s acute

sensibility provides another link to the sentimental heroine. As noted above, certain treatises on acting suggest that actors enter into or sympathize with the feelings of the characters they are playing. Acting thus requires large measures of “sensibility,” a capacity for empathy and intense feeling. Despite these strong narrative connections, Straub shows conflict between Bellamy’s rhetorical stance as the “unguarded” sentimental heroine who must deal with the vagaries of the public world and her professional career as public actress. Bellamy “controls the spectacle” of her own femininity, “she takes pleasure in her own self-display,” and enjoys being in control of her own image (119-120). Straub writes that Bellamy’s autobiography “cracks down the middle on this fault line between the professional and domestic,” the public and the private (121). One cannot possess private virtue as a public woman. According to the responses the *Apology* received in its own time, this is not the only crack in Bellamy’s work: it is full of falsehoods and tall tales.

Though her private life was shrouded in controversy, Bellamy was clearly and stably associated with Shakespearean roles. Along with various other Shakespearean heroines, she played Juliet to Garrick’s Romeo at Drury Lane theatre at the same time Spranger Barry and Mrs. Cibber were also playing the young lovers at Covent Garden in the famous 1750 twelve-night competition. In her reading of Bellamy’s self-representation, Straub pays attention to the influences of Stern and other sentimental novelists. However, Straub does not mention the constant references and quotations drawn from Shakespeare’s plays and the persona Bellamy aimed to build on her public expertise as an actress so personally familiar with Shakespeare’s works. Bellamy consciously underscores her use of Shakespearean quotations as she addresses her reader:

I will not pay so ill a compliment to *your* taste, as to suppose the frequent

quotations I make from my favourite Shakespear [sic], most of whose female characters I have filled, prove disgusting to you; nor will I pay myself so ill a compliment, as to imagine you accuse me of applying them improperly.

They are so consonant with my own sentiments, and expressed in a manner so infinitely beyond the reach of my pen, that I cannot help making use of them whenever they occur to my memory, and appear to be apropos. (1: 235)

In this passage, Bellamy emphasizes that her profession has heightened her sensibility to Shakespeare's works: she has felt the feelings of his heroines. Moreover, Bellamy sheds the mantle of social misfit in the bourgeois practice of lauding Shakespeare's genius. By incorporating Shakespeare into her own narrative, she downplays the bawdiness with which her profession was sometimes associated and focuses on the virtuous qualities of the theatre. Kate Rumbold demonstrates that this use of Shakespearean quotations, so ubiquitous in novels of the period, is seldom innocuous. Rather, quotation is an important means of characterization. She advances the argument that "Shakespeare's multiple availability to the eighteenth-century public [...] renders his quotation an ambiguous act, capable of representing simultaneously a stagy self-dramatization and a benign readerly admiration" (1). Bellamy certainly presented the stagiest of stagy self-dramatizations as she positioned herself as the tragic Shakespearean heroine of her own life.

Bellamy, I wish to argue, moved a step beyond readerly admiration by using Shakespeare as a point of philosophical and moral meditation to demonstrate the prudential wisdom she had gained from her erroneous ways. The following will consider the polyvocal nature of Bellamy's *Apology* by addressing her important moral engagement with Shakespeare to construct a persona that is both public and virtuous. She created a narrative that exploits the

player's role as acutely sensible to channeling a character's passions, and she thereby positioned herself as an avatar of Shakespeare's morally upstanding (and suffering) heroines and impressed upon her readers that Shakespeare's art had formed her moral character.

As my previous chapter outlined, Shakespeare was especially admired in the eighteenth century for his accurate and moving representations of human passions and the psychology these passions constituted: he was received as a writer with almost divine insight to the laws of human nature. Samuel Johnson thought Shakespeare's comprehension and art in portraying human nature so powerful that by reading his plays even "a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions" (7: 65). Elizabeth Montagu enthusiastically proclaimed Shakespeare "one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived" (59) while Elizabeth Griffith embraced Shakespeare as both poet *and* philosopher (x). Montagu and Griffith, like Samuel Johnson before them, point to the "practical axioms" and "domestic wisdom" that abound in Shakespeare's opus; Johnson even claims that a "system of civil and oeconomical prudence" might be collected from the plays (7: 62).

Bellamy shrewdly quotes "that great moralist Shakespeare" throughout the *Apology*; from the very beginning, an epigraph encourages readers to exonerate her from the more condemnatory episodes of her life (2: 149). Judith Hawley notes that Shakespeare supplied epigraphs for some of Bellamy's contemporary and well-respected writers, including Hannah More and Sarah Fielding (291). By following suit, Bellamy situates her work alongside other praiseworthy literary projects; hers is a memoir unlike the soft-core pornography featured in the memoirs of actresses like Nell Gwynn and Margaret Woffington. Instead, Bellamy drew on this authority of Shakespeare to emphasize that her own faults, while unfortunate, were

constitutive of human nature in general. She quotes from *All's Well That Ends Well* in order to encourage her readers to exonerate her from the more condemnatory episodes of her life: "The Web of our Life is a mingled Yarn, good and ill together; our Virtues would be proud, if our Faults whipt them not; and our Crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our Virtues" (4.3.84-87). This is a tactful way to defend a scandalous life. Shakespeare tells the reader that Bellamy's life is neither simple, nor what they imagine it to be; it is a "mingled yarn," with good and bad interwoven. In her narrative, the actress's shortcomings are frequently portrayed as threaded with goodness. For example, her profligacy is a result of too fine a taste, to this she admits, but it is also a result of her heightened generosity to those in need. She discusses the happiness that naturally springs from relieving the necessities of others, and compares giving to Portia's idea of mercy: "it is twice blessed, it blesseth him that gives and him that takes" (1: 178). What's more, Bellamy's epigraph suggests that she has learned her lessons and does not take her own transgressions lightly; she has "cherished" her faults: they have humbled her and strengthened her virtues. The subtext here also hints that readers who cannot sympathize with her are over-proud of their own virtue.

Indeed, Bellamy frequently reiterates the distinction between the easily preserved virtue of private women and the hard-won reputation of the public actress. For instance, in her early days as a stage actress, she defends the women of her profession at a dinner party: "I thought a woman who preserved an unblemished reputation on the stage, to be infinitely more praiseworthy, than those who retained a good name, merely because they were secured by rank or fortune from the temptations actresses are exposed to" (1: 92). Bellamy closes her apology by drawing attention to this aptly chosen epigraph, at which point she clearly pleads with her audience to reflect on the wisdom of its message: "I hope this consideration will weigh in my

favour with the liberal and unprejudiced: and though I may not stand totally acquitted; though my faults may overbalance my virtues; I trust it will soften the severity of public censure, and restore me, in some measure, to their good opinion” (2: 260). Bellamy was not aspiring to sainthood in this autobiography; she hoped only to show that her misconduct resulted more from “thoughtlessness and imprudence, than of a depraved disposition” (2: 260). She hoped her own mistakes might inspire other ladies to a greater degree of prudence and reflection. It is the lack of attention to a “prudential system” in her life that led to “poverty, distress, anxiety, and every other attendant evil” (2: 260-261). As she wrote her story and meditated on her poor judgment, she offered lessons from her own Shakespeare-filled life just as contemporary critics were teaching morality from Shakespeare’s plays.

Bellamy aligns herself with Shakespearean heroines when dramatizing certain episodes of her life in order to give herself a certain type of character, to elicit sympathy from readers, and to establish her familiarity with Shakespeare. For instance, in one such episode she recalls being summoned to the dressing room of James Quin, a fellow actor. Upon approaching the room, she overhears Quin criticize her as cold and conceited (she takes great pains to inform the reader she was not eavesdropping). She responds to this evaluation “with the air of queen Catherine,” who in *Henry VIII* is a spirited woman throughout, always insisting on the respect due to a Queen, much as Bellamy consistently does in the *Apology*. Bellamy responds to Quin just as Catherine of Aragon boldly defies Wolsey, refusing to submit to his judgment (1: 128). There is another brilliant scene she paints of her later years, when her grown sons almost get into a duel over debts they owe to one another. Bellamy, who elsewhere doesn’t speak much of her sons, claims the position of the bereft mother Constance in *King John*:

Will you pardon me [...] if I repeat a few lines from a part I have often performed, and when I performed have most susceptibly *felt*? But never do I recollect, that they struck me with greater force than on the present occasion; they are part of the wailings of Constance, when she laments the loss of her beloved son. For the whole of the beautiful and affecting scenes, I refer you to the piece. And not much short of hers would have been my grief, had I been robbed of either of my sons by this unnatural contest. (2: 208)

Bellamy goes on to quote Constance at length. It is worth noting that she was especially lauded as a comic actress, and was considered particularly successful in contemporary plays. Yet it is not the more sexually titillating, modern comic roles she claims to identify with in the *Apology*; but rather with Shakespeare's poorly treated, hard-done-by heroines.

Characters from Shakespeare's plays also migrate from the stage into her *Apology* as she likens her contemporaries to dramatic personae. The actress Mrs. Monford, jilted by her lover for another actress, fell into a "desperation that deprived her of her senses" (1: 116). Bellamy recounts the madness and demise of this love-forlorn woman just as Gertrude tells of Ophelia's off-stage death. Bellamy describes a pathetic Mrs. Monford in her final "insane state":

[...] she found means to elude the care of her servants, and got to the theatre; where concealing herself till the scene in which Ophelia was to make her appearance in her insane state, she pushed on the stage before her rival, who played the character that night, and exhibited a far more perfect representation of madness than the most utmost exertions of mimic could do. She was, *in truth*, Ophelia *herself*. (1: 116)



This same play inspires a long description of a good-natured, young Major whom Bellamy encounters at a dinner party as a modern day Horatio (1: 297). Less adulation is placed on her lover, Calcraft, whom she was not fond of; he is frequently compared to Shylock, especially for his lack of refinement and taste in music (Bellamy offers such a description just before, Jessica-like, she leaves Calcraft to sneak off with another man) (1: 303). Meanwhile, her lover Metham is likened to the hot-headed Percy, her lover West Diggs to a jealous Othello, and her daughter to an ungrateful Goneril or Regan (1: 240; 2: 70; 2: 238-9). Bellamy also creates a wonderful picture of a portly knight who is the very semblance of Falstaff: the rotund stranger chases her down the street to proposition her, only to arrive wheezing and breathless; the actress describes the scene like something lifted from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2: 157).

She so easily conjoins her narrative with her Shakespearean theatrical experience that she begins to mingle dramatic and literary conventions. She writes about episodes in her life as though they were scenes; she adds to this sense of theatricality by detailing the emotions she feels as though she were actually shifting through them onstage, and she often describes her emotions as those felt by Shakespeare's characters. Sometimes, just thinking about aphorisms from Shakespeare gives rise to sentiment. For instance, when one of her sons dies, she feels deep grief and sorrow, a sorrow heightened when she remembers the king in *Hamlet* exclaims: "When sorrows come, they come not in single spies, but in battalions" (2: 238). This causes her to fear the death of her other children, and heightens the poignancy of her loss. At another moment of high tension in the narrative, Bellamy is about to open a letter from a man who has threatened to abduct her when she pauses the action of the narrative to soliloquize: "I think that word soliloquy is full as applicable to a moral reflection when written alone, as when spoken

alone; at least I shall use it upon occasion;” she then offers readers a “soliloquy” on the sordid solicitations actresses must constantly face (1: 132)

Bellamy also has a tendency to interrupt her narrative with philosophic musings or comments on appropriate social conduct drawn from a scene in her life, much as Elizabeth Griffith, in her *Morality of Shakespeare Illustrated*, offers part of a scene from a play and then comments on its moral meaning. When abandoned by friends in moments of adversity, Bellamy quotes from *As You Like It*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus* to discuss the revolutions of friendship; she condemns those who slander while considering some lines from *Cymbeline*; and she borrows from *Timon of Athens* and *The Merchant of Venice* to speak about the pleasures of beneficence when an anonymous person relieves her debts (2: 64; 2: 65; 2: 163; 2: 49; 2: 255; 2: 178). However, she amplifies most fully on Shakespearean quotations when narrating the more notorious moments of her life, often highlighting the vicissitudes of life that are beyond human control. For example, after explaining the grave mistake of leaving her lover Metham for another man, whom she doesn’t truly love, she quotes from *Julius Caesar*:

“There is,” as Shakespeare tells us, “a tide in the affairs of men (and why not women!) which, taken at the flood, leads on to “fortune.”—But how are poor mortals to know when this successful tide begins its course? Was it, indeed, to rush with the impetuous Hygra of the Severn, we may then be assured of its having taken place. But as it commonly flows in a gentle stream, and rises by degrees, its advance is imperceptible. The consequences of which is, that being unnoticed by the greater part of mankind, particularly those possessed of enlarged minds, the opportunity is “omitted, and all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows,

and in miseries.” (1: 235)

In another instance, she spotlights Shakespeare’s influence in shaping her interior self; in the convention of epistolary novels, she pauses in the middle of a letter to meditate on his words:

That great moralist Shakespeare, speaking of the blindness of mortals in their wishes, tells us that we, “ignorant of ourselves, / Beg often our own harms; which the wise powers / Deny us for our good: so find we profit / By losing our prayers.”

Let me then indulge the thought; and endeavour to dispel the gloom, which, when viewed in another light, they cast over my mind. (2: 149)

In a happier letter, she describes the solace of female friendship and quotes at length from Titania’s fond memories of her own friendship with her beloved votary in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2: 118). As Straub notes, female companionship is a key element of the sentimental novel, and Bellamy incorporates this literary trope in her *Apology* to emphasize her acceptance by “respectable” women (115).

Bellamy’s construction of friendship is more complex than Straub suggests, however. Bellamy has her set of sentimental companions, to be sure, but she also informs her reader that she associates with a class of sophisticated, intellectual and educated women who inspire her to study natural philosophy, political science, to attend public lectures, and to participate in literary salons (1: 264). Indeed, Bellamy aspires to be another Maintenon, the politically influential second wife of Louis XIV. Several of her letters detail the political affairs of her father, who was an ambassador to Russia, and she also discusses current politics at length, recording conversations with her friend Mr. Fox, the Secretary of War, a regular theatre attendee and a patron of sorts to her companion, Calcraft. This was not a woman who wished to downplay her involvement in public life; rather, Bellamy constructs the persona of a learned

lady whose interests are appropriately directed to self-improvement by participating in London's cultural and political circles. Bellamy already follows the lead of prominent intellectuals like Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Griffith in her moral engagement with Shakespeare. These and other Shakespeare critics, like Charlotte Lennox and Elizabeth Inchbald, formed part of the famous "Bluestocking Circle," a literary and cultural community that Elizabeth Eger shows "forged new lengths between learning and virtue and public imagination" for women ("Representing Culture," 123). Eger notes that female friendship and professional support were vital components in establishing the bluestockings as a group. She points to women's public importance not only in producing art and literature in this period, but also in publicly representing the embodiment of a cultivated, culturally sophisticated society—the positive aspects of the "conversable world" which David Hume praises.

To conclude this section, I want to argue that the tension between Bellamy's public professionalism and private virtue that Kristina Straub sees as a "crack" or a fault line in Bellamy's self-representation suggests that Straub's categorization of women's roles in public and private spaces in the eighteenth century is too rigid. It is perhaps more helpful not to view this as a fault line, but as a point where competing, alternative conceptual frameworks within which the public / private distinction was employed seem to overlap. By connecting her private and public life through her constant engagement with Shakespeare's plays, Bellamy also dismantles the divide between her theatrical life and the literary practice of moral criticism. The actress seeks to excuse her transgressive behaviour by suturing her questionable private life with her public persona as a Shakespearean actress. Her memoir is a performance of identity: her engagement with Shakespeare stands as a signifier for her moral character. What Bellamy does with Shakespeare on a more personal level, David Garrick does on a much larger scale.

My final section will illustrate how Garrick justifies ideologically illegitimate forms of recreation, like pantomime, by incorporating Shakespearean character into them. Relying on his public reputation as a champion of Shakespeare, Garrick cunningly unites high and low entertainment by exploiting the contemporary fascination with Shakespeare's characters. In *Harlequin's Invasion*, Garrick satisfies the contemporary preference for pantomime by dramatizing the triumph of Shakespeare, whose masterful art of characterization was evaluated as shaping moral character, over Harlequin, the consummate shape-shifter and trickster figure who destabilizes identity. Garrick's afterpiece, *The Jubilee*, meanwhile, capitalized on the fascination with Shakespearean characters in order to stage parades and songs.

### ***Harlequin's Invasion and the Shakespeare Jubilee***

As a point of contrast to Bellamy, David Garrick impeccably managed his public image as a private person so as to uphold his position as an agent of virtue. Garrick's mastery in physically depicting the passions and representing human nature associated him closely with Shakespeare as a fellow genius. Over the course of his thirty-year career, he became a national icon, often conflated with Shakespeare in the eyes of the public. As many scholars have shown, Garrick made restless efforts to promote Shakespeare as the representative of British dramatic culture. Indeed, his career coincided with the consecration of Shakespeare as the national poet: Garrick's success was founded on playing Shakespeare's tragic characters, he made his debut the same year a statue of Shakespeare was erected in Westminster Abbey, and not only did he collaborate with scholars on his interpretation of characters, but was himself considered a scholar of Shakespeare with a vast collection of books and materials related to the playwright's works. Moreover, Garrick was represented in art in association with Shakespeare. Of the many portraits produced in this era of Garrick and Shakespeare, Thomas

Gainsborough's *Garrick With the Bust of Shakespeare* (1769) shows the actor smiling with an air of jovial familiarity, his arm draped around the stone likeness of the playwright, as Shakespeare gazes down at Garrick with a look of fatherly pride. Shearer West highlights the continuation of this affiliation even after Garrick's death. In George Carter's *Apotheosis of Garrick* (1782) Garrick is mourned by a group of Drury Lane actors dressed as their Shakespearean characters, while Henry Weber's monument to Garrick in Westminster Abby bears an inscription by S.J. Pratt that links the playwright and the actor in the heavens:

To paint fair Nature, by divine Command,  
Her magic pencil in his glowing hand,  
A Shakespeare rose: then, to expand his fame  
Wide o'er this "breathing world," a Garrick came.  
Though sunk in death the forms the poet drew,  
The actor's genius bade them breathe anew:  
Though, like the bard himself, in night they lay,  
Immortal Garrick call'd them back to day:  
And till Eternity, with power sublime,  
Shall mark the Mortal hour of hoary Time;  
Shakespeare and Garrick like twins stars did shine,  
And earth irradiate with a beam divine.

This conflation of Shakespeare and Garrick is also echoed in Edmund Burke's epitaph, which highlights their shared genius:

Shakespeare was the chosen object of his study: in his action, and in his declamation  
he expressed all the fire, the enthusiasm, the energy, the facility, the endless

variety of that great poet. Like him he was equally happy in the tragic and comic style. He entered into the true spirit of the poets because he was himself a poet, and wrote many pieces with elegance, and spirit. He raised the character of his profession to the rank of a liberal art, not only by his talents, but by the regularity and probity of his life and the elegance of his manners.

(Cited in Stone and Kahrl 648)

Along with Garrick's enduring devotion to Shakespeare and his talents as a player and writer, Burke's epitaph draws attention to the actor's private life and his moral character to emphasize that he transcended the scandal and interests sometimes associated with lives of actors.

Indeed, David Garrick cultivated a sense of moral domesticity and social respectability that positioned him as a man of taste. Not only did he come to embody middle-class respectability, but he also made enough money to buy a sizable country estate, and he mingled with elegant people well above him in station. As Thomas Davies comments at the end of his biography on Garrick: "[...] we know with certainty, that persons of the most elevated rank in the kingdom, as well as the greatest and bravest of our generals and admirals, have dined with Mr. Garrick, and thought it no favour conferred upon him, nor any mark of condescension in them" (1780 2: 362). Davies likewise notes that Garrick's house was a cultural epicenter; he describes it as "a rendezvous for excellence of every kind; [...] for the learned, the elegant, the polite, and the accomplished in all arts and sciences" (2: 365). He lent an air of respectability to the theater in his time as the manager of Drury Lane, and his upstanding moral character was often connected with his association with and constant advancement of Shakespeare in the public imagination.

David Garrick's dual role as an arbiter of taste and as a cunning theatrical entrepreneur reflects the duality of commerce at play in this era. On one side, Garrick cultivated an exemplary private character as he advanced Shakespeare in the theatre and professionalized acting; on the other side, he was a manager dealing with the exigencies of running a theatre in a competitive market. Though his public image associated him closely with Shakespeare, Garrick had to compete with the masquerades, farces, and pantomimes that were so popular, even though these were derided as effeminate and vulgar entertainment. The national concern for public taste and morality (as discussed in my first chapter) deemed some pleasures more legitimate than others, depending on how useful these entertainments were in educating an audience. Certain stage entertainments were considered effeminate, especially if they seemed to stir the passions without the aim of moral refinement. According to Straub, "rope-dancing, puppet shows, the sexually ambiguous castrati singers of Italian opera, "all serve as visible foils for the rational, critical observer" (3). In some instances, the legislation of popular entertainment was enmeshed in the rise in nationalistic sentiments. Italian opera was a particular bugbear for John Dennis, who railed against the pernicious consequences such entertainment had on the stage and on public taste: "wherever the *Italian Opera* had come, it had driven out Poetry from the Nation, and not only Poetry, but the very Taste of Poetry, and all the Politer Arts" ("Reflections on An Essay Upon Criticism," *Works* 1: 396). Dennis elsewhere warned that Italian Operas were "sensual and effeminate, compared to the genuine Drama, and a greater real promoter of wanton and sensual Thoughts than ever the Drama was pretended to be [...] they have nothing of that good Sense and Reason, and that artful Contrivance which are essential to Drama" ("The Stage Defended," *Works* 2: 301). According to Dennis, this foreign import did nothing to promote decency or inspire virtue.



Farce was likewise negatively appraised for its exaggerated distance from artistic mimesis. William Cooke condemned farce in his *Elements of Dramatic Criticism* (1775): “the dialogue is usually low, the characters of inferior rank, the fable trivial, or ridiculous, and nature, and truth, everywhere heightened to afford the more palpable ridicule” (171). Character development and a delineation of the passions was not an imperative of farce; instead, farce presented audiences with grimacing caricatures that were incredibly popular throughout the eighteenth century, though they did little to evoke sympathy or increase an understanding of human nature. In fact, Deidre Lynch suggests that the audacious contortions of an actor’s expression typical of farcical humour were aligned by its critics with lack of restraint: “caricaturists differed from character writers in their audacity, they flaunted their excesses” (58). Similarly, mimicry was dismissed as unable to form social virtues and as transgressing the boundaries of polite sociability. Samuel Foote, a celebrated master of mimicry, was criticized by Churchill for his distorted images of real-life characters: “His strokes of humour, and his bursts of sport, / Are all contain’d in this one word, Distort: / Doth a man stutter, look a-squint or halt; / Mimics draw humour out of nature’s fault; / With personal defects their mirth adorn, / And hang misfortunes out to public scorn” (21). Rather than arousing sympathy in an audience, the mimic and farceur inspire scornful laughter contrary to sociability because the extravagant gestures are too excessive and unrealistic to achieve sympathetic identification.

Other forms of entertainment on the eighteenth-century stage were also viewed as exciting the passions without refining them. For instance, pantomime was often staged as an afterpiece and was widely enjoyed, though critics like Henry Fielding and Alexander Pope disparaged it as mere spectacle. Pantomime was a hybrid of dance, song, and spectacle.

Pope's Book III of the *Dunciad* describes the extravagant scene changes and outlandish pageantry of this genre that so delighted crowds:

All sudden, Gorgons hiss, and Dragons glare,  
And ten-horn'd fiends and Giants rush to war.  
Hell rises, Heav'n descends, and dance on Earth:  
Gods, imps, and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,  
A fire, a jig, a battle, and a ball,  
'Till one wide Conflagration swallows all.  
  
Thence a new world, to nature's laws unknown,  
Breaks out refulgent with a heav'n its own:  
Another Cynthia her new journey runs,  
And other planets circle other suns.  
The forests dance, the rivers upward rise,  
Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies;  
And last, to give the whole creation grace,  
Lo! One vast Egg produces human race. (3: 235-248)

George Odell explains that the last lines refer to John Rich, the manager of Covent Garden and a major proponent of pantomime in the first decades of the eighteenth century, as he was hatched as Harlequin from a large egg onstage (312). Pope's attack on pantomime illustrates the distance between this brand of entertainment, in which battles and jigs comele onstage, where "whales sport in woods," and "nature's laws" are defied, and the "natural" realism for which Shakespeare's drama was admired in the period. In contrast to Shakespeare's mimetic art, Pope censures pantomime as outlandish, vulgar, and unsophisticated.

As a manager of one of the two patent houses in London, Garrick was at the epicenter of cultural debates about legitimate culture and the cultivation of morality. Garrick spoke this prologue written by Samuel Johnson for the occasion of the actor's first night as manager of Drury Lane in 1747: "Ah! Let not Censure term our Fate our Choice / The Stage but echoes back the publick Voice / The Drama's Laws the Drama's Patrons give, / For we that live to please, must please to love. / Bid scenic Virtue from the rising Age, / And Truth diffuses her Radiance from the Stage" (Prologue spoken at the opening of the Theater in Drury Lane, 1747). This prologue suggests the imperative of the theatre to teach and improve the morality of its public, but it also suggests that although the stage is a vehicle for refining taste, it must simultaneously conform to the preferences and desires of its audiences. Scheil's important study argues that authors and theatre managers deferred to the "taste of the town," the paying audiences who ultimately governed public culture. To complicate the claim made by other scholars that Shakespeare's plays were often adapted to align them with neoclassical standards, Scheil examines the abundance of prefatory material that expresses the material need of the theatre to make money by catering to prevailing demands of the public (16).

Character was the main focus of productions of Shakespeare's plays in this period, and scenery and spectacle were not typically a highlight of Shakespearean performances. However, sometimes spectacle was exactly what the public desired, as Garrick's prologue at the opening of Drury Lane Theater in 1750 suggests: "But if an empty house, the actor's curse, / Shows us our *Lears* and *Hamlets* lose their force; / Unwilling, we must change the nobler scene, / And, in our turn, present you *Harlequin*: / Quit poets, and set carpenters to work, / Shew gaudy scenes, or mount the vaulting *Turk*." While Garrick declares the theatre sacred to Shakespeare, he

threatens to abandon better plays and feed the public on spectacular entertainments if he found that Harlequin was preferred to the Shakespearean tragic heroes he preferred to play.<sup>34</sup>

Instead of relinquishing Shakespeare entirely to please the public taste for Harlequin, Garrick adroitly overcame the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate entertainment by infusing elements of one into the other, sometimes to public approval and at other times to consternation. For instance, Francis Gentleman approved of the elaborate funeral procession staged in Garrick's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*:

Though not absolutely essential, nothing could be better devised than a funeral procession, to render this play thoroughly popular; as it is certain, that three-fourths of every audience are more capable of enjoying sound and shew, than solid sense and poetical imagination; stage pageantry can not be very pleasant at any time to judicious taste, but, if at all commendable, it is upon this procession. (1: 185)

Such spectacle was equated with mundane, effeminizing entertainment in this period, but according to Gentleman, the frivolity of "sound and shew" was more endurable when embedded in a Shakespearean performance. Theophilus Cibber was less generous in allowing Garrick some necessary compromises to Shakespeare's plays in order to fill seats, and went so far as to suggest that Drury Lane's manager imposed nonsense on the audience, rather than the other way around; he wrote that despite the low entertainment, Garrick's "Houses were

---

<sup>34</sup> It is worth mentioning that Harlequin and Shakespeare were competing forces throughout Garrick's career both as an actor and a manager: Garrick made his London debut as Harlequin but later downplayed this in favour of his celebrated performance as Richard III.

crowded; for what he designs to give must be Receiv'd." Cibber castigated Garrick's tendency to mix Shakespeare with low entertainment. He wrote, "*The Midsummer Night's Dream* has been mimic'd and fricasseed into an undigested and unconnected Thing, cal'd *The fairies*:—*The Winter's Tale* mammoc'd into a Droll; *The Taming of the Shrew*, made a Farce of;—and, *The Tempest*, castrated into an Opera" (*Two Dissertations on The Theaters, with an Appendix in Three parts. The Whole Containing a General View of the Stage, from the Earliest Times to the Present*, London, 1756).<sup>35</sup> Despite his alterations and infusion of low entertainment into Shakespeare's plays, Garrick tried to distance himself from such entertainment through apologetic posturing. Peter Holland notes that Garrick was embarrassed by his 1755 operatic version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

---

<sup>35</sup> George Odell calls Garrick a "depredator" for his adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. He writes: "Garrick began his series of onslaughts on the Shakespearian drama—In need of "entertainments" or operatic spectacle, he turned four of Shakespeare's plays into slight performances, only two of which —*The Winter's Tale* and *Catherine and Petruchio*—had sufficient merit to live through the paltriest existence" (358). However, Charles Conaway illustrates that Garrick's 1754 farcical adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* aims to "reinscribe male dominion over spouses" within the eighteenth-century discourse of companionate marriages. This reassertion of male hegemony, Conaway argues, is Garrick's attempt to legitimize the stage and show that it is a space of masculine virtue, rather than effeminizing entertainment.

The prologue mockingly apologizes for the whole idea of the English opera,  
“played by an English band, / Wrote in a language you understand” and masks  
“The Fairies” authorship into a combination of its source and the normal expectation  
of Italian origins: “I dare not say *who* wrote it—I could tell ye, / To soften matters,  
Signor Shakespearelli.” (*Age of Garrick*, 79)

Whether Garrick was actually embarrassed by joining elements of Shakespearean drama with popular entertainment is hard to say, though it is clear that Garrick’s prologue to his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* opera seeks to excuse the idea of an English opera, even though Garrick consistently repositioned Shakespeare’s plays in popular genres certain to appeal and make money. Not only did Garrick adapt Shakespeare’s plays to include elements of “low” entertainment, but he also incorporated Shakespeare into pantomime and pageantry.

Pantomime, spectacle, and musical entertainments found a regular place on the program at Drury Lane, as they did at Covent Garden. Martha Winburn England asserts that “a large part of eighteenth-century stage history has to do with the battle between pantomime and legitimate drama,” as it was represented by Shakespeare (7). England notes that the same night Garrick made his memorable debut as Richard III in 1741, a replica of the Shakespeare statue that had just been erected at Westminster Abbey was paraded in triumph over Harlequin in a pantomime called *Harlequin Student* (7). Years later, Garrick rewrote *Harlequin Student* to create a pantomime with spoken lines called *Harlequin’s Invasion* (1759), where Harlequin invades the province of legitimate drama and is vanquished again by the statue of Shakespeare.<sup>36</sup> John O’Brien draws attention to the fact that Garrick wrote *Harlequin’s*

---

<sup>36</sup> Despite this polarization between Shakespeare and Harlequin, John O’Brien discusses Garrick’s indebtedness to pantomime in his incorporation of its “hyper-kineticism” into

*Invasion* “at a particularly jingoistic moment” in 1759, a year in which Britain had defeated France in key battles of the Seven Year’s War; these English victories over the French were celebrated with patriotic songs throughout Garrick’s spoken pantomime (508). However, rather than explicitly pitting England against France, the war was portrayed more lightly as a battle between Shakespeare and Harlequin. In the first scene, Mercury enters “Dramatica’s Realm” to inform the inhabitants of the pantomime that a “French trick may be play’d ye” by an invading Harlequin, and to solicit defenders of Shakespeare against this foreign intruder: “Let the light Troops of Comedy March to attack him, / And Tragedy whet all her Daggers to Hack Him. / Let all hands, and hearts, do their utmost Endeavour; / Sound Trumpet, beat Drum, King Shakespeare forever” (13). Threaded into the nationalist discourse of *Harlequin’s Invasion* is the topos of disguise. The plot focuses on a tailor named Joe Snip whose shrewish wife prompts him to hunt and kill Harlequin so that they might advance in social rank; she urges “Put on a sword and bring me this Frenchman’s Head on the point of it and at once make me a Lady and Yourself a Lord” (14). Not only was posturing represented in the portrayal of ill-mannered rustic characters aspiring to be of higher rank, but also in the figure of Harlequin, whose presence completely destabilized any unified sense of identity. By giving characters in this pantomime speaking parts and by enacting the triumph of Shakespeare over Harlequin, Garrick was able to please the public taste for pantomime while simultaneously affirming Shakespeare’s positive influence in forming moral character.

Usually a silent figure, Garrick’s Harlequin is endowed with the power of speech, not to make him a more realistic figure, but to give him what he needs to reveal his lack of character.

---

his own acting techniques; O’Brien also traces how Garrick “rearticulated pantomime’s association with national character and social deviance” (504, 502).

Whereas Shakespeare's characters were valued in this period for their realism and the sense that they were navigating public roles and private impulses, it was impossible to imagine that Harlequin possessed any private, moral character. Harlequin's first words in the play do not unfold an inner self but declare instead: "I am nobody and come from nowhere" (16). The consummate trickster figure, Harlequin is representative of transformation and mischief; he is a figure of performance who can shape-shift and become anything he desires. In Garrick's pantomime, the character Dolly Snip describes him as seemingly without a stable character:

Nobody can comprehend him, he's too nimble for 'em. That's my comfort.

They hunted him last week all about town, and he turned himself into ten thousand shapes. First he shrunk himself into a dwarf, then he stretched himself into a giant. Then he was a beau, then a monkey, then a peacock, then a wheelbarrow. And then he made himself an ostelige, and he walked about so stately and looked so grand, and when I went up to him and clapped his wings so (mimics the ostrich) that my very heart leaped within me. (29)

Harlequin also poses as Snip and other townspeople throughout the play, and he generally serves to complicate and distort how characters perceive themselves and others. Whereas Shakespeare's art of characterization was considered formative of moral character in this period, Harlequin represented the opposite idea of disguise.

The anxiety of destabilized identity that Harlequin embodies in this pantomime is highlighted by an attempt on behalf of the townspeople to vanquish Harlequin. Snip, the tailor whose heroic task it was to kill the merry trickster, instead is outdone and has his head cut off and then sewn back on by Harlequin. O'Brien writes:

By granting Harlequin the skill of the tailor's craft, Garrick may be



making an association between the protean Harlequin and the tailoring trade based on a contemporary understanding of the latter as an art of transformation, the profession that was able to “make the man,” permitting anyone to pass for the member of another social class. (508)

Indeed, gender and class boundaries collapsed under Harlequin’s magic: when not cutting off heads, he transforms a group of judges into old women who then sing a song professing their wisdom and equality with men (26-27). Meanwhile, Mrs. Snip and her daughter Dolly aim to be “Qualitify’d,” and Dolly especially underscores the nature of performing rank when she equates being a lady with wearing high hair and sitting in a certain section of the theatre above all the low-born people who occupy the pit (32-33). Sense is restored at the end of the play when Mercury returns to capture Harlequin, the “Earthly Proteus,” at which point Harlequin sinks through one trap door as a statue of Shakespeare rises onstage through another. Mercury then calls on a chorus of Shakespeare’s characters who enter accompanied by the three graces to praise the poet (46-47). Though *Harlequin’s Invasion* did not train passions, transforming them into social sentiments in the same way as observing Shakespearean characters, the pantomime represented anxieties of identity formation that were prominent in the era, and enacted the possibility that Shakespeare’s presence on the stage could help ease these tensions.

Garrick’s attempts to reconcile fashion with taste proved financially successful, and the parade of Shakespearean characters onstage was successful as a popular entertainment. Christian Deelman tells us that Garrick’s afterpiece, *The Jubilee*, “was so successful that it ran for an extraordinary ninety-nine nights” during the theatrical season of 1769-70 (89). *The Jubilee* was at once an extravagant pageant of Shakespeare characters in dumb show, and a satirical farce dramatizing the events of Garrick’s 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee. This was one of

the most controversial, publicized, and unique cultural events of the eighteenth century spawned from Garrick's flair for publicity and passion for Shakespeare: an extravaganza to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in his own hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. Gillian Russell argues that the Shakespeare Jubilee was Garrick's clever means of emulating "the theatrics of fashionable society" like masquerades, dances, and other forms of "effeminate" culture with which the theatre was in competition (119). While the competition between legitimate and illegitimate entertainment occurred onstage in the instance of *Harlequin's Invasion*, the theatre as an institution had also to compete with other effeminizing entertainment in the broader cultural sphere.

This three-day event honouring Shakespeare included songs played and sung by the first musicians of the nation in a rotunda built to resemble the Globe, a masquerade ball, and even a horse race. No plays were staged and not even a sonnet was uttered, though there were several odes spoken to glorify Shakespeare. Russell notes that Garrick attempted to create distance between the festival and what was perceived as "effeminate" and illegitimate pleasure with some savvy maneuvers, such as planting a French macaroni, a fashionable and effeminate young man, in the crowd to interrupt Garrick's *Ode to Shakespeare* with derisive comments about the national poet. The appearance of the macaroni, Russell notes, "was used by Garrick to make the claim that it was the responsibility of the ladies in the audience to defend Shakespeare against such a critique" (136). Despite the adulation of Shakespeare's genius, the closest thing resembling Shakespeare arrived on the second day of the festivities when an untimely tempest disrupted a fireworks display and prevented a costly procession of actors dressed as Shakespearean characters. Many people left Stratford early and disappointed. After the festival, George Colman wrote a three-act main-piece comedy, *Man and Wife: or, the*

*Shakespeare Jubilee*, which was performed at Covent Garden on October 2, 1769. Colman provided the parade of characters Garrick had promised at the Stratford Jubilee but which had been cancelled because of rainy weather. Following Colman's lead, Garrick created his own afterpiece that presented a host of Shakespeare's characters. The *Shakespeare Jubilee* satisfied the desire of eighteenth-century audiences to imagine characters outside the parameters of the play. Martha England describes the spectacular and elaborate parade of characters that concluded the afterpiece every night: "the procession would start outside the theater, and the characters would literally bring in people from the street," so that "by the time the final curtain fell, the audience stood on common ground with Falstaff and Lear, singing the familiar songs" and "doing obeisance to the statue" of Shakespeare that was also paraded on stage (92).

Shakespeare's characters were not treated as speculative instruments used to cultivate taste in these extravagant productions. Rather, these pageants and extravaganzas are culturally derivative modes of entertainment that arose from the prevailing interest in the moral efficacy of engaging with Shakespeare's fictional people. Productions like *The Jubilee* and *Harlequin's Invasion* were a means by which Garrick could satisfy the public demand for spectacle and frivolous entertainment that always remained alongside "legitimate" drama. As I illustrate above in my analysis of George Anne Bellamy's memoir, Shakespeare became a symbol for moral character in this era; by incorporating Shakespeare into "low" entertainments, Garrick could enforce his image as a "man of taste," and an agent of cultural and moral improvement.

## **Conclusion**

Henry Gally, Samuel Johnson, Lord Kames, and others demonstrate different attitudes towards reading Shakespeare's plays and viewing them in the theatre. In print and onstage, audiences valued characters for the way they mirrored the passions and motives of real people:

Shakespeare's brilliant insight into human nature was reflected in both mediums. In both, there was also an important focus on feeling and sensory experience as the foundation of knowledge and morality; an emotional engagement with characters was crucial as pleasure and feeling was considered foundational to moral knowledge in this period. Johnson focuses on feeling when he advises the reader "yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators" (7: 111). Johnson continues to urge novices to consider the notes and clarifications of commentators only after they have "read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption" of Shakespeare's sublime art (7: 111). For Johnson, this unmediated reading is akin to viewing Shakespeare onstage.

While readers could immerse themselves in Shakespeare's works "with utter negligence of all his commentators," as Johnson writes, spectators could only engage with Shakespearean characters as players presented them. There was a growing encouragement for actors in this period to mirror onstage the diversity and complexity that made Shakespeare's characters so seemingly real, and new theories of acting instructed players to depart from traditional methods of performing parts in the same way that Shakespeare broke neoclassical rules to follow principles of nature. New theories of natural methods of acting encouraged actors to study, understand, and identify with their roles in order to produce affective responses in an audience. Players mediated Shakespearean characters in the theatre, and the gestures and expressions of actors' bodies were thought to channel the beauties and obscurities of Shakespeare, especially his masterful delineation of the passions, at which eighteenth-century audiences marveled. Audiences received a moral education in the immediate emotional experience of sympathetic spectatorship, and also outside the theatre as individual performances were vigorously

discussed, weighing particular actors' interpretations against other understandings of a character's thoughts or feelings.

Successful actors were, on one hand, esteemed as avatars of Shakespearean character and as participants in Shakespeare's genius. Like critics and editors in the world of print, actors and actresses played a crucial role in illuminating the moral truths and beauties that were sometimes obscured in Shakespeare's sublime creations. On the other hand, players were perceived as figures of hypocrisy in society. Audiences desired to uncover the truth of an actor's character as much as they sought to understand the characters the actors portrayed in London's theatres. Actresses like George Anne Bellamy, who flagrantly represented the effeminizing potential of the domesticated public sphere by making a living in the trade of disguise and by defying ideals of domestic femininity, were especially scrutinized. Her autobiography elucidates how the engagement with Shakespeare was conceived of as shaping moral character: Bellamy intended to simultaneously redeem her scandalous private life and justify her profession as a public actress by demonstrating how her experience playing Shakespearean roles had shaped her moral character. Through this public display of emotional identification with Shakespeare's heroines, and by illustrating the centrality of Shakespeare in her private life, Bellamy's autobiography highlighted the interplay of the private and public components of identity.

As the consummate Shakespearean actor of the eighteenth century, Garrick was made of Shakespeare's plays and characters. David Garrick was a creative cultural producer apart from his successful career as an actor: as the manager of Drury Lane, he adapted and wrote new plays and forged spectacular events, like the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769. Garrick cunningly sought to bridge the divide created by the duality of commerce in this period by marrying

fashion and taste: his productions of Shakespeare often included frivolous elements of theatrical entertainment, while his pantomimes and pageants incorporated signifiers of Shakespeare's art of characterization. Such productions corroborate the fascination with character in this period; they also reveal the dialogic relationship between Shakespeare and his eighteenth-century audiences. The playwright's craft generated and inspired conversation and dialogue on the topic of his characters in the world of theatrical criticism, and the idea that watching and studying these characters could in turn shape the moral character of the audience inspired other cultural activities, some of them ideologically in line with ideas of moral development, others merely satisfying a desire for fun. Within this dual context of legitimate and illegitimate entertainment and commerce, Sir John Falstaff was a character who captured the eighteenth-century imagination more than any other. My final chapter will focus on Falstaff to illustrate the culturally productive nature of Shakespearean character in the eighteenth century.

## Chapter Four

### Falstaff in the Eighteenth Century

Falstaff was a prominent and controversial figure in the popular imagination of the eighteenth century. *1 and 2 Henry IV*, along with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, were among Shakespeare's most frequently performed plays. Not only did theatrical audiences and readers appreciate this favourite character in Shakespeare's original works, but Falstaff also enjoyed one of the busiest afterlives of any fictional person in the era. The portly knight, in all his copious abundance, inspired a bounty of cultural material: John Dennis adapted *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as *The Comical Gallant* (1702); William Kenrick imagined the knight after his rejection by the newly reformed King Henry in *Falstaff's Wedding* (1760); David Garrick and George Coleman the Elder both created a central role for Falstaff in their spectacular *Jubilees* (1769); Wedgewood and Derbyshire immortalized the old knight in decorative figurines, and his robust image could be found on packs of playing cards—and these are but a few examples of cultural productions featuring Sir John.<sup>37</sup> Of course, this popularity is not peculiar to the eighteenth century; Falstaff remains to this day one of Shakespeare's most captivating creations, and recent criticism is still preoccupied with the paradox of Falstaff: why do audiences feel so affectionately for a character whose actions are reprehensible? In an era when Shakespeare's characters were used as speculative tools for moral development, the question of why audiences responded so sympathetically to Falstaff, why he remained so lovable when so depraved, provided ample fodder for literary and theatrical criticism.

---

<sup>37</sup> See Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, "The China Statuettes of Quin as Falstaff" (*Theatre Notebook*, 1958): 54-58.

Indeed, Ronald K. Levaio considers Falstaff's dramatic appeal and boldly asserts that character criticism was "largely invented for Falstaff himself" (335).

Previous chapters of this thesis have established how the eighteenth-century critical engagement with Shakespearean characters participated in a pervasive project of moral education in Britain; this chapter will continue to explore this phenomenon by treating Falstaff as the exemplar of the dynamic reception of Shakespeare's characters in this period. Eighteenth-century ideas of moral education incorporated the practice of imagining oneself in the position of another in order to understand and evaluate feelings and actions. Critics, readers, and spectators recognized real moral value in Shakespeare's art of characterization at a time when understanding the human passions and the psychology they constitute was considered essential to the moral development of individuals and the cultivation of the public good. Unlike their actual human counterparts who have a tendency to mask true feelings, whether to deceive or for the sake of civility, Shakespeare's characters were lauded as truthful reflections of human nature untainted by the artifice of society. Indeed, Falstaff in the eighteenth century is often compared to nature itself; for example, Garrick's *Ode to Shakespeare*, which he performed during the Jubilee in 1769, describes Falstaff born from Shakespeare's mind: "Not a tiny spurious birth, / But out a mountain came, a mountain of delight!" (Vickers 5: 350). Maurice Morgann compares him to "some fantastic Oak, or grotesque Rock" and Oliver Goldsmith likens him to an evergreen (4-5; x). Shakespeare's characters can be instructive because they are as heterogeneous as nature itself: they demand close scrutiny in order to determine why they make the choices they do in reaction to the contingencies of the play. Not only did contemporaries treat characters as moral agents within the



plays, but characters were also imagined outside their play's context and living within the perplexing conditions of modern times. Such culturally derivative literature and theatre provided a means for eighteenth-century audiences to make sense of their society by imagining Shakespeare's characters reacting to contemporary social problems.

This chapter will explore how Falstaff represented certain social anxieties of the era. Just as contemporaries had a dual perception of the domesticated public sphere as corruptive and corrective of moral behaviour, Falstaff was perceived as embodying both the disruptive force of misrule and the life-affirming power of pleasure. What puzzled eighteenth-century audiences was that Falstaff is a gluttonous, lying, cowardly buffoon who indulges his baser appetite; the stage favourite was a far cry from the ideal "man of character" who, through self-governance, refines his lower passions into a moral sense of taste. However, Falstaff was also widely recognized in the period as a merry wit who inspires sociability and feelings of benevolence. In 1746, James Upton stated the paradox of Falstaff matter-of-factly: "Tho' Falstaff is a fardle of low vices, a lyar, a coward, a thief; yet his good-humour makes him a pleasant companion" (85). William Guthrie similarly refers to Falstaff as a "moral contradiction" in that he is a "complication of the meanest, most infamous, the most inexecrable qualities" yet he is "so agreeable a composition" that "[t]here is not a spectator who does not wish to drink a cup of sack with the merry mortal, and who does not in his humour forget, nay sometimes love his vices" (Vickers 3: 195).

That Falstaff is not an easy character to pin down is no great wonder since he is an amalgamation of various types: the Lord of misrule, the braggart soldier, the parasite, the allegorical vice figure, not to mention the link to his historical namesake, a puritan

martyr. This chapter will first explore how eighteenth-century audiences expressed their uncertainty about Falstaff's protean nature by connecting him with masquerades, a cultural activity that symbolized the opulence, pleasure, and the practice of performing identity. The chapter will then move on to elucidate the complex perception of Falstaff by examining how, on one side, some critics viewed the knight as an evolved vice figure who tempts Hal from his proper duty, so that Hal's denial of Falstaff is a necessary step toward good governance. On the other side, Falstaff was viewed as an amiable and benevolent merry-maker, the very embodiment of sociability, and even those critics who often viewed his rejection as necessary simultaneously viewed it as regrettable. William Kenrick allows audiences to enjoy the pleasure of Falstaff in his play, *Falstaff's Wedding*, by creating a scenario whereby Henry pardons and forgives Falstaff his foibles, which are cast as harmless, after the knight saves the King's life from assassins. Meanwhile, some writers focus on the historical dimension of Falstaff's character to gain a sense of moral orientation and in order to reconcile Falstaff's clownish joviality with his vicious qualities and to make sense of sympathetic responses to him. Finally, this chapter will examine how William Richardson and Maurice Morgann theorized literary character in new systems of reading in order to make sense of Shakespeare's genius. By examining the social creativity of the period's conception of Falstaff, I hope to show how Shakespeare's characterization resists easy ideological appropriation. Indeed, as I shall show, the figure of Falstaff inspired conversation, literary theory, plays, fictive and factual historical accounts, and other entertainments. As Falstaff describes himself in 2 *Henry IV*: "I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men" (1.2.10).

This evaluation of the vital, generative essence of his character is particularly striking in this era.

### **“Laugh and be Fat”: Falstaff as a Figure of Masquerade**

Like Falstaff, the eighteenth-century masquerade possessed an innovative quality of its own: the social entertainment of attending balls in disguise offered individuals the freedom to perform some other version of public selfhood. While masquerades varied over the course of the century, disguise always remained the central point of these popular events. Attendees might dress in abstract costumes representing “Night” or “Death,” or, they might adopt more specific costumes, like a milkmaid or a sultan (Ribero 34). According to Terry Castle’s comprehensive study, the eighteenth century “divided masquerade costumes into three generic types: the domino, or neutral costume; ‘fancy dress,’ in which one personated one of a general social class of beings; and ‘character dress,’ in which one represented a specific figure, usually historical, allegorical, literary, or theatrical character” (58). Aside from the dancing and eating, the favourite pastime of the masquerade was guessing who was who; in fact, the activity of deciphering character was formalized in standard greetings that reflected the preoccupation with hiding or discovering identities: masked participants would address each other with such introductions as “I know you” or “do you know me?” (Castle 35). Castle describes the masked assemblies of the eighteenth century as “in the deepest sense a kind of collective meditation on self and other, and an explanation of their mysterious dialectic”; the two-way process of cloaking and discovering “true” character was not restricted only to these lavish events (4).

Indeed, the ability to analyze the outward signs of character in oneself and others was central to eighteenth-century moral life. In order to convey their moral worth to the public, people had to perform their character. This process of identity formation was at once private and public: self interests and private concerns were checked by an internalized idea of a broader public conception of morality. Whether these self-interests and passions were ideally refined into social sentiments or merely disguised by a performance of a public conception of morality, the element of acting was integral to theories of moral development and social interaction in this era. The masquerade was therefore an apt symbol for the theatricality of eighteenth-century culture: it celebrated identity play and the possibility of personal metamorphosis, but at the same time, it emphasized the possibility that a person's true worth might not have been represented by his / her apparent value.

The idea of disguising the base and vulgar qualities of human nature was a common topos of the era, and was symbolized by the subversive elements of the masquerade. In fact, Castle claims that the masquerade was "typically presented as a moral emblem, the image of a corrupt and pleasure-seeking populace" (Castle viii). Castle argues that the masquerade's disruptive power was symptomatic of the broader carnivalization of its cultural setting: the topsy-turvy nature of the masquerade, with its temporary suspension of sex and class divisions and escape from ordinary cultural prescriptions, exemplified the effeminacy, superficiality, and indulgence of which the age was accused. Gillian Russell similarly asserts that the masquerade was a "powerful realization of the energies and forces that were shaping [its] context," like the commercializing culture in which it was situated (39). Russell explores how this revelry

was an arena for gauche display as much as it was for careful concealment, since masquerades exhibited Britain's wealth in their costumes and lavish decorations. Women in particular were offered an opportunity to decorate themselves with sumptuous clothing and were granted a unique freedom in the cultural and social space of the masquerade. Russell notes: "Part of its notoriety and appeal lay in the latitude it gave women, who could attend incognito or, most importantly, unchaperoned" (39). The license to transgress social boundaries, along with all the fashion and dress-up, aligned the masquerade with the ideologically unstable, effeminate world of commerce and illegitimate entertainment.<sup>38</sup> Its critics viewed the masquerade as part of a consumer economy that was contrary to good taste and virtue because it bred pernicious passions. However, Castle writes that "the cheek of the masquerade was that it both sanctioned deceit," in the form of disguise and subversion of social convention, and "suffused it with a kind of euphoria" (57).

Shakespeare's Falstaff and the eighteenth-century masquerade share much in common. Sir John Falstaff is a perfect embodiment of the "euphoric deceit" that Castle argues characterizes the masquerade: he is the most pleasing and the most elusive of all Shakespeare's characters. His whole nature is famously unified by paradoxical opposites: he is physically bulky but intellectually nimble, old but youthfully gay, a shameless sensualist but wisely philosophical, a parasite who is giving of life and mirth,

---

<sup>38</sup> Gillian Russell highlights this association by examining the connection between high profile adultery cases of "ladies of quality" and the increasing popularity of masquerades held in the fashionable Carlisle House of which the infamous Teresa Cornelys, a Venetian opera singer, was hostess.

the butt and the wit of his own jokes; Falstaff is simultaneously despicable and admirable. Indeed, the desire to discover Falstaff's essence, his "true" character, was very like the game of disguise and recognition at the heart of masquerade. Maurice Morgann says of Falstaff at the close of *2 Henry IV* that "we wish to know what course he is afterwards likely to take: He is detected and disgraced, it is true; but he lives by detection, and thrives on disgrace; and we are desirous to see him detected and disgraced again" (215). Falstaff is also connected to the masquerade's carnivalesque qualities. Bakhtinian readings of Falstaff as a figure of the carnival, a figure of license and theatricality opposed to the order represented by the King, have become commonplace.<sup>39</sup> In his influential work, *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin associates the grotesque with pleasure, sensuality, and physical excess. As a vestige of the ancient and powerful world of the carnival, Falstaff is the corporeal idealization of the grotesque form; he rejects the lofty ideals of public duty and honour and chooses instead the private pleasures of the flesh. In the eighteenth century, Falstaff's role as a carnival figure was important because it aligned him with the self-indulgence, pleasure, and effeminizing forces that were perceived as defining the domesticated public sphere.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> See François Laroque's "Shakespeare's 'Battle of Carnival and Lent': The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered (*1 & 2 Henry IV*)" in *Shakespeare and Carnival* (New York, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Christy Desmet notes the growing popularity in identifying Falstaff with 'Woman': "both as a maternal figure that Hal must reject to become his father's son and as a "sweet creature of bombast" linked to the feminine copiousness of discourse that inhibits the male voice" (Desmet 58). See Valerie Traub, "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 40, 1989):

An illustrated children's conduct book from the period exemplifies this crucial likeness between Falstaff and the eighteenth-century masquerade. Designed to "Amuse and Instruct all the Good Boys and Girls in the Kingdom," this collection of character types, titled *The Masquerade; Containing a Variety of Merry Characters of all Sorts*, presents young readers with a host of familiar characters in assorted scenes accompanied by a playfully didactic analysis of their behaviour. While the work seems designed more to entertain than to caution against vicious action, a little rhyme on the first page guides the reader to find useful lessons amidst the fun: "The various scenes which here arise, teach to be merry and be wise. Of all that here you see in JEST, IN earnest, you should choose the best" (1). The book includes illustrative woodcuts beside each characterization, and the narrator presents the figures as though they were entering a miniature "Lilliputian" masquerade hosted by the Emperor of Lilliput. As each character enters the scene, he or she is examined so as to teach children proper conduct.

Several of the characters are drawn from Shakespearean drama. For example, Bottom, entering with his donkey's head, is "vain enough to introduce himself to the queen of the fairies," and this "folly and vanity" cause his "disfigurement" (54). This character stands to remind the reader that "there are many ways by which people (comparatively speaking) make themselves *asses*, and none by which they are more likely to do so than by vanity, pretending to what is above their reach" (55). Caliban, meanwhile, exemplifies that "grumbling" is "a very hateful quality" and his "bad humour" when Prospero asks him to perform a task "renders him more frightful than

---

456-74; Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London, 1987): 20-22.

nature first made him” (58). Unlike Caliban, young readers are meant to obey orders readily and happily. Scrutiny of a “Student” who enters the masquerade results in similar advice. Children should not, like Shakespeare’s description of a school-boy in *As You Like It*, go “creeping like a snail, unwillingly to school”; rather, they should “go where they ought” gladly and without complaint “as the only way to be made great men of” (18). Even abstract characterizations of Tragedy and Comedy are used to caution against deceit:

A double face is likewise expressive of deceit and falsity, which it is to be hoped you will always take care to avoid. For as nothing is more agreeable than truth, and honest plainness, so there is nothing more hateful than fraud and falsehood in men, women, or children. (13)

While most of the characters in this collection are a means by which to indoctrinate social norms and good behaviour, Falstaff is an exception as the very figure of masquerade:

Sir *John Falstaff* is represented as a braggadocio, cowardly in his heart, but always ready to boast of his great bravery. However, he has such a knack of jesting, that people, instead of finding fault with him, can hardly forbear laughing at his drollery [...] Such is *Shakespeare’s* merry knight, a fit character to be introduced at the *Lilliputian* masquerade, where “laugh and be fat” is the motto, and all are expected to contribute to their share of diversion. (59-60)

The accompanying woodcut shows Falstaff with his traditional accoutrements, his shield and sword and the “load” of his person that “fattens upon mirth and good living; for his belly is full of sack and his heart full of mirth, so that he seems confident enough that he



shall render himself a boon companion” (60). Although Falstaff is a lying, bragging, coward with no trace of moral worth, his unwavering commitment to his own self-interest is nevertheless delightful and produces laughter and pleasure in his audience who would have him as a “boon companion” rather than reject him on grounds of bad behaviour. In fact, the narrator explains that Falstaff’s capacity to raise laughter is “the only reason for his being introduced into this company” (62). Whereas other characters are made an example of to teach proper conduct, Falstaff is welcomed to the masquerade as a figure of sheer pleasure.

Falstaff is once again cast as emblematic of masquerade in a two-act farce called *Sir John Falstaff in Masquerade*, produced on April 11, 1741 at Drury Lane theatre.<sup>41</sup> The farce begins with a gathering of gentlemen at a Lord Modely’s house in London where the host implores his friend, Mr. Many Backs, to attend that evening’s masquerade as Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff. Lord Modely, whose name satirically hints at the fashionable sort of person who attends masquerades, comments on the protean nature of Many Backs’ character: “This fellow, Sir Thomas, has a Soul like the Paste of a Minced pye, which is turn’d into any shape for the sake of the Fruit to be put in it—Yet one can’t help enduring the man for his Drollery.” Lord Modely suggests here that Many Backs is

---

<sup>41</sup> *Sir John Falstaff in Masquerade*. Farce, Two Acts. Samuel Johnson (of Cheshire).

John Larpent Plays. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. This play is listed as LA14 in the Larpent collection, while it appears to have been adapted by the same author to an operatic comedy in three acts titled, *The Fool Made Wise; or, Sir John Falstaff in Masquerade*, listed as LA29 in the Larpent collection. The pages in this manuscript are not numbered.

no man of character but an inveterate performer. Though Many Backs has a shifty reputation, much like Falstaff, he also embodies affability; indeed, in order to satisfy his company, Many Backs honours his host's request and speaks "in Falstaff's manner" for most of the two-act farce, wherein he conjures inventive puns and offers predictable jokes about filling his belly with sack.

When Many Backs adopts Falstaff's character in the first scene, a parallel is drawn between the nature of the masquerade and Falstaff. Many Backs ridicules people who cannot resist the decadent allure of these extravagant cultural events:

Why, there will be those that love Masquerades as they do a  
Dram—They take Tickets in Private, and rail at them in Public  
Companies—while others again are carried Thither out of  
Curiosity forsooth—But Body o'me! Some of them will pay for  
their Curiosity—I know them all—They are ALL at my Devotion.

Hinting here at the status of masquerades as illegitimate entertainment, Many Backs also highlights the problem of hypocrisy in a society where people publicly condemn such modish gatherings only to attend them secretly and in disguise. Many Backs, especially as Falstaff, also embodies the licentiousness for which masquerades were considered controversial in this period. Not only does he suggest that all who attend the masquerade are in his "devotion," as though he epitomizes pleasure itself, he is likewise associated with the baser appetites as he promises all the gentleman (upon their bidding) to secretly procure them lovers. This task leads to several cases of mistaken identity that are the main source of the farce's comedy: Many Backs persuades the gentlemen's wives to attend the masquerade so that the gentlemen, thinking they are pursuing new paramours,

are actually flirting with their own spouses, who in turn speak lasciviously with the “strangers” who woo them. Although masks are eventually removed and costumes doffed to reveal true identities, the focus of the farce is the thrilling pleasure of the masquerade, of Falstaff, and what both represent: escaping the burdens of duty and morality and abandoning oneself to pleasure.

Although Many Backs / Falstaff operates as a trickster figure in this farce, his wily scheme prevents the characters from committing any *real* misconduct. Many Backs convinces the women to attend the masquerade and encourages innocent transgressions of cultural prescriptions, yet all the characters are brought back to their proper partners through his machinations, and at the end, social harmony is restored. The farce concludes with the unmasking of revelers in a tavern scene. Just as Falstaff is the author and also the butt of his own jokes, Many Backs, as it turns out, has been unknowingly flirting all evening with his sister, Phillus. While Many Backs laughs heartily at his own blunder, the other couples are stupefied by the behaviour of their partners, and Many Backs must help them out. For instance, he patches things up between Mr. and Mrs. Felicity when the former cannot explain his promiscuous behaviour:

Many Backs: he has not sense to answer her—I must help him  
out (aside) Very true madam—I told your husband that you were to  
be there in that same Habit—I paired you out for a joke, and I hope  
you’ll receive benefit from it—Body o’ me! You all seem to look  
at one another with half glob’d opticks, that see only outwards!

Now veil the front of your eyes and with the back part o' them look  
into yourselves. There you'll see virtue nod—vice awake—a hot  
constitution and a cold divinity—what! Is it a silent meeting!

Come—I'll give you all absolution.

Falstaff comically urges all parties to judge themselves before they judge others. In this instance, which seems like an attempt to redeem his character, Falstaff is figured as disruptive to moral behaviour while at the same time he facilitates moral reform.

Falstaff's ambiguous moral character thus reflects the fundamental tension embodied in the dual perception of the newly commercialized public culture. In many instances, as we will see, Falstaff destabilizes moral development because he embodies the idea of unregulated passion and pleasure, which he shared in common with the masquerade.

However, Falstaff is also frequently viewed as encouraging a healthy sociability because audiences respond so warmly and sympathetically to his good humour. As the next section will illustrate, Falstaff's critical reception in this period provoked debate and inspired derivative cultural activities as eighteenth-century audiences tried to make sense of the pleasure produced by the knight, despite his bad behaviour.

### **Sir John Falstaff: Harmless Knave or Vicious Coward?**

Since audiences responded so sympathetically to Falstaff, a point of contention was whether or not the old knight was really a boastful coward deserving of Henry V's harsh rejection or merely a harmless rogue unfairly punished by his "nimble-footed madcap" companion, the Prince of Wales (*1 Henry IV* 4.1.95). In 1709, Nicholas Rowe admitted that Falstaff was a "Thief, lying, cowardly, vaingloriously, and in every way vicious" (Vickers 2: 195). However, he conceded that Hal's rejection of Falstaff is harsh

given that his character is a “masterpiece” in that he is drawn with “so much Wit as to make him agreeable; and I don’t know whether some People have not in remembrance of the Diversion he had formerly afforded ’em, been sorry to see his Friend *Hal* use him so scurvily when he came to the Crown in the End of the Second Part of *Henry IV*” (Vickers 2: 195). Though Falstaff was cruelly banished by his fictional monarch, it was a common belief in the early eighteenth century that Queen Elizabeth had beckoned him back to the stage with a whimsical inclination to see the old knight in love. In 1702, John Dennis adapted *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to his own stage play, *The Comical Gallant*.<sup>42</sup> In his dedicatory epistle to George Grenville, he writes:

---

<sup>42</sup> Katherine Scheil discusses Dennis’ *The Comical Gallant*, as corresponding to this mode of reading Falstaff in a positive light. Scheil contextualizes the changes made to Dennis’ adaptation by examining shifts in comedy of the early century that bent towards more “humane comedy,” a term Scheil borrows from Shirley Strum Kenny, and what Stuart Tave similarly calls “amiable humour,” both of which extol good-natured mirth and laughter with mercy instead of ridicule and satire (137). Scheil writes: “A number of Dennis’ adjustments to Falstaff can be traced to his desire to craft a character that conforms to an emergent comic form which involved greater amiability, gentleness, and tolerance” (136). Kristina Straub likewise discusses a brand of amiable humour advocated by Joseph Addison, who she argues “complicates the power relationship between spectator and spectacle in order to bring a less crudely hierarchical organization into the politics of laughter” (9). The Addisonian “Butts” in eighteenth-century comedy were “Men of Wit and Sense” who, for common sociability, allow themselves to be made into objects of humour without losing dignity or status.

I know very well it had pleased one of the greatest Queens that ever was in the world [...] This comedy was written at her command and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it acted that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation.

Nicholas Rowe repeats this amusing anecdote in his first annotated edition of Shakespeare's plays in 1709, setting a trend for subsequent editions. Falstaff's position as a favourite of the Queen's did wonders for his reputation: it suggested his vices were harmless good fun rather than a threat to the public good. This resonates in Charles Gildon's 1710 publication *Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare*. In this work, Gildon turns a blind eye to Falstaff's faults and views him simply as a comic diversion, focusing exclusively on Falstaff's excellent humour (Vickers 2: 216). In Corbyn Morris' 1744 anthology of wit and humour, Falstaff is the ideal embodiment of a humanitarian and benevolent sort of comedy that makes you *feel* so good, you even enjoy his faults:

Sir John Falstaff possesses generosity, cheerfulness, alacrity, invention, frolic and fancy, superior to all other men. The figure of his person is the person of jollity, mirth, good nature, and banishes at once all other ideas from your breast; he is happy himself, and makes you happy [...] if you put these qualities together, it is impossible to hate honest Jack Falstaff, if you observe them, it is impossible to avoid loving him. (28-29)

Morris easily dismisses Falstaff's vices: "If Falstaff were a coward," Morris claims, he would have "sunk into infamy and become quite odious and intolerable" (26). Morris is

implicitly answering a question that frustrated his contemporaries: If cowardice were an essential part of Falstaff's character, than how and why do people admire him? And if Falstaff is not reprehensible, then why does his friend Hal banish him? In spite of all his jollity, Falstaff nevertheless posed a problem.

Some eighteenth-century critics viewed Hal's renunciation of Falstaff as necessary for the metamorphosis of a pleasure-seeking prince into a responsible monarch. Such critics recognized in the *Henriad* the same thematic tensions between appetite and restraint, self-interest and the public good, which they experienced in their own time. For example, William Warburton suggests Falstaff's charming joviality is of secondary importance compared to the character of the Prince; in fact, Warburton concentrated on the knight's shortcomings and applauds Hal for banishing this "dissolute Companion" (Vickers 2: 479). Warburton not only defends Hal's rebuke, but he also averts any possible attacks on the authenticity of the prince's reform: "For what can be more ridiculous than (in our modern writers) to make a debauch'd young Man, immers'd in all the Vices of his Age and Time, in a few hours take up, confine himself in the way of Honour to one Woman, and moralize in good earnest on the Follies of his past Behaviour?" (2: 479). But, Warburton argues, Shakespeare has not "transgress'd against the Rule" of consistency in character "by making Prince *Harry* at once, upon coming to the Crown, throw off his former Dissoluteness and take up the Practice of sober Morality and all the kingly Virtues." Rather, Shakespeare prepares audiences from the beginning of the play for the Prince's reformation. According to Warburton, Hal unfailingly displays "the Sparks of innate Honour and true Nobleness" when the occasion calls for it, and even when he seems profligate in his behaviour, as when he agrees to participate in

the Gadshill robbery with Falstaff, Shakespeare “has taken care not to carry him off the Scene without an Intimation that he knows them all, and their unyok’d Humour, and that, like the Sun, he will permit them only for a while to obscure and cloud his Brightness” (Vickers 2: 479). Johnson, however, makes a note that challenges Warburton’s reading of Prince Henry’s speech at the beginning of *I Henry IV*. In agreement with Warburton, Johnson admits that the speech is “artfully introduced to keep the Prince from appearing vile in the opinion of the audience” and “prepares for his future reformation” (7: 458). However, the critic suggests “what is yet more valuable” in this speech is that it “exhibits a natural picture of a great mind offering excuses to itself, and palliating those follies which it can neither justify or forsake” (7: 458). Self-deceit clouds Hal’s character as much as Falstaff’s influence does, and Johnson implies the young Prince requires more rigorous and honest self-scrutiny. The ideology of good taste and sympathy prompted rigorous practices of self-scrutiny in order to better understand and refine the passions that motivate human behavior so that one’s feelings correspond with how one presents oneself socially. In Johnson’s reading of the play, Hal is not as blameless as Warburton claims; rather, it is Hal’s challenge in the play to deny himself the pleasure produced by Falstaff, not use him as an excuse for his actions.

In his analysis of Falstaff, Johnson considers the knight’s complicated, robust, almost paradoxical nature more thoroughly than does Warburton, though he likewise concludes with the necessity of Hal’s rejection. In what follows, he perfectly illustrates a balanced assessment of Falstaff’s character, with all its virtuous and vicious features:

But Falstaff, unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be



admired, but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised but hardly detested. Falstaff is a character loaded with faults, and with those faults that naturally produce contempt. He is a thief, and a glutton, a coward and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor; to terrify the timorous and insult the defenceless [...]

Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the Prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety, by an unfailing power of exciting laughter, which is more freely indulged, as his wit is not the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in escapes and sallies of levity, which make sport but raise no envy. (7: 523)

Here Johnson evaluates the good and the bad in Falstaff, and importantly, the feelings he provokes in other people. Johnson concludes his endnote to *2 Henry IV* with a rather didactic message: “The moral to be drawn from this representation is that no man is more dangerous than he that, with a will to corrupt, hath the power to please; and neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such a companion when they see Henry seduced by Falstaff” (7: 523-524). Johnson only arrives at this just conclusion after curbing his initial, immediate feelings of delight and pleasure in Falstaff’s character with a more objective glance at Falstaff’s faulty behaviour. While this is exactly what Adam Smith suggests *should* happen in a person’s moral development, one feels Johnson’s struggle between the pleasure he takes in Falstaff and the censure the character deserves.

Elizabeth Montagu likewise focuses on the career of Prince Hal. She surmises that stories of King Henry’s youth would have been popular still in Shakespeare’s time

since people continued to celebrate his great victories. It is thus not so much Hal's rejection of Falstaff that preoccupies her attention, as much as the danger in showing Henry V as a profligate in his younger days: "It was a delicate affair to express the follies of Henry V. before a people proud of his victories, and tender of his fame, at the same time so informed of his extravagancies and excesses of his youth, that he could not appear divested of them with any degree of historical probability" (102). By the jolly mirth of Falstaff, Shakespeare manages to excuse the Prince's follies because the old knight is hard even for common audiences to resist, much less great princes. Not at all distracted by the dismissal of Falstaff, Montagu refers to the knight as "a stain" upon Hal's "character," though "it is of a kind with those colours, which are used for disguise in sport, being of such a nature as are easily washed out, without leaving any bad tincture" (103). Montagu continues to point out that the "disposition of the hero" so easily overcame "the idle frolics of the boy" that audiences might conclude that "Henry was studying human nature, in all her variety of tempers and faculties" and not merely indulging in vice (104). She dwells on this point as an excellent virtue, as one might expect in a writer who lavishes praise on Shakespeare for his keen insight into human nature. Though Montagu praises Falstaff's character for his air of "festivity," she mostly views him as "adapted to encourage and excuse the extravagancies of the Prince," for, she writes, "a person must be ill-natured, as well as dull, who does not join in the mirth of this jovial companion, who is in all respects the best calculated to raise laughter of any that ever appeared on stage" (106). In Montagu's reading, Hal is blameless for his friendship with Falstaff because the knight is the very figure of mirth.

In her own moral interpretation of *I Henry IV*, Elizabeth Griffith lauds Falstaff as Shakespeare's best creation. Falstaff is not only "original," but he is "inimitable"; however he may be lacking in moral principles, he is a lively, unique, and irresistible character. Griffith points clearly to the problem of Falstaff for moral critics in this period: "In fine, the portrait of this extraordinary personage is delineated by so masterly a hand, that we may venture to pronounce it to be the only one that ever afforded so high a degree of pleasure, without the least pretence to merit or virtue to support it" (228). In other words, Falstaff delights the audience without offering any sort of moral instruction. The notion that pleasure trumped morality was a point of tension in eighteenth-century culture and is an anxiety represented by the critical reception of Falstaff. Griffith confesses that she could not mine any useful moral lessons in observing the old knight. She writes, "I was obliged to pass by many of his strokes of humour, character and description because they did not fall within the rule I had prescribed to myself in these notes," which is to derive moral insight from Shakespeare's play. Though Griffith aspires to correct her readers' conduct, she is seduced by Falstaff's good humour. She regrets not dwelling on Falstaff in her notes "for were there as much morals" she writes, "as there certainly is physical good in laughing, I might have transcribed every scene of his" in all the plays in which he figures "for the advantage of the health, as well as the entertainment, of my readers" (228). In an era that praised Shakespeare for his ability to teach by delighting, Falstaff challenged the neat union between morality and pleasure.

While the above critics examine Falstaff within the context of Shakespeare's plays, others, like Samuel Johnson in his *Sir John Falstaff in Masquerade*, discussed above, sought to illuminate Falstaff's character by placing him outside of the play's

confines. For example, William Kenrick works to redeem Falstaff in his comedy *Falstaff's Wedding*, in which he creates a solution to the problem of Falstaff's rejection by imagining a reconciliation between King Henry V and his old wayward friend.<sup>43</sup> According to Kenrick's preface, *Falstaff's Wedding* was composed years previously as a juvenile piece, "written so long ago as the year 1751" (v). Kenrick modestly assures the reader that the play was originally created merely as "a kind of poetical exercise" in imitation of Shakespeare's character "when the author was young and giddy enough to amuse himself in a stuffed doublet, before a private audience, with an attempt at a personal representation of the humours of Sir John Falstaff" (v). This parlour-room entertainment and the subsequent publication of the play speaks to the critical endeavour of the eighteenth-century engagement with Shakespearean character: the play is published for no other reason than to offer "a reader of taste and judgment" an "hour's

---

<sup>43</sup> Though the play is actually dedicated to the great Falstaffian actor, James Quin, the lead character was never performed by this player. The first record of the play's production is April 12, 1766 at Drury Lane theatre as a benefit for James Love, another actor who was also appreciated for his performance of Shakespeare's knight. The theatrical edition and the reading edition of the play are quite different, though in each, Falstaff is both showcased and redeemed. The acting edition, published in London (1766), includes an advertisement which announces that alterations have been made to Kenrick's successful publication "to accommodate it for a theatrical audience." This is in place of the preface found in the 1760 publication examined here. I examine the 1760 edition here because it was reprinted several times and was thus likely more broadly read than the theatrical version.

amusement” (v). Kenrick echoes the typical veneration for Shakespeare’s art of characterization in the eighteenth century in his imitation of Falstaff, even as he criticizes Shakespeare’s poetic language when he apologizes for the “blemishes” that were necessary in copying Shakespeare’s own idiom and style.

The play spans the interval between *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*, beginning on the day of Henry’s coronation, with Falstaff freshly escaped from the crowds at the procession of their newly crowned king, and ending as King Henry V is about to go fight in France. Rather than showing Falstaff once again disgraced and rejected by his former drinking companion, Kenrick has King Henry pardon Falstaff after the old knight saves his life from the assassination plot of Cambridge and Scrope, two of the traitors discovered at the opening of *Henry V*. Shakespeare’s text shrouds the discovery of the assassination plot with mystery: “the King hath note of all that they intend, / By interception which they dream not of” (2.2.6-7). In *Falstaff’s Wedding*, however, Kenrick explains this secret intelligence. Cambridge and Scrope think Falstaff is a fit assassin for Henry—they can rely on him as someone who disdains the King because he has been banished as a “most proper villain” (61). Indeed, Falstaff enters in the first scene outraged by Hal’s “ingratitude” and he informs Mistress Quickly that Hal has turned “fanatick” (1).

In this play, it is Henry, and more devious characters like Cambridge and Scrope, not Falstaff, who are accused of being changeable characters and hypocrites. Not only is Falstaff struck by Hal’s change of character, but the Lord Chief Justice also views King Henry V’s condemnation of Falstaff and his crew as too harsh given they were close companions. He changes the conditions of Falstaff’s punishment and decides that Falstaff might be restored to the King’s good favour were he to reform his ways and

agree to live in a monastery. The Lord Chief Justice explains to the friar charged with reforming the knight that the King's severity may have been too bold an act:

There, good friar, thou hast it: it would little conduce to raise  
the king's wisdom in the general estimation of the world, to  
have it thought in the power of such unworthy men as Falstaff  
and his fellows, to lead him implicitly into all those extravagance  
under which the character of his youth suffer'd: and yet, so would  
it be suspected, if his highness should now act towards them with  
ill-timed severity.

Henry's would-be assassins certainly do not believe the King has truthfully turned to a life of piety and uprightness. In scene IV the assassination plot is introduced as Scrope and Cambridge conspire to dethrone Henry in order to make Mortimer king. Cambridge, like Falstaff in a previous scene, is shocked by Hal's sudden change in character and rejects the authenticity of his reformation:

Oh! I could go to daggers with him,  
To see his grave demeanour and address;  
But yesterday with thieves a pot-companion,  
The scoff and nay-word of each manly tongue.  
I'm all on fire, to hear his sober prate,  
See his mock-majesty and portly mein,  
So aping royalty, that all his peers  
Cry out in wonder of their gracious king. (10)

Scrope offers a discourse on hypocrisy when Cambridge confesses that his hatred for Henry is “so deeply rooted” that it “Might make dissimulation painful”: “For me, I know my heart’s so full of hate, / That shews of love but hurt me to the soul” (11). Cambridge distrusts King Henry as he now appears to the world. Scrope tries to convince Cambridge that hypocrisy is the “universal business of mankind,” as “all agree / To dupe each other by hypocrisy” and that he should not be squeamish to practice such a craft (11). Scrope thus convinces Cambridge to keep his true feelings for the king well hidden so that they might successfully execute their plan to dethrone him. Meanwhile, Cambridge reveals to the audience that he desires to overthrow the king because he “dreams of England’s crown in right of’s wife,” who is Mortimer’s sister; little does Cambridge know that Scrope is his wife’s “secret paramour” and that he has his own aspirations to England’s throne (13).

In juxtaposition to this display of multilayered deceit, Kenrick begins Act 2 in the Boar’s Head Tavern where Falstaff discusses how he has shaped Hal’s character. Compared to the conspirators, whose ambition and desire for power are potentially harmful to the king and state, Falstaff’s hedonistic influence on Prince Hal seems relatively harmless. Falstaff boasts “of the pains” he has endured “to make a man of that Hal” who “knew nothing” before he became the object of Falstaff’s tutelage:

The sneak-cup could not drink sack; made conscience of going to church  
on holidays; and blush’d like a scarlet cloak, at entering a bawdy-house.

Then he made a poor hand at cards and dice, and was a mere  
novice, a very noodle, at a robbery on the highway. I instructed  
him in all these manly exercises. I was content to win his money,

to teach him gaming: to get drunk myself to make him so: to teach  
him Sabbath-breaking by going ever to church with a chimney  
in it,--the tavern. And then, again, mercy on this round body of  
mine! How I have been pox'd to teach his smock-face whoring! (18)

On the last point of whoring, Henry takes great pains in this play to forget about his amorous dalliances. Kenrick emphasizes the King's severity and lack of sympathy for his former friends by introducing the character of Eleanor Poins, the sister of Hal's friend, and a former lover of the King's. She too is rejected as a testimony to Hal's reformation, as the newly crowned King orders her to a life in a nunnery (where she is seduced by the menacing Scrope). Falstaff's ironic catalogue of the efforts he has made in mentoring Hal finally culminates with a confession that he had little to do with teaching the young prince wit and wordplay—in this field of study, Hal was a born master. However, the audience witnesses no witty repartee between King Henry and Falstaff in Kenrick's play as they are kept apart in their respective worlds of the court and the tavern. When Falstaff finally meets the king, it is under the double pretence of, firstly, pleading reform and begging forgiveness, and secondly, as Scrope and Cambridge assume, to assassinate Henry. Of course, Falstaff reveals the plot to regain the king's good favour, who is forced to question his own judgment since the banished Falstaff saved his life and his close friend and advisor, Scrope, aimed to end it. This suggests Hal's rejection of Falstaff was a mistake. The knight's heroic intervention is coupled with the news of his recent marriage to Dame Ursula, a former flame to whom Falstaff owed money, and who was willing to forgive debts and provide a substantial dowry should Falstaff marry her. Falstaff's marriage and the act of saving the king inspires



Henry to pardon the knight, fulfilling a wish for readers who felt their favourite character was too harshly handled by the monarch. Even though Falstaff serves his own self-interest in protecting Henry, Kenrick endowed him with a moral purpose by imagining how he would respond given the opportunity to assassinate Hal.

The second plotline of Kenrick's original play, Falstaff's scheming to marry Dame Ursula in order to pay his debts and to signify some semblance of reform, is given more attention in the revised theatrical adaptation, which discards entirely the plot of the political assassination. In fact, King Henry has no role in the Drury Lane production, though he is once again described by Falstaff as "fanatic, presbyter, bishop" (5). The advertisement included in the Drury Lane theatrical rendering of *Falstaff's Wedding*, as discussed above, notes that adaptations were made to the play to accommodate it to a theatrical audience. Perhaps the reason for rejecting the political subplot of the play was to enlarge the part of Dame Ursula, who, as a list of the *dramatis personae* and the players who filled these parts indicates, was performed by the popular actress, Hannah Pritchard. Or perhaps the political subplot was discarded as too serious for the farcical Drury lane adaptation. The opening scenes of the theatrical version, and many besides, match the published copy of Kenrick's play. In fact, the prominent contours of Kenrick's original work shape the Drury Lane production: Falstaff is still offered an opportunity to receive Henry's pardon by the intervention of a hapless friar; Falstaff not only struggles with his rejection by Prince Hal, but he must consider his debts to Quickly, Dame Ursula, and Justice Shallow, with whom he has a duel; and finally, Falstaff is redeemed of his sullied reputation by way of matrimony. However, the Drury Lane play-text is drastically different from its original.

The introduction of Pistol and Nym, two Shakespearean characters who do not appear in Kenrick's original work, heightens the motif of disguise present in the original version, but in a more farcical and playful manner. Instead of showing Scrope and Cambridge turning against the new king, a sub-plot develops wherein Pistol and Nym decide they have to make it on their own, without Falstaff, as the fat knight has been turned away from court. As a solution, they decide to disguise themselves as Spaniards, "Don Anticho del Pisto" and "Signor Nymwego," two fictional fencing masters who take over the business of a recently deceased "Professor of the art of self-defence," Ponjardo del Stiletto (7). They also decide to seduce and marry the wealthy widow Ursula, who is Falstaff's "neglected flame" and who has "Grown rich, is fond of finery and name," along with her young niece (28). Not only do Pistol and Nym set themselves up as rivals to Falstaff, but they also decide to trick Justice Shallow and Slender into marrying Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet by dressing them as "London dames of rank" (31). Nym proposes a plan to convince Shallow and Slender that they are connecting themselves to the wealthy widow, Ursula, and her niece: "I'll fashion it, by working up those noodles into a conceit of their being beloved by the widow, and Madam Beatrice" (31). Meanwhile, Falstaff decides to "make virtue of necessity" and marry Ursula in order to be free of his debts to her and because he has "small hopes from Hal" unless he can "reap the credit of reformation" (39). Ursula shows Falstaff the love letters Poins has been writing her, and Falstaff recognizes Poins' handwriting. Moreover, Falstaff discovers that Poins and Nym have been playing a joke on Shallow and Slender. He exclaims to Bardolph: "Bardolph, those knaves would leave me, and set up for themselves. The 'squires are mine; a lawful prey, and shall not be fed upon without our

leave. Learn more, and I will bethink me how to counteract the villainous machinations of these runagates” (52). In the final act, Falstaff functions in a similar manner to the Falstaff / Many Backs character in the farce discussed at the beginning of this chapter: all the characters attend a masquerade; only Falstaff knows the true identities of those disguised; through Falstaff’s mechanizations, justice is meted out as Doll and Quickly are married with Poins and Nym, and it is Falstaff who calls for an unmasking to reveal the truth.

While Kenrick created new plays as either a means of redeeming Falstaff, or allowing him another opportunity to tickle London’s audiences, other writers adopted a more historical orientation in order to make sense of Falstaff’s morally questionable tendencies.

### **Looking for Falstaff / Falstolff: Historical Readings of Shakespeare’s Sir John**

William Oldys, for instance, in his *Biographia Britannica*, condemns Falstaff, not for threatening the reputation of King Henry V, but in order to save the reputation of the historical Falstaff. The first edition of this six-volume work was edited by Oldys between 1747 and 1760, and, in the nationalist spirit of the day, sought to document the lives of England’s worthies. The entry on “Falstolff, John” shows the historical Falstaff as someone who shaped Britain’s history in a noble fashion through patronage and other public acts that contributed to the greatness of the nation. In contrast, the dramatic representation of Falstaff is presented as a figure of private vice who tarnishes the honour of his historical namesake. Instead of casting Hal as the dramatic hero who turns from private interest and pleasure to his public duty as king, William Oldys pits the virtuous knight of the garter against the selfish but mirthful buffoon in order to defend the honour

of the former and to clear his reputation as a corruptive influence on the young prince. Just as Oldcastle's descendents are said to have objected to Shakespeare's association between their ancestor, a Puritan martyr, and the debauched knight, causing Shakespeare to change the name of his character from Sir John Oldcastle to Sir John Falstaff, so too Oldys works to unfix any affiliation between the historical Falstaff, "Knight, and Knight-Banneret; a valiant and renowned General, Governor, and Nobleman in France, during the conquests of that kingdom, under Henry IV, V, and VI of England" and his dramatic counterpart.

Though Oldys works to tease apart historical fact from the powerful fiction created by Shakespeare, his argument ironically contributes to blurring the line between fact and fiction by comparing and contrasting the two Falstaffs as though they were both real. For example, after outlining the details of the knight's lineage and important dates in his life, Oldys writes: "we cannot see any room, either in time or the temper, in the fortunes or employments of this our Worthy, for him to have been a companion with, or follower and corrupter of Prince Henry, in his juvenile and dissolute courses" (3: 1901). Nor did Shakespeare intend to connect the real Falstaff to his fictional counterpart—the two men are cast as entirely different. Oldys condemns Shakespeare's character as "an old, humourous, vapouring, and cowardly, lewd, lying, and drunken debauchee, about the Prince's Court" whereas "the other" Falstaff was "young and grave, discreet and valiant, chaste and sober Commander abroad; continually advanced to honours and places of profit, for his brave and politic achievements, military and civil; continually preferred to the trust of one government or other." Moreover, unlike his cowardly double, the actual knight was "a General, and Commander of armies, in martial expeditions, while abroad;

made Knight-Banneret in the field of battle; Baron in France, and Knight of the Garter in England.” Apart from his courageous military achievements abroad, Oldys represents the historical Falstaff as “a generous patron of worthy and learned men” and “a public benefactor to the pious and poor” when he was at home in England, not only in his lifetime, but “beyond the grave” as the “founder of religious buildings and other stately edifices, ornamental to his country, as their remains still testify.” In his efforts “to remove all similitude” between these two Falstaffs, Oldys shows one as an upstanding, socially benevolent public figure and the other as “a man of mean, necessitous, shifting circumstance.” The real Falstaff is “valiant and vigilant, trusty and incorruptible, politic and prudent, temperate and continent,” whereas the other is “a fat, amorous, vain, cowardly, drunken old fellow.” Not only does Oldys assess the virtues and achievements of each Falstaff to highlight the superiority of England’s worthy, but the writer also checks historical dates against Shakespeare’s figuration of Falstaff in history to illustrate the impossibility of Shakespeare’s intention to spoil Falstaff’s reputation; for example, Oldys points out that the real Falstaff was only twenty-six at the Battle of Shrewsbury, and not at the end of his days, as in Shakespeare’s historical drama. Moreover, Oldys imagines that “King Henry would never have preferred him to any posts of honour, or trust” had Falstaff actually been a bad influence on his son. There is an anxiety throughout this corrective piece of historical narration that Shakespeare’s Falstaff and his lasting influence on the cultural imagination have eclipsed the historical Falstaff, so that audiences are “bewitched into a belief, that this drollery was a piece of true history.” In his final effort to save the name of Falstaff, Oldys concludes his entry by admitting that Shakespeare probably meant no harm by using this name, for if the playwright had truly

intended to malign England's great knight, "it would have been founded upon some important, some significant transactions, some instances of flagitious and irreputable misconduct, not such odd, drole, inconsiderable circumstances as these, the harmless issue of pleasant wit and humour." In order to save the reputation of England's worthy, Oldys concedes that Shakespeare's Falstaff is more a figure of comic mischief than disgrace.

In 1767, Oliver Goldsmith wrote a short dissertation on the character of Sir John Falstaff that he appended to other essays about the knight, including a history of the Boar's Head Tavern and a fictional chronicle of the life of Sir John, which seems to be in direct dialogue with Oldys' efforts to separate Shakespeare's Falstaff and England's great hero. Unlike Oldys, however, Goldsmith facetiously creates a two-headed beast by uniting the historical and poetical Falstaffs. Like many of his contemporaries, Goldsmith privileges evaluating character according to the feelings they arouse in an audience rather than by a fixed system of rules. His essay on Falstaff focuses on the private character of men rather than their public deeds because it is easier to relate to and sympathize with them. Goldsmith writes that the "histories of princes and great men, dazzle us by their splendour, but useful instruction is to be learned from the anecdotes of their private life" (iii). To accrue what Samuel Johnson called "domestic wisdom," audiences investigated the inner and private passions that motivate characters rather than focusing on their public, social roles. As Oliver Goldsmith notes, focusing on the public deeds of men has its shortcomings as "the scene is laid far above us, and the objects shewn at such a distance, that the greater part of mankind can only look up with admiration." Rather, by concentrating on the private, universal passions and motivations of a character, "every action is immediately proposed to imitation or abhorrence, and every event is interesting as it might

have happened to ourselves” (iii). Studying the universal passions that motivate human behaviour allows readers to enter sympathetically and judiciously into the situation of another.

Goldsmith’s criticism focuses on the feelings Falstaff provokes in an audience as he describes the typical reaction to Falstaff: “At the first entrance of the knight, your good humour and tendency to mirth are irresistibly excited by his jolly appearance and corpulency. You feel and acknowledge him to be the fittest subject imaginable for yielding diversion and merriment” (v). According to Goldsmith, Falstaff is so amiable, that even his harsher moments towards other characters in the play are cast as thoughtfully intended to prevent the audience from splitting their sides with laughter. Falstaff’s condescending and mean behaviour is thus justified:

The privilege you allow him, of rebuking and cheating others, when he affirms it with proper firmness and superiority, helps to settle anew and composes his character, after an embarrassment, and reduces, in some measure, the spirit of the company to a proper level, before he sets out again upon a fresh adventure; without this they could be kept comically strained and wound up to the highest pitch, without sufficient relief and diversity. (vi)

Unlike Ben Jonson’s comic characters, who are of a “satirical deceitful, or else of a peevish or despicable species,” in whom “there is something very justly to be hated and despised,” Shakespeare’s Falstaff merely possesses “amiable oddities and foibles” that serve an innocently comic purpose (viii). In other words, Falstaff’s faults are forgivable, if not enjoyable; there is “no fierceness, reserve, malice or peevishness lurking in his heart” and all “his intentions are pointed at harmless riot and merriment” (vii). Goldsmith praises Falstaff “in gratitude” for his “jovial and gay humour” that contains no note of “anything envious,

malicious, mischievous or despicable” but is “continually adorned with wit” and “yields that peculiar delight, without an alloy, which we feel and acknowledge in Falstaff’s company” (viii). In Goldsmith’s view, every aspect of Falstaff is “directed to advance your pleasure, and it is impossible to be tired or unhappy in his company” (viii). If Falstaff wishes to pass as a man of courage even if he is not, “you can easily excuse so harmless a foible, which yields you the highest pleasure in its constant detection”; in fact, Falstaff’s “amiable oddities” are no different from those “you would chuse in your own companions in real life” (vii-viii). Goldsmith’s effusive praises of his favourite character casts Falstaff as the figure of generosity rather than self-interest.

In fact, in order to enhance this character’s benevolent nature, Goldsmith aligns Falstaff more closely with his historical namesake. In Goldsmith’s *The History, Droll Adventures, Memorable Exploits, and Comical Humours of the Renowned, Facetious, and Diverting Sir John Falstaff*, the author speaks ironically to the “Hypercritics” such as Oldys “whose optics resemble that of the mole” in their severe criticism of Shakespeare “for having travestied a real worthy historical personage into a changeling buffoon” (1). Rather than expressing anxiety regarding the tarnished reputation of England’s worthy by his association with Shakespeare’s Falstaff, Goldsmith delights in collapsing the boundaries between fact and fiction as he plainly states his method of interweaving history with hearsay:

we shall proceed to relate what has been collected from tradition  
of this laughter-creating hero; and, first, of his real name and actions,  
the following pages shall relate; afterwards whatever can contribute to



create mirth and electrify the risible faculties of readers, must be given upon the *undoubted* authority of *hearsay*, as ancient a story-teller, and authentic intelligencer, as the most ancient land. (1)

Goldsmith practically takes a page from Oldys' account of the historical Falstaff in discussing his ancestry; however, as he begins to offer a more detailed portrait of the knight's private character, it is clear that the author is playfully conjoining the historical and dramatic Falstaff into one persona, much to the chagrin of the historians. For example, he describes Falstaff as a child, "his belly more round than is common to those of his age, his form very much resembled a nine pin, biggest in the middle" (2). The young Falstaff was "naturally witty, and it was a dry sort of wit, yet so humourously expressed, and with such an expressive set of features, that the most rigid cynic could not help laughing at his conceits" (2). Although Falstaff may have grown cowardly later in life, Goldsmith asserts "he must have had a very different reputation at his first adventuring in the world, as we find him intrusted with the commands of consequence, both civil and military" (2). At this point, Goldsmith blends the imagined private character of the dramatic Falstaff with the real exploits of the historical Falstaff. For example, Goldsmith speaks of Falstaff's trips to Ireland and France, where "he passed through several offices of the highest importance, distinguished himself most illustriously in all the arts of peace and war, and was successfully crowned with titles and honours" (3). Upon his return home, Goldsmith assures his reader, Falstaff "became no less amiable in his domestic, than he had been admirable in his public character," and because "he gained no small share of glory in the wars, and imagining he might hang up his armour in the temple of peace, he gave loose to his natural disposition for humour, and

drinking, with those other extravagancies, which distinguished the manners of his later career” (5). According to Goldsmith, Falstaff displayed courage and valour as a young man and rested on his laurels as he grew older: “His military reputation had been established long before, and he had now fixed his rendezvous, at the Boar’s Head, in East Cheap” (5). This is where he took up with Prince Hal: “The Prince of Wales, son of King Henry the Fourth, a wild and extravagant youth, took much delight in his company, and was his companion in all his midnight excursions and debaucheries” (5). After summarizing the major plot points of *1* and *2 Henry IV*, along with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as though these plays were actual history and Goldsmith their chronicler, the author ends his account of Falstaff’s escapades with a eulogy for the knight: “Farewell, *Sir John*—by Shakespeare’s pen display’d, / Thy wit and humour n’er can fall or fade / While laughter shakes the sides with honest glee, / Sure ev’ry reader must be pleased with thee” (12).

To lend an air of authenticity to his history, Goldsmith offers “an old Chronicle in the Cotton Library” titled “*A Riot at the Boar’s Head Tavern, in East Cheap.*” This historical document (written in contemporary English) records a fight that broke out at the Boar’s Head, not involving Hal and Falstaff, but Hal’s younger brothers, Thomas and John, which gives the impression that mischief and debauchery was a family affair. He consecrates the Boar’s Head as the mock temple of Falstaff: “Here they laid their schemes for their intended frolics—here *Sir John* regaled himself with his favourite beverage, sack and sugar—and here the Prince enjoyed the extraordinary wit and humour of the fat knight” (6-7). Goldsmith then offers a *History of the Boar’s Head Tavern, in Eastcheap* wherein he creatively archives the circumstances and people of Falstaff’s

famous tavern, of which “nothing remains upon record of the masters or mistresses” and “no more than of the customers who used it, till the time of our hero” (32). Beginning his historical narrative in the age of Falstaff, Goldsmith writes that the Boar’s Head was “kept by a gentlewoman, named Dame Quickly, whom Shakespeare represents as famous for her humour, as for excellent sack and sugar, which was the most frequent drink at her house in those days of royal merriment and debauchery” (32). So affected was Dame Quickly by the death of Falstaff, Goldsmith reports, “that she drank more to drown her sorrow, than she drew to her customers” (33). Since Falstaff has a real history, it augments the sense that his companions were historical figures, as well. The author imagines the sorrowful afterlife of Mistress Quickly; he outlines how a clergyman blackmailed her and subsequently turned the house into a corrupt monastery that was a site of debauchery, hypocrisy, and pleasure—a despicable example of corruption compared to Sir John’s good nature and wit.

Goldsmith casts Falstaff’s indulgent behaviour in an innocent light by concocting vile and malignant accounts of those people who replaced him in the tavern. Apart from the crooked monks, Goldsmith moves from one proprietor to the next, and concludes with the sad story of the last hostess who was falsely accused of witchcraft by a sanctimonious neighbour and “executed accordingly” (44). “Since her time,” Goldsmith writes, “the tavern underwent several revolutions, according to the spirit of the times or the disposition of the reigning monarch” (44). Goldsmith’s description continues to portray the Boar’s Head as embodying not only the spirit of Falstaff, but also the spirit of England’s own past: “It was one day a brothel, and the next a conventicle for hypocritical enthusiasts; it was this day noted for harbouring loyalists, and tomorrow for secreting

republicans; sometimes notorious for harbouring whigs, and again infamous for a retreat to Tories” (45). Goldsmith’s account of the Boar’s Head concludes with a description of the tavern as it appeared in Falstaff’s day, replete with “a vast grapevine, growing upon the supporters; and over the door-way, a blue boar, a bacchus, a tun, and a bunch of grapes” (45). The apartments were “accommodated with mighty large chimney places, adorned also with great impost carving, much in the Bacchanalian stile,” and any reader who “has ever been to Westminster Abbey, and taken up the seats, which turn on hinges, in Henry the Seventh’s chapel, he has seen specimens of the sculpture of the days of Sir *John Falstaff*” (45). This comparison between Westminster Abbey and the Boar’s Head, along with the bacchanalian signifiers that adorn the tavern, creates an impression that this is a consecrated space that houses Falstaff’s spirit and is as important to England’s past as a king’s chapel. Though Shakespeare’s King Henry V does his best to banish and forget Sir John Falstaff, Goldsmith chronicles his life as part of England’s heritage. While Oldys considered any connection between Falstaff and his historical namesake objectionable and incoherent, Goldsmith’s imaginative history of Shakespeare’s fascinating character suggests his prominent place in the cultural imagination.

### **Developing New Systems of Reading Character**

Clearly, within the grand aim of judging Shakespeare’s characters, the magnetic appeal of this protean character posed a challenge to literary moralists. In his essay “On the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff” (1785), William Richardson makes a philosophical attempt to reconcile the spectator’s sympathetic reaction to the knight with the reality of what is commonly perceived as his inherently base, immoral nature. In order to achieve this, Richardson makes a crucial distinction between our psychological

and ethical reactions to Falstaff. A sympathetic reading of Falstaff is unethical and misguided; our affection for Falstaff is “delusive, and arises from partial views” (287). Richardson emphasizes the importance of viewing every angle of Falstaff’s being. Only after strict deliberation and consideration do we see, along with Prince Hal, that Falstaff is a coward and a rogue.

In his analysis of Falstaff as a real person, Richardson asserts that spectators are naturally repulsed by qualities of vice; yet, when there is a “mixture of different ingredients,” i.e. respectable qualities within the character, then “the character, though highly blamable, attracts our notice, excites curiosity, and yields delight” (242). Richardson suggests that these opposing elements in a character equally afford contrary emotions in the spectator; the “vainglorious passion” prevails and even engrosses the other emotions we experience to give it greater force. Richardson highlights the danger in this responsive process by likening these overwhelmed emotions to a defeated army incorporated into a conquering force under the direction of ruthless tyrants (245).

It is this “blending of qualities” in the character of Falstaff, Richardson contends, that endears him to us. Falstaff’s “ruling principle” (the ruling passion that guides Falstaff’s behaviour and actions) is “the desire of gratifying the grosser and lower appetites” (249). Following this guiding principle of sensuality and pleasure-seeking are cowardice, boastfulness, deceit, flattery, and a presumptuous disposition. These are the constituent parts of Falstaff’s real moral character, and had Shakespeare not placed Falstaff in such humorous situations so as to arouse laughter, as well as endow Falstaff with certain estimable social and intellectual qualities, then we might be mortified by Falstaff’s constant folly (251-54). Here, Richardson implies that one must imagine

Falstaff beyond the plot structure in order to better understand his essential nature as it would respond to a variety of situations. But even Falstaff's apparently redemptive qualities are sacrificed to Richardson's construction of a moral system.

Richardson lists joviality and good humour as Falstaff's winning qualities, but does not count them as virtuous, since Falstaff is only consistently jovial and good-humoured to Prince Hal; he is often "insolent and overbearing" to his social subordinates (260). Falstaff's intellectual qualities also fail to redeem him: his wit and humour are used "to promote some design" and not for the purer purpose of merriment alone (269). The other intellectual components Shakespeare attributes to Falstaff's character are "the discernment of character, versatility, and dexterity in the management of mankind" but usually for some sort of gain, praise or distinction (273). In other words, Falstaff is masterful at the toning up and down of emotions and behaviour to gain approval from those with whom he interacts. The danger in this is the danger inherent in the masquerade and in Smith's own *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "the esteem to which he aspires, is not for reality, but the appearance, of merit: about the reality, provided he appear meritorious, he is quite unconcerned" (253).

But Richardson credits Shakespeare's good sense and judgment by showing Falstaff judiciously unmasked when he brings Shallow to London to see and profit by his influence at court when Hal is made king in the second part of *Henry IV*:

His hopes are unexpectedly blasted: he sees his importance  
with those whom he had deceived completely ruined: he is for a moment  
unmasked: he views himself as he believes he appears to them: he

sees himself in the mirror of their conception: he runs over the consequences of humiliation; he translates their thoughts and their opinions concerning him; he speaks to them in the tone of the sentiments which he attributes to them; and in the language which he thinks they would hold. (285)

The language Richardson chooses here is again reminiscent of Smith's theory of sympathy; Falstaff acts according to how he imagines others see him and he adjusts his behaviour according to the "mirror of their conception." Yet there is a sharp sense that Richardson is unfair in his final analysis of Falstaff; moreover, Richardson is reductive in his evaluation of Shakespeare's intentions with Falstaff: "Shakespeare, whose morality is no less sublime than his skill in the display of character is masterly and unrivalled, represents Falstaff, not only as a voluptuous and base sycophant, but as totally incorrigible" (286). Despite Richardson's criticism, Falstaff had been a favourite on the stage since his conception, and few spectators would condemn the knight as so completely base and corrupt.

It is against such harsh accusations that Maurice Morgann constructs his own defence of Falstaff. Whereas Richardson persuades his readers to acknowledge the *inner* depravity of Falstaff's character, Morgann's ethical criticism encourages readers to view Falstaff according to his external qualities and his immediate appeal to our sensibilities. Morgann distinguishes between the categories of mental Impression and Understanding in order to clear Falstaff from the accusation of cowardice and to account for our reaction to him. Our faculties of Understanding and Impression are often at variance since we sometimes misapprehend and censure a character "even if our hearts and affections might

secretly revolt” (10). The Understanding is only cognizant of the actions of a character and infers from these actions the character’s motives and intentions. Understanding, according to Morgann, “delights in abstraction and general propositions,” like the concepts of duty and honour that Falstaff dismisses in *I Henry IV* (6). Impression, on the other hand, cannot be farther from systemic reasoning. With his bent toward intuition and unprejudiced childlike impressions, Morgann anticipates the Romantics and simultaneously evokes the experience of the sublime: “The Understanding must, in the first place, be subdued; and lo! How the rooted prejudices of the child spring up to confound the man! The Weird sisters rise, and order is extinguished ... The laws of nature give way and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror” (69). As previously mentioned, Falstaff himself is a sublime figure likened to “some fantastic Oak, or grotesque Rock” that arouses a strange affection in his spectators (4-5). These impressions are products of Shakespeare’s genius, which “thought it fit to conceal or obscure” a clearer cause (148-149). The faculty of Impression, like the qualities of human nature that strike it, is opaque and “incommunicable” it is “something possessed: it is an imperfect sort of instinct, not necessarily rational” that grasps the “original character in the man himself” (7-8). It is by Impression that we realize the “first principles” of character, which is a sort of pure essence untouched by accident; Falstaff’s first principle is a high degree of wit and good humour (151).

Johnson famously quipped that Falstaff’s “perpetual gaiety” won over an audience despite the old fool’s moral depravity and purported cowardice. Since our experience of Falstaff is intuitive and incommunicable, and since “Shakespeare has made a secret impression on us in favour of Falstaff” (14), as Morgann has it, the critic has no other



choice but to rely upon his rational faculty to clear this character of the charge of cowardice. Morgann sympathetically adopts the role of Falstaff's advocate and combs Shakespeare's text for evidence that Falstaff possesses courage. Other characters in the play are called forth like witnesses to testify to the knight's true nature; Lancaster, for example, is examined and dismissed as an unreliable source because he is cold-hearted (85-86). To further serve Falstaff's defence, Morgann constructs a backstory that is loosely based on evidence Shakespeare has provided in the play. For instance, Morgann imagines Falstaff as a younger man, lovingly appreciated for his intoxicating wit and good humour; in fact, the critic surmises, Falstaff so easily won approval for his joviality and alacrity of mind that he never bothered to develop any real virtue, but developed bad habits instead (18). Yet, Morgann contends, Falstaff *does* possess a "constitutional" innate sort of courage that is rooted in his noble lineage and Oldcastle stock (45). Although this seems outlandish, Morgann continues to show that Shakespeare meant to *impress* rather than to explain Falstaff's character to an Elizabethan audience: "If the ideas of Courage and birth were strongly associated in the days of Shakespeare, then would the assignment of high birth to Falstaff carry along with it, to the minds of the audience, the associated idea of courage" (47). While such ideas are "too minute to notice," they make an accumulative impression (47). This invention of a cumulative backstory, with its combination of historical, dramatic, and imagined facts to rationally determine whether or not Falstaff is a coward, is cheeky evidence that we must indeed rely (at least to some degree) on our sympathy and responsive impressions of characters. This fanciful construction of Falstaff's life also served Morgann's broader purpose of

establishing why we respond to Falstaff so sympathetically. Something essential in Falstaff's character arouses sympathy in his spectators despite his debauchery.

Morgann's analysis of Falstaff created more discussion about the knight's moral character. In response to the claim that Falstaff is no coward, Johnson quipped: "Why, Sir, we shall have the man [Morgann] come forth again, and as he proved Falstaff to be no coward, he may prove Iago to be a very good character" (qtd. in Stoll, 158). Johnson was not alone in addressing Morgann's claims that Falstaff possesses a constitutional courage; Richard Stack examined Falstaff in reaction to Morgann's reading in order to demonstrate that Falstaff would not be such a comic figure were he not cowardly (Vickers 6: 469- 479). Morgann's work not only generated conversation in his own day, but it has been cited as influencing the Romantic engagement with Shakespearean character, and his essay was also highly influential in the works of modern Shakespeare scholars, like A.C. Bradley.<sup>44</sup> While critics like Elmer Edgar Stoll have dismissed the preoccupation with Falstaff as sentimental, especially such defenses as Morgann's that seek to excuse the knight's cowardice, eighteenth-century critics had much more at stake than the cultivation of sentimentality in their socially creative disagreements about this popular character.<sup>45</sup> This chapter has aimed to consider how eighteenth-century readings and renderings of Falstaff were a means of making sense of the anxieties of contemporary culture. Falstaff challenged aesthetic ideals that associated pleasure with morality so that audiences struggled to square the pleasure produced by this complicated character with

---

<sup>44</sup> See R.W. Babcock, "The Influence of Late Eighteenth Century Shakespeare Criticism on Hazlitt and Coleridge" (*Modern Language Notes*, 1930): 377-387.

<sup>45</sup> See Elmer Edgar Stoll, "A Falstaff for the Bright," (*Modern Philology*, 1954): 145-159.

his immoral nature in various modes of cultural production, from plays and children's books that associated the stage favourite with the disguise of the masquerade to historical accounts that sought to untangle qualities of the "real" Falstaff from that of his fictional counterpart. Furthermore, Falstaff's protean, paradoxical character mirrored the dual nature of the domesticated public sphere. Eighteenth-century audiences viewed Falstaff as an example of unchecked appetites and passions that connected him with the effeminacy, superficiality, indulgence and pleasure that was characteristic of commercialized culture. Yet, audiences also recognized in Falstaff a figure of sociability and benevolence in the same way as they acknowledged the corrective, socializing aspects of commercialized culture. At stake in discussions about Falstaff's character, then, are questions about contemporary society and ideas of personhood. I have focused on Falstaff in this chapter to demonstrate how Shakespeare's art of characterization defied easy appropriation in the eighteenth century and to highlight instead the generative quality of his work as audiences shaped public culture and explored ideas of identity formation through their engagement with Shakespearean characters.

## Conclusion

Falstaff's incongruous nature made him a regular figure of debate in the eighteenth century. He has continued to provoke controversy up to our own time. In an article for the *New York Times*, November 9, 2003, journalist Ron Rosenbaum considered what he playfully dubbed "The Falstaff Wars." Rosenbaum wrote in anticipation of a production of *Henry IV*, directed by Jack O'Brien and featuring Kevin Kline as the debauched knight. The article focused on the puzzling nature of Falstaff and how the character of the knight inspires conversation and disagreements, like those so common in eighteenth-century public life. The particular conflict featured in Rosenbaum's article was between Jack O'Brien, the play's director, and Harold Bloom, the Yale literary scholar, the former accusing the latter of uncritical sentimentality and emotionalism when it came to his praise of Sir John. In his conversation with Rosenbaum, O'Brien expressed his ambition to control what he calls Falstaff's "expansiveness"—the quality Falstaff has that allows him to take over the stage and seize hold of audience sympathy. In his production, O'Brien wished to achieve equilibrium between the knight and the play's other characters. More than this, the director confided that he wanted to produce a balanced portrayal of Falstaff rather than a narrow representation of him as a jolly, life-affirming wit, the "heroic vitalist" Bloom praised in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (4). Bloom celebrated Falstaff as a joyful figure of human freedom. For him, Falstaff is "the Socrates of Eastcheap," "the son of the vitalistic Wife of Bath" (275, 278). Fat Jack is *not*, according to Bloom, "a cowardly braggart, a sly instigator to vice, a fawner for the Prince's favour, a besotted old scoundrel" (283). O'Brien disagreed. Bloom wished him good luck.

Indeed, O'Brien outlined the various ways in which he and actor Kevin Kline sought to contain Falstaff's "seductiveness" and to focus instead on Falstaff's more sobering, wicked qualities, for instance, the knight's cold indifference to the death of his soldiers in the civil war. One section of the article nicely expresses the challenge of curbing Falstaff's magnetic appeal as O'Brien catalogued the various strategies he employed to achieve a comprehensive view of the character. He excised jokes, and with the help of adapter Dakin Matthews, he compressed *1* and *2 Henry IV* by rearranging and cutting the two plays into one production. This was not the first mash-up of Shakespeare's historical works; Orson Welles memorably combined the *Henriad* with *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to showcase Falstaff as a tragi-comic hero. But O'Brien's ambition was to illuminate the darker elements of Falstaff's persona that are more prominently highlighted in *2 Henry IV*. This is no easy task. While Kevin Kline and O'Brien worked to reign in Falstaff, to downplay his charisma, both admitted to feeling the draw of his comic nature. In preparing for the show, they could not just shape Falstaff the way that they wanted to. Although they aimed to "put Falstaff on a diet," they could not help but fatten him up again by allowing him his laughter. Rosenbaum wrote of his visit to a dress rehearsal: "That day it was Mr. O'Brien who couldn't resist the enchantment of Falstaff's stage turns; after it's Mr. Kline who wants to allow Falstaff full Bloom, so to speak." Falstaff influenced and overwhelmed the actor and director despite their best intentions. I am suggesting that this same recalcitrance characterizes the relationship between Shakespeare's art and his audiences in the eighteenth century as it does today.

Falstaff, more than any other character in the eighteenth century, provoked a formative dialogue between Shakespeare and his eighteenth-century audiences. My final chapter focuses on Falstaff for two main reasons. First, Falstaff captivated the eighteenth-century imagination and inspired a variety of cultural productions, from plays and children's books to historical fiction. The breadth and volume of Falstaff material in this period exemplifies the culturally generative capacity of Shakespeare's works. It also demonstrates the agency and creative potential of Shakespeare's art in shaping culture. This leads to my second main reason for focusing on Falstaff: his eighteenth-century audiences recognized in the knight properties that represented the defining tensions and anxieties of the age—he was a figure of pleasure—and as such, he was fodder for cultural debates. Falstaff represented the unbridled self-interest and changeable identity associated with the realm of “effeminate” and “low” commercial pleasures that were viewed as destructive to social order and good governance. On the other hand, Falstaff produced a pleasure that fostered sociability and that was considered beneficial to the public good. In this way, the knight was aligned with the “legitimate” cultural pleasures that were meant to refine public taste and moral character. Eighteenth-century audiences viewed Falstaff as defined by the same tensions, the same incongruous nature, as their modern world. However, his audiences did not simply assimilate Falstaff to suit their cultural agenda. Instead, this character challenged contemporaries to rethink and revise aesthetic models, and he forced them to question their own ideology. It is this complexity in Falstaff's character that actively shaped eighteenth-century culture by provoking conversations that addressed the period's keen interest in identity formation.

Along with my close study of Falstaff in the eighteenth century, I have explored a wide range of cultural material inspired by Shakespearean characterization. These works all address prominent social questions, especially ideas about morality and personhood, through a productive engagement with Shakespearean character. I am not claiming these works were all written with the intention of refining moral character or national taste; they were born for other reasons, too. Writers like Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, to name a few, all pointedly state their moral purpose of reading Shakespeare's plays for "domestic wisdom." David Garrick, though, was likely thinking of financial profit rather than moral education when he incorporated Shakespeare's characters into his pantomimes and farces. Nevertheless, such characters functioned as moral signifiers, and they legitimized what some critics viewed as low, "effeminate" entertainment. Like Garrick, George Anne Bellamy knew Shakespeare had a great reputation as a moral philosopher. To save her sullied reputation, the actress constructed an identity shaped by her performances as the playwright's suffering heroines. And of course, cultural producers wrote spin-offs featuring Shakespeare's dramatic personae for sheer fun, simply because they wanted to see more of a character. However, the artistic liberties writers took by extracting characters from their native plays does not mean that they saw these characters as freestanding, autonomous creations, each with his or her own interiority. Rather, cultural producers often portrayed characters as distinctly formed by the institutions and ideologies of a more contemporary world in order to more easily address specifically modern moral questions. Otherwise, characters were often viewed as shaped and informed by the social structures of the plays, with a particular focus on the complicated private and public dimensions of identity.

In keeping with their own experience of inter-subjective identity formation, commentators of the day believed that the forces of society and conditions of life even shaped Shakespeare's own character as a writer. Unlike other playwrights whose "acquaintance with the characters of men is formed in the library," Shakespeare, according to Elizabeth Montagu, was a writer who grew familiar with humanity because he was himself a part of the commerce of everyday life; he accurately copied the nature of people he met "in the street, the camp, the village" (18). Even Shakespeare's middle standing in the social spectrum helped form him as an artist. Montagu writes: "Shakespeare was born in a rank of life, in which men indulge themselves in a free expression of their passions, with little regard to exterior appearance. This perhaps made him more acquainted with the movements of the heart, and less knowing or observant of outward forms" (37). Though eighteenth-century audiences viewed the playwright as a genius, they did not view him as entirely transcendent of the context in which he wrote. Neither did critics suggest he invented modern subjectivity, as Harold Bloom has argued in our own time.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare's plays consistently provoked questions about identity that resonated in the eighteenth century. This is in part because ideas of identity formation in the blossoming commercial society of Shakespeare's time carried over into this era, and contemporaries recognized models of personhood in the playwright's well-wrought dramatic personae. As Katharine Maus writes: "Elizabethan and Jacobean models of personal inwardness [...] are not simply identical to currently available paradigms, but they are not wholly alien, either" (213). Renaissance models, according to Maus, emphasize "the disparity between what a person is and what he or she seems to



be to other people” (210). Shakespeare certainly develops such ideas as the incongruity between thought and action, appearance and reality, and public and private personhood through his characters. Eighteenth-century audiences recognized familiar elements in his representations of personhood and treated them with great urgency. The practice of imagining Shakespeare’s characters as though they were real people is also thrown into relief when we consider that British aesthetics in this period was a part of the social fabric of everyday life. The realm of the aesthetic was not absolutely autonomous, above the fray of commerce, or disengaged from moralistic functions. On the contrary, morality and aesthetics were one and the same. Contemporaries believed sympathy and taste could be exercised and refined by judging art and literature. For them, a mimetic engagement with fictional characters could lead to ethical development and positive social interaction. Moral and aesthetic inquiries thus intersect in the study of Shakespeare’s characters.

Shakespeare’s richly drawn characters continue to shape culture today. Based on interviews with the director, one gets the impression that the preoccupation with Falstaff, especially Bloom’s celebration of the knight, was O’Brien’s main source of inspiration for his production of *Henry IV*. It is as though O’Brien were embracing the challenge of staging a production in which Falstaff might be contained. As it turns out, *Henry IV* was a tremendous success. In his review of the play in the *New York Times*, Rosenbaum praised the production’s “narrative vigor,” its achievement “in capturing the thematic scope of the plays,” and its overall staging that “seamlessly elucidates textual motifs,” (“Falstaff and Hal, With War Afoot,” Nov. 21, 2003). And then there is Kevin Kline, who “looks like the most traditional Falstaff imaginable,” costumed “to resemble a

threadbare Santa Claus with a blimp of a prosthetic belly and a snowy beard.”

Traditional as this Falstaff may seem, Kline “never panders to the audience,” he “rarely raises his voice,” and he does not “expend undue energy in ho-ho-ho heartiness.”

Instead, the “all-dominating life force that the scholar Harold Bloom has made” of this character “exudes weariness as well as craftiness.” But perhaps Rosenbaum was too heavy-handed in crediting Bloom’s contagious enthusiasm for Falstaff as the main reason for this character’s reception as a life-affirming figure. Perhaps Falstaff’s jovial nature is a crucial aspect of the knight’s irreducible character and of the play’s emotional effect on the audience. Indeed, another review of the play suggested there was no clear winner in the “Falstaff Wars.”

Charles Isherwood, reviewing *Henry IV* for *Variety*, felt O’Brien’s production lacked emotional heft. Like Rosenbaum, Isherwood was pleased that Falstaff “is not allowed to stuff the production into a bulging pocket and saunter off with the evening” (*Variety*, Nov. 20, 2003). He praised Kline for his “dryly funny, technically superb” manner in adroitly conveying Falstaff’s wit and in balancing dignity and debauchery. This Falstaff, like Shakespeare’s various plays here shaped into one, “has been cut down to size,” wrote Isherwood, and “the lack of theatrical volume in the performance brings a haunting sense of doom” to the character. Kline’s “relative sobriety” in his rendering of the knight, “carries its own pathos: This great symbol of life seems uncomfortably aware—even more so than usual—of the irksome proximity of death, always ready to spoil the party.” However, Isherwood disappointedly noted, “the performance stints on the exuberance we associate with the character, and cherish in him; Kline is almost unrecognizable inside a convincing fat suit, but the performance itself has a lean quality.”

This Falstaff is a survivor in life, not a celebrator of life. For Isherwood, the production's central imperfection was that "psychological intricacy takes a back seat to narrative clarity and eloquence of speech." Neither Hal nor King Henry is a man "of profound feeling." In fact, in his own review, Rosenbaum noted that Hal appeared to be uncomfortable in the world of the tavern. Hal's steely distance undermines the potential emotional tension created in his choice between the world of play and the affectionate Falstaff and the world of politics and his reserved father. Similarly, Isherwood wrote that Hal's loyalties are "only lightly sketched in" among all the other ambiguities presented in *Henry IV*. Overall, Isherwood decided, "O'Brien's *Henry IV* is better at the big brush strokes than emotional detail: there is a superficial quality to even the best of the central performances, including Kline's admirable but surprisingly subdued Falstaff."

The departure from the focus on a character's passions and appeal to affect is a notable shift from eighteenth-century examinations of character I explore in this project. Yet, there is something undeniably recognizable between this production of *Henry IV* and the eighteenth-century cultural works inspired by Shakespeare's plays that suggests the resistance and creative potential of the playwright's art as it continues to shape our world. By examining the eighteenth-century fascination with Shakespearean character with a fuller understanding of the aesthetic function of art in a commercialized public sphere, this thesis has sought to rethink eighteenth-century character criticism and the nature of Shakespearean reception in this period. This dissertation has argued that Shakespeare's characters were often scrutinized and examined as though they were real people as part of a mimetic exercise that helped to navigate the uncertain atmosphere of eighteenth-century culture. Contemporaries felt that their world was in a state of flux; they witnessed major

shifts in social structures, and they were trying to define themselves along blurred boundaries of private and public paradigms. It was not crucial to eighteenth-century audiences that the truths embedded in Shakespeare's plays asserted ideals of universality and transcendent subjectivity, or that they were in line with bourgeois or nationalistic ideology. Rather, contemporaries recognized in Shakespeare's dramatic art a comprehension of human life that helped them make sense of their own society as it underwent fundamental changes. Commercial interests, nationalism, and other factors functioned alongside the civilizing process to shape attitudes towards Shakespeare's canonical status as a playwright. However, the engagement with Shakespearean character was much more than ideological appropriation. As this study demonstrates, Shakespeare's art of characterization inspired derivative literature and theatre that capitalized on the popularity of Shakespeare's dramatic creations. At the same time, the complexity of Shakespeare's characters raised questions, invited controversy, and provoked conversation that is the very stuff of cultural formation.

### Works Cited

- Addison, Joseph. *The Spectator*. 5 Vols. Ed. Donald F. Bond. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Agnew, Jean-Christophe. *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1986.
- Ashfield, Andrew and Peter De Bolla, eds. Introduction. *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. Ed. John Wiltshire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Avery, Emmett L. "The Shakespeare Ladies Club." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7 (1956): 15-58.
- Babcock, R.W. "The Influence of Late Eighteenth Century Shakespeare Criticism on Hazlitt and Coleridge." *Modern Language Notes*. (1930): 377-387.
- Baillie, Joanna. *Plays on the Passions*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001.
- Bar-on, Gefen. *True Light, true method: science, Newtonianism, and the editing of Shakespeare in eighteenth-century England*. Diss. McGill University, Montreal, 2007. Print.
- Barrell, John. *English Literature in History: An Equal Wide Survey*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1983.
- . *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public.'* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986.

- Bate, Jonathan. "The Romantic Stage." *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*. Eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 92-112.
- Bate, W. Jackson. *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- Bellamy, George Anne. *The Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*. 2 vols. Dublin, 1785.
- Berg, Maxine, and Elizabeth Eger. *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Berger, Harry Jr. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*. Ed. Peter Erickson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Betterton, Thomas. *History of the English Stage*. London, 1741.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Penguin, 2005.
- Brewer, David A. *The Afterlife of Character: 1726 - 1825*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- Brewer, John. "'The most polite age and most vicious': Attitudes towards culture as a Commodity 1660-1800." *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800*. Eds. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer. London: Routledge, 1995. 341-361.
- . *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*.

- Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Bristol, Michael D. *Big-Time Shakespeare*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- . "Vernacular Criticism and the Scenes Shakespeare Never Wrote." *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 53 (2000): 89-103.
- . "'A System of Oeconomical Prudence': Shakespearean Character and the Practice of Moral Inquiry." *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*. Eds. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.
- Brown, John. *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. London, 1757.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Ed. J.T. Boulton. London: Routledge and Paul, 1958.
- Burns, Edward. *Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage*. New York: St. Martin's, 1990.
- Burroughs, Catherine B. *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997.
- Burwick, Frederick. "Joanna Baillie, Matthew Baillie, and the pathology of the passions." *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*. Ed. Thomas C. Crochunis. London: Routledge, 2004. 48-69.
- Campbell, Lily B. "The Rise of a Theory of Stage Presentation in England during the Eighteenth Century." *PMLA* 32.2 (1917): 163-200.
- Castle, Terry. *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.

- Churchill, Charles. "The Rosciad." 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London, 1761.
- Cibber, Colley. *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*. London, 1740.
- Cibber, Theophilus. *Two Dissertations on the Theatres*. London, 1756.
- Clery, E.J. *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce, Luxury*. New York: Palgrave, 2004.
- Collier, Jeremy. *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage*. London, 1698.
- Conaway, Charles. "'Thou'rt the man": David Garrick, William Shakespeare, and the Masculinization of the Eighteenth-Century Stage." *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theater Research* 19.1 (2004): 22-42.
- Congreve, William. *Concerning Humour in Comedy*. London, 1695.
- Cooke, William. *Elements of Dramatic Criticism*. London, 1775.
- Crochunis, Thomas. "Joanna Baillie's ambivalent dramaturgy." *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*. Ed. Thomas C. Crochunis. London: Routledge, 2004. 168-187.
- Crouch, Kimberly. "The Public Life of Actresses: Prostitutes or Ladies?" *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities*. Eds. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997. 58-78.
- Damrosch, Leo. *The Profession of Eighteenth-Century Literature: Reflections on an Institution*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Davies, Thomas. *Dramatic Miscellanies*. 3 volumes. London, 1784.
- . *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*. 2 vols. London, 1780.



- De Bolla, Peter. *The Discourse of the Sublime : Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*. New York: B. Blackwell, 1989.
- De Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Deelman, Christian. *The Great Shakespeare Jubilee*. New York: Viking Press, 1964.
- Dennis, John. *An Essay Upon the Publick Spirit; being a Satyr in Prose upon the Manners and Luxury of the Times*. London, 1711.
- . *The Critical Works of John Dennis*. Ed. Edward Niles Hocker. 2 vols. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939.
- Desmet, Christy. *Reading Shakespeare's Characters*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Dobson, Michael. *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaption and Authorship, 1660-1769*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- . "Improving on the Original: Actresses and Adaptations." *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*. Eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 45-69.
- Dodd, William. "Destined Livery? Character and Person in Shakespeare." *Shakespeare Studies* 51 (1998): 147-58.
- Downer, Alan S. "Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth-Century Acting." *PMLA* 58.4 (1943): 1002-1037.
- Dryden, John. "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy." Preface. *Troilus and Cressida; Or, Truth Found Too Late*. London, 1735.
- Eger, Elizabeth. "Representing Culture: 'The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain'." *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere: 1700-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press, 2001. 104-133.
- . “‘Out Rushed a Female to Protect the Bard’: The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare.” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*. Vol. 65, No. ½. (2002): 127-151.
- . “Spectacle, Intellect, and Authority: the actress in the Eighteenth Century.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*. Eds. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 33-52.
- Engell, James. *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge*. Harvard University Press, 1989.
- England, Martha Winburn. *Garrick’s Jubilee*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964.
- Fielding, Sarah. *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia*. Ed. Christopher D. Johnson. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1994.
- Ferguson, Adam. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Dublin, 1767.
- Foote, Samuel. *A Treatise on the Passions*. London, 1747.
- Fordyce, James. *Addresses to Young Men*. 2 vols. London, 1777.
- Gale, M.B. and Gardner, V. *Auto/biography and identity: women, theatre, and performance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody’s Story. The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Gally, Henry. *A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings*. London, 1725.
- Gardner, Viv. “By herself: the actress and autobiography, 1755–1939,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*. Eds. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 173-193.

- Garrick, David. *Prologue Spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane*. London, 1750.
- . *Harlequin's Invasion. Three plays printed from hitherto unpublished MSS.; with introductions and notes by Elizabeth P. Stein*. New York: B. Blom, 1967.
- Gentleman, Francis. *The Dramatic Censor; or, Theatrical Companion*. London, 1770.
- Gerard, Alexander. *An Essay on Taste*. London, 1759.
- Gill, Michael. *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Glauser, Richard. "Aesthetic Experience in Shaftesbury." *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*. 76 (2002): 23-54.
- Goldsmith, Oliver. *Sir John Falstaff. The History, Droll Adventures, Memorable Exploits, and Comical Humours of Renowned, Facetious and Drunkenly Sir John Falstaff. To Which is Appended a History of the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap*. London, 1767.
- Grady, Hugh, and Terence Hawkes. Introduction. *Presentist Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Grady, Hugh. "Hamlet and the present: Notes on the moving aesthetic 'now.'" *Presentist Shakespeares*. Eds. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes. London: Routledge, 2007. 141-164.
- Griffith, Elizabeth. *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*. London: 1775.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Hawley, Judith. "Shakespearean Sensibilities: Women Writers Reading Shakespeare,

- 1753-1808.” *Shakespearean Continuities: Essays in Honour of E.A.J. Honigmann*. Edited by John Batchelor, Tom Cain, and Claire Lamont. London: St. Martin’s Press, 1997.
- Henderson, Andrea. “Passion and Fashion in Joanna Baillie’s ‘Introductory Discourse.’” *PMLA*. 112.2 (1997): 198-213.
- Hill, Aaron. *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq; in four volumes*. London, 1754.
- Hill, John. *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. London, 1755.
- Hogan, Charles Beecher. *Shakespeare in the Theatre: 1701-1800. A Record of Performances in London 1751-1800*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1957.
- Holland, Peter. “The Age of Garrick.” *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*. Eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 69-92.
- Hume, David. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- . *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*. Ed. Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985.
- Inchbald, Elizabeth. *The British Theater; or, A collection of Plays, Which are acted at the Theatres Royal, Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Haymarket. Printed Under the Authority of the Managers From the Prompt Books. With Biographical and Critical Remarks by Mrs. Inchbald. In Twenty-Five Volumes*. London, 1808.
- Ingrassia, Catherine. *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Isherwood, Charles. Rev. of *Henry IV*. *Variety*. 2. Nov. 2003.

- Johnson, Samuel (of Cheshire). *Sir John Falstaff in Masquerade*. London, 1741. John  
Larpernt Plays. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. LA14.
- Johnson, Samuel. *Prologue Spoken at the Opening of the theatre in Drury Lane*.  
London, 1747.
- . *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Ed. Arthur Sherbo. The Yale Edition of the Works of  
Samuel Johnson. Vols. 7 & 8. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Jones, Robert W. *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The  
Analysis of Beauty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kames, Henry Home, Lord. *Elements of Criticism*. 3 vols. Edinburgh, 1762.
- Kenrick, William. *Introduction to the School of Shakespeare*. London, 1774.
- . *Falstaff's Wedding*. London, 1760.
- Knights, L.C. "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" *Hamlet and Other  
Shakespearean Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. 270-  
50.
- Kucich, Greg. "Joanna Baillie and the re-staging of history and gender." *Joanna Baillie,  
Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays*. Ed. Thomas C. Crochunis. London:  
Routledge, 2004. 108-130.
- Lennox, Charlotte. *Shakespeare Illustrated*. London, 1753-54.
- Levao, Ronald. Introduction. *Henry IV, Parts I & II, A Longman Cultural Edition*.  
London: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- Lloyd, Robert. *The Actor*. London, 1760.
- Locke, John. *Locke on Words. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London:  
W.S. Sonnenschein & Co., 1882.

- Lynch, Deidre. *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998.
- Lyttelton, George, Baron. *Dialogues of the Dead*. London, 1760.
- Mackenzie, Alan. "The Systematic Scrutiny of Passion in Johnson's *Rambler*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 20.2 (1986 / 87): 129-52.
- Mackenzie, Alexander. *Mirror* no. 100. April 22, 1780.
- Mander, Raymond and Mitchenson, Joe. "The China Statuettes of Quin as Falstaff." *Theatre Notebook* (1958): 54-58.
- Mandeville, Bernard. *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest*. London, 1705.
- . *Fable of the Bees and other writings*. Ed. E.J. Hundert. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997.
- Marsden, Jean I. *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
- . "Daddy's Girls: Shakespearian Daughters and Eighteenth-Century Ideology." *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (2007): 17-27.
- . "Shakespeare and Sympathy." *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*. Eds. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008. 29-43.
- Marshall, John. *The masquerade: containing a variety of merry characters of all sorts, properly dressed for the occassion [sic]: calculated to amuse and instruct all the good boys and girls in the kingdom*. London, 1785.
- Marshall, Louise H. "Women and Politics in Adaptations of Shakespeare's English Histories: Re-enacting the Nation, 1719-1745." *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (2006): 61-77.

- Maus, Katherine. *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- McKeon, Michael. *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.
- Mellor, Ann K. "Joanna Baillie and the Counter Public Sphere." *Studies in Romanticism* 33.4 (1994): 559-67.
- Monk, Samuel Holt. *The Sublime; a study of critical theories in XVIII-century England*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960.
- Montagu, Elizabeth Robinson. *A Dialogue Between Berenice and Cleopatra*. c. 1760. MO 2998 (box 37).
- . *An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespeare, compared with Greek and French Dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. De. Voltaire*. London, 1769.
- Moody, Jane. "Stolen Identities: Character, Mimicry and the Invention of Samuel Foote." *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 65-89.
- More, Hannah. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. London, 1799.
- Morris, Corbyn. *An Essay towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Railery, Satire, and Ridicule*. London, 1744.
- Morgann, Maurice. *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*. London: T. Davies, 1777.
- Mullan, John. *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

- . "Sensibility and Literary Criticism." *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*.  
Eds. H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
1997. 419-34.
- Nicoll, Allardyce. *The Garrick Stage: Theatres and Audience in the Eighteenth Century*.  
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980.
- Norton, M. "The Plays of Joanna Baillie." *Review of English Studies*. 23. 90 (1947):  
131-43.
- Nussbaum, Felicity. "Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800." *Theatre  
and Celebrity in Britain*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. New York:  
Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 148-169.
- O'Brien, John. "Harlequin Britain: Eighteenth-Century Pantomime and the Cultural  
Location of Entertainment (s)." *Theatre Journal* 50.4 (1998): 489-510.
- Odell, George. *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*. Volume 1. New York: Benjamin  
Blom, Inc., 1963.
- Orgel, Stephen. "The Authentic Shakespeare." *Representations* 21. (1988): 1-25.
- Oldys, William. *Biographia Britannica*. London, 1747-60.
- Parker, Patricia. *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*. London: Methuen, 1987.
- Patey, Douglas Lane. "The Institution of Criticism in the Eighteenth Century." *The  
Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Vol. 4 Cambridge: Cambridge UP,  
1997. 3-37.
- Phillipson, Nicholas. "Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of early Eighteenth  
Century Scottish Culture." *Scotland and England 1286-1815*. Ed. Roger A.  
Mason. Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987. 226-46.



- Pickering, Roger. *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy*. London, 1755.
- Pocock, J.G.A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1975.
- Porter, Roy. Introduction. *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. Roy Porter. London: Routledge, 1997. 1-16.
- Pope, Alexander. *The Works of Alexander Pope*. Eds. Rev. Whitwell Elwin and William John Courthope, M.A. Vol. 4. Poetry. New York: Gordian Press, 1967.
- Price, Cecil. *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973.
- Pullen, Kristen. *Actresses and Whores*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Resnick, Robert. "James Quin: The Actor and the Man." *Studies in the Humanities*. 6.2 (1978): 29-35.
- Ribeiro, Aileen. *The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730 to 1790*. New York: Garland, 1984.
- Richardson, William. "On the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff," *Essays on Some of Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters. To Which is added, an essay on the faults of Shakespeare*. 5th edition. London: J. Murray and S. Highley, 1797. 240-88.
- Ritchie, Fiona. "Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Actress," *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 2.2 (2006).
- Roach, Joseph. "Public Intimacy: The Prior History of 'It.'" *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 15-30.
- . *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*. Ann Arbor: The University of

- Michigan Press, 1993.
- Rogers, Pat. "Breeches Roles." *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982. 244-58.
- . "'Towering Beyond Her Sex': Stature and Sublimity in the Achievement of Sarah Siddons." *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*. Eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991. 48-67.
- Rosenbaum, Ron. "Corrupt Buffoon or Joyous Inspiration?" *The New York Times*. 9 Nov. 2003.
- Rumbold, Kate. "Alas, poor YORICK": Quoting Shakespeare in the Mid-Eighteenth Century Novel." *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 2.2 (2006).
- Russell, Gillian. *Women, Sociability, and Theatre in Georgian London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Rymer, Thomas. *A Short View of Tragedy*. London, 1693.
- Sabor, Peter and Paul Yachnin. Introduction. *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008. 1-9.
- Scheil, Katherine West. *The Taste of the Town: Shakespearian Comedy and the Early Eighteenth-Century Theatre*. London: Associated University Press, 2003.
- Scouten, Arthur H. "The Increase in Popularity of Shakespeare's Plays in the Eighteenth Century: A Caveat for Interpreters of Stage History." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 7.2 (1956): 189-202.

- Sechelski, Denise S. "Garrick's Body and the Labour of Art in Eighteenth-Century Theater." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29.4 (1996): 369-389.
- Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of the Public Man*. London: Penguin, 2002.
- Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of. *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Ed. Laurence E. Klein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Shakespeare, William. *Mr. William Shakespeare his Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. 10 vols. Ed. Edward Capell. London, 1767-68.
- . *The Works of Shakespeare*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 6 vols. Ed. Thomas Hanmer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1770-71.
- . *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*. 10 vols. Ed. Edmond Malone. London, 1790.
- . *Twenty of the Plays of Shakespeare*. 4 vols. Ed. George Steevens. London, 1766.
- . *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare*. 6 vols. Ed. Nicholas Rowe. London, 1709.
- . *The Works of Shakespeare*. 6 vols. Ed. Alexander Pope. London, 1723-25.
- . *The Works of Shakespeare*. 7 vols. Ed. Lewis Theobald. London, 1733.
- . *The Works of Shakespeare*. 8 vols. Eds. William Warburton and Alexander Pope. London, 1747.
- . *The Works of Shakespeare*. 8 vols. Ed. William Warburton. London, 1795.
- Sheridan, Thomas. *British Education: Or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain*. London, 1756.

- Slights, Jessica, and Paul Yachnin. Introduction. *Shakespeare and Character: Theory, History, Performance, and Theatrical Persons*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 1-18.
- Smallwood, Angela J. "Women and the Theatre." *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700-1800*. Ed. Vivien Jones. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 238-263.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984.
- . *The Wealth of Nations*. Books I-III. Ed. Andrew Skinner. London: Penguin Books, 1999.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Watson, Julia. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Solkin, David. "ReWrighting Shaftesbury: The *Air Pump* and the Limits of Commercial Humanism." *Painting and the Politics of Culture*. Ed. John Barrell. Oxford: Oxford UP. (1992): 73-99.
- Spacks, Patricia Ann Meyer. *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-century Self*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003.
- Stock, R.D. *Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.
- Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "A Falstaff for the Bright." *Modern Philology*. (1954): 145-154.
- Straub, Kristina. *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.

- Stone, George Winchester, Jr. "David Garrick's Significance in the History of Shakespearean Criticism: A Study of the Impact of the Actor upon the Change of Critical Focus during the Eighteenth Century." *PMLA*. 65. 2 (1960): 183-197.
- Stone, George Winchester, Jr. and Kahrl, George M. *David Garrick, a critical biography*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.
- Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare: a Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989.
- Taylor, George. "'The Just Delineation of the Passions': Theories of Acting in the Age of Garrick." *The Eighteenth Century English Stage*. Eds. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson. London: Methuen & Co., 1975. 51-73.
- Theobald, Lewis. *Shakespeare Restored: or, A specimen of the many errors, as well committed, as unamended, by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this poet*. London, 1726.
- Thomson, Peter. "Celebrity and Rivalry: David [Garrick] and Goliath [Quin]." *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 127-147.
- . *The Cambridge Introduction to English Theatre, 1600-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Townsend, Dabney. *Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Traub, Valerie. "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 456-74.

- Trussler, Simon. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of British Theatre*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Upton, John. *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*. London, 1746.
- Vaughan, Anthony. *Born to Please: Hannah Pritchard, Actress, 1711-1768*. The Society for Theatre Research. Bath: Pitman Press, 1979.
- Vickers, Brian, ed. *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*. 6 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974-1981.
- Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century Britain*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Wanko, Cheryl. *Roles of Authority: Thespian Biography and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2003.
- Weintraub, Jeff and Krishan, Kumar. *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997.
- West, Shearer. *The Image of the Actor*. London: Pinter Publishers, 1991.
- . "Siddons. Celebrity and Regality: Portraiture and the Body of the Ageing Actress," in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. 191-214.
- Whatley, Thomas. *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare*. London, 1785.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Sociology of Culture*. New York: Schoken, 1982.
- Wilkes, Thomas. *A General View of the Stage*. London, 1759.
- Woo, Celestine. *Romantic Actors and Bardolatry: Performing Shakespeare from Garrick to Kean*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Wood, Leigh. *Garrick Claims the Stage: Acting as Social Emblem in Eighteenth-*

*Century England.* London: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Worthen, William B. *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance.*

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.