“Shakespeare revives! In Garrick breathes again!” claims one mid-century tribute to David Garrick. Against Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s lament that Garrick, like every actor, would vanish without a trace, there existed simultaneously the celebration that Garrick had, in his lifetime, brought Shakespeare back to life. “Shakespeare and Garrick, like twin stars shall shine,” celebrates Garrick’s epitaph in Westminster Abbey, in a similar vein, espousing the belief that if Garrick could revive Shakespeare, then Garrick could aspire to a similar longevity for himself. The statements are, as I emphasize in my introduction, fantasies doomed to fail, and yet they also suggest a thought experiment that I want to pursue. If actors can in some way outlast their “hour upon the stage,” how should those of us interested in writing about performance approach the history or chronology of an actor’s theatrical career? And how might understanding an actor’s career in these terms—as something ongoing, rather than something that is doomed to possess only a short life onstage—affect how we understand performance’s ability to commemorate that which it represents?

These questions have implications for how we “do” theater history, even as they are in tension with my own emphasis elsewhere in this book on Shakespeare and Garrick’s legacy of loss. While the functions of performance are diverse—from entertainment, to escapism, to the depiction of fantasy characters and worlds—one way critics understand it to function is as a receptacle of memory: actors stand in, not only for
the fictional characters they play, but for the actors who have played those characters before, thus prompting us to remember performances and people now gone. And yet, as this chapter will explore, in the performances popularized by Garrick, the loss of Shakespeare, and, (he hoped) himself, was often presented as never quite complete, so that audiences could enjoy a theatrical experience in which those who should be in most need of commemoration actually still seemed to populate the stage. Within this thought-experiment, actors become not those most in danger of effacement, but those who singularly possess some key to immortality, and those with the power to bring moments and people from the past back forward into life.

Theater history, by contrast, typically tracks an actor’s career linearly, from its beginning to its end, and this endpoint, be it retirement or death, is for beloved actors often treated by critics and practitioners as something to be mourned. Garrick, for example, viewed retirement and death as equivalent: in theatrical performance, the experience of which he considered to be limited to the moment of its occurrence, every exit of the actor marked the loss of an experience that could never be reclaimed, while the retirement of the actor took from audiences all such experiences and the chance to ever have such experiences again.

As Laurence’s Sterne’s character Tristram will say to his beloved Jenny, each individual parting, each individual exit from the stage, has the potential to resonate with audience and actor as a “prelude[e] to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make!” It becomes a rehearsal for the more final exit of retirement and a morbid reminder of the ultimate exit of death. And yet, as various critics have explored and as my opening thought-experiment spells out, time in the theater does not move in a strictly linear fashion, complicating the very notion of an exit, and making the end of a performance often hard to track.

This fact in turn revises how we think about the relationship of performance to loss. If endings need not be permanent, then the performer need never truly disappear. In one very potent sense, loss is the teleological endpoint of every drama, as the actor enters only to exit like Macbeth’s “poor player” on the stage, who “then is heard no more.” But theatrical time is simultaneously cyclical and futuristic, with the same actor enjoying (he hopes) the experience of entering and exiting and entering again. Loss in this experience becomes transient—the invitation for an actor or a performance to live again. These experiences of theatrical time coexist during any performance, even as discussions of
the actor still tend to produce linear, chronological accounts of how a particular performance or a particular actor’s career played out.

Accounts of Garrick play to type in this regard. Yet Garrick, perhaps more than any actor of his age, manipulated concepts of theatrical time, most particularly through his fantasy that through him Shakespeare could live again. Garrick’s spectators didn’t ever forget that he was Garrick—far from it—but they could see the Shakespeare in him, and, as my subsequent chapters will show, this fantasy affected eighteenth-century attitudes toward recuperation and obsolescence. This chapter delves more particularly into the theoretical implications of Garrick’s fantasy, demonstrating Garrick’s utility as a case study beyond what he can tell us about the history of the British stage. Live performance, as most critics of the discipline seem to agree, is always on some level steeped in pathos, as the actors who appear before us evoke the absence of past performances and anticipate their own disappearance. Yet Garrick’s Shakespearean performances, while immersed in these dynamics, also did something slightly different. Through these roles, he suggested, aspirationally, that lost performances or icons could be not just referenced as memories or evocations, but revived, in their own personae, by the actor who yet remains himself. Performance in this fantasy offers more than the promise of revival through biological or artistic succession, a promise in which the memory of past performers and performances is preserved via the tributes given by their now-living replacements. Instead, Garrick in his most extreme examples of this fantasy presents performance as that which could bring the dead back to life, to live next to, and not through, the successors who otherwise stand in for them.

The latter scenario can never truly happen, except in the magic of a Shakespearean play. But the reception of Garrick, in his Shakespearean parts, shows that Garrick and many of his spectators came to believe that it had. Many artistic responses to Garrick, as I subsequently discuss, depict Garrick and Shakespeare as coexisting, whether they be occupying alternate sides of a medallion; or blended in a statue ostensibly of Shakespeare, but for which Garrick likely posed; or awaiting, as an already deified figure, the apotheosis of the other. And this belief in the possibility of their coexistence has implications for how we understand the impact of Garrick, then—and for how we talk about performance and performance history, now. It is in part because acting is a time-bound art that actors must base their careers on the practice of standing in for others—not just the dramatic characters they play, but also the
rival actors, or “missing originals,” who came before. But sometimes an actor, such as Garrick, aspires to revivification rather than substitution; he envisions a world in which the missing original can return and—as in Garrick’s epitaph, which depicts him as a star in the firmament alongside the playwright he had brought back to life—in which the actor who summons that original can remain forever by his side. Though the scenario remains a fantasy, the circulation of this fantasy via Garrick created, I contend, a cultural investment in performance, not as that which models the human condition of mortality, but as that which could transcend it, and Garrick’s stage modeled an environment in which the truth of what Joseph Roach calls “surrogation”—a world in which, in performance as in life, loved ones can be recaptured and remembered only by those they leave behind—could be denied.

In such a world, when exits need not be absolute, and past icons need not live only in the past, thinking about performance in linear terms becomes misleading, and the performer or performance becomes not merely a symbol of man’s immanent mortality, but a vehicle for revival and an emblem for living on. Garrick’s career, this chapter contends, and the rest of the book exhibits, models for us a new way of thinking about theater and theater history: not in linear, chronological terms, but as “a network of signification that moves across time.” And as those most embedded in that network, theatrical performers become not only vehicles for commemoration, or even living reminders that memories can fail and fade, but also emblems of vitality who broker an experience that can transcend loss and time.

The Chronology of Garrick

I departed my theatrical life on Monday the 10th of June.
—David Garrick, to Suzanne Necker, 18 June 1776

In most accounts, Garrick’s Shakespearean career is presented via a chronological arc. He made his first official appearance on the London stage, which was also the occasion for his first Shakespearean role, on 19 October 1741, when he appeared at Goodman’s Fields as Richard III in Colley Cibber’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play. His next Shakespearean appearance that season was at Goodman’s Fields as the ghost of Old Hamlet, on 9 December 1741, and he then played the part of Lear at the same theater (in Nahum Tate’s bowdlerized adaptation) on
11 March 1742. Many additional parts were interspersed among these (Bayes, from Buckingham’s *The Rehearsal*; Lord Foppington, from Gibber’s *The Careless Husband*, for instance), but his first professional season on the London stage was bookended by Shakespeare: he closed out this season by signing articles for what would become his long appointment at Drury Lane, and then repeating there his performances of Lear (27 May 1742) and Richard, this time by royal command (31 May 1742).

During the ensuing summer, at Smock Alley Theater in Dublin, Garrick reprised many of the above Shakespearean roles. He also added one that was new: Hamlet, on 12 August 1742, a part he then brought to Drury Lane, on 16 November of that same year. In the 1743–44 season at Drury Lane Garrick would add to his Shakespearean repertoire the part of Macbeth (7 January 1744), which he prepped and puffed by publishing the anonymous and satirical *Essay on Acting*, a piece that critiques, among other things, the notion of a diminutive actor like Garrick playing the part. He played King John for the first time on 20 February 1745 and then, on 7 March 1745, for the first time, Othello. He played Hotspur once, very unsatisfactorily, on 6 December 1746. On 14 November 1748, he gave his public for the first time a version of Benedict drawn from his own highly redacted version of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado*. He debated performing the part of Coriolanus in his adaptation of that play, but then, on 11 November 1754, gave the part to an Irish actor in his employ, Henry Mossop.

In addition to these roles, Garrick produced during this time period several Shakespearean adaptations, such as his three-act *Catharine and Petruchio* (1754) and his operatic version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, titled *The Fairies* (1755), though he didn’t himself take on a part in either play. But then, in his redacted, three-act version of *The Winter’s Tale*, he did, debuting Leontes on 21 January 1756. He played Henry IV in 2 *Henry IV* for the first time on 13 March 1758, and Antony in a version of *Antony and Cleopatra* that he altered and performed for the first time on 3 January 1758. In 1761 he made his first appearance as Posthumus in his alteration of *Cymbeline*. This was the last new Shakespearean part that he would take on in his career. After a two-year exodus to France and Italy, from 1763 to 1765, he returned to London to restart his acting career with a performance of Benedict, on 14 November 1765. And though
after Posthumus he would attempt no new Shakespearean roles, September 1769 saw the debacle of his rained-out three-day Shakespeare festival, The Jubilee, and his resulting and incredibly popular concoc-
tion of songs and processional of Shakespearean characters, The Jubi-
lee. On 8 June 1776, at the end of a retirement season replete with his
most beloved Shakespearean performances (Richard, Hamlet, Benedict,
Lear), he delivered his next-to-last performance ever and his final Shake-
spearean role, as Lear.

The above account is relatively comprehensive, and this summary can
be found in or redacted from various accounts: The Biographical Diction-
ary of Actors, The London Stage, the multiple biographies of Garrick that
exist in print. But it also leaves out a lot, and not just about the other
roles that Garrick interspersed with his Shakespearean ones, or the mul-
tiple occasions on which he reprised the roles that he debuted above.
Why bookend his very first London season with Shakespearean roles?
Why choose Benedict, out of all his roles, for his return from the contin-
nent? What was it like for him to play the role of Iago after playing the
part of Othello—or the part of the Bastard after debuting, nine years
prior, the part of King John? Why save the role of Posthumus for so late
in his career? Why wait to play Romeo until the moment that Barry was
also playing it? Why relinquish the part of Coriolanus, at the last instant,
to someone else? And why not ever attempt certain Shakespearean roles,
such as Shylock?

These questions, despite often being answerable only by speculation,
point to how each new role of Garrick’s interacts with its contemporary
context and with the other roles that Garrick had played or aspired to
play. And while more exhaustive accounts (such as the list of perfor-
mannces given in The London Stage) include the various times he reprised
the given roles and the other roles he played in between, filling in Gar-
rick’s timeline still misses what was happening each time he played a part.
Garrick’s reprisal of Benedict in 1765 would undoubtedly have reflected
on his prior performances of Benedict; his Smock Alley appearance as
Old Hamlet’s ghost inevitably prepared him, and was meant to prepare
him, to appear soon thereafter as Old Hamlet’s son; his Romeo can only
be understood in tandem with that presented by Barry. No single Shake-
spearean performance of Garrick’s existed in a vacuum. Instead, they
intersected with, anticipated, and echoed all the other performances
that he, and other actors before and contemporaneous to him, had giv-
en or would give.

Scholars of performance are more than ready to acknowledge as
much. Yet against the work we do to recover each single performance exists the narrative we subsequently create around it, and this narrative almost always unfolds in chronological terms. Garrick’s achievements (and failures) invite us to reexamine how we could narrate the history of his or indeed any actor’s career. Even as he is engaged, necessarily, in a sequential, teleological approach to his professional development, my subsequent chapters show that Garrick understands theatrical performance as that which works in nonteleological terms. So while he describes, in my epigraph to this section, leaving the stage for the final time as a theatrical death, he pens this statement at the conclusion of a career that he hoped would give him a way to transport the liveness he so loved about performance off the stage. His vision of performance as key to a new kind of immortality opens up new questions about how time works upon the stage, and about how aspects of “theatrical time” may influence notions of theater history in turn.

Theatrical Time

I am not able to answer the question, which is so often put to me, whether I shall strut & fret my hour upon the Stage again. 15
—David Garrick to Dr. John Hoadly, 4 May 1765

For audiences of Garrick, and especially of Garrick as Shakespeare, questions about theatrical time were constantly being engaged. First, and perhaps most obviously, Garrick’s approach to Shakespeare accentuated theater’s obsession with the past. Garrick’s Shakespearean roles always presented his viewers with what Marvin Carlson calls a “haunted stage,” in that to see Garrick perform was to confront the ghosts of all the past Shakespearean actors or performances (actors such as Thomas Betterton or, in more recent audience memory, Colley Cibber; or competing Shakespearean performances given by Charles Macklin or James Quin) who came before and would never come again. 16 While as much is true of any act of performance—as any stage is always populated by such ghosts—Garrick perhaps called attention to this fact more than other actors and used Shakespeare to do so more than he did his other roles: some of his most successful performances feature encounters with actual spirits—Hamlet, Richard III, Macbeth—and some of his best-known and oft-reproduced portraits from the time (especially as Hamlet and Richard III) depict these encounters. To see Garrick perform was also
to confront the ghost of Shakespeare himself, who, as I will detail more explicitly in chapter 3 (and as Michael Dobson has so beautifully discussed), often appears in prologues to plays in which Garrick would perform and haunts so much of the writing being done for and around the mid-eighteenth-century stage.\textsuperscript{17} Theater in this experience becomes a so-called memory machine, or a place in which we are summoned, through the work of performance, to remember what is no longer there.\textsuperscript{18} On such a stage, the experience of loss is everywhere we look.

And yet theater is also always filled with living bodies, which serve as constant reminders of our existence in the here and now.\textsuperscript{19} The “nowness” and vitality of live performance is often what draws observers to the stage; to watch Garrick perform was also always to be reminded that he had not yet disappeared, while to witness this fact gave his viewers the necessary reminder that they, too, were yet alive. Even as a young actor Garrick would emphasize this point by somewhat paradoxically choosing the part of Lear for only his second Shakespearean role and ultimately (and after some tutoring from Macklin) astonishing audiences with his ability, at twenty-four years of age, to play convincingly the part of a man near death. (The potency of this performance, I would argue, comes from the audience’s awareness that Lear’s age and fragility, while performed so convincingly, are but a performance: one that makes them attuned to the young and virile body that performs it, even as it highlights Lear’s fragility as the end toward which Garrick, like all of us, ultimately tends.) As I discuss in my final chapter, Garrick also triggered this experience, even as he reminded his spectators of its transience, most especially during his retirement season on the stage. Those spectators who risked an outbreak of influenza, for example, to see their beloved Garrick in some of his final performances celebrated their own vitality by their attendance—though they also perhaps compromised that condition by putting themselves in a prime position to get sick. On such a stage, loss is always waiting in the wings.

Simultaneously, the fact that ghosts have been replaced by bodies gestures to a cycle within performance that will keep recurring, and to an experience of anticipation shared by actor and spectator alike.\textsuperscript{20} The sense that loss was imminent triggered for Garrick and his spectators the frisson of anticipation, an experience, for example, activated, and ironically forestalled, by Garrick’s Othello. As I discuss in the next chapter, this role eludes Garrick’s mastery even as it goes to the heart of his own, future-oriented desires for posthumous fame: it is a part in which he demands that spectators will, after his death, “speak of me as I am.”\textsuperscript{21} The
fact that performance is always vanishing brings Garrick great anxiety; that it is (in William Hazlitt’s words) “always setting out afresh” brings him hope.22 As the epigraph to this section shows, Garrick, returning to England in 1765 after two years away from the stage, was well aware of both potentials, and though his absence may have doomed him to obsolescence, theater, as he writes to Hoadly, also always offers the opportunity (though it doesn’t guarantee it) for an “again.” On this stage, loss is a condition to transcend.

Finally, the Othello quotation, with its paradoxical tenses—for Othello asks that future generations speak of him as he is, not as he was—gets at yet another experience of theatrical time evident in Garrick’s career. By playing Shakespeare, Garrick is commemorating Shakespeare, and anticipating his own—Garrick’s—future success. But as the tributes that opened this chapter also show (“Shakespeare revives! In Garrick breathes again!”), he is also suggesting that he, Garrick, can through himself bring Shakespeare back forward into life, and that he, Garrick, can remain indefinitely by Shakespeare’s side. Garrick in this fantasy is not merely a conduit for the playwright, but also one who will have the privilege of meeting his hero, reintroducing him to the modern world and sharing his contemporary experiences and space. “By each other’s aid we both shall live,” asserts one anonymous poetic tribute to Garrick, as spoken hopefully by the soon-to-be-resurrected spirit of Shakespeare. “I, fame to thee, thou, life to me, shalt give.”23 This theatrical experience—in which Garrick and Shakespeare may occupy, simultaneously, the same time and place—supplements the ghostly quality of Carlson’s stage, on which a dead Shakespeare can only ever be commemorated and mourned. It augments the present-ness of theater, in which Garrick reminds viewers of his own liveness, and the anticipatory quality of his performances, in which Garrick encourages spectators to see him rise again. In this particular work of resurrection, Garrick surpasses, too, the work of the typical reenactor, in which the actor remains a clear and necessary substitute for the person he or she reenacts.24 Instead, Garrick presents a world in which he and Shakespeare may coexist on equal terms, and a fantasy for spectators in which moments in time seem to collapse or conflate.

Garrick’s ability to make the historical and theatrical past coeval with the present—if only for the brief time that spectators could see him on the stage—encourages those of us interested in theater history to resist reinscribing onto our reconstructions of performance a linear trajectory that the experience of those performances disavows. It also means that
those of us interested in studying performance should rethink how we approach that work of reconstruction. For if Garrick conveys an experience in which the past is never truly lost, nor something to be studied only through intermediaries or replacements, then for those spectators persuaded by such an experience, the act of reconstructing a performance need not be viewed pessimistically as a work of only-ever partial approximation. Instead, what Garrick suggests (and characters like Othello, too, when he declares, “And smote him—thus”) is that performance gives us the ability to interact directly with those figures or experiences we thought had disappeared.\(^{25}\)

**Celebrating Performance**

Show his eyes and grieve his heart; / come like shadows,  
so depart.  
—*Macbeth*, 4.1.132–33

Using Garrick as a critical case study, then, this book sets out to celebrate performance, and the theatrical experience, even as it takes seriously the documentary challenges that come with studying it. Whereas my first book showed that nondramatic writers sought to import into their novels some of the characteristics of the stage, this book thinks more deeply about how the commemorative and recuperative aspects of performance differ from those achievable in other media, such as novels or portraiture, that are less dynamic than the stage.\(^{26}\) The dynamism of performance is, for the project of commemoration, both a blessing and a curse: the temporal nature of performance means that the actor’s skill can never be accurately recovered or depicted in some static form, but the temporal nature of performance also means that a new performance can repeat and echo prior performances, becoming a living monument to those performances that have come before.\(^{27}\) And for Garrick, as it does so—and unlike other more typical monuments that stand as testaments to the absence of that which they replace—it offers to bring back the very subject it depicts.

Garrick’s project, though fueled by anxiety, thus remains a very hopeful one, whereas for many scholars of performance, the acknowledgment that we can never fully recapture the experience of performance often overshadows the hopefulness of our pursuits. Taken to the extreme, as it sometimes seems to be by Hazlitt, for example, the impossibility of recovering a performance or performer can motivate arguments that we
abandon altogether our attachment to the stage. But, as my final chapter will show, antitheatricality can often be a symptom of theater-love—only one piece of a complicated, affective response to theater, and a protective, coping mechanism designed to defuse the strong desires that come with loving something or someone we know will disappear. Documenting performance will always remain fraught, yet the ephemerality that poses the challenge to documentation is something to mourn and to embrace—as that which incites a level of desire that could not otherwise exist. We see this in spectators’ response to Garrick’s retirement, as discussed in chapter 6. To go back even further in time, we see this in the feelings experienced between Homer’s Odysseus and Penelope at their ultimate reunion, when they cling to each other “as though forever,” and when the acknowledged impermanence of life motivates their sustained embrace.\textsuperscript{28}

The physical intimacy of theater is similarly a constant reminder of the impermanence of life and the mortality that haunts us all. And yet theater is not simply a crucible for mourning, but a space to celebrate the vitality and liveness that the experience of loss brings to light. The “shadows” that the witches show to Macbeth, invoked in this section’s epigraph, flit across the wall to be seen no more. And yet these shadows—the future descendants of Banquo, who will soon replace the childless Macbeth upon the throne—will yet manifest in physical form. They vanish only for a time, soon to be seen again, and to carry on the legacy of their father and the right to rule.

As I will revisit in my final chapter, it is this same sentiment from \textit{Macbeth}—the very lines cited as the epigraph to this section—that will inspire some of Hazlitt’s meditations on the ephemerality of the stage and on the tragic loss of Garrick. “Come like shadows, so depart” heads Hazlitt’s essay “Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen,” Garrick being appointed as the favored person of interest, and the one he is most sad never to have met.\textsuperscript{29} In the context of Hazlitt’s essay, the lines read as a lament on the evanescence of actors and the impossibility of retrieving them and, more broadly, as a lament on the shadowy nature of our own existence. But in the context of the play, the lines are both more hopeful and, for Macbeth, more threatening; the witches speak them to reinforce the immanence and potency of biological succession. What is now shown to Macbeth as but a brief vision is threatening not because it will disappear, but because it will soon come to pass.

Just so, the ephemerality and loss associated with performance are but one facet of a medium that is equally about the experience of extended
life. And for Garrick, whose engagement to *Macbeth* I will touch upon in chapter 4, performance provided the antidote to the very professional and personal anxieties that it fueled. As an actor, he worried about being remembered after he left the stage; as a man, he confronted a more general problem—one that he seemed not to have mourned in any obvious sense—of dying childless and without an heir. Though on his own deathbed he reflects without compunction on this fact (as I discuss in chapter 3), it is intriguing that many of the Shakespearean roles he masters and many of the roles discussed in this book are characters that similarly die without successors: Othello, Hamlet, Richard III, Macbeth. Macbeth in particular, in the lines cited above, is threatened by the lineage of another and is simultaneously a character who reflects tragically, in speech that Garrick would restore to Shakespeare’s script from a prior alteration made popular in 1664 by Sir William Davenant, on the parallels between the career of an actor and the ephemerality of human life: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more” (5.5.24–26). And yet, as shown in the previous section, when the same sentiment creeps into Garrick’s own correspondence, it is both with the acknowledgment that his time on the stage may be over, and with the hope that he may yet have another chance. (He did.)

With the exception of Othello, his personal successes with these roles thus show Garrick surmounting the tragedies experienced by the characters he plays. His successes endorse his larger belief that performance can do what biology cannot; they also help Garrick model an experience of time that isn’t merely about “light[ing] fools / the way to dusty death” (5.5.22–23). *Macbeth* (and indeed *Richard III* and *Hamlet*) are plays in which the central characters reflect obsessively on the nature of time, and not just in Macbeth’s “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” speech, but also in Lady Macbeth’s call to forget the past (“what’s done is done”) (3.2.13; 3.2.14). And yet in his performance of this character, and his other Shakespearean roles (and as noted above, Garrick performed Macbeth after already impressing audiences with the characters of Richard III, Lear, and Hamlet), Garrick conquers the anxieties about time and loss that his characters feel. Instead, he presents time as less linear, more comprehensive: he gives his spectators a sense that through theater, many moments in time may coexist.

It was the experience of this fantasy that, as I will argue, made the
ultimate loss of Garrick so painful to his spectators, even as it was this experience that transformed performance into a practice to be celebrated as key to how beloved figures could be not only remembered, but preserved. My subsequent and nonchronological chapters on Garrick seek to represent this potential through example, by preserving something of the interlocking nature of Garrick’s various roles. In doing so, I yet recognize that in setting out any story of an actor’s performances or career, we necessarily choose for it a sequence that, in its original state, it transcends; I recognize that my own approach to Garrick’s career, as narrated here, can’t fully escape this tension. But I strive to remain conscious of it and to inspire us to think more broadly about alternate modes of narrating theater history, especially when these alternatives and their implications—that performances and performers will live on, somehow, to narrate themselves—are investigated so consciously for us by one man via his, ostensibly linear, theatrical career.