

An Eighteenth-Century *mise en scène* and the Play of Refractions: Essayists, Critics, Spectators, and an Actor Negotiate Meanings

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Abstract

The article aims to reconstruct the eighteenth-century discussion about knowledge and its connection to a new kind of acting. *Mise en scène*, that is, the collective and negotiable creation of meaning in theatre, will be at the core of the following pages. I will examine the eighteenth-century essayists who redefined the body as a readable text and senses as useful tools for understanding others, participants in the process. Metatexts, engendered by both the dramaturgic text and its staging, will demonstrate how these essayists orientated acting and theatrical reception. Keywords around which the main concepts have been developed will be considered as markers of the pervasiveness of the discourse on passions and sensibility in many literary and performative genres. As a case-study, the article focuses on *Macbeth*, affirming that essays written on the art of acting and related topics concurred in creating meaningful refractions in Garrick's performances, whose manifold instances were disseminated by reviewers. The process of knowledge examined in essays was literally acted out in the theatrical space and commented in letters shedding light on Shakespeare's text and its previous adaptations. However, the article's focus can only be retrospective and highly influenced by contemporary pivotal studies on these topics.

Keywords: *Aaron Hill*, *Eighteenth-century Acting*, *Garrick*, *Macbeth*

1. *The Text and its Generating Energy*

The eighteenth century has long been considered a watershed in the history of the English theatre because it redefined the complex relationship between text and performance. The Elizabethan text, which was born from the cooperative act of a playwright and his company and during rehearsals was corrected and adjusted for new audiences and historical contingencies, was distinctively unstable. Printed forms of the most famous plays were available, but they differed conspicuously, and none of them was more authoritative than any other. In short, the text shared the transience of its theatrical performances.



However, this did not frustrate writers and actors, and audiences felt no loss of meaning from one text to another, or from a text to a performance based on it. The Urtext of many plays certainly developed into a multiplicity of texts, which could be communicated more or less effectively on the stage, but afterwards it was not so easy to find, and it was rarely sought. Furthermore, many extant copies were incomplete, with the main text being fragmented and distributed to actors playing one or two roles. Fragmentation, then, was part of the organization process, which finally led to the fleeting piecing together of the fragments to recreate the play in its entirety. The main consequence was that authorship was recognized but communal (Pugliatti 2016, 239); the text was sometimes the collaborative effort of two or more dramatists, actors may have had their parts adapted to their physical appearance, and impresarios as well as persons in power may have asked for omissions or additions (250).

The separation of the printed text from its staging appeared in the late eighteenth century, when the literary status of Elizabethan and in particular Shakespearean drama was recognized, and a collation of the many extant quartos and folios was printed of the most reliable versions of the Bard's works, or 'as much of "what Shakespeare wrote" as possible' (Roberts 1998, 192). The canonization of an author entails the unchangeability of his text, especially in the full blossoming of the print era and the literary market.¹ We can affirm, in agreement with Jean I. Marsden, that the philological analysis of the printed text has been paramount in the last centuries, while during the Restoration and early eighteenth century the focus was on adapting the script to the expectations of new audiences (1995, 1-2).

Vanessa Cunningham states that 'after Garrick none had the authority personally to hold together the soon-to-be-separate worlds of editing and performing Shakespeare' (2008, 6). Notwithstanding glosses, notes on variants, and parallel readings,² extant scripts were almost frozen in a form deemed to be closer to the original by renowned editors, and then passed on to future generations, while performers continued to mould Shakespeare's lines to render them more palatable and less obscure to contemporary audiences.

¹ Trevor Ross states that '... the nomination of canonical secular texts in a rhetorical culture carries with it an insistence on textual authenticity less because the text may offer an endless supply of meaning than because it heightens the circulation of symbolic capital. And for this intensification to occur, the text must exert a continual and predictable control over its readers' reactions, which it can accomplish only if all readers confront the text in a version that remains uniform throughout an edition ... the fixity that print afforded led to the acclamation of canonical texts whose value lay precisely in their supposed ability to direct readers to a more accordant response' (1998, 108).

² Roberts' analysis of Theobald's editing of Shakespeare's dramas in the light of twentieth-century theories highlights the coexistence of conflicting ideas on authorship and the practice of editing in the early decades of the eighteenth century, which produced texts that were both open and closed, unstable and stable, determinate and multiform (1998, 202).

The twentieth-century rift between dramatic text and performance was a trend that had been going on since the eighteenth century, when critics set themselves up as literary judges, while the theatre held on to its intersemiotic³ translation practice (Jürs-Munby 2006, 4), negotiating meaning among diverse participants in the performance-making process rather than paying homage to the author's intentions.

Since the eighteenth century, critics have cut texts to pieces in order to render them suitable for minute interpretation, concentrating more on deconstructing than on re-creating the whole. The practice has been both the cause and the effect of constructing cultural icons, and has contributed to the dissemination of Shakespearean dramas, albeit in a dismembered form. In addition to this, quotations from Shakespeare's most famous plays have appeared in novels, essays, popular newspapers and advertisements, dislocated from their original characters and words and relocated in newly imagined geographical and temporal contexts. As such, they have taken on new meanings which have been communicated, in their own way, to new audiences (Rumbold 2016). Consequently, quotations can justly be considered autonomous texts which receive and in turn generate new messages. Thus, we have the paradox of the text's powerfully re-emerging fluidity at the very moment that its fixed form evokes the synecdoche of the unalterable text to which the quotation refers.

Rewritings, adaptations, hypertexts, and refractions are the labels used by scholars to describe texts which have been derived from other texts. They testify to the intense multiplying power which is typical of authorized texts, and among them Shakespeare's plays. The phenomenon characterized the Restoration and eighteenth-century theatre, when Shakespeare's masterpieces were cut, expanded or adulterated to obey new aesthetics, comply with classical unities, or respond to the norms of etiquette, and turn a profit. Therefore, they were true refractions (Lefevere 1984, 219) which co-existed with the original, uncontrolled by the author of the source text or hypotext and submitted exclusively to the approval of their audiences and readers (221). Garrick refracted Shakespeare's plays 'in such a way that they became more acceptable to an audience familiar with a poetic concept which was no longer Shakespeare's' (220). Like every refractor, Garrick had to accommodate the hierarchy of constraints imposed by patronage, shared poetics, genres, and the language of Shakespeare's time to what was in vogue in the present day (221).

Garrick was an eclectic figure who both was influenced by and fostered the renewed interest in Shakespeare, intertwining the construction of his own *persona* as the major interpreter of Shakespeare's plays with that of the Bard as a cultural icon. Certainly, he could mediate Shakespeare's complex synthesizing of

³ The term was coined by Roman Jakobson (1959, 233), and felicitously applied to define the relationship between text and *mise en scène*.

multiple texts into his own literary product by skilfully adapting those materials of the Elizabethan age to respond to contemporary issues. Garrick himself was an eager reader, a critic engaged in intellectual debates, an actor, a manager and a poet. Primarily, he was able to create that special kind of social energy which Greenblatt discusses in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), as shown by the participation of his audiences, the number of reviews, the letters he received, the essays that analysed his delivery of special lines, and the portrayals that immortalized his gestures and facial expressions on the stage.

In the early stages of Garrick's acting career, the Bard's texts had not yet been completely canonized, and they could easily have become a symbolic place where opposite critical opinions and even models of human beings faced each other. Not only was social energy (Greenblatt 1988, 6) produced and invested again in appropriations and rehearsals, but it also became the focus of literary criticism and acting. According to Johnson, Shakespeare's plays were studies in passions which must be interpreted effectively to mirror, stir, or restrain those of the public. His famous comment in the dedication to the Earl of Orrery, in his preface⁴ to the 1753 edition of Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* was: 'but his chief Skill was in Human Actions, Passions, and Habits ... his Works may be considered as a Map of Life, a faithful Miniature of human Transactions, and he that has read Shakespear with Attention, will perhaps find little new in the crouded World' (Johnson 1753, ix-x).

Shakespeare's plays were adapted by a process of refraction to meet the needs of the larger audiences that flocked into eighteenth-century theatres. The printed versions of Shakespeare's works, by then part of the cultural capital that the middle class had to acquire to gain access to elite circles, ensnared the potential spectators and served as a sort of advertisement for the performance (Stone Peters 2000, 47). Intellectual, political and social forces at play in those years were willingly exploiting Shakespeare's plays for their own educational purposes and attentively explored the audience's emotional reactions to performances. The 'network of associations or relationships uniting the different stage materials into signifying systems, created both by production (the actors, the director, the stage in general) and reception (the spectators)' (Pavis 2004, 25) was keenly scrutinised by all those who participated in it. Spectators were acknowledged as one of the interpreters and co-authors involved in the complex circuit of theatrical communication. In the Lotmanian sense of the term, they were also 'texts' (Lotman 1994, 378-379), model spectators incorporated in the *mise en scène*, interacting with other heterogeneous texts (previous interpretations of the play, the actual spectators' reactions, old and new aesthetics).

⁴ The dedication was ambiguously attributed to 'the author' in the 1753 edition of Lennox's book, but Robert Anderson clarified in his biography that Johnson wrote it for 'Mrs Lennox' (1795, 101-102).

The following sections highlight Garrick's *mise en scène(s)* of *Macbeth*, or, rather, the traces of the communal production of the stage show. Garrick performed it for the first time in 1744, and lastly in 1768. In his intent to offer his own authoritative version of this tragedy, he partly revised Davenant's adaptation (1674), restoring some of Shakespeare's lexical choices and consulting Johnson and Warburton about controversial passages.⁵ And extant letters attest to the fact that he also heeded the opinions of dilettantes in interpreting the character of Macbeth. Lefevere states that Garrick's rewritings were successful because they 'fit in with the hierarchy of the receiving-culture audience' (1984, 223). I suggest that his intersemiotic translation of *Macbeth* was particularly attractive because it expressed a new set of aesthetic values and acting styles that enabled spectators to gain access to a great deal of knowledge. An analysis of the multiple texts produced in the aftermath of the 1744 and later performances will show how actors, critics and theatre goers negotiated the text into a collective, distinctively provisional rewriting of *Macbeth*.

The next section will pinpoint some of the issues discussed in essays that helped to define a new set of aesthetic values and audiences' potential needs, which worked as powerful constraints for the refractors. In the first half of the eighteenth century, intellectuals were to a certain extent creating a demand for literary and theatrical products that could teach people how to express themselves, decipher and evaluate oral and visual messages produced by others (the writers, actors, or persons they interacted with in their family or social life).

2. *Within the Refraction Process: Negotiating Aims and Strategies of Intersemiotic Translation*

Theatricality pervaded eighteenth-century social life. Much as happened during the Elizabethan age, people scrutinised other social performances, applauded, or criticised them, and put themselves on display on the public stage. Theatres encapsulated many performances: those represented on the stage and those acted out in the galleries, boxes, and pits (Brewer 2013, 64-68). Each of these performances was commented upon in amicable circles, in the clubs and coffee-houses, and in letters, diaries, journals and essays. Because of the Puritan belief that behaviours unveil the individual's inner self, a complex cultural phenomenon was emerging. The body and sight were either the object of intense analysis or the instruments for mapping the self and its place in the outside world.

As Balme states, in the eighteenth century the adjective 'theatrical' was used to define events performed by conflicting forces or characters, or to emphasise the visual quality and perception of actions/portraits/landscapes/bodies/objects. It was also associated with deception. None of these

⁵ See, for an exhaustive discussion of Garrick's scripts, Cunningham (2008).

connotations of the term was new but had been passed down through the ages. What was new was the focus on human corporeality as an instrument of both perception and creative construction of knowledge (2007, 4), which was expressed in philosophical and medical essays on the human senses. However, the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste were insufficient in themselves; a sort of inner eye needed to process them. Only when the apprehension of reality had been mediated and controlled by the human mind did this result in the sensibility of the refined soul (Van Sant 1993, 13). The special quality of sensibility was displayed and scrutinized in society and fiction. Its pervasiveness in so many social and artistic practices marks its centrality to the eighteenth-century discourse. Emotional reactions to works of art, nature and other people's behaviours were vividly examined and described in novels, dramas, books on etiquette and even acting manuals. Since acting techniques could be applied to both social life and the theatre, discussions on oratory and the performing arts can provide a deeper insight into the eighteenth-century construction and maintenance of a well-accepted and 'readable' public *persona*, as well as into the conflicting theatrical aesthetics then under debate (Cassidy and Brunström 2002, 19-20).

It therefore comes as no surprise that one of the recurrent words in eighteenth-century essays on acting is 'sight' and words related to its semantic field. In Elizabethan plays, references were constantly made to the cooperation of senses in eliciting truth from characters and events. It is no accident that Aaron Hill (1685-1750), an actor, writer and influencer, reverted to Shakespeare's ekphrastic descriptions of emotions when he wanted to describe an actor's miming of anger (1753, 369-70). Facial expressions and gestures were thought to be universal. However, they were not easy to imitate, and so it was hard to deceive people by feigning feelings that one did not have. In his *Sentimental Journey*, Sterne demonstrated that he could translate body language into words and reply pertinently to his interlocutor, despite his poor proficiency in French. Moreover, he added that he had long been used to translating body language into words when walking through the streets of London (1768, 182).

Indeed, this universal language may have helped people communicate in a post-Babel world, which had fully experienced the manipulative power of words and rhetoric. Some decades before, Charles Gildon had written that different ethnic groups shared the same 'natural significations of the motions of the hands and other members of the body, which are obvious to the understanding of all sensible men of all nations' (1710, 50). To adapt Wordsworth's lines (1852, 542), theatre was an open school in which audiences 'read with most delight the passions of humankind,' as it reproduced human body language.⁶ Eighteenth-century essayists agreed with Sterne when he

⁶ The awareness of a complex eighteenth-century discourse on human knowledge, its fragmentariness and liability underlie twentieth and twenty-first-century essays on Georgian

stated that visual signs were a more economic code than words. They advised shorter speeches, translating the unsaid into words such as Yorick's. 'Sight', 'picture', 'portray' are among the most recurrent words in Aaron Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* (1753). Moreover, the writer proceeded to fragment performances, considering the visual signs produced by the actors to be a means to highlight the meaning of excerpts from famous scripts.

In doing so, he hinted at a refinement of the Elizabethan hierarchical alliance between sight and word. The interdependence of eye and ear is part of the magic of the theatre: the spectators perceive polysensorially what the actors are performing and feel that their experience is fuller than bookish knowledge. As Gurr states, 'it is now a cliché that Elizabethan audiences were hearers before they were spectators,' which implied a 'three-dimensional acting' and perception (2004, 47). It should be added that the iconoclastic turn in English culture, which was in full bloom during Cromwell's rule, was preceded by a public debate and confuted on the stage by the Elizabethan dramatists. Shakespeare's metadrama can be convincingly considered his own 'response to iconoclasm'. So many scenes demonstrate that 'visual understanding can achieve its own legitimate status and trust in relation to other possible understandings, including the competing scepticism of verbal constructions' (O'Connell 2000, 144). Offstage scenes narrated by various characters, or embedded scenes, clarify that the audience can be deceived when one of these two senses cannot process the events being staged. Let us take for example the proposal to crown Julius Caesar, which is related indirectly by various characters but never actually shown on the stage. The multiple versions blind the crowd's perception but make the audience conscious of the manipulative power of words. Indeed, the spectators cannot verify any of the reports empirically. The opposite situation is staged when Othello sees Bianca and Cassio laughing, but he cannot hear the words they utter. He falls prey to his fears, fostered by Iago's art of insinuation. When characters and audiences can process all the empirical data, they are less likely to be tricked. These sequences are both a lesson on the performer's art, which is a cooperation between visual and verbal signs, and a useful guideline for spectators. They also deny the hierarchical relationship between the two senses in the Elizabethan theatre, which has been recently affirmed by eminent scholars, such as Andrew Gurr, who states that 'proximity to the stage was designed for hearing not for

acting manuals. The compelling and comparative essays by Claudio Vicentini (2012) illustrate the web of interconnections between classical, French, and British eighteenth-century theories on acting and philosophy, while other studies concentrate on acting manuals and the construction of the man (and woman) of feeling (Goring 2005), and on the 'proto-sociology of emotion' (Cassidy and Brunström 2002). Interest in eighteenth-century theories on acting has been discontinuous, but recently renewed. Some of the findings of a common effort to bring to life the remains of an eighteenth-century discourse on acting have helped me to better define my goals.

seeing' (2017, 172), which implies the subordination of the sense of sight to that of hearing in the aesthetic experience of Elizabethan audiences.

Aaron Hill's essay contains evidence of the supremacy of the eye on the eighteenth-century stage as the main perceptive instrument, and of visual signs as the most intuitive translation of verbal signs. In his opening pages, Hill concentrates on acting technique, codifying the main steps of the impersonation of characters into the 'only general rule' (1753, 355) that an actor must observe and practice: 'To act a passion, well, the actor never must attempt its imitation, 'till his fancy has conceived so strong an image, or idea, of it, as to move the same impressive springs within his mind, which form that passion, when 'tis undesigned, and natural'. His acting theory revolves then around the keyword 'passion', in line with eighteenth-century criticism. An actor will not impersonate a character but passions and, as Hill clarifies elsewhere (358; 367-368), that art of expressing 'changing passions' which was typical of Garrick (McKenzie 1990, 3).

The eighteenth-century's critical appreciation of Shakespeare mainly focused on his ability to give vent to strong passions. As Johnson wrote in his preface to Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated*, the Bard's plays were still enjoyable and instructive, because 'his heroes are men, ... the love and hatred, the hopes and fears of his chief personages are such as are common to other human beings' (1753, x). Johnson's opinion was shared by Thomas Gray, who wrote to Mason in 1753:

it is nonsense to imagine that Tragedy must *throughout* be agitated with the furious passions or attached by the tender ones. The greater part of it must often be spent in a preparation of these passions, in a gradual working them up to their height, and must thus pass through a great many cooler scenes and a variety of *nuances*, each of which will admit of a proper degree of poetry, and some of purest poetry. (1935, 359)

In so writing, Gray stresses the way in which Shakespeare narrates the passions in his plays, their slightly changing shades of meaning and expression. The interweaving of comedy and tragedy, joy and hatred is typical of everyday life and Shakespeare powerfully conveys the mysterious ways of human conduct because he surrenders to the flowing rhythm of change, flux, and transformation: 'join[s] it [poetry] with pure passion and yet keep[s] close to nature' (359). Won over by the great feast of Shakespearean language, Gray claims that some of the Bard's lines are untranslatable because they are 'picture[s]', as he affirms in a 1742 letter to West (193). One of the main principles of eighteenth-century aesthetics underlies Gray's letters: 'words when well chosen, have so great a force in them that a description often gives us more likely ideas than the sight of things themselves. The reader finds a scene drawn in stronger colours and painted in more to life in his imagination by the help of words than by an actual survey of the scene which they describe' (Addison 1975, 160). Grey, as well as Addison in an essay of 1712 (1975,

160), draw on a common eighteenth-century conception of the relationship between the visual arts and literature. As Gores states: 'eighteenth-century audiences could treat the arts as various representational discourses [i.e. a group of signs united by a certain social practice and which tend to produce the same culturally approved meaning] among which difference was largely a matter of translation' (2000, 18). In Gray's view, Shakespeare sees and feels life more intensely than other human beings and translates his vision and emotional reactions into words. Lexical choice is so effective because it allows the reader to share the poet's vision.

From Hill's perspective, the actor in turn translates the poet's words into visible signs that succeed in communicating passions more effectively. To achieve his goal, the actor must identify the character's emotional reaction to a given event by analysing the script. When he conceives a threatening or joyful passion his face will change and express the strong feeling which emerges from the lines, his body will assume a matching posture, and his voice will attune itself to his body (1753, 362). In Hill's words, the process of translation is 'natural,' the inevitable consequence of the empathetic sharing of a mood, which will generate the audience's sensorial and emotional involvement. The adjective 'natural,' which was loaded with so many meanings in the eighteenth century, here implies that the detected idea transferred itself almost mechanically to the body of the actor, which makes visible the intangible and the secret. It is the idea that cannot but 'impress ... its own form upon the muscles of the *face* ... nor can the look be muscularly stamp'd, without communicating, instantly, the same impression, to the muscles of the body' (*ibid.*). 'Impression' and 'stamped' are polysemous words, which refer to the actions of printing, depicting, and impressing/engraving marks on a surface. These actions happen almost unconsciously and transform the actor's body into a readable book, composed of iconic signs. Just how much these ideas were shared is demonstrated by Thomas Sheridan (1719-1788), himself an actor, in *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762), which aimed at a complete reformation of the rhetoric of delivery (Mullini 2018, 164). Aaron Hill's ideas are considered here applicable to social conversation, sermons, public readings and teaching.

Visible signs were widely charged with the main function of communicating. A diachronic perspective on the history of British acting demonstrates that Colley Cibber already appreciated Thomas Betterton's skilfulness in reproducing the visual expression of feelings (Goring 2005, 122-125). Betterton (1635?-1710) lived before Garrick's revolution, but he certainly expressed a deep interest in human feelings and in the human body as an outlet for the passions. When he died, the sentimental novel had not yet been labelled as such – this would come about in the late eighteenth century (Mullan 1996, 236) –, but the language of feeling was already being perceived and gendered. In a dedicatory poem prefixed to *Poems on Several*

Occasions (1696), the anonymous poet pits feminine and masculine competing skills and values against each other, arguing that the softness of sentiment is typical of a female mind (Clery 2004, 39). Sentimental novels were meant to reach a large female audience and successfully spread the eighteenth-century discourse 'that constantly reweighed the relative emotional transparency of variously socially situated bodies' (Zunshine 2010, 131). Women's emotional transparency, already an exploited *topos* in classical literatures, was effusively described and articulated in novels and plays, and held to be the distinctive mark of women's epistles (Hinton 1999, 60-63). Being transparent, they were easily understood, ridiculed and deceived by men, but they were also better equipped to articulate themselves in both the corporeal and verbal languages. The focus on women's communicative skills contributed to train audiences at large in the decoding and translation practices of oral and visual signs.

However, experience teaches us that we are sufficiently self-conscious to assume poses 'to shape other people's perceptions of our mental states' (Zunshine 2010, 120), performing passions as actors do. Therefore, in real life the body is liable to become an opaque sign. Sentimental novels and dramas contrast correct and erroneous interpretations of gestures, behaviours, and gazes, in order to aid in the uncertain act of decoding ambiguous signs and in preventing social misconduct. Aaron Hill instead relies on the strong belief that bodies are transparent signs; that when an actor feigns passions he/she ends up being totally immersed in them. The theatre was a living conduct-book for him (Goring 2005, 128), and his essay on acting was a manual for helping people distinguish and control passions.

In keeping with his didactic and moral purpose, Aaron Hill identifies ten dramatic passions 'which can be distinguished by their outward marks, in action, all others being relative to, and but varied degrees of, the foregoing' (1753, 357). He then proceeds to describe each of them in detail, and how an actor should ensure their perception by an audience. Joy, for instance, 'cannot, therefore, be expressed without vivacity, in look, air, and accent' (358). Reading the passage, we come to understand that conflicting signs are to be avoided (360), as the performance must be a true mirror of a simplified reality, from which ambiguity has been removed. That is why an actor should try to identify the passion which underlies his lines and then relive it on the stage. The translation process is lucidly described: analysis of the text is the first step, the second being impersonation, which results naturally from empathetic feelings. The mirror test will help the actor see whether the marks of joy, for instance, are correctly printed on his face:

If, for example, his brow, in the glass, appears bow-bent, or cloudy, his neck bowing, and relaxed, his breast not thrown gracefully back, and elate; if he sees his arm swing languid, or hang motionless, his back-bone reposed, or unstraiten'd, and the joints of his hip, knee, and ancle, not strong-brac'd, by swelling out the sinews to their full extent. — All, or any of these spiritless signs, in the glass, may convince him,

that he has too faintly conceived the impression: and, at once, to *prove* it, to his own full satisfaction, let him, at that time, endeavour to speak out, with a voice as high raised as he pleases, he will find, that, in that languid state of muscles, he can never bring it to found *joy* ... But, if on the contrary, he has hit the conception, exactly, he will have the pleasure, in that case, to observe, in the glass, that his forehead appears open, and rais'd, his eye smiling, and sparkling, his neck will be stretch'd, and erect, without stiffness, as if it would add new height to his stature; his breast will be inflated, and majestically backen'd; his back-bone erect, and all the joints of his arm, wrist, fingers, hip, knee, and ankle, will be high-strung, and brac'd boldly. And *now*, if he attempts to speak *joy*, all the spirit of the passion will ascend in his accents, and the very tone of his voice will seem to out-rapture the meaning. (360-361)

In his dressing room, or during rehearsals, an actor checks the meticulous transference of meaning from the script to his own body, and the exact match of the feelings which transpire from the words and his body language. When on stage he will have to deliver his lines after assuming the posture, gestures and facial expressions that correspond to the passion he has detected in the script: 'But as soon as this pathetic sensation has strongly and fully imprinted his fancy, let him, then — and never a moment before — attempt to give the Speech due utterance' (367). In so doing, he will display the authentic process and technique of impersonation; the play will be fragmented into messages in different codes which will not act simultaneously but one-by-one, with a composite effect that helps to clarify the character's emotions. The hierarchical relationship between eye and ear has been transformed into an alliance which reminds us of the visually expressed moral abstractions in emblems, a form which powerfully joined words and pictures, and was still appreciated in eighteenth-century England (Bath 1994, 255-256). Hill's essay, published at mid-century, inherited the highly codified language of Ripa's archive of icons, but also 'rested on English empiricism' (Hagstrum 1958, 150). The dramatic code could be a technique for representing a medley of passions but also distinguish any slight nuance in a single one. A more realistic interpretation of them is achieved, while their creation in slow motion on the stage allows a deeper insight into the characters' psychology.

The felicitous expression of feelings will generate an empathetic response on the part of the spectators, and will transmit the living spirit of the words, 'So shall he always hit the right and touching sensibility of tone, and move his auditors, impressingly' (Hill 1753, 367). Aaron Hill applied to the stage what Addison had already stated about the visual quality of poetry, 'the aesthetic value of the sublime object,' and their momentous impact on the mind of the spectators (Hagstrum 1958, 137-138). In his essay, the focus is alternatively on the process of making the passions visible and on the audience's reactions to them. Hill, in attuning himself to the picturesque theories, always bears in mind the necessary cooperation of the hearer/seer. The audience will complete the living portrait of the acted passion by

imagining it. A fragmentary interpretation of the slow raising of passions will help the audience anticipate emotional reactions to the staged events and get involved in the action, thereby becoming part of the frame, and living an intense collective psychological experience.

Although Hill asserts that dramatists, and especially Shakespeare, must be served by the actor, he seems to challenge their authorship because their texts need interpretation and completion by so many participants. John Hill (another Hill, c. 1714-1775), who had been in his early years 'a would-be quack-scribbler-actor' (Rousseau 2012, 11), plainly states the point in his essay *The Actor*: the author's poignant lines fail in raising passions if the actor does not embody the right feelings, and the audience may laugh at emotional speeches when badly delivered (1750, 5-6). This aligns the two essayists with the narrative approach of eighteenth-century novelists, who allow unreliable witnesses to compete with the omniscient narrator (Brodey 2008, 163-164). In its way, the novel reproduced a communal action of deciphering visual and verbal signs.

Pauses between action and speech delivery, between the translative intersemiotic phases, will also allow the actor to pace and control his voice to more closely mirror reality and human nature: 'pensive pausing places, will at the same time, appear to an audience, but the strong and natural attitudes of thinking; and the inward agitations of a heart, that is, in truth, disturb'd, and shaken' (A. Hill 1753, 368). Verisimilitude, plausibility are Aaron Hill's keywords, and one of the main concerns in Lennox's strictures on Shakespeare's plays.

In the dedicatory preface to *Shakespear Illustrated* we read that 'it is not perhaps very necessary to enquire whether the Vehicle of so much Delight and Instruction be a story probable, or unlikely, native, or foreign. *Shakespear's* Excellence is not the Fiction of a Tale, but the Representation of Life' (Lennox 1753, xi). This general assumption is consistent with Samuel Johnson's critical reading of Shakespeare, whom he considered the 'poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour of manners and of life' (1766, iv). Smallwood claims that these words have been misunderstood. Johnson's appreciation of the Bard revolves around two keywords, 'nature' and 'manners', which have opposite traits, such as 'permanent' and 'changing', 'hidden' and 'visible'. In Smallwood's own words, 'It is a distinction between surfaces and depth – how things appear to us and how they are when we look deeper' (1997, 148). Johnson profoundly believed that a common reader/spectator could still decipher 'details of behaviour, gesture, and speech found in the dead-and-gone society which remain atemporally human and therefore visible today' (148-149). This conviction was nurtured by the strong belief that the particular (the visible) was akin to the general (the ideal; Hagstrum 1958, 135). As Jean Hagstrum notes, one of the senses of the word 'mirror' listed by Johnson in his *Dictionary* was 'an archetype' (136). In accordance

with this, the theatre is a mirror of a prototypical life that constantly renews its forms in successive ages.

Charlotte Lennox blames Shakespeare whenever his portrayal of feelings and actions does not meet eighteenth-century standards of verisimilitude. When contrasting *Othello* with its Italian source, she notes that the drama's plot is more credible but still contains inconsistencies that make some characters' reactions hard to understand. For instance, Othello is a man of noble birth and 'the Dignity which the Venetian state bestows upon Him is less to be wondered at' (1753, 127), Cassio is an amiable and handsome young man, likely to win Desdemona's love and excite Othello's jealousy. Emilia's behaviour seems implausible to Lennox: the woman empathises with Desdemona, correctly identifies Othello's possessive love, but inconsistently helps her husband to entrap them in his psychological snares (127-129). To confute the accusation of implausibility suggested by Rhymer, she observes that it cannot be excluded that a character as evil and dissembling as Iago would live among valiant and noble soldiers and reinforces her point by drawing on a stereotypical archive of cruel and vengeful Italians, still prevalent at the time (130). Following the same train of thought, she acquits Shakespeare of implausibly portraying an interclass and interracial marriage. In her own words, 'There is less Improbability in supposing a noble Lady, educated in Sentiments superior to the Vulgar, should fall in love with a Man merely for the Qualities of his Mind, than that a mean Citizen should be possessed of such exalted Ideas, as to overlook the Disparity of Years and Complexion, and be enamoured of Virtue in the Person of a Moor' (132). It seems improbable to her that Iago, who has fallen in love with Desdemona (130), could urge Othello to kill his wife, while his fear of being betrayed by Emilia and the Moor seems to be more consistent with his actions. However, 'his Barbarity to Desdemona is still unnatural' (130-131).

By discriminating between probable and improbable reactions to people and events, Lennox considers not only archetypal models, but also cultural constraints. In so doing, she describes Shakespearean refractions in the eighteenth century and offers her audience a distinctive sense of what an English lady and gentleman would feel and how they would act in a given situational context. Her judgments of verisimilitude depend on her own values, which are not those of Rhymer. The emergence of a new discourse on femininity is evident, when she accuses Emilia of being Iago's accomplice, and notes that Desdemona loves Othello for his many qualities. Being a cultivated lady, she appreciates virtue and consistently discriminates between good and bad behaviour.

In her contrastive analysis of *Macbeth* and its sources, Lennox is animated by the same methodological rigour, which makes her discriminate between probable and improbable events in the plot. She calls into question the latter cultural products of Shakespeare's time (e.g., the witches' apparition),

whose ‘darkness of Ignorance has been more gross’ (281). She also identifies some of the constraints that must have prompted Shakespeare’s refractions of Holished’s *Chronicles*: transcodification from prose writing to the stage (272-273), homage paid to James I (275-276), and strong cultural beliefs (281-300), as detailed by Johnson in a long embedded long quotation from *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (Johnson 1801). Such an erudite discussion leaves space for analyzing the passions. According to Lennox, Shakespeare has ‘softened a little some of the most rugged Features [of Macbeth]; he shews him doubtful and irresolute about the Murder of the King, spurred on by Ambition to commit it, but restrained by his Abhorrence of the Action’ (1753, 279). Lady Macbeth instigates her husband to crime ‘by the most provoking expressions, reproaching him with Cowardice and Sloth, as negligent to receive what Fate had directed to obtain’ (279-280). As far as we know from reviews and letters, Garrick’s and Pritchard’s interpretation of the two characters, made of the inner conflict which tears Macbeth apart, and its psychological projection into the man-wife relationship the central topic discussed in the performance. Ambition is the main passion examined: Lady Macbeth’s actions are driven by her lust for power, while her husband, who is not as bold as she is in pursuing the throne, is tormented by inner conflict. Strangely, Lennox does not comment on the undermining of this traditional masculine leadership, though it was effectively taken into account by Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in their stage interpretations.

3. *Traces of Significant Refractions in Garrick’s Adaptations of Macbeth*

In 1741, Garrick’s first appearance in *Richard III* was greeted as a renewal of the theatre, the shift from a rhetorical and static form of acting towards an emotional, vibrant and more natural rendering of passion-driven characters. From then on, he acted as Shakespeare’s refractor in subsequent *mises en scène*. His rewritings were so successful that ‘Well into the nineteenth century, successor Macbeths expired on the stage with Garrick’s death speech on their lips’ (Cunningham 2008, 43). Although celebrated as a lover of the purity of the Shakespearean texts, he nonetheless made no bones about modifying the plots, removing scenes and adding others to satisfy the cultural needs of his audiences and soothe their anxieties. The fact was that Garrick was rewriting to perform and to sell his performance, not to be read by philologists. His performances were intended to entertain, not to disappoint his audiences, which were well acquainted with previous performances and Davenant’s rewriting. In line with Davenant, he kept the witches’ scenes, which were among the most spectacular of Davenant’s additions (Cunningham 2008, 55).

Contiguous dates of the first performance of Garrick’s *Macbeth* (1744) and the composition of Johnson’s *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1801) suggest the influence of Johnson’s criticism on Garrick.

However, Garrick rejected many of Johnson's choices, since they had different goals (Cunningham 2008, 45). Garrick was out to mediate and make palatable an old revered text to eighteenth-century spectators, while Johnson was on a bookish mission to revise Shakespeare's texts, purge them of their 'blemishes,' clarify the meanings of obscure words, and even correct punctuation. Garrick could count on gestures, facial expressions and proxemics to shed light on opaque meanings, while Johnson wrote *about* Shakespeare's texts, fragmenting them, adding his own explicative expansions. To a certain extent he intervened excessively in the texts, cancelling or highlighting entire passages. This is not to deny that Garrick took pains to single out the most appropriate and theatrically effective words. In fact, he was aware of the creative and suggestive power of words, and – for example – restored 'knife,' whose recurrence is highly evocative, and which Davenant had substituted with the gentler metonymy of 'my keen steel' (Cunningham 2008, 46). Where he removed lines, he protected himself against the predictably unfavourable reaction of an eighteenth-century audience to cruel or coarse scenes. The Porter's part was erased to comply with contemporary tastes, and Macbeth's dying speech was added to increase poetic justice (Benedetti 2001, 127). In Garrick's adaptation, Macbeth confesses to his crimes and anguish, and dies bitterly aware that his soul is heavy with the bloodshed of his victims (*ibid.*). All things considered, Garrick's omissions helped his audiences to concentrate on the main character's inner conflicts and concerns, at the expense of the political and historical context (Cunningham 2008, 54), in keeping with the largely shared aesthetic values of his time.

Garrick's audiences were so impressed and overwhelmed by his performances that they wrote to him, congratulating him on his acting, and discussing their own critical appreciation of the text, suggesting new gestures and pitches of tone to render the 'true' nuance of meaning in selected passages. Some of these letters contained vivid descriptions of very short scenes, which equalled in impressiveness some of the most famous theatrical paintings of Garrick's Macbeth. By reading these letters, we can appreciate an aesthetic perception stimulated by these intensely represented and perceived visual fragments of the performance. This is clear evidence of a new shared analytical approach to the theatrical text, which is primarily based on the relevance of sight in appreciating the main outward manifestations of passion.

In eighteenth-century reviews and debates on theatre, Garrick was celebrated for his demeanor and civility (Shawe-Taylor 1998, 107), the former certifying to his accomplishments in the latter. Biographies devoted to him extolled his gentlemanly qualities, as did the circle of his friends and acquaintances in their reminiscences about him, 'to the point of denying character weaknesses' (Boyd 2018, ch. 1). His own body was a living conduct-book on the stage: gentlemen could recognise their good manners, while people wishing to be members of elitist circles learned correct etiquette from

his performances. When he first performed *Macbeth*, he appeared untidily dressed, and was urged by Lady Macbeth to act manly and return the daggers to the crime scene, to provide other characters with evidence of the grooms' guilt. These details powerfully conveyed his profound distress in the aftermath of Duncan's assassination, but the audience did not appreciate such a display of careless behaviour, as his friends reported (Shawe-Taylor 1998, 110-111). In the following performances, his twisted right leg and his hands fending the air off were signs of a soul struck with horror. Johann Zoffany froze the frightful moment in one of his theatrical portraits (1768, 1776): oblique lines are formed in disorderly fashion by Mrs Pritchard's and Garrick's arms, which point towards the centre of the picture, but without touching each other. Mrs Pritchard looks angrily at Garrick, her right hand raised and pointing towards him, while the other is holding a dagger pointing towards the door on the left. While Mrs Pritchard's arms and legs form two almost perfectly parallel lines, Garrick's hands and legs do not repeat the same symmetry. Notwithstanding the neoclassical sceneries, the neat garb, the composure on Garrick's face, the whole scene conveys disturbing emotions. Conflicting signs heighten the inner tension between the gentleman Macbeth and his wife, who urges him on to commit evil: the biblical pattern of the temptress Eve is being repeated in an eighteenth-century mansion.

The striking effect was reached also thanks to Mrs Pritchard, who had 'a genius for body language' (Leigh 2014, 103). Her evil, vigorous Lady Macbeth counterpointed Macbeth's passivity, embodying a manly woman who deviates from the feminine standard. Thomas Davies (c. 1713-1785) grasped the sense of the weird contrast between a sensitive man and his heartless wife and admired how the two actors communicated the anxiety arising from the collapse of the traditional polarity of gender norms: '[Garrick's] distraction of mind and agonizing horrors were merely contrasted by her seeming apathy, tranquillity, and confidence. The beginning of the scene after the murder was conducted in terrifying whispers' (1784, 93). The strength of Pritchard-Lady Macbeth's challenge to her husband can be felt in Davies' metatextual note: 'Her reproving and angry looks, which glanced towards Macbeth, at the same time were mixed with marks of inward vexation and uneasiness' (105). Visual signs were easily decipherable by the audience: stillness, whispers, angry looks foregrounded the conflict between sexes, which runs throughout Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Indeed, Pritchard's and Garrick's interpretation of the play relocated it in their own times and refracted it through the lens of the cognitive topic at issue then. Pritchard's Lady Macbeth was upset and frustrated because her husband, fraught by worries and remorse, could not act. However, her rational thinking and her focus on her main goal are what cause disaster to crash down on them in the end. As Davies testifies, Garrick's Macbeth won the audience's favour just because he is sensitive enough to regret his crime and to be unwilling to persevere in it (93). A manly man was

not the hero of middle-class audiences.

Like Davies, Thomas Wilkes highlighted the importance of the performance as a complete text, harmoniously knitted together by the combined efforts of visual and oral signs. In a few lines, the author makes us relive the *energeia* that was contained potentially in Shakespeare's text and was later released by Garrick and transmitted to his audience:

It is impossible for description to convey an adequate idea of the horror of his looks, when he returns from having murdered Duncan with the bloody daggers, and hands stained in gore. How does his voice chill the blood when he tells you, 'I have done the deed!' and then looking on his hands, 'this is a sorry sight!' How expressive is his manner and countenance during Lennox's knocking at the door, of the anguish and confusion that possess him; and his answer, 'twas a rough night', shews as much self-condemnation, as much fear of discovery, as much endeavour to conquer inquietude and assume ease, as ever was infused into, or intended for, the character. (1759, 248-249)

Looking at Zoffany's theatrical painting and perusing Wilkes' and Davies' descriptions, we perceive how Garrick and Pritchard were applying Aaron Hill's precepts to their acting. Garrick certainly did not rely completely on his own experiences and feelings, but also 'on the systematic studies of expression which were fashionable at the time' (Shawe-Taylor 1998, 111), notably Le Brun's *Conférence sur L'expression* (1698). The precise drawings in this text presented the actor, the audience and society at large with an inventory of visual signs combined in different ways to express passions as much as Aaron Hill's ekphrastic descriptions did. Both essayists gave the illusion that the human soul was visible, detectable and readable.

Appreciation of the performance was oriented by mental image catalogues and words that confidently assert that human passions and intentions are recognizable and reproducible. The memories of past performances interacted with the most recent ones and activated sagacious comparisons on the part of the spectator, making him/her revert to the Shakespearean text to better understand the poet's intentions. Murphy's famous letter to Garrick (Garrick 1832, 363) reveals that sort of energy that the theatre released back onto the text. It is a wonderful example of how the collective reading and translation of Shakespeare influenced the common reader's taste, sharpening his/her emotional intelligence, that valuable gift of empathy with others. The sender first congratulates the actor on his performance of Macbeth, which, however, seemed to him less effective than the young Garrick's interpretation. Next, he confesses to having read the dramaturgic text again and made a contrastive analysis between it and the later theatrical version, drawing on the visual images he had stored in his mind. The transiency of the performance is highlighted as well as the permanency of the text (which of the many available versions Murphy does not detail!). Garrick's polite response does not deny

the implicit unfavourable comparison, when protesting that, if ‘in order,’ he will profit from these criticisms. A metaphorical portrait of himself running to follow the suggested tracks like a huntsman (364) closes, and renews, the circle of theatrical energy:

The scene I mean is the first in the second act, where you converse with Banquo. For a man just going to commit a murder, and so strongly possessed with the horror of the deed, as in a moment after to see a dagger, — were you not a little too disengaged, too free, and too much at ease? I will tell you how I have seen you do it: — you dissembled indeed, but dissembled with difficulty. Upon the first entrance the eye glanced at the door; the gaiety was forced, and at intervals the eye gave a momentary look towards the door, and turned away in a moment. This was but a fair contrast to the acted cheerfulness with which this disconcerted behaviour was intermixed. After saying, ‘Good, repose the while;’ the eye then fixed on the door, then after a pause in a broken tone, ‘Go, bid thy mistress, &c’. If I had been to give an account of the manner with which Mr. Garrick acquitted himself in this scene, it should have been to the above purport. Pray observe, that as you assume a freedom and a gaiety here, it will be also a contrast to the fine disturbance of mind and behaviour, in the night gown, after the murder is committed, when no cheerfulness is affected: I am sure this was the way formerly, and I own it strikes me most. If I am wrong, you must thank yourself for it.

The other passage is, ‘Doctor, the Thanes fly from me’; it used to be a strong involuntary burst of melancholy, and the other night I thought it sounded very differently. You see I have had my telescope at the sun for the dear delight of finding a few spots, and if I have found them, you are the optician yourself who furnished me with the medium to look through. (363)

Murphy, who was one of Garrick’s biographers, was such an alert reader of the theatrical code that not only did he detect the sequence of conflicting signs (indicating cheerfulness and distress) in the scene, but also the contrast with the assassination scene, where darkness and evil prevail. In other words, he was able to appreciate the theatrical syntax of the performance because he correctly identified not only the ‘relationship between the signs of many different kinds’ (Kirby 1987, 39), but also how later ‘scenes’ were semantically connected to earlier ones. Although fragmented, the performance acquired meaning in the process of making itself, mainly thanks to the spectator’s contribution and his/her use of the retrospective gaze. The active role of the audience is emphasised in the last lines of the letter, where the metaphor of sight is extended to show the connections between all the parts involved in the making of the performance. The actor/optician tests the spectator’s sight, so that the latter can improve his abilities and peruse both the script and its translation on the stage. This circle generates and gives back energy.

In 1744 an anonymous essay on acting, ‘containing the mimical behaviour of a certain fashionable actor,’ was published. As it has been attributed to Garrick, the actor’s artistic choices can be easily detected,

being foregrounded by means of an external point of view. I will confine myself to analysing some excerpts from the mock criticism of the first run of *Macbeth's* performance. Pretending to highlight his own faults, Garrick stages a conflict between the role of a refined Shakespeare critic and his own. In doing so, he can demonstrate that some of the essayist's main assumptions are pointless, but at the same time assume the critic's stance of facilitating a better appreciation of the masterpieces by the readers. He combines two hackneyed metaphors to describe his critical effort, which is to make other critics see their 'misconceptions' and how their misunderstandings can drive them away into ignorance (Garrick 1744, 13). The sender, the mock-essayist, is there to drive them home, that is back to the main meaning of *Macbeth*: 'But Metaphor apart, what is the *Character of Macbeth?*' (*ibid.*).

Garrick's mask here admits that he has not the physical appearance of a hero. His approval of the first precept in John Hill's *The Actor* (1750, 1-2) sounds like an *innuendo* to the audience (Garrick 1744, 14). Notwithstanding Garrick's shortness, his performance as Macbeth established a model for future generations of actors, spectators and critics. What is at issue here is the aesthetic value of verisimilitude, which is not to be punctiliously pursued in every detail (15-16). Apart from exhilarating notations about the actor's wig and cloak in *Macbeth*, the most relevant information is given when the mock essayist tries to apply the precepts about transient passions to the opening lines of the hero's part: 'Tho' I cannot convey in Writing the Manner how it *should* be spoke, yet every Reader may comprehend how it *ought* to be spoke, the Sentiment is languid, unintelligible, and undescriptive' (16). It is more than a hint at the unsayableness of shades of feelings, which can be better expressed by gestures, looks, and posture. The powerful circle of energy created by the body of the actor is emphasised in the description of the dagger scene, which completely focuses on the facial expressions of the actor, making him capable of reliving the feelings surrounding the assassination, and enabling the spectator to share in the character's anguish:

Macbeth, as a Preparation for this Vision, is so prepossess'd, from his Humanity, with the Horror of the Deed, which by his more prevailing Ambition he is incited to, and for the Perpetration of which, he lies under a promissary Injunction to his Lady, that his Mind being torn by these different and confus'd Ideas, his Senses fail, and present that *fatal Agent* of his Cruelty,—the Dagger, to him:—Now in this visionary Horror, he should not rivet his Eyes to an *imaginary* Object, as if it really was there, but should shew an *unsettled Motion* in his Eye, like one not quite awak'd from some disordering Dream; his *Hands* and *Fingers* should not be *immoveable*, but *restless*, and endeavouring to disperse the Cloud that over shadows his optick Ray, and bedims his Intellects; here would be Confusion, Disorder, and Agony! Come let me clutch thee! is not to be done by one Motion only, but by several successive Catches at it, first with one Hand, and then with the other, preserving the same Motion, at the same Time, with his Feet, like a Man, who out of his Depth, and half drowned in

his Struggles, catches at Air for Substance: This would make the Spectator's Blood run cold, and he would almost feel the Agonies of the Murderer himself. (17)

The conveyance and public experiencing of passions is all we can infer. Theatre should mirror human beings' natural manners (in the Johnsonian sense), the only ones that can be shared by a contemporary audience. Garrick might have discontented his critics, who thought that eighteenth-century theatrical taste had degenerated, but he also won the public's favour. The spectators' reviews testify to the enlivening experience they enjoyed. The marshalling parallelism of positive and negative precepts – probably intended to ridicule James Quin, the rival star –, certainly criticised 'empty posturing and gesticulating, with no pretence of an imaginary dagger' (Benedetti 2001, 128), but also reminded critics that a test of the successfully renewed energy of Shakespearean drama is the audience's empathetic silence. Nonverbal clues give a much more accurate picture of what a person experiences than words can. When this happens, the recipient allows feelings to circulate through his/her body.

Once again, the description of the passions expressed by visual signs has been fragmented, its quick, fractured rhythm aimed at reproducing the rapid shift of feelings. Conflicting ideas have been conflated in so tiny a space that the reader is required to complete the unfinished work, that is the actor's performance, with his own intellectual and emotional response. Indeed, the most powerful aspects of the discussion on the process of knowledge acquisition are visible here: interest in the broken syntax of human feelings, in the visual signs that reveal it, and the effort to include the reader in creating meaning, especially meaning that is unutterable.

The *mise en scène* has shown itself as a dynamic process triggered by multiple refracting readings of Shakespeare's works, and provisionally ended by the actors, the spectators and the reviewers. Now that the complex debate on knowledge acquisition has been partially reproduced on the page, I can conclude that it reverberated in eighteenth-century essays on acting, leading to a profound reform of acting techniques, but also to a profound metatextual analysis of the performance. The main results of this debate were applied by actors and audiences, fully aware of their role as active participants in producing the performance, as testified in their letters.

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Impermanence of Authorship

