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The Margins of the Rational Man: Fluid Identities in Eighteenth-Century Biography

ABSTRACT

This study will explore the Enlightenment conception of the individual of reason, its attempted formulations in actor biographies, and its ultimate denial by the reality of human identity as multiple, fluid, and dialogical. Such fluidity sought to overcome the marginal status of the stage player through the embodiment of rational models of personality. Some stage celebrities, most notably David Garrick, were offering themselves as public models of identity for the new age of reasoned discourse. This involved the presentation before the public of stage performers as fully realized individuals. However, the unavoidable problem was that presenting an individual, even a renowned stage star, as a living paradigm of the enlightened person of reason would prove elusive. Aside from the inherent contradiction of locating any perfected stereotype in an actual person, the qualities making an individual in full conformity to his or her "reason" did not match the particular cultural qualities demanded for a successful eighteenth-century middle-class Englishman or Englishwoman. Nonetheless, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, significant advances were made both within the particular profession of acting and before the onstage and offstage public. The acting profession was moving quickly and for the first time in England away from its marginalized status to offer respected agents for cultural change. The new genre of actor biographies as well contributed to this more fully realized formulation of the modern individual.

ABSTRACT

It is not the violent man unable to control himself who moves us;
that is an advantage reserved for the man in full possession of himself.
(Diderot, *Paradox on Acting* 320).

REASON BEYOND THE MARGIN

28 As a new class of self-made celebrities, many stage actors eagerly endorsed the notion of education for improvement through reason and sought to offer public instruction, despite their perceived marginality and lingering doubts about their own moral respectability among the same public. Actor biographies and essays, both new genres, introduced the notion of the celebrity performer as archetype of the rational man.¹ This study will explore the Enlightenment conception of the individual of reason, its attempted formulations in actor biographies, and its ultimate denial by the reality of human identity as multiple, fluid, and dialogical. Such fluidity sought to overcome the marginal status of the stage player through the embodiment of rational models of personality.

When Enlightenment notions posited knowledge as the means to improve the human condition, they furnished the grounding for nothing less than a science of living. The new rationality rejected many of the traditional notions of religious obedience to reified laws and directives in favor of human-based standards for progressive change. Bracketed by Locke and Hegel, the age prioritized “reason” as the universal method for individual betterment, requiring “rational self-responsibility.”² Reason in this way became the supreme unifier of the energies of the mind. “Variety and diversity of shapes are simply the full unfolding of a . . . homogeneous formative power.” This dynamic but coherent power was characterized with the single word “reason.” This task Montesquieu expressed succinctly and eloquently: to bring “nature under the intense light of reason” (Cassirer 5–6; 47–48).³ In Herbert Marcuse’s words, “From now on, the struggle with

¹ Daniel J. Boorstin discusses the development of the essay from Montaigne as originative of the biography of an individual (556–66). However, he does not mention actor biographies. The appearance of the actor biography was a vital element to the rise of the self-made celebrity, and hence of the individual, in the eighteenth century.

² John Locke expanded on Francis Bacon’s prioritization of reason for human progress. At the end of the era, Hegel presupposed rationality as the essential tool for human betterment. Locke’s “rational control of the self” implied “the ideal of rational self-responsibility” (Charles Taylor 174).

³ However, Diderot warned of applying systems of reason to every field, especially natural history and such disciplines as botany (Cassirer 77).

nature and with social organization was to be guided by [the individual's] own progress in knowledge. The world was to be an order of reason" (3–4). Much of the new thought in the eighteenth century concerned egalitarian goals that posited a social leveling, or at least balancing. These democratic aims, brought about in part through a greater appreciation of truth by scientific reasoning and broader educational visions, remained largely unrealized throughout the century. Still, the British middle class moved to the epicenter of consciousness, inspiring and defining movements for change.⁴ Conspicuous among these were certain theatre celebrities, who began to offer public instruction for personal improvement, albeit aware of their own problematic acceptance among elements of the general public.

In an age when reasoning, individual deportment, articulate speech, appropriate clothing, contained emotionality, knowledge of social etiquette, and amateur scientific experimentation marked the identity of the gentleman, and to an extent that of the lady, famous theatre performers were increasingly valued as educators and—specific to the new science of living—as advocates of “nature” in the theatre.⁵ Figures such as Charles Macklin and David Garrick, two of the most revered, in Great Britain, actors and actor-managers (stage directors), began to accept aristocrats and the new bourgeoisie alike as students of acting, deportment, manners, moral behavior, and most vitally, of the new science of living. Instruction was offered in the homes of the actors and their customers, while oratories and coffee houses became the sites of public and semi-public demonstrations of such behavioral standards. Also, dramatic productions did double duty as entertainment for mixed audiences of the aristocracy and the middle class while offering opportunities for spectator/learners to observe the class-coded details of behavior, interaction, and moral sensibility presented by the characters on stage.⁶ Extending this interest, actor biographies and essays furnished models of the individual for a rational age, a discourse that could overcome the marginal status of the theatre profession.

Some stage celebrities were offering themselves as public models of identity for the new rational individual, a powerful theme which, to

⁴ Among others, Paul Langford discusses middle-class influence on the wider culture of eighteenth-century Britain in *A Polite and Commercial People* and *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798*.

⁵ The general Enlightenment project for the improvement of living, especially by acquiring notions of sensibility for various endeavors and behaviors, are detailed throughout Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World*.

⁶ See for example William W. Appleton, *Charles Macklin: An Actor's Life*, 98–108; Christian Deelman, *Great Shakespeare Jubilee*; a general discussion of manners, deportment, and middle class sensibilities are discussed in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (59–123; 461–518).

borrow a term from Laura Brown, qualifies as a “cultural fable,” that is, “a collective enterprise, which, through its collectivity, engages with the most vital, problematic, or prominent aspects of contemporary experience” (3). However, the unavoidable problem was that presenting an individual, even a renowned stage star, as a living paradigm of the enlightened man of reason would prove elusive. Aside from the inherent contradiction of locating any perfected stereotype in an actual person, the qualities making an individual in full conformity to his or her “reason” did not match the particular cultural qualities demanded for a successful eighteenth-century middle-class Englishman or woman. In fact, the motivation to represent a person of reason to the general public was based on contradictory aims and power-centered strategies, not rational and fixed ideals. The reality of human experience as multiple, fluid, and dialogical would undermine any such absolute identities and ultimately reaffirm the marginality of theatre professionals.

REASON UNDER CONTROL

The inner qualities of character, emotion, and thought were often presumed outwardly verifiable in the eighteenth-century public sphere. There was a widespread need among the increasingly self-conscious middle class to learn the external rules and aesthetics of “politeness.” The hunger for “the polite attainments of fashionable living” could be accommodated by self-made celebrities known for their graceful deportment but also for their adherence to “nature” and “truth,” different concepts that the period did not hold in contradiction (Langford 80). Outward manifestations of human thoughts and feelings became systematized by prominent actors for popular heuristic purposes.

Macklin became the first major performer to analyze communicative delivery in a systematic way. His instruction included schematic terminology indicating various lengths of pausing for effect, and the proper movement to express particular thoughts and emotions. Emotionality through physicality, thought through eloquence of speech, and diction (word choice) as the conceptual form of sentiment, all were thought controllable and teachable as a system. Human feeling was no longer understood by these offstage teachers as an ineffable force of nature, or originitive of divine grace or reified evil. Rather, both the inner life and the outer life were controllable and analyzable in the service of “Truth” and “Nature.” In effect, all of human subjectivity could be classifiable and directly transmittable through training and discipline from a knowledgeable teacher/performer. This didactic orientation was inspired largely by an Enlightenment view that regarded the human body as a controllable

machine, in real life as much as in artistic performance. Such a mechanistic approach to human expression would be refined by David Garrick and other stage performers to view truth in performance from more realistic models (Roach 87). Here he knew his audience. Training and personal discipline as ideals were particularly appreciated by the rising middle class, which remained relatively insecure about its new position in British society, despite its growing numbers.⁷

As even Georgian royals and members of the high nobility received instruction from notable performers and actor-managers, theatre celebrities themselves were eager to be perceived as embodiments of the new ideal of controllable feeling for enhanced living. The desire of the new educator/performers to gain higher social status had personal as well as ideological justifications. Even noted stage performers, especially glamorous feature players, were often heckled in the English theatres, challenged and harassed in the green rooms and dressing rooms, and parodied in print and before audiences. These affronts to their new social status as self-made celebrities were mainly undertaken by theatre-going aristocrats, who exploited their own *de facto* legal immunity and traditional cultural privileges.

David Garrick's famous banishment of gentlemen spectators from the English stage had social and ideological as much as artistic significance, a fact overlooked by most theatre historians.⁸ In fact, the era's program of social and personal betterment also served the demarcation of social classes to maintain elite structures, albeit with an acceptance of broader notions of privilege. Peter Borsay comments, ". . . improvement, for all its emphasis on sociability, was a major tool in the pursuit of status." Nonetheless, refined discourse and deportment was sought not merely as part of the material culture of luxury and leisure, but "as vehicles for deeper psycho-moral systems," as an expression of mental forms of self-improvement (189, 201).

Cheryl Wanka notes that the new phenomenon of the actor celebrity brought multiple public versions of the person celebrated. She understands, as did Garrick's biographer Thomas Davies, how Garrick's reputation offered the morally suspect a degree of middle-class respectability (54). However, the wider historical context needs to be considered. More than a morally respected performer and producer, Garrick became a national figure embodying universalistic values, an identity that countered the marginal status of his profession. His enlightened principles of artistic

⁷ Roy Porter discusses the concerns and goals of the rising middle class in the British Enlightenment. See *Flesh in the Age of Reason*.

⁸ For example, Kristina Straub in *Sexual Suspects* assumes a more static social identity for the performer in that century, one more deterministic and less dynamic.

truth and simplicity directly influenced the social reception of the other arts as well. For example, his support and literary influence on Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810), the “Shakespeare of the dance,” led dance as an art form away from dogmatic standardization (Boorstin 489–90).

Accordingly, many eighteenth-century British theatre figures assumed a double identity within culture. First, they embodied the new standards for “truth” and “nature” in everyday life on both the individual and social levels, offering demonstrations of the new “truth” of human action onstage. Their approach included the selection of plays, which had typically valorized the traditional aristocratic values and sensibilities that were now emulated by the more broadly oriented middle-class. Second, actors began to offer the public individual instruction on *The Science of Acting*, as Charles Macklin’s now lost tome was entitled. Greatly influenced by Macklin, John Hill’s instructional book, *The Actor*, rejected what he regarded as pseudo-scientific analyzes of expressed feeling, such as Aaron Hill’s mechanistic method of evoking a set list of passions through gesture and facial expression (*The Prompter*). More sophisticated didactic standards were replacing earlier attempts to apply rational schemata directly to the representation of human sentiment. Nevertheless, the controllability of human subjectivity through trained outward manifestations remained the overall intention in public performance as the century progressed.⁹

Stage celebrities taught privately and demonstrated onstage the new enlightened standards of human behavior and the outward conveyance of emotion and thought. Although most personal qualities presented for emulation were originative to the aristocracy, certain middle-class attitudes and tenets were valued, especially a disciplined focus for life and an enterprising attitude increasingly associated with economic rationality. Eighteenth-century tragedies, both the traditional and the new “middle-class tragedy” were widely cherished as exemplifications of the new ideals for living. These new living standards were at times even passed along to the working classes. A telling example was George Washington at Valley Forge, who had Joseph Addison’s patrician tragedy *Cato* performed to educate his troops in personal resolve during the hard winter (Addison).

Theatre celebrities often sought to project their own public personae as high-status representatives of the new rationality and “sensibility.” The new rational individual possessed thoughts and feelings made understandable, and hence controllable—under public scrutiny. For Macklin and especially Garrick, the growing social status of actors allowed a less defensive and more didactic orientation towards the public, culminating in the celebration of the self-defined “new truth on stage.” This manifesto

⁹ See footnote 6.

developed into a close association of Shakespeare as national icon with all Shakespearean actors, especially with Garrick himself as public guardian of the Bard's artistic "Truth." Moreover, Shakespearean dramatic form was comprehended as a mixture of tones and character types associated with the social mobility of British society (Gary Taylor 118, 122–23).

SEVERAL VERSIONS OF THE SELF

33 Donald Stauffer's study of eighteenth-century biography argued that the histrionic experience of the stage actor, the ability to play many roles and to handle dialogue easily, was a significant influence on the narrative development of biographical writing. Actors, he thought, seemed less hesitant to express their private thoughts and emotions than most people and were more adroit at presenting them to the reading public (27–30). All the same, eighteenth-century stage personalities often felt a need to hide their private lives from their readership and audiences. Stauffer's chapter on the stage actor's influence in the development of biographical narrative recognized the importance of histrionic sensibilities but ignored role playing as a conscious writing strategy in biography. The autobiographic *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* (1740), for example, presents a lively mix of onstage and offstage performances wherein the actor's private identity continually evades the reader. Cibber's elusive writing strategy prevented a largely anonymous but socially powerful public from fixing his private identity. However, the same strategy fell short of creating a new archetype of the enlightened individual, whose thoughts and actions follow the course of transparent truth. This new goal demanded "simplicity" of action and word for the self-improving rational person, who would overcome a marginalized status.

William Epstein argues that, as the movement for greater individualism influenced various eighteenth-century social institutions, autobiography became an important genre through which a writer could secure a degree of public identity. New biographers discovered a successful channel through which the rising consumer market could materially reproduce the individual (52). Epstein's viewpoint needs qualification in the important case of the actor's biography, where the private life of the biographical subject often merged with his or her public identity as stage performer of known roles, a circumstance that complicates the narrative of self-disclosure—and hence fails at creating a model for rationality. The biographical form presented the actor/biographer with a useful medium for self-defense but also for self-promotion, an attractive option in an era when stage performers were regarded with suspicion and condescension. Expanding Epstein then, it could be said that the actor's biography, repre-

sented by Cibber's *An Apology*, reproduced not one individual alone but rather several versions of the biographical subject for purposes of both self-promotion and self-defense. Epstein's reproduction of the individual was in this way extended and altered by the writer's intentional creation of a personality with multiple identities for ends that both protected and promoted the individual subject. The fluidity of human identity had in fact replaced universalistic and abstract conceptions of human being.

In contrast to *An Apology*, Thomas Davies' *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (1780) seems to construct a consistent identity for its subject. In fact, however, Davies also intentionally conflates the onstage and off-stage identities of his subject, much as Cibber does defensively to construct an indeterminate identity to evade personal criticism and for public promotion. Of course the narrative of individualism, then and now, has never been so transparent that it simply "reproduces the individual," as if such an entity were photographically repeatable. On the contrary, the biographies of Cibber and Garrick reveal strategies that construct multiple personalities for multiple purposes: to protect the actor from public attack; to promote the theatre as a central—no longer marginal—cultural institution charged with promulgating rationalistic concepts of education for personal living; and finally, especially in the Garrick biography, to identify actors as public exempla of "reason" and "truth."

Contemporary critical reaction to *An Apology* often denigrated the marked fluidity of its identities. The anonymous author of *The Laureat: or, the Right Side of Colley Cibber* (1740) wrote that Cibber's posturing showed only "self-sufficient Folley" (Ashley 99). In *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding commented that Cibber "lived such a life only in order to write it" (4). In fact, most observers then and now missed, or ignored, the defensive basis of his multiple role playing in the autobiography and public letters. Acting remained socially marginalized, a suspect and precarious profession among audiences and the general public alike.

Cibber was not unaware of the potential power of his profession to redefine the wider boundaries of cultural identity. For instance he records that King George was so impressed by his cast's performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* that a courtier quipped that the monarch might replace all his court officials with stage actors (300). Cibber later expands this theme with a lengthy comparison of passionate rivalries between actors with rivalries among royal courtiers throughout history (304). He even briefly imagines a theatre where stage performers would be raised above their traditional social status, and the stage magnified to become a national political institution of reason and nature. "I have so often had occasion to compare the State of the Stage to the State of a Nation, that I yet feel a Reluctancy to drop the Comparison" (301). The public's ha-

bitual conflation of actor and stage character allowed Cibber at times to associate the theatre profession with roles of much higher social privilege, endowing it with a status worthy of an educational institution based on reasoned living. However, more commonly Cibber's celebrity power and personal independence were maintained by using the ambiguity of his multiple identities rather than by professing ideologies of social betterment.

FROM SOCIAL SYMPTOM TO ARCHETYPE

The two generations separating Cibber's account of the theatre from Thomas Davies' biography cover a period of major change in cultural perception. The most evident change in *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* is the assumption, albeit tentative at moments, of social respectability and reasoned judgment. Davies, an actor who changed careers to become an important London publisher, and his wife, the actress Susanna Yarrow Davies, regarded themselves as models of social respectability in the theatre (Boswell 2:391). Although *Memoirs* reflects just as much professional exuberance as Cibber's account of theatre life, it reveals much less defensiveness, less posturing for public approval, and far less personal display. While Davies occasionally laments the "limited station" of the theatre, he portrays Garrick as a stage figure who in every way exudes "order, decency and decorum" (1:44, 148–49). For instance, Garrick runs a patent theatre like a well-regulated business, projecting a respected level-headedness to the public: "While the leading players of Covent Garden were wrangling among themselves, the manager of Drury Lane [Garrick] pursued his business unremittingly" (1:146).

Whereas *An Apology* often assumes a tone of forced assertiveness, Davies presents Garrick as unconcerned and even compliant to public wishes. Such non-threatening and confident personal qualities assured his acceptability and popularity among the London nobility (1:43). Though he almost always reveals a keen awareness of his public image, Garrick's social attitude remains confidently circumspect and reserved, in stark contrast to the insecure volubility of Cibber. However, he too carefully avoids argumentation in cultivated society, often to the point of innocuousness. As with Cibber, the Garrick of the *Memoirs* possesses a capacity for anticipating public perceptions of his private identity: "Indeed, the guarding against distant ridicule, and warding off apprehended censure, was a favorite peculiarity of Mr. Garrick through life" (1:197). Similarly, Garrick's *An Essay on Acting*, according to Davies, was written "to attack himself ironically, to blunt, if not prevent, the remarks of others" (1:198). Its defensive strategy of self-deprecation is similar to Cibber's strategy. Ironic self-reference as a rhetorical device was employed by both figures throughout their careers.

Both would use self-criticism as a preemptive tactic, knowing that their audiences would likely assume that their frequent offstage role playing was common in the acting profession. With a public less likely to take their identities at face value, Cibber and Garrick often succeeded in avoiding escalating attacks.

Davies' detailed account of a scandalous pamphlet war reveals the degree to which Garrick and other eighteenth-century actors were vulnerable to public scrutiny. Davies feels a need to reassure his readers that theatre spectators are the anonymous patrons, and that stage performers are "their servants" (1:87–88). However, despite the occasional guarded statement, the main point of the *Memoirs* is to cast Garrick in the progressive role of public educator, to present him as an enlightened contributor to innovative social formation, hence central, not marginal, to the culture. Garrick's public persona as an advocate for social improvement Habermas identifies more generally as the "new form of bourgeois representation" (37). In fact, two specific developments famously credited to Garrick helped actors and theatre managers achieve a higher social status. The first was the introduction of a "natural" acting style, one more subtle and detailed in characterization. The second was the successful association of Shakespeare as patriotic and cultural icon with the public identity of David Garrick.¹⁰

Davies' deft treatment of these two public identities promoted his subject as harbinger of the new verisimilitude in the theatre and of a vitalized national culture, represented above all by the figure of Shakespeare. Garrick sought to perform Shakespeare "unaltered," purposefully redefining the national icon on the London stage. Later Garrick organized the first Stratford Festival. To the extent that actors expanded their eighteenth-century repertory of performances to become onstage and offstage social regulators and educators, they transcended the limits of their former professional identities. No longer the passive personifications of traditional class-based ideals, English stage celebrities would become forgers of progressive change. Garrick as the enlightened actor/educator sought to instruct the British public from his own script of social identities. He would define the future in innovative ways by professing moral and aesthetic judgments on playwrights and plays. The theatre professional would become a privatized individual of authority, according to Garrick. Garrick would instruct by means of the actor as teacher, bringing central Enlightenment ideas onto the podium of the stage (both literally and figuratively).

Garrick became public educator in another cultural sphere when he assumed responsibility for giving formal lectures on Shakespearean drama-

¹⁰ Garrick's management of the Shakespeare Jubilee is assessed by Martha Winburn England.

turgy from the famous Drury Lane Theatre stage. For Davies these prescriptive lectures “criticized the various palates of the public for theatrical representation, and compared the wine of Shakespeare to a bottle of brisk Champaign” (1:311). Reflecting the Enlightenment pursuit of rational justification for social institutions, the stage lectures broadened Garrick’s reputation in the dialectic of cultural change. His interest in artistic verisimilitude and his public reputation for cool-headedness and circumspection reveal a concern for the representation of the “new nature” in the arts, designed to keep the imagination on short leash, under the control of reason and discipline (qtd. in Daston 121). In the face of Samuel Johnson’s warning in *Rasselas*, “All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity,” Davies presents Garrick as the supreme artist who all the same is a shrewd economic realist uncorrupted by forms of fiction and imagination (104–05). Garrick’s reputation associated the theatre professional with innovative ideals for the new middle class.

Garrick alone is associated throughout the *Memoirs* with the development of a new acting style.¹¹ Davies considers this an entirely original artistic achievement, a supersessionist movement where “nature” and “simplicity” must replace the traditional exaggeration, mechanistic externality, and broad gesturing of previous eighteenth-century character portrayal: “Garrick shone forth like a theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and action; he banished ranting, bombast, and grimace; and restored nature, ease, simplicity, and genuine humour” (1:44). Davies repeatedly asserts that his subject’s stage identity seamlessly complements his private identity, conflating Garrick’s public and private identities in his arguments. Thus Davies claims that Garrick’s personal stature remains consistent throughout his life. Whereas the Cibber autobiography presents multiple identities of the subject largely for defensive reasons, the Davies Garrick by and large possesses an integrative identity where public and private lives merge to define the dedicated professional, the new individual embodying the Enlightenment ideals of consistency and instrumental focus. He is allegorized as a theatrical Newton and a Shakespeare who will demonstrate a world of reason and nature, of bourgeois conformity for the new commercialized world (Daunton 141–80).

Garrick’s attention to truth and simplicity in theatrical performance complements an offstage attention to “ease, simplicity, and genuine humour” in business practice and social deportment. Davies quotes in its entirety the Samuel Johnson prologue for Garrick’s opening of the Drury Lane Theatre, which champions Garrick’s stagecraft as a new turn towards

¹¹ In fact, Macklin helped Garrick with certain roles early in his career (Cooke 107). Macklin preceded Garrick in the development of more “natural” roles.

“Nature”: “’Tis yours this night to bid the reign commence / Of rescu’d Nature, and reviving Sense.” Davies’ comment on this speech strongly associates Garrick’s management of the Drury Lane Theatre and his offstage conduct in general with the theme of middle-class diligence: “He was so accomplished himself in all the external behavior, as well as in the more valuable talents of his profession, that his example was greatly conducive to that regularity which he laboured to establish” (1:147–48). Garrick is presented as “reviving Sense” in the theatre by representing the middle-class and capitalist aspirations of consistency and disciplined work. Actor, educator, theatre manager, and offstage archetype of the self-made individual form a single persona of civic centrality, beyond marginality, the new individual who supports a social agenda.

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The *Memoirs* often rebuts public criticism of Garrick, arguing for the singular importance of the age’s man of reason. For example, his promotion of Shakespeare along with other revered playwrights in England is critiqued for its obvious profit motive and for giving “no encouragement to new compositions.” Davies dismisses these objections succinctly: “There is no drawback on the profit of the night in old plays” (1:269). He includes an Oliver Goldsmith’s quote that depicts the soul of Shakespeare greeting a resurrected Garrick in heaven before other famous personages (2:164–65). Throughout the appendix Davies quotes at length selected eulogies to Garrick, most of which associate Shakespeare in some way with Garrick: “Though the proud dome and sculptur’d form declare / Immortal Shakespeare thy peculiar care” (2:454); “While here to Shakespeare Garrick pays / His tributary thanks and praise” (2:456); “When Shakespeare died, he left behind / A mortal of an equal mind. / When Garrick play’d, he liv’d again” (2:462). The appendix also includes details of the funeral celebration at Westminster Abbey, where Garrick achieves final recognition by being buried “near to the monument of Shakespeare” (2:486). He becomes a latter day Prometheus bringing Enlightenment values of “truth” and disciplined enterprise to the nation, by so doing escaping his profession’s traditional marginal status.

Both Shakespeare and Garrick are associated with modest language and unassuming behavior, in contrast to the embroidered dramaturgy of “gentlemen authors” such as Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher (2:328–29). Plainness and modesty as values for living are identified with a middle-class ethos, in opposition to traditional aristocratic concerns, such as social deportment and honor. Thus Davies quotes in full Oliver Goldsmith’s eulogy to Garrick wherein the actor’s onstage performances embody the plain truth as a prescriptive ideal for living. His stage acting is “natural, simple, affecting,” in the service of those ideals through which the plain truth reveals the human heart. Honest striving displaces established aris-

tocratic privilege and hubris; plain middle-class manners supplant the artificialities of upper-class civility, which function to delimit social status. The criticism of aristocratic hegemony is thinly disguised, even as Davies seeks to render Garrick's public persona non-threatening to upper-class privilege.

For Leigh Woods, "Garrick's refusal to use theatre for political purposes aided him in his ability to concentrate on areas of private, subjective, and emotionally intense experience which he discovered in his characters" (148). The *Memoirs* deliberately extends this presumed apolitical strategy to its subject's conformist and circumspect private life. Davies was naturally predisposed to become interested in such a persona. In fact, he had been urged by Samuel Johnson to write Garrick's biography in order to extricate his own family from social disgrace and to save his publishing career from financial ruin. The middle-class virtues Davies attributes to Garrick—hard work, discipline, and moral steadiness—he desperately sought for himself as a former actor and publisher on the brink of economic failure. Garrick becomes the redeemer of an imagined status lost since the Elizabethan "Golden Age" in order to recast (and re-caste) the stage practitioner as public educator. He presents the characteristics of a model theatre manager, that is, of a successful propertied individual in Habermas's sense (see above p. 12).¹²

For Davies the new verisimilitude of the Garrick acting style associated with polite conversation in the actor's private life. Whereas the caprice, sarcasm, and braggadocio of Cibber's public personae reveal a celebrity escaping social categorization through a fluidity of voice and identity, Davies' Garrick presents consistency, dependability, and business solidity, qualities that exemplified the recognizable values of the new reason-directed sociability.¹³ However, both biographies utilize, in varying degrees, a fluidity of identity for social acceptability, a strategy that complicates universalistic and rationalistic conceptions of human experience.

SPACE FOR MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Writing on the age of representation, William Egginton refers to Jacques Lacan's notion of the split subject, that is, one who views the self objectively in response to modern notions of representation. Egginton's subject is the theatregoer of the Spanish Golden Age, but his summary of the spectator's

¹² Michael Duffy discusses the general trajectories that defined the commercial and product-oriented world of middle-class capitalism in the eighteenth century (213–42).

¹³ Many recent studies on the significance of sociability and civility in the culture and science of the Enlightenment have been undertaken in recent years. For a comprehensive treatment see Dorinda Outram (14–30) and Wanko (10–46).

experiential situation applies accurately to the eighteenth-century English theatre performer and spectator:

Spectators become, themselves, microcosms of the theatre, acting roles for internal and external audiences, and thereby developing techniques of self-representation that would serve, on the one hand, to help integrate them into a new system of political organization while, on the other hand, to produce a sort of “breathing space,” a gap between the role played and the subject playing it that would guarantee that the subject never becomes fully subsumed by the role. (410)

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Audience members respond to the ideological enticements of the roles represented onstage by using evasive means of internal and external fantasization. The common practice of gentlemen spectators sitting on the English stage in open view of other audience members is an overt consequence of the internalization of role playing and the theatricalization of everyday life. Garrick’s famous banning of such spectators from the stage instances the performer’s own contribution to the disruptive circumstances of the audience’s internalization of role playing. As members of society, stage performers also felt the need for “breathing spaces.” Accordingly, in the role of actor-as-public-educator, Garrick distinguished and defended his art and profession from the incursions of aristocratic theatre patrons, reconfirming the actor’s personal space both literally and figuratively. It reconfirmed Garrick’s movement from the margins to the center of eighteenth-century society.

Stage actors had long lived in a position of ambivalence: they were objects of desire but also social outcasts. For Egginton,

The actor was the living, breathing conduit for the spectator’s desires and identifications, existing in a relation of excess or surplus to the already-existing web of social relations: he or she could represent any and all roles within the set, but for that very reason had to be excluded from the set. In brief, the actor was a symptom of the social body. (401)

However, in eighteenth-century England the actor-as-educator sought to redefine the doctrine of civility, making the actor not solely a “symptom” of the social body but also a central definer of social identity. If the theatre spectator could hybridize into an actor in the theatricalization of everyday life, so too the actor had channels through which he or she could transcend assigned roles. As in the case of Colley Cibber, eighteenth-century stage performers were able with some facility to embroider, repair, transform, deny, and even criticize their own onstage and offstage identities. In turn Garrick and Davies sought consistent strategies for the broad transforma-

tion of society. As a recognized public educator, Garrick to some degree was able to transcend the objectification of the stage performer. A signifier representing another signifier, Garrick would be an arbiter of national taste and creator of allegorized themes. His new personae were prescriptive and authoritative as much as mimetic and symptomatic, embodying a cultural semantics of the self-made individual of property. All the same, these identitarian strategies moving the subject to the center of cultural life also brought with them ambiguities and uncertain hybridities.

Jean Baudrillard claims that objects become carriers of a particular social and cultural hierarchy, “but precisely for that reason . . . far from following the injunctions of this code undeviatingly, individuals and groups use it to their advantage. . . . That is to say, they use it in their own way: they play with it, they break its rules, they speak it with their class dialect” (37). Going further, Michael Bronski understands that any social group “creates and recreates itself—politically and artistically—along with, as well as in reaction to, the prevailing cultural norms. No counterculture can define itself independently of the dominant culture” (7). Both views form a symmetry of internal cultural balance. Alan Sinfield explores the levels of freedom through which emerging groups operate within dominant culture:

[T]hey may return from the margins to trouble the center. They may redeploy its most cherished values, abusing, downgrading, or inverting them; willy-nilly, they exploit its incoherences and contradictions. So they form points from which repression may become apparent, its silences audible. (79)

For Louis Althusser all art has this potential of “internal distancing” by revealing the dominant ideology from which it departs (204). Both Bertolt Brecht’s famous *Verfremdungseffekt* and the eighteenth-century English celebrity actors discussed here represent conscious attempts to distance artistic performance from “the motive forces of . . . society” (39). However, while Brecht used the didactic function to inspire social revolution, English performers allied with, as much as challenged, hegemonic social forces for purposes of self-defense, individual trajectories, and national idealization.

MULTIPLICITY, FLUIDITY, AND INDETERMINACY

Garrick’s offstage identification with Shakespeare’s “truth to nature” supported certain Enlightenment values appropriated by the middle class, in effect circumventing traditional aristocratic priorities for patronage and

enforcement. Garrick in his private life was widely perceived to embody middle-class, entrepreneurial values and behaviors. His “natural” acting style and antiquarian accuracy in costume and scene design associated with the Enlightenment values of fidelity to historical truth, but also with the pragmatic and empirical utility of middle-class enterprise.

The cultural discontinuities that engaged the rising status of the actor and actor-manager as moral educator but also as propertied “successful individual” in Habermas’s sense paralleled the Enlightenment notion of instruction for living. The progression from Cibber to Macklin to Garrick reflected the general rise and confidence of the self-made, middle-class professional. New notions of celebrity engaged this development. The defensive ambiguities of the celebrity’s marginal status earlier in the century gave way to the exalted narratives of later actors, most especially to Garrick in his search for new formations of social identity. Nevertheless, in both cases, the intentional alteration and conflation of private and public identities, the fluidity and indeterminacy of human identity, conflicted with the project to portray the individual of reason, whose coherent and universalistic qualities were valorized.

The consistent identity and social centrality of the subject is continually undermined in these biographies, since character identity remains fluid on and off the theatre stage. The hybridity and indeterminacy of human identity are exploited by public professionals such as Cibber and Garrick. Since the private life of the biographical subject often merges with his or her public identity as performer of known roles, the meaning of the individual subject suggests hybridized and changing identities rather than the fixed, consistent definitions required for the individual of reason. These circumstances make problematic but also enrich the narrative of self-disclosure, human identity and the movement away from the social margins.

Garrick’s promotion of a new acting style embodying greater complexities derived from the verisimilitude of nature and truth was inspired by an Enlightenment emphasis upon spontaneity and unconscious motivation (from D. Hume and J.J. Rousseau, for example).¹⁴ Garrick’s public persona valorized the new capitalistic success ethic by promoting middle-class standards of discipline, moral reliability, individualism, and a more realistic acting and stagecraft style that reflected these values. The eighteenth-century actor’s biography genre was at once symptom of this change—self-made individuals recognized as worthy subjects of biogra-

¹⁴ Hume before Rousseau emphasized custom and feeling over reason in daily life. See his *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature* (16 ff). Hume’s emphasis on “passion” and social custom over rationality in decision making influenced subsequent economists such as Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. See Fitzpatrick (23–47).

phy—but also, more significantly, a documentation of the multiplicity and fluidity of human identity that engaged the dialectics of the era. Instead of fixity and unity, human identity offered multiplicity and a fluidity of voice that defied coherence. Thus the age brought into question its own equation of “nature” with “reason,” a disruption that was hardly settled during the eighteenth century. David Hume’s famous attack on human decision making as rational and universal even he regarded with some ambivalence, as evident in his treatise’s subtitle, *Treatise of Human Nature: An attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into Moral Subjects*. So the famous defender of “nature” against “reason” could not entirely divorce himself from the powerful pull of rationality in human representation.¹⁵ A similar ambivalence is traced in the actor biographies examined here; Garrick also could not entirely acknowledge the contradictions of rational consistency, nor could he entirely accept the fluidity of human nature that would allow him to escape from the marginalizing status of his profession.

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¹⁵ The observation on Hume’s apparent ambivalence was suggested by Basil Willey (111–12).

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