Shakespeare Survey

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Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century

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Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Volume 52, on 'Shakespeare and the Globe', which will be at press by the time this volume appears, will include papers from the 1998 International Shakespeare Conference. The theme of Volume 53 will be 'Shakespeare and Narrative'.

Submissions should be addressed to the Editor at The Shakespeare Centre, Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6QW, to arrive at the latest by 1 September 1999 for Volume 53. Pressures on space are heavy; priority is given to articles related to the theme of a particular volume. Please either enclose postage (overseas, in International Reply Coupons) or send a copy you do not wish to be returned. All articles submitted are read by the Editor and at least one member of the Editorial Board, whose indispensable assistance the Editor gratefully acknowledges.

Unless otherwise indicated, Shakespeare quotations and references are keyed to the modern-spelling Complete Oxford Shakespeare (1986).

Review copies of books should be addressed to the Editor, as above. In attempting to survey the ever-increasing bulk of Shakespeare publications our reviewers inevitably have to exercise some selection. We are pleased to receive offprints of articles which help to draw our reviewers' attention to relevant material.

S. W. W.

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: CRITICISM AND RESEARCH

CATHERINE M. S. ALEXANDER

In his essay for *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, 'Shakespearian Criticism from Dryden to Coleridge' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), T. S. Eliot took much care to underpin his argument with what he described as a 'very simple' point: 'Shakespeare criticism will always change as the world changes' (p. 288). Yet while arguing for critical difference, he explored the growth of eighteenth-century criticism that was based on textual study rather than performance by singling out Maurice Morgann's essay *On the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777) and applauding the piece in terms typical of 1930s character criticism. Iris Murdoch, in a 1961 *Encounter* article, 'Against Dryness', contrasted Shakespeare's unique facility 'to create at the highest level both images and people' with the empirical rationality of representations of man which she deplored in contemporary literature. She illustrated her argument with a historical parallel which considered the enduring influence of Hume and Kant and suggested

> our present situation is analogous to an 18th-century one. We retain a rationalistic optimism about the beneficent results of education, or rather technology. We combine this with a romantic conception of 'the human condition', a picture of the individual as stripped and solitary ... The 18th century was an era of rationalistic allegories and moral tales.
>
> (*Encounter* 88, 18)

Clearly these are different responses to the same period but it is not the changes which are most striking; their interest lies in the choice of examples and the approaches which reveal, through a significant similarity, another 'simple point': the recognition or imposition of the prevailingly familiar (implicit in Eliot and openly acknowledged in Murdoch) which prompts the choice and interpretation of the work of an earlier age through the critical and philosophical concerns of the present. At the end of the 1990s it is the contemporary critical and cultural issues of politicization, appropriation, production, the visual image, and nationalism which dominate the selection and critical interpretation of the body of work, from a range of disciplines, which constitutes eighteenth-century Shakespeare. This essay considers the effect of these emphases and offers an overview of the resoures which facilitate the breadth of interpretation.

The propensity to read eighteenth-century Shakespeare through the filter of late twentieth-century values (intellectually inevitable perhaps and frequently compounded by the desire to judge the cumulative cultural effect) propels eighteenth-century Shakespeare *forwards*. Material linking it/him (it is hard to determine the pronoun as 'Shakespeare' shifts from figure to construct) to its own past or connecting it to the intellectual activities of its own time is far less common. The forward propulsion is typified by Michael D. Bristol who insists, in *Big Time Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), that 'Shakespeare' is a commercial product within a 'market for cultural goods and services' and contends that:

Understanding Tonson's solution to the contemporary problem of cultural technology is far more important in the long-term history of Shakespeare's reception than any quibbling over the precision of Rowe's textual scholarship. (p. 75)

Such an approach makes eighteenth-century Shakespeare teasingly familiar to an age well used to monopolies, promotion and publicity: it emphasizes the similarities rather than the differences. It is the elevation of process above aesthetic and sensibility explored by Gary Taylor in *Cultural Selection: Why Some Achievements Survive the Test of Time – And Others Don't* (New York: BasicBooks, 1996). He describes Shakespeare, for example, as a parasite 'attached to a species that eventually dominated its own niche [through 'physical, military, or economic power'] and migrated out into others, taking the parasite along and introducing it into new ecosystems that had, often, no defenses against it' (pp. 87–8). This type of reading is resisted most strongly by Harold Bloom in his insistence upon Shakespeare's survival through aesthetic superiority in his exploration of *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994).[1] Bloom praises Johnson, largely for his work on Shakespeare, as the 'canonical critic proper', contrasting his method with that of those he has identified earlier as belonging to 'The School of Resentment':

More than any other critic, Johnson demonstrates that the only method is the self, and that criticism is therefore a branch of wisdom literature. It is not a political or social science or a cult of gender and racial cheerleading, its present fate in Western universities. (p. 184)

Less aggressively, Marcus Walsh makes a similar point in the introduction to his sensitively argued exploration of *Shakespeare, Milton and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 'one of my motives in writing this book has been the sense that, in some recent discussions, the eighteenth century has been judged, unsympathetically, by inappropriate and modern criteria' (p. 3).

Yet the diversity of judgement and interpretation not only reflects a clash between a reclamation of former ideologies and the overlay of the new but is a response to the magnitude of the eighteenth-century events which contributed to Shakespeare's survival and cultural dominance, and the quantity of material which records the expansion. The scale of the growth of editions and commentary, stage adaptations and the emergence of charismatic actresses, actors, and managers, the proliferation of and concomitant familiarization with references to characters and quotations in novels, verses, and art, have prompted commentators to explore and explain not just the individual progressions or developments but the conditions and the cultural nexus that may not merely provide the context but prove to be active agents in the change. Increasingly, eighteenth-century Shakespeare is read in conjunction with the promotion of nationalism, the development of a domestic aesthetic in art and literature, the expansion of and competition between publishing houses, the growth of a commercial middle class and a literate working class, and the reclamation of women's contribution to intellectual life. The reader has access to these trends through fine studies such as Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (Yale University Press, 1992) and John Brewer's *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), and to an overview of specifically Shakespearian development in Michael Dobson's 'Improving on the Original: Actresses and Adaptations' and Peter Holland's 'The Age of Garrick' in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, edited by Jonathan

[1] Jan Gorak provides an analytical critique of the role of eighteenth-century editors in determining Shakespeare's place in the Western canon, and explores the critical and theoretical issues which so incense Bloom, in *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1991). See particularly pp. 44–50.

Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford University Press, 1996) or S. Schoenbaum's exploration of eighteenth-century constructions of Shakespeare in *Shakespeare's Lives, New Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). But what makes the eighteenth century unique (and contributes, of course, to the breadth of interpretation) is the vast quantity of original source material which illuminates the developments from a range of perspectives.

Theatre records, letters, pictures, magazines, libraries and collections which complement text and commentary make the eighteenth century particularly tangible to the researcher, and the general reader undertaking the study of Shakespeare in the period will find the field rich in outstanding collections of facsimiles, edited assemblages of primary sources, and a growing body of commentary and criticism. The remarkable collaboration between the Birmingham Shakespeare Library and the Cornmarket Press, propelled by the Librarian Waveney Payne, celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the opening of the library by producing over eighty volumes of facsimiles of acting editions and adaptations of the plays, covering the period from the Restoration of the Monarchy to the death of Garrick in 1779 (London: Cornmarket, 1969). They provide easy access to material now little known but central to Shakespeare's survival. Read in conjunction with the cast lists, programme details and performance dates in Emmett L. Avery's and others' unsurpassed *The London Stage* ... (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), Charles Beecher Hogan's *Shakespeare in the Theatre 1701–1880: A Record of Performances* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957) and the evidence of the employment of Shakespeare as an arbiter for superior English standards of wit, cuisine, sense, architecture and sex, as well as drama,[2] in the outstandingly thorough collection *The Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century* edited by Pierre Danchin (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990–), the facsimiles form the bedrock of theatre research and reveal more about the period than, for example, some of the tedious and uncritical anecdotal material in biographies of Garrick. The focus on the single representative of Shakespeare, however great his contribution, has led to the neglect of other actor-managers, of actors whose specialism was comedy rather than tragedy, and of the role of actresses.

Elizabeth Howe's *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) is one of the few works, and certainly the finest, to redress the balance. She discusses many of the popular Shakespearian adaptations that survived well into the eighteenth century and argues that the introduction of gratuitous scenes of sex, violence and voyeurism (in Tate's versions of *Lear* and *Coriolanus*, for example, or Durfey's adaptation of *Cymbeline*, *The Injured Princess*), narratively unnecessary breeches parts (such as that added by John Crowne in *The Misery of Civil War*, his reworking of *Henry VI Parts II and III*) and the affecting speeches of Cibber's version of *Richard III* and Otway's of *Romeo and Juliet* (*The History and Fall of Caius Marius*) were the exploitative result of introducing actresses into roles formerly taken by men. Sandra Richards also considers eighteenth-century breeches roles, such as Charlotte Charke's early performance as Hamlet (p. 27), in *The Rise of the English Actress* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993). One of the strengths of the work is the thorough bibliography, and while the anecdotal and biographical approach of the main text is sometimes a limitation, her discussion of the

[2] See, for example, Shakespeare's role as both the prophylactic antidote and approved alternative to homosexuality in Bevill Higgons's prologue to George Granville's adaptation *The Jew of Venice: A Comedy* (1701); his consumption of 'plain Beef' in the prologue to Mary Pix's *The Double Distress* (1701); his opposition to classical architecture (the proposal to build a new theatre in the Haymarket) in the anonymous epilogue to *Timon of Athens* (1703); and his 'golden Days of Wit' in the epilogue to the anonymous *The Amorous Miser* (1705). Danchin, I, 8, 15, 242.

reception of Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth during the Old Price Riots is valuable material missing from Shearer West's treatment of the same disturbances in *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representations in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (London: Pinter, 1991) and Marc Baer's exploration of their theatrical, political and cultural contexts, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

The 1994 reprinting of *The Memoirs of Mary Robinson*, edited by M. J. Levy (London: Peter Owen; first published posthumously in 1801) and Claire Tomalin's *Mrs Jordan's Profession* of the same year (London: Viking, 1994) reveal much about actresses whose personal appeal contributed to the revival of Shakespearian comedy in spite of (or possibly because of) their off-stage role as royal mistresses. Robinson's affair with the Prince of Wales (later George IV) which was initiated at the Royal Command Performance of *The Winter's Tale* became public after the revelation of the Prince's notes, signed 'Florizel', and generated a series of scurrilous verses and cartoons (and the stunning portraits of 'Perdita' by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Romney now in the Wallace Collection), giving the play an unexpected afterlife. The early sections of Robinson's autobiography provide incidental glimpses of an itinerant life which invite further research: she spent part of her childhood, *c.* 1763, at a boarding school run by Hannah More's sisters. She tells of a visit to William Powell's benefit performance of *King Lear* in the company of fellow pupils including Powell's two daughters, Miss Hopkins (later Mrs John Kemble), and the daughter of Hannah Pritchard (best remembered for playing Lady Macbeth opposite Garrick). This revelation of an academy for stage daughters is an unexpected one, suggesting how much is still to be discovered. Certainly the sixteen volumes of *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800* edited by Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans (Southern Illinois University Press, 1973–1993), and Bryan Gooch and David Thatcher's five-volume *A Shakespeare Music Catalogue* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) provide ample evidence of many others' involvement with Shakespeare and confirm that the definitive (and necessarily lengthy) work on Shakespeare in the Georgian playhouse is yet to be written.

A number of noteworthy facsimiles reflects the revival of interest in the eighteenth century across the arts and social sciences and provides evidence of Shakespearian proliferation. The reprinting of William Hogarth's empirical treatise of 1753, *Analysis of Beauty* (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971), reveals the extent to which Shakespeare was an inspiration for his 'serpentine line', with Cleopatra's 'infinite variety' as its defining analogy. The advertisements in the endpapers, including one for the print of 'Mr Garrick in the Character of King Richard the Third', are reminders of Hogarth's importance, through his dramatic history paintings and his concern to found an English school of art, to the development of stage portraits and the visual record of Shakespeare performances. The on-going publications of the Augustan Reprint Society (from William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles), which has reproduced useful Shakespeare-specific texts by Lewis Theobald, Charles Macklin, Edmond Malone and Joseph Warton among many others, are a valuable source of minor contextualizing pieces such as a plan of Pope's garden and Thomas Sheridan's work on elocution.

D. Nicol Smith, in *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (Glasgow: James Maclehouse, 1903; 2nd edn Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) was the first to reprint a number of important pieces of criticism including Nicholas Rowe's 'Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr William Shakespear' (not published since 1714), and John Dennis's 'On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear' (not published since 1721), as well as the Prefaces to the editions by Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Warburton, and Johnson,

and the essays by Richard Farmer (Shakespeare's Learning) and Maurice Morgann (Falstaff).

Although now out of print the twenty-six facsimile volumes in the 'Eighteenth Century Shakespeare' series published by Frank Cass in the early 1970s enhance Nichol Smith's valuable collection of primary sources by providing copies of the major criticism and commentary that took place outside editions of the Collected Works. Beginning with Rymer's *A Short View of Tragedy* and John Dennis's 1693 reply, the series progresses through texts by Charles Gildon, Theobald, Thomas Edwards and William Dodd, includes the three major texts by women – Charlotte Lennox, Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Griffith – and concludes with papers on the Ireland forgeries by Thomas Caldecott, George Hardinge, and George Chalmers as well as the better known *Inquiry* by Malone. If one adds to this material the extensive resources of the six volumes of Brian Vickers' *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (London: RKP, 1974–1981) and the growing collections of letters, many completed in the last twenty years and drawing on extensive North American holdings, then it becomes apparent how well served is the period with accessible, original sources.

Collections of correspondence are valuable records of the networks of scholarship, the connections between professional writers and amateur enthusiasts, and the collaborative nature of much Shakespearian research. They provide evidence of the reception of editions, criticism, and performance, demonstrate the importance of Shakespeare to pockets of literary aspiration and endeavour (the Warwickshire Coterie and the Blue-Stockings, for example), and reveal the widespread appropriation and application of Shakespeare's language. While *The Letters of David Garrick*, edited in three volumes by David M. Little and George M. Kahrl (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), are esssential reading, the outstanding collection remains – despite recent allegations of prudish editing by W. S. Lewis[3] – the mammoth forty-eight volumes of the *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (London: Oxford University Press; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937–1983). The correspondence with Edmond Malone is a particularly valuable feature, and the 'notes on several characters in Shakespeare' which Walpole mentions in a letter to Malone of 11 February 1785 have been located by Lewis and reprinted in *Evidence in Literary Scholarship*, edited by René Wellek and Alvaro Ribeiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). The notes offer a fine defence of the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet*, cut from Garrick's 1773 adaptation, and are further evidence of the collaborative and cumulative nature of eighteenth-century engagement with Shakespeare.[4]

The five-volume collection of *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, edited by Bruce Redford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), reveals his attitude to Shakespearian criticism that post-dates his own and, when read in conjunction with the Boswell collection, the letters of Hester Piozzi, and Fanny Burney's journals and correspondence,[5] provides evidence of the ambivalent attitudes of his circle, owing more to social jealousy than concern for scholarship, to the Shakespearian work of Elizabeth Montagu.

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[3] Timothy Mowl suggests that Lewis excluded material which alluded to Walpole's homosexuality. See *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: John Murray, 1996), pp. 2–5, 97–8.

[4] Walpole first considered the effect of the gravediggers in the preface he wrote for the second edition of *Castle of Otranto* (1765) in an entertaining passage which leads him to question the judgement of Voltaire.

[5] Of the *Yale Editions of Private Papers of James Boswell*, the most pertinent is vol. 4, *The Correspondence of James Boswell with David Garrick, Edmund Burke and Edmond Malone*, ed. by George M. Kahrl and others (London: Heinemann, 1986). See also *The Piozzi Letters*, ed. by Edward A. Bloom and Lilian D. Bloom, 3 vols (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989) and *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. by Joyce Hemlow and others, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972–84).

Other revealing collections remain out of print: Elizabeth Carter's *Letters from Mrs Elizabeth Carter to Mrs Montagu* (3 vols., 1817) and Montagu's own letters, which are valuable records of women's engagement with Shakespeare, as writers, readers and leaders of fashion, deserve a new audience.[6] They may be read as a useful adjunct to the collection by Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660–1900: An Anthology of Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), which gives short extracts, with commentary, from the work of Charlotte Lennox, Elizabeth Griffith and Elizabeth Montagu. Further evidence of an engagement with Shakespeare by those at some remove from the dominant culture may be found in *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho*, edited by Paul Edwards and Polly Rewt (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), which disclose the involvement of this former slave and domestic servant with Garrick and other literary figures (see Virginia Mason Vaughan's article, pp. 57–66 below). The series of essays, *Ignatius Sancho: An African Man of Letters*, which accompanied the 1997 National Portrait Gallery exhibition of the man's life and work, reprints his published setting for 'Sweetest Bard", a section of Garrick's 1769 Jubilee Ode. It compares favourably with Thomas Arne's original music for the piece, Charles Dibdin's settings for the songs, *Shakespeare's Garland or the Warwickshire Jubilee*, and Thomas Linley's better known but similar piece *The Witches and Fairies, an Ode in Commemoration of Shakespear* (a commemorative work with words by French Lawrence performed at Drury Lane in 1776). Sancho also wrote a setting for part of *Measure for Measure* but his work is not recorded by Gooch and Thatcher and deserves to be more widely known.[7]

Selections from the *Spectator*, which provide valuable evidence of the reception of plays and players, are available in a range of modern editions but other magazine material has been less accessible. The period from 1749 onwards, when the publication of the *Monthly Review* set new trends and interests, saw an explosion in the systematic and regular reviewing of books which reveal the critical reception of text. Johnson's 1765 edition of the Collected Works, for example, was reviewed in *Monthly Review*, *Critical Review*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, and the *Annual Register*. The access to digital images of eighteenth-century material provided by the Internet Library of Early Journals project will facilitate the exploration of such resources, and enable Robert Babcock's important study of 1931 *The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry 1766–1799* (which uses magazine and other popular pieces to investigate the growth of bardolatry), and George Winchester Stone's 'Shakespeare in the Periodicals 1700–1740' (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2, 1951; 3, 1952), to be expanded. The eighteenth-century obsession with collecting, collating, categorizing and classifying – manipulating 'the available indices of reality' in George Steiner's phrase[8] – was particularly important for the preservation and proliferation of

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[6] *The Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu* . . ., ed. by Matthew Montagu, 3rd edn, 4 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810–13) and correspondence from the second half of her life in John Doran's *A Lady of the Last Century (Mrs Elizabeth Montagu)* . . . (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1873). The correspondence between Carter and Montagu reveals the genesis and reception of Montagu's *Essays on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear* (London: J. Dodsley and others, 1769) and provides many examples of the application of Shakespearian quotation and allusion.

[7] Examples of the use made of Shakespeare by working women as source and inspiration can be found in Donna Landry's *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739–1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Richard Greene's *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

[8] Sensing, as a child, the 'countless systems of discourse specifically tailored to the teeming diversity of human purposes, artifacts, representations or concealment', George Steiner began to compile lists and create his own taxonomies to supplement 'the available indices of reality'. *Errata: An Examined Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), pp. 3–4.