4. Retelling The Winter's Tale

Published by

Anderson, Emily Hodgson.
Shakespeare and the Legacy of Loss.

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A year or so after Sterne’s death, and only some months after the reported theft of Sterne’s skull, Garrick launched his culminating tribute to Shakespeare: his 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee. A three-day event at Stratford planned by Garrick in honor of the playwright, the Jubilee was meant to include a processional of Shakespeare’s most celebrated characters and to close with Garrick’s recitation of a laudatory ode, including the lines “’tis he, ’tis he / the God of our idolatry.”

Torrential rain and flooding foreshortened the ceremonies, prevented the parade of characters, and made Garrick, for a time, an utter laughingstock. His contemporary and rival Samuel Foote referenced the event as including “an ode without poetry . . . a horserace up to the knees in water, [and] fireworks extinguished as soon as they were lighted.”

The performance, as Foote indicates, was remembered best for what had not occurred. Garrick would have the last laugh, however, when he restaged his rained-out processional a month later, as part of an afterpiece titled *The Jubilee* that would be performed at Drury Lane for a record run of eighty-eight consecutive nights. In mounting this recoup, framed specifically as a satire on the failed Stratford event, Garrick’s *Jubilee* showed how he had always meant to capitalize on the ideas of absence flagged by Foote. Regardless of weather, the Stratford celebration was never meant to feature any of Shakespeare’s actual plays. Like the broader cultural desire to restore Shakespeare by changing him, Garrick’s celebration was intended to memorialize the playwright by accentuating Garrick’s own creative
abilities, just as the *Jubilee* processional was meant to commemorate Shakespeare by using his characters as the platform for Garrick’s own, entirely new work. In both projects, Garrick’s personal motivations—to showcase his talents, and later to redeem himself from the financial and personal humiliations of the rained-out Stratford affair—were, if anything, more evident than the act of literary homage, a fact that Foote, who observes that Garrick strives “to celebrate a great poet whose own works have made him [Garrick] immortal,” also notes. Unlike Foote, however, Garrick probably wouldn’t have seen his Shakespearean homage as being compromised by its simultaneous acts of self-promotion. As becomes evident in his engagements with *Hamlet*, Garrick’s entire career project, leading up to the Jubilee, had been to merge his image with that of Shakespeare’s, so that the apotheosis of the one would be equivalent to, and not in tension with, the apotheosis of the other.

This aspiration was increasingly reflected in the period’s art. While, as seen in the aforementioned portraits of Garrick as Hamlet, Garrick was regularly portrayed in the character of his Shakespearean roles, other artistic tributes prior to and surrounding the Jubilee conflate him directly with Shakespeare: the masterful Louis-François Roubiliac statue (1758) of Shakespeare that Garrick commissioned and for which, rumor has it, he posed; Thomas Gainsborough’s *Garrick Leaning on a Bust of Shakespeare* (1768); and Benjamin Van der Gucht’s half-length portrait of Garrick gazing at a medallion miniature of Shakespeare (1769). Such images celebrated the fact that Shakespeare and Garrick had become for spectators “virtually interchangeable,” the living manifestation of Shakespeare on earth.

And yet, despite this achievement, Garrick’s anxieties about obsolescence were not relieved. “No pen nor pencil can the Actor save,” Garrick mourns, in his prologue to *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766): “The art, and artist, share one common grave.” The proliferation of images that confirm that Garrick’s reputation has attained the status of Shakespeare’s also confirm, paradoxically, the insufficiency of these images to preserve the very reputation that they record. Garrick’s true skill, as he notes, rests in something that literary or visual attempts cannot convey; tragic, indeed, are the limitations of art.

For Shakespeare, however, these limitations were never set in stone. “Comes it not something near?” (5.3.23), queries the servant Paulina in Shakespeare’s play *The Winter’s Tale*, upon revealing to King Leontes the statue of Hermione, his dead queen. “Thou art Hermione,” agrees the repentant king, tortured anew by the loss he sustained some sixteen years
Fig. 12. Louis-François Roubiliac, marble full-length figure of William Shakespeare (1758). © Trustees of the British Museum.
Fig. 13. David Garrick leaning on a bust of Shakespeare after Thomas Gainsborough (c. 1769). Folger Shakespeare Library Call # FPb27. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
Fig. 14. Joseph Saunders after Benjamin Van der Gucht, *Mr. Garrick as Steward of the Stratford Jubilee September 1769* (1773). Folger Shakespeare Library Call # ART 242301. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
before (5.3.25). In this example, the extreme verisimilitude of the statue seems to taunt rather than solace Leontes, as it advertises to him what art cannot do: bring back for him the queen he has lost. And yet readers and spectators familiar with this play know there will be exceptions to this rule. Whereas Leontes’s first reaction to the statue is tempered by his recognition of how it differs from the Hermione he recalls—“but yet, Paulina / Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / so aged as this seems” (5.3.26–28)—the play soon reveals the statue to be Hermione herself, either revived by magic or kept alive in secret these sixteen years. The exception, then, isn’t that the memorial reconstruction must always fall short of its original source, but that the past and present, the original and representation, can ultimately align.

This potential starts to explain Garrick’s interest in a play that had, until 1750, been only infrequently staged. *The Winter’s Tale* wasn’t published until its appearance in the 1623 Folio, and throughout the seventeenth century it was rarely performed. From 1611 to 1634 it was produced only six times, and after 1634 it would remain dormant for over a century. It was finally resurrected in January 1741 at Goodman’s Fields,

Fig. 15. John Miller, *Garrick; Shakespeare* (c. 1792). Folger Shakespeare Library Call # ART G241 no. 62. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
though it was subordinated to the primary entertainment for the evening, a “Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music Divided in Two Parts” between which were to “be presented a Play (not acted these Hundred Years) call’d The Winter’s Tale.” It was performed again in November of the same year, at Covent Garden, but enjoyed only a short run. Then between 1750 and 1800, The Winter’s Tale, in a variety of adapted forms, was acted over a hundred times.

One of these adaptations was authored by Garrick, a project that, while it represents his general goals of “rectifying” Shakespeare to suit eighteenth-century tastes, also targets a more conceptual concern: how could the actor or actress, engaged in an ephemeral form of art, find a way to remain? If the magical promise of this play is that the artistic subject and the representation of that subject might be one and the same, that promise overlaps with the other wish fulfillment of the moving statue, that the older generation need not be effaced. It is this play, then, with its emphasis on the resurgence of the older generation, that provided Garrick (as elder statesman to those who would succeed him) with another vehicle to make a statement about the endurance of not only Shakespeare’s reputation but his own. It is this play, with its reflections on the opportunistic courtship between members of the second generation, that his protégée Mary Robinson subsequently used to propel her nascent acting career and to publicize her liaison with the Prince of Wales. And it is this play, with its final scene that brings a dead queen back to life, that Garrick’s rejected protégée, the actress Sarah Siddons, used at the turn of the century to prepare, grudgingly, to leave the stage. Garrick’s relationship to The Winter’s Tale thus runs parallel to a story of patronage, in which these actresses’ engagements with the play recall, in their own careers, their lived engagements with Garrick. And, as this chapter will show, these engagements also recall what Garrick had attempted to achieve in his retelling of Shakespeare’s tale.

The Return of Leontes

Garrick’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play, titled The Winter’s Tale; or, Florizel and Perdita, was staged for the first time on 21 January 1756, fifteen years after Shakespeare’s play had been revived onstage in its original form. Though Garrick had shortened the play to three acts, it was performed as a mainpiece, often accompanied, as an afterpiece, by Catharine and Petruchio, another three-act Garrick Shakespeare adaptation. Listed
in *The London Stage* sometimes by its main title, sometimes by its subtitle, the play enjoyed a popular early run, with subsequent performances in the season described as being “by desire” (13 March 1756) or “by particular desire” (20 March 1756), and a 29 January 1756 performance indicated as by royal command. By February, the words from the songs in the play had become popular enough that they were “printed and . . . delivered gratis in the playbill.”\(^{13}\) Garrick, as Leontes, played opposite Hannah Pritchard as Hermione; his Perdita was, initially, Susannah Cibber (a gifted singer), though on 28 April 1756, Charles Macklin’s daughter Maria took over the part of Perdita for the first time (Cibber subsequently resumed it).\(^ {14}\)

All these actors appeared in a play that differed significantly from Shakespeare’s. Garrick’s most significant change, in making his adaptation, had been to cut Shakespeare’s first three acts, so that the play transpires in one place and time. In Shakespeare’s original, Leontes suspects his queen Hermione of infidelity with his friend Polixenes, and reconciliation comes only much later with the budding romance between Leontes’s grown daughter (Perdita) and Polixenes’s son (Florizel). The action of the play as written violated classical conventions of space (shuttling from Leontes’s kingdom in Sicilia, to Polixenes’s kingdom in Bohemia, and back to Sicilia) and time (transpiring over the course of sixteen years), a fact that Garrick’s script, in keeping with the eighteenth-century preference for neoclassical ideals, amends. Garrick hadn’t been the only one to try to rectify such violations, and his changes support the suggestion, advanced by many critics, that he took the inspiration for his adaptation from Macnamara Morgan’s 1754 similarly redacted three-act version of the play. Titled *The Sheep-Shearing; or, Florizel and Perdita*, Morgan’s play focused the action entirely on the young lovers, and Garrick’s play, staged a mere two years later, preserves many of these changes, moving various critics to dub his *The Winter’s Tale; or, Florizel and Perdita* a “less intelligent” or “priggish” revision of an immediate competitor’s work.\(^ {15}\)

Unlike Morgan, however, who cuts the first-generation characters altogether, Garrick preserves the characters of Leontes and Hermione and their reunion in the climactic statue scene. The decision requires some fancy maneuvering: as the entire play now takes place in Polixenes’s Bohemia, Garrick must decide that Paulina has fled there after Hermione’s “death.” He has the aged Leontes journey to Bohemia out of remorse, and has Paulina explain that Hermione fled Sicily with Paulina, to live in Bohemia for sixteen years “veil’d . . . from the world.”\(^ {16}\)

These contortions suggest a level of artistic determination motivated,
Jenny Davidson suggests, by Garrick’s desire to maintain Leontes as one of his “showcase roles.” For Michael Dobson, Garrick brings back Leontes and his wife to emphasize the bonds of family over aristocratic rank, rewriting Hermione and Leontes as “private beings. . . . husband and wife rather than a long-heirless king and queen.”

That Garrick adapted Shakespeare’s play with his own talents in mind is not in doubt, and not surprising. Among the changes he makes, Garrick inserts new speeches for Leontes that confirm him as a penitent, sympathetic figure and that also allow the actor, Garrick, to indulge in the highly emotional, mercurial speeches at which he excelled. But given the original play’s investments in themes of succession, and given Garrick’s own investments in posthumous fame, his choice to bring back the parental generation resonates as more than simply a fresh opportunity to demonstrate his famous acting style, or to reinforce an emerging commitment to bourgeois versus monarchical values. To revive the statue scene Garrick had to go back to Shakespeare and the complicated approach to commemoration that the scene invokes.

Complicated, because the statue scene can be read as a challenge to memory as much as an endorsement of it. In Shakespeare’s final scene, Hermione’s reanimation represents, among other things, a return of the original, and the play’s ending asks us to consider what happens to substitutes once the missing originals are found. Such a finding remains problematic, both in the casualties it demands (of Mamilius and Antigonus), and in the ramifications it offers to those, such as Perdita, who have for the time being taken Hermione’s place. The living don’t easily make room for the reanimated dead, nor do the dead return to life without some scars. To move a statue is to lose a monument, and, as indicated by her wrinkles, Hermione’s reawakening represents the promise of her eventual demise.

Garrick, the Shakespeare substitute who seeks to balance his position with that of the poet he aspires to revive, was caught up in these very complications. His prologue to Florizel and Perdita concludes with the assertion that “’Tis my chief wish, my joy, my only plan / To lose no drop of that immortal man,” a seemingly hypocritical claim when attached to a play that cuts three acts from Shakespeare’s play. The prologue, however, places Garrick in a long line of Shakespeare adaptors who rely on strategic metaphors to justify their acts of emendation. For writers such as Nahum Tate, Nicholas Rowe, and John Dryden, Shakespeare’s works represented an unweeded garden, full of promise but in need of tending, a rough gemstone simply requiring polish, the root
of a tree from which new branches could spread. For Garrick, by contrast, Shakespeare becomes a fountainhead of fine wine, which merely needs to be remixed and rebottled to suit contemporary tastes. Comparing himself to a vintner who, undetected, mixes “Perry” with “Champaign [sic],” Garrick admits to combining some of his own material with Shakespeare’s. The ends in this case justify the means: “Lest then this precious Liquor run to waste, / ’Tis now confin’d and bottled for your Taste,” states Garrick, his changes here subordinated to the project of repopularizing Shakespeare’s work. But as he “confines” a “liquor” that now contains an undetectable blend of Shakespeare and Garrick, he specifically identifies the work of commemoration as dependent on his ability to meld his work with that of the playwright he revives. If Garrick’s governing metaphor “challenges his auditors to distinguish the original Shakespeare from his own modern ‘Perry,’” then his service to Shakespeare inheres in making the substitute and the original merge.

Such a strategy has much in common with those espoused, in previous chapters, by Othello and by Sterne, but it has much in common, too, with the Garrick adaptation that follows. In this context, Garrick’s decision to write Leontes back into a play from which he had, by Morgan, been excised, reads as more than an indulgence in self-casting. In casting himself as the paternal character who had been temporarily sacrificed to contemporary taste, Garrick recaptures one more “drop” of his immortal Shakespeare even as he steps into the first-generation, paternal role himself. And by reviving Hermione’s scene of animation, Garrick further restores the older generation and the scene in which the original subject and representation of that subject become, literally, one and the same.

At the same time, Garrick’s decision to retain the redacted version of the play, in which the majority of the plot focuses on the pastoral scenes of young love, resonates as more than simply an emulation of Morgan or a commercial strategy in keeping with current theatrical trends. For Garrick emends the statue scene so that the reunion of Hermione and Leontes happens in conjunction with, but not at the expense of, the second-generation romance. As Leontes, Hermione, and Polixenes join hands in a final gesture of forgiveness, Garrick gives Perdita and Florizel a complementary verbal exchange:

**PERDITA:** I am all shame
And ignorance itself, how to put on
This novel garment of gentility,
And yield a patch’d behaviour, between
My country-level, and my present fortunes,
That ill becomes this presence. I shall learn,
I trust I shall with meekness—but I feel,
(Ah, happy that I do) a love, an heart
Unaltered to my prince, my Florizel.

**FLORIZEL:** Be still my queen of May, my shepherdess,
Rule in my heart; my wishes be thy subjects,
And harmless as thy sheep.²⁷

The children who in Shakespeare’s play spend the final scene nearly speechless here remind viewers that their circumstances and concerns are as important as those of the parents they revere. They also, simultaneously, articulate a nostalgic attachment to the scenario and roles from which they have just emerged.

Garrick’s play thus empowers the successors even as it restores the originals, scripting Garrick’s own seemingly impossible wish fulfillment: that he can be both successor to and equivalent of Shakespeare. In this play, however, unlike in *Hamlet*, such wish fulfillment is something the actor playing Leontes can only observe. The actorly ability to be a moving statue or a living monument—a concept that inevitably fascinated Garrick about this play, and to which he referred over a decade before in his *Essay on Acting*, in a passage designed to instruct himself on how to act Macbeth—is here reserved for the actress playing Hermione alone.²⁸

The living statue in *The Winter’s Tale*, in both Shakespeare’s original and Garrick’s adaptation, literalizes Garrick’s professional aspirations, even as it relegates Garrick as Leontes to an audience position, suggesting that his acts of revival (of the statue scene, of Hermione) might ultimately serve others more than himself.

The performance history of this play bears witness to this fact. With Garrick as Leontes, *The Winter’s Tale* enjoyed moderate success: thirteen performances in its initial season and a minirevival that featured Garrick for five performances between 1761 and 1762.²⁹ But Garrick’s play fell out of the repertoire after he relinquished the role (which he performed for the last time on 29 March 1762). His successor, William Powell, didn’t seem to have the drawing power to maintain public interest in the play. Garrick, who would continue to act at and manage Drury Lane for fourteen years after giving up the role, would witness for himself that, in acting, the promise of revival is balanced with the threat of obsolescence.³⁰

Fortunately for Garrick’s reputation, his associations with this play transcended his connection to a particular part. As the author of this
adaptation, Garrick could be celebrated as the godlike figure who chooses to subvert or empower the female response, and this reading seems supported by Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s decision, in 1779, to stage a revival of Garrick’s *Florizel and Perdita* as a memorial to Garrick, who had died earlier that year. He cast in the lead female role one of Garrick’s own protégées, an up-and-coming actress with modest theatrical training and a beautiful face. Her name was Mary Robinson, or, as she was subsequently remembered, “Perdita.”

“Perdita” Robinson and the Burden of the Past

Mary Darby Robinson’s trajectory to stardom has many contemporary parallels: born into a working-class community, she was elevated to heights of fame and notoriety through her beauty, publications, and sexual escapades.31 As a young girl of fourteen she caught the eye of Garrick, and only the pressure of an early marriage prevented her from immediately taking to the stage. She had a second chance in 1776, when financial troubles and a meeting with Sheridan made an acting career possible and desirable again. Sheridan hired her, but Garrick made her what she was: despite his ill-health, despite his recent retirement, despite the fact that she had in 1773 abandoned his tutorials to marry after he had coached her for the stage, Garrick came out of retirement to prepare Robinson for her Drury Lane debut.32 When, three years later, Sheridan cast Robinson in his 1779 revival of *Florizel and Perdita*, he confirmed the theatrical aspirations Garrick had revived.33

But Robinson’s performances as Perdita soon provided more than a reminder of Garrick’s tutelage. Appearing in a 1779 royal command performance of *Florizel and Perdita*, Robinson supposedly caught the eye and fancy of the Prince of Wales, and audiences thereafter came to the theater to watch the progression of their affair.34 Whether or not the performance truly sparked her intrigue with the prince, it provided an excellent venue for fostering it: a story of two young lovers separated by suspected class difference and a father’s ire, the script provided fodder for gossip and confirmation that the stage offered a peephole into more private indiscretions. “Every tender speech she ought to have addressed to Prince Florizel,” the Prince of Wales asserts, after a night at the theater, “[she addressed] to me.”35 Audiences recognized onstage and off-stage parallels, and the evolving affair, which gained in publicity after Robinson retired from the stage in July 1780, continued to be described
in terms of her theatrical persona. In the subsequent months, both the prince and the press would court Robinson under her stage name Perdita, and Robinson embraced the alias (and the prince) with an ardor that was subsequently hard to efface.

This phenomenon, whereby the persona of Robinson and Perdita became inextricable, spoke to a desire among theater audiences to find similarities between the actor and the character she played. This was a desire encouraged by recent developments in print culture, which provided eighteenth-century theater audiences with new access to information about actors’ “private” lives. With the advent of the first daily newspaper in 1702, performance reviews and also information about actors’ offstage engagements were circulated for the first time, in “real time,” via the periodical press; simultaneously, images of actors, circulating in portrait form since the Restoration, sometimes in character, sometimes not, provided supplementary suggestions about the person behind the onstage role. As a result, audiences increasingly evaluated actors not only for how they played a role, but on how closely the persona of the stage character confirmed what audiences knew (or thought they knew) about the actors’ behaviors offstage. Lisa Freeman cites, for instance, William Chetwood’s account of the Restoration actress Anne Bracegirdle, who received great applause for her rendition of Cordelia, though he notes that Bracegirdle was celebrated more for her own “Virgin Innocence” than for any great skill she showed in performance. In comparison, Chetwood records that Elizabeth Barry’s performance of the same character was met with a “Horse laugh” when she took the stage—not because she fumbled or forgot her lines, but because she was known for her offstage sexual antics, and audiences refused to see such a woman in a virtuous part. Parallels between the actor and character are here presented as fortuitous, not practiced. The mimetic relationship between art and life becomes one of happy correspondence, in which, in good acting, the personalities of artistic creation and flesh-and-blood actor conveniently align.

Of course, actors could and did manipulate such assumptions, as strategic acting choices could perpetuate the reputations that they needed in order to play certain parts. In the case of Robinson’s successor Sarah Siddons, public performances of what was assumed to be a private virtue allowed her to achieve the kind of liberty onstage that we associate more traditionally with acting today. Siddons’s earlier emphasis on her maternal nature—her choice to bring her three children onstage with her in 1782 as the “reasons” why she needed to move from the provincial
theaters and back to the London stage, or her choice to play her first role in London, the part of Isabella (in Thomas Southerne’s *Isabella, or The Fatal Marriage*), opposite her own son—conditioned audiences to retain the image of her maternal virtues, so that she was eventually able to portray ruined or immoral women (such as her Lady Macbeth) without damaging her reputation. Siddons’s success in this regard rests in what Felicity Nussbaum defines as the ability to create an “interiority effect”: “a commoditized version of the self . . . offered to consumers as an effect . . . a provisional, multiltered, and situational interiority . . . a kind of property subject to market conditions.” Successful actors such as Siddons, Anne Oldfield, and Catherine (Kitty) Clive cultivated an illusion of personal identity through and against their staged characters, recognizing that the audience desire to emphasize points of conflation between actor and role coexisted with the exploitation of distinctions between the same. “A player is the character he represents only in a certain degree,” claims James Boswell in 1770, channeling Diderot’s theories of the actor’s detachment from the part he plays.

As a case study in the relationship between the actor and her roles, Robinson stands out for her inability to cultivate, effectively, this aspect of detachment. The early association between her and the character of Perdita would, to a certain degree, stand in the way of her later attempts at redefinition; the persistent use of this label to refer to Robinson suggests the weight of memory, and that the power of an association, once harnessed, can be hard to shake off. For Garrick, likeness (to Shakespeare) marks a standard to attain; for Robinson, likeness (to Perdita) marks an origin to transcend. But the label simultaneously stands in for the impossibility of this desire, as “Perdita” is the second-generation character who forever remains the absent trace of someone else. “And for the babe / Is counted lost for ever, Perdita / I prithee call’t,” quotes Antigonus in Shakespeare’s text, repeating a speech delivered to him in a dream by Hermione’s ghost (3.3.31–33). The name symbolizes Perdita’s exile and misfortune, but also characterizes Perdita as the conduit for others’ desires. She is something to be sought, not simply for her own sake, but for what her finding will accomplish. The loss of Perdita propels Shakespeare’s plot, and even in her homecoming, Perdita’s identity must hinge on the ways in which she can be easily displaced.

Within Shakespeare’s play, Perdita thus stands in for how identity is problematized by the burden of succession. It is precisely because Perdita functions as a substitute for her mother that she struggles to forge her own identity, and her shift in Shakespeare’s fifth act, from outspo-
ken shepherdess to her mother’s nearly speechless double—Perdita’s “standing like stone, with thee!” (5.3.42)—emphasizes the various ways in which Hermione’s awakening comes at Perdita’s expense. Once a replacement for the missing woman, Perdita now stands in for the missing monument, and what story and identity she had freezes at the moment her mother returns to life.

Within Garrick’s adaptation, as discussed above, the second-generation figures become far more independent, and for Robinson, Perdita seemed to present a fitting vehicle for her career. Perdita, not Hermione, is Garrick’s female lead, a character whose royal identity is confirmed and rewarded with a prince. Yet when spoken by Robinson, the final exchange with Florizel (cited above) offered audiences an all-too accurate reflection on offstage events:

PERDITA: I am all shame
And ignorance itself, how to put on
This novel garment of gentility.

Lines that in Garrick’s script were meant to read as a statement of humility—symptomatic of the “natural” innocence that marks Perdita as truly royal—now, against the background of Robinson’s opportunistic flirtation, reflect Robinson’s true rusticity and aristocratic aims. For Robinson’s audiences, the meaning of the name “Perdita” shifts: from a sign of rightful inheritance denied, to a sign of sexual corruption.

As Robinson would therefore discover, Garrick’s Perdita models a form of succession linked—perhaps too firmly for Robinson’s liking—to the past. His Florizel and Perdita move forward in their courtship by retaining ties to the pastoral roles that have fostered it (see Garrick’s lines for Florizel: “Be still my queen of May, my shepherdess”), and for Garrick, striving to promote himself based on his emulation of Shakespeare, the model makes sense. For Robinson, more invested in ultimately burying her origins, the model became problematic—and not just for the personal reflections on her character it produced during the evolution of the affair. Instead, the affair itself became a defining characteristic of her subsequent career. After retiring from the stage in 1780, Robinson published novels, essays, and poems at a terrific rate, under a series of different pseudonyms and to a good amount of acclaim. She impressed Coleridge with her ear for meter, and her late poetic collection *Lyrical Tales* (1800) provided some much-needed publicity for the anonymous first volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The frontispiece she used for much of
Fig. 16. Engraving of Mary Robinson, used as a frontispiece to her *Poems* (1791). 147564, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
this published work, Joshua Reynolds’s second portrait of her (1783), shows her trying to represent her mental rather than physical gifts: at times titled *Contemplation*, the portrait depicts her with a melancholy and averted gaze. But even this portrait—with the turn of the head that comes close to what artists dub a “lost profile,” and the backdrop of desolate landscape and sea that suggests the exile’s plight—shows Robinson redefining herself by referencing her theatrical roots.

The reference indicates one of many ways in which the “Perdita” association was hard for Robinson to live down. In 1783, upon news that she was suffering from a paralytic rheumatic fever, the *Morning Herald* crowed, “The name of Perdita will soon be too truly applied to this once all-conquering impure.” About a year later, in exile from England, with her finances and royal relationship in tatters, she was dubbed by the *Morning Post* “the lovely, though ill-fated Mrs. Robinson . . . the now too verified Perdita.” An August 1784 issue of *Rambler’s Magazine* mounted perhaps the most cruel version of this association. “Perdita upon her last legs” pictures Robinson as a prostitute, the shriveled legs likely a reference to her now well-known paralysis. For a woman ultimately so invested in reinvention, this physical ailment was painfully ironic. A Perdita paralyzed, frozen into some version of her younger self, Robinson, despite her offstage efforts at redefinition, cannot completely surmount an identity that theatrical association had established. Contemporary scholars continue to affix the name to her biographies, so that she remains known as “Perdita” even today.

The “Perdita” label also flags, for Robinson, the brevity of her theatrical career: it shows contemporaries clinging to Robinson’s early indiscretions and career even as it accentuates how short-lived this aspect of her career finally was. Assured in writing that the Prince of Wales would pay her, at his coming of age, twenty thousand pounds, Robinson retired from the stage less than four years after she first set foot on it. He never paid her the full amount, and financial necessity played no little part in her later affairs. As Perdita, Garrick’s protégée flames very briefly on the stage, but while her personal conduct is remembered in the stage name, her theatrical career is quickly effaced. For example, when viewing John Philip Kemble’s restoration of the play in 1802, the biographer James Boaden found the character of Perdita to be “one of the few [parts] upon the stage that never was adequately performed. . . . Our Perdita seems, in spite of the fifth act of the play, condemned never ‘to be found.’” Despite the intrigue embodied by Robinson’s performance of the role, and despite the fact that nineteenth-century tributes contem-
poraneous with Boaden’s review would still reference Robinson by her theatrical name, Boaden’s comment shows that, by the turn of the century, the memory of Robinson’s theatrical performance has been labeled as inadequate, if not erased.⁵¹

What Boaden also responds to, however, is the fact that Hermione, if she is included in the production, must by definition overshadow all other characters in her final scene. This was the bind in which, by restoring Hermione, Garrick as Leontes had found himself enmeshed, and in which Boaden’s Perdita now finds herself engaged. In contrast to the
memorable association between actor and character presented to audi-
ences when Robinson performed, Boaden’s memory of his Perdita is
appropriately vague: the Perdita he sees “was a very delicate and pretty
young lady of the name of Hickes, thus much I remember of her; but
whether she had more or fewer requisites than other candidates for this
lovely character, I am now unable to decide.”\(^5^2\) Robinson, offering the
titillation of her offstage intrigue and playing opposite the unremark-
able “Mrs. Hartley” as Hermione in her renditions of the role, had been
able to command audience attention even in the final scene.\(^5^3\) But for
Boaden, watching a new Hermione in Kemble’s adaptation of the play,
Perdita would have been particularly easy to overlook.

\[\text{Reanimating Lady Macbeth}\]

In 1802, Sarah Siddons took on the last new role of her theatrical career:
Hermione in her brother’s rendition of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.
She played the part eleven times during the 1802 season. The play was
revived again on 11 November 1807, for six performances, and then
again in November 1811, midway through Siddons’s final official sea-
son onstage.\(^5^4\) While Siddons didn’t perform the role with nearly the
frequency of some of her others, the fact that she would add a new char-
acter to her established regime, and that she would play it in the lead-up
to her retirement, suggests that Hermione helped Siddons shape how
she wanted to be remembered, and how, at the end of her career, she
was received.

Prior to performing Hermione, Siddons had developed associations
with many Shakespearean roles. She first caught the eye of Garrick in the
provinces in 1775, while performing the breeches part of Rosalind in *As
You Like It* (and while flaunting the “big belly” of a woman six months
pregnant), and she made her London debut under Garrick in Decem-
ber 1775.\(^5^5\) Infamously, her first season was a debacle. Garrick did not
invite her back, turning his attention instead, in the following year, to
Robinson. When Siddons did return to Drury Lane in 1782—after Gar-
rick’s death—she initially focused on non-Shakespearean parts: Isabella
in Thomas Southerne’s *The Fatal Marriage*, Belvidera in Thomas Otway’s
*Venice Preserv’d*, Calista in Nicholas Rowe’s *The Fair Penitent*.\(^5^6\) Then in
February 1785 she performed for the first time in London the character
of Lady Macbeth, and her impact in this role was instant and endur-
ing.\(^5^7\) Within days the *Public Advertiser* had declared her “sleeping scene”
as “the greatest act that has in our memory adorned the stage.”

“The character of Lady Macbeth became a sort of exclusive possession to Mrs. Siddons,” states her biographer James Boaden, while her biographer Thomas Campbell asserts that “the moment she seized [Lady Macbeth], she identified her image with it in the minds of the living generation.”

“Theatrical history deems Sarah Siddons and Lady Macbeth to be synonymous,” states contemporary critic Philip Highfill. “We speak of Lady Macbeth,” writes the nineteenth-century essayist and Shakespearean critic Charles Lamb, “while in reality we are thinking of Mrs. S.”

Siddons’s close association with this role made her Lady Macbeth a standard against which her subsequent performances, such as her Herm-
ione, could be judged. For example, Kemble’s version of *The Winter’s Tale*, while it restored much of Shakespeare’s original script (so that the play again oscillates in space and time, featuring a younger Hermione and Leontes in its first acts), was far from a faithful Shakespearean production, and his script contains lines spoken by Leontes that encourage spectators to associate Hermione with Lady Macbeth:

> Hark, hark, she speaks! . . .
> O, pipe, through sixteen winters dumb! Then deem’d
> Harsh as the raven’s throat; now musical
> As nature’s song, tun’d to the according spheres.

The lines echo, as Judith Pascoe points out, other lines from *Macbeth* for which Siddons, as Lady Macbeth, would have been well known: “the raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan.” In her final performance as Hermione, Siddons would answer her Leontes’s delivery of these revised lines some seven months before her concluding performance of Lady Macbeth.

Neither Siddons nor Kemble was the first to associate these two plays. The amended speech in Kemble’s version of *The Winter’s Tale* is a holdover from revisions first introduced by Garrick and a suggestion that, when working on his *Florizel and Perdita* in 1756, Garrick may have had in his mind the memory of his very first attempt at restoring a Shakespearean play to the stage. On 7 January 1744, he had delivered to the public a restored performance, and script, of *Macbeth*, a version of the play that he had reclaimed from the popular adaptation authored by William Davenant in 1672, and an act of revision that set a precedent for all his future emendations of Shakespeare. The popularity and duration of Davenant’s version had been such that Garrick’s colleague James Quin, for example, seems not to have known that the version he’d been acting of Macbeth was not Shakespeare’s: “Don’t I play Macbeth,” he apparently responded, to Garrick’s announced restoration, “as Shakespeare wrote it?” He didn’t, and Garrick’s version of *Macbeth*, though not a completely faithful return to Shakespeare’s script, was much closer than Davenant’s to Shakespeare’s original. Garrick rectified, for example, Davenant’s changes to Macbeth’s final soliloquy on the ephemerality of life, in a passage that then seems to haunt Garrick throughout his career. As a “poor player / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more,” Macbeth is a character that speaks to Garrick’s own anxieties about fame, and these lines reappear some twenty
years later in Garrick’s prologue to *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) when he mourns, as mentioned in my introduction, that “he who struts his hour upon the stage / can scarce protract his fame thro’ half an age.”

The same anxieties about ephemerality are present in *The Winter’s Tale*, and when, in 1756, Garrick turned his attentions to this play, there are additional indications that, beyond its significance as the first Shakespearean play he would have ever revised, *Macbeth* may have yet been in his thoughts. Garrick had taken special care in framing his appearance in *Macbeth*, publishing before his debut the satirical pamphlet *An Essay on Acting... of a certain fashionable faulty actor... with a short criticism on his acting of Macbeth* to preempt criticism of his reinterpretation of the part and to poke fun at his own decision, given his slight physical stature, to tackle the part of an imposing war hero. He’d included in this pamphlet the above-noted, and significantly worded, instruction that the actor, after the murder of Duncan, “should... be a moving Statue,” a conceit he then gets to experiment with literally in his adaptation of *The Winter’s Tale*. He also chose as his Hermione, for his 1756 staging of *Florizel and Perdita*, the actress Hannah Pritchard, who had since 1748 played his favored Lady Macbeth, and who would then command the role of Hermione until Siddons took it over.

In casting Pritchard as both Hermione and Lady Macbeth, Garrick was also, perhaps to his own detriment, creating an onstage precedent for the strong female virago character that Siddons would subsequently perfect. Throughout her career Pritchard would continue regularly to play both roles, with her success as Lady Macbeth commemorated by Johann Zoffany in a series of paintings he did of Garrick and Pritchard’s appropriately statuesque poses after the murder of Duncan. Zoffany’s second version of this painting, done in honor of Pritchard’s retirement—and an image that therefore functions for Pritchard as “a memento as well as a performance”—accentuates a gendered dynamic that Siddons would inherit, and that would be later reworked through her performance of Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*. For Zoffany accentuates as opposed to disguises how the statuesque Pritchard towers over the much shorter Garrick, suggesting that if Garrick at times attempted to overshadow his leading ladies, certain parts, and performers, also threatened to overshadow him.

By taking over Lady Macbeth from Garrick’s former leading lady, and by performing the part with such aplomb, Siddons takes steps to overshadow Garrick and Pritchard alike. Yet her Lady Macbeth remains trapped in what Hazlitt would lament as the actor’s inevitable cycle of suc-
cession, in which “the exertions of the greatest actor die with him, leaving to his successors only the admiration of his name.” Macbeth is a play that comments far more tragically than The Winter’s Tale on the themes of genealogy, gender, and succession: faced with the long line of kings sired by Banquo despite his death, Macbeth must confront the fact that the womb often trumps masculine ambition, even as Lady Macbeth, with her mysterious missing child, is denied maternity as an option for living on. And though Siddons herself famously performed her maternity for all to see, as Lady Macbeth, her later performances suffered in proportion to her acclaim. In the years leading up to her retirement, she was critiqued for performing with less than her youthful vigor. She gained weight; she lost teeth; her movements slowed. Her lips were afflicted

Fig. 19. Valentine Green after Johan Joseph Zoffany, Mr. Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard, in the Tragedy of “Macbeth.” Act II. Scene III. (1776). Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
with erysipelas, and the condition left her, in her own words, “a frightful object,” bereft of even “those poor remains of beauty once admired.”

As her performances changed, audiences’ responses changed, too, exhibiting both grief at the actress’s decline and “a kind of personal offence” that she would make this decline available for all to see. “Her fine features [are] lost,” states the poet Henry Crabb Robinson, seeing her onstage a year before she would finally retire, “her disadvantage of years and bulk made as prominent as possible . . . her advancing age is a real pain to me.” This pain was most pronounced for spectators like Crabb Robinson, who yet remembered Siddons “in her greatest days,” and these disadvantages were most evident in her continued performance of the roles for which she was best known. “She did not play parts like Isabella and Belvidera with the old spirit and abandon,” her biographer Percy Fitzgerald notes, while another anecdote records that her loss of teeth renders phrases said by her Lady Macbeth now “indistinct.” Such criticisms, revisited in chapter 6, demonstrate that theatrical performance can compromise memorialization as much as foster it. For Siddons, these recurrent performances only serve to undermine the memory of what she had previously achieved.

Siddons’s performances as Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*, however, avoid these critiques. Playing the part from 1802 until 1811, the same time frame during which she was being criticized for other flawed performances, Siddons received nothing but acclaim. *The Times*, on 26 March 1802, asserted that her interpretation of Hermione “towered beyond all praise.” William Hazlitt, who would become one of the elderly Siddons’s most outspoken critics, found in her performance of Hermione only things to admire: “In the last scene [she] acted the painted statue to the life—with true monumental dignity and noble passion . . . we shall never see these parts acted so again.” States her nineteenth-century biographer Thomas Campbell, “This statue scene has hardly its parallel for enchantment even in Shakespeare’s theatre. The star of his genius was at its zenith when he composed it; but it was only a Siddons that could do justice to its romantic perfection.”

One explanation for this contrasting reaction was that—unlike Lady Macbeth, or Isabella, or Belvidera—Hermione was a character that Siddons’s audiences had seen her play only recently, and they were thus unable contrast her present performances with some memory of a preferable past. And yet, as worked out above, her version of Hermione didn’t leave her other roles behind. Instead, the new role allows Siddons to recall, without ineffectively reduplicating, a great performance from
her days of yore. Siddons’s Hermione allows her to incorporate references to Lady Macbeth within a character that challenges what Hazlitt would lament as an otherwise inevitable pattern of succession, in which the actor’s achievements die with her and are replaced. For Hermione, unlike Lady Macbeth, does not die.

Whereas spectators of the aging Siddons would, as they observed her in other roles, thus bemoan the imminent realization of Hazlitt’s lament, in Hermione they could celebrate with Siddons the idea that the dead could return to life. Indeed, more specific reviews show that Siddons in this part was celebrated for more than her similarities, as an aging actress, to Hermione the aging queen. Siddons’s predecessor and rival, Mary Ann Yates (who also performed Lady Macbeth), had made a good statue as long as she was posing, but “when she had to speak, the charm was broken, and the spectators wished her back to her pedestal.” Siddons, by contrast, could pose and move: “She . . . stood as one of the noblest statues, that even Grecian taste ever invented,” states one reviewer. “Mrs. Siddons looked the statue, even to literal illusion,” states another. But then, when she comes to life, “The sudden action of the head absolutely startled, as though such a miracle had really vivified the marble.” Siddons’s achievement, like the achievement of the moving statue she represents, becomes her ability to cross from one art form to another and to underline continuities between the stasis of the typical monument and the dynamism of theatrical art.

Long before her performance of Hermione, Siddons had encouraged audiences to see, through her, such connections. Like Garrick, Siddons was a favored subject of portrait painters, who often depicted her in the costumes and characters from her most famous roles. Between 1780 and 1797 eighteen portraits of her were exhibited at the Royal Academy, and she apparently “stole as much time as possible to sit for pictures,” with perhaps the most memorable being Joshua Reynolds’s *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784). The prevalence of these images—which tended to blur the generic distinctions of portraiture and history painting—encouraged audiences to see actors themselves as aesthetic objects, what Shearer West calls “virtual pictures without frames.” As theaters expanded in size, emphasizing the body of the actor as the crucial tool of communication, performances also often became a series of *tableaux vivants*, in which performers took on “emphatic, rhetorical, markedly static stances leading audiences to see *pauses* in the action . . . as *poses* in an artist’s studio.” As mentioned in the preceding chapter with Garrick’s poses, actors studied history paintings and prints, but
Fig. 20. Joshua Reynolds. *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse* (1784). © Courtesy of the Huntington Art Collections, San Marino, California.
also sculpture, in order to perfect these attitudes, or “points.” Siddons took these associations to a new extreme in her onstage performance of Hermione. But she had anticipated these connections when, in the 1785 revival of Garrick’s Shakespeare *Jubilee*, she was wheeled in during the pantomime procession, seated in the very posture and costume of Reynolds’s tragic muse.

In both her recreation of Reynolds’ portrait and her performance of the statue who comes to life, Siddons depicts the flourishing symbiotic relationship between the visual and the dramatic arts. But with the part of Hermione she communicates something different about this relationship than what she sought to have represented and remembered in her choice to bring the Reynolds portrait on the stage. As indicated by the title most often affixed to it, *Sarah Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, or *Mrs. Siddons in the Character of the Tragic Muse*, Reynolds’s work didn’t seek to capture a representative image of Siddons, so much as preserve Siddons as an “icon for Tragedy” or “an ideal representation of despair.” Hazlitt, inspired by her acting and such iconic images in turn, would dub her “tragedy personified,” an epithet that similarly commemorates her as an ideal construct, existing outside of time. In staging her own portrait in 1785, Siddons seems to suggest that she must resort to the static forms of visual art if she truly wishes to be remembered by her spectators as ideal. With her performance of Hermione toward the end of her career, Siddons suggests instead that such idealization, or “romantic perfection” (Campbell’s phrase), may also be preserved within the more dynamic realm of dramatic art.

The Romantic ethos—that only a Siddons could animate Hermione—thus rings true, but not simply because of Siddons’s “attic shape! fair attitude!” As a moving statue, Siddons mounted a challenge to more classical forms of commemoration that insisted the monument must stand in for what time has destroyed. Lauding her success as Hermione, Romantic-era audiences could celebrate Siddons’s timelessness in a part that initially seems to reflect critically on the destructive passage of time. As Paulina laments in Shakespeare’s text, “O Hermione, / As every present time doth boast itself / Above a better gone, so must thy grave / Give way to what’s seen now” (5.1.97–100). Kemble, who cuts these lines, maintains the sentiment in Paulina’s chiding of Leontes: “your eye hath too much youth in it. Not a month / Fore your queen died, she was more worth such gazes / Than what you look on now” (5.1.224–26).

Among the living, each new generation threatens the status of the old, yet Hermione’s reanimation disavows this trajectory, suggesting that art can establish what performance must carry out.
In this formulation, the reanimation of Hermione, or of Siddons, need not be a reminder of her ultimate mortality and demise. As opposed to fixing a woman at the height of her beauty (Pygmalion’s project), Shakespeare’s statue shows, somewhat ominously, “a woman marked by time.” Kemble’s version of the play, however, cuts Leontes’s observation that “Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / so aged” as this statue seems (5.3.27–28). Describing a role played by his aging sister, Kemble could have simply made the courteous edit. But the change is also consistent with what this role allowed Siddons to achieve. Performing a character that herself embodies the reanimating powers of performance, Siddons as Hermione shows how theatrical performance allows her to recapture the greatness of her prior career.

Siddons and the Memory of Garrick

As a successful Hermione, a role that literalizes the idea of the living monument to which Garrick had aspired, Siddons also recalls that in the course of her career she appropriated Garrick’s approach to memorialization as her own. Theater, as Garrick knew all too well, encourages others to stand in for those they seek to emulate or revere, and for Siddons, the process of Garrick-appropriation began for her almost as soon as Garrick had left the stage. Back at Drury Lane in 1782 after Garrick’s death, with her own reputation beginning its meteoric rise, Siddons records in her *Reminiscences* one acknowledgment of her growing fame:

I was now highly gratified by a removal from my very indifferent and inconvenient Dressing room to one on the stage floor, instead of climbing a long stair case; and this room (oh unexpected happiness) had been Garrick’s Dressing room. It is impossible to imagine my gratification when I saw my own figure in the self same Glass which had so often reflected the face and form of that unequalled Genius, not perhaps without some vague, fanciful hope of a little degree of inspiration from it.

Siddons’s laudatory account is tinged with no little irony, as she’d been deeply hurt by Garrick’s refusal, in 1775, to retain her at Drury Lane. Given that Siddons’s career was finally about the possibility of rendering her own genius “unequalled,” her acknowledgment of Garrick’s superlative status registers as strategic more than sincere. The reverence of
the younger generation, as Garrick well knew, could signal ambition as much as nostalgia, and mimetic reflections, especially in theater, can turn cruel—especially when all that remains of Garrick, the actor who once held the “mirror up to nature,” is the mirror that reflects his successor’s face.

Despite Garrick’s best efforts to live forever, Siddons’s comment shows that even the most revered actor is inevitably replaced. In Hazlitt’s words, the theatrical spectator at the end of the eighteenth century may yet “extol Garrick, but he must go to see [Edmund] Kean.” But theater is also all about second chances, as Siddons’s performance of Hermione, and her preceding quotation, both attest. Unlike Garrick, who had stunned audiences with his performance of Richard III in his 1741 London debut, Siddons’s London debut had failed. Now, returning to a theatrical space she thought she had left behind, and anticipating the fate of the queen she would only much later perform, Siddons shows that such losses need not be for good.

Hermione, however, was a role that Garrick never saw Siddons perform. If the role of Leontes’s queen would reflect on Siddons’s ultimate good fortune (and offset criticisms about her professional decline), the role that Garrick chose for her debut would become predictive of her temporary struggles. He cast her, for her first London appearance, as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, a performance that was met with “anemic reviews.” “Her figure and face . . . have nothing striking, her voice . . . is far from being favourable . . . she possesses a monotone not to be got rid of,” announced the reviewer in the *Middlesex Journal*. “On before us tottered rather than walked, a very pretty, delicate, fragile-looking young creature, dressed in a most unbecoming manner,” stated another. “Altogether the impression made upon the audience by this first attempt was of the most negative description.”

Garrick’s exact motivations for this casting choice remain unknown, and Siddons’s biographer James Boaden defends Garrick’s decision and his overall treatment of Siddons during her first year at Drury Lane. As the subsequent chapter will detail, a prior actress under Garrick’s employ had had much success as Portia, and as manager Garrick would have wanted all plays at Drury Lane to be well received. Siddons, however, retrospectively attributed her failure to Garrick’s pandering to his more established actresses, and his waning interest in anyone’s career but his own (his subsequent commitment to Robinson would contradict both these claims). Portia was, she claimed in her *Reminiscences*, “a Character in which it was not likely that I should excite any grand sensa-
tion,” and the assertion bears thought.¹⁰⁹ There is something about Garrick’s choice of this particular character—that of a daughter, her wishes “curbed” by her father even after his death—that resonates ominously with Garrick’s relationship to the novice actress on the stage.¹¹⁰ The judgments of an established precursor can often constrain the actions of his successors, even when his powers are in decline, and especially when the aspiring successor is a woman. For Garrick, for Siddons, and for their contemporaries Charles Macklin and Catherine Clive, *The Merchant of Venice* would become a testing ground for this fact.