THE IMPACT OF THE ACTING OF DAVID GARRICK
AND SIR LAURENCE OLIVIER:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history man has had a desire for theatre. Man has always wanted a place to go for entertainment where he could think and feel privately and yet be part of a group. While in the theatre man could indulge himself in fantasy, which seems fundamental to him. Howard Taubman has written the following about man's desire and need for the theatre:

He goes to the theatre to laugh and weep at others, to comfort himself by feeling superior to other men, and, in deeper truth, to laugh at his own follies, weep at his own sorrows, and, if possible to be exalted and inspired by the potentialities of his nature.¹

The majority of mankind wants to attend the theatre to be amused by the pretentions of those upon the stage, but a small number of men wish to face the other way and share their pretentions with the audience. These men are actors, and upon their shoulders lies much of the responsibility for maintaining the life of the theatre. It does not matter how good plays may be, if the acting of them is poor. Kenneth Tynan, the well-known English drama critic, wrote the

following concerning the importance of actors to the theatre:

In this chapter of chronicle we shall investigate some of the big, unique performances which bare up the theatre like so many telegraph poles . . . obtrusive, eccentric performances, in which the actor thrust at the audience the full impact of his quiddity, and stood out mountainously, giving shape and a third dimension to a bare horizon.²

These telegraph poles, or actors, whom Tynan thinks so important to the theatre as to write that they held it up, usually did most of their performing in the classics. The classics are usually more difficult to perform than contemporary drama, and the actors who become recognized as great, work often in the classics.

If an actor devotes the greater part of his professional career to acting in these classics, he becomes known as a classical actor. Kitchin wrote, "By classical acting one means what is done by performers of the masterpieces."³ If a performer is outstanding in a role, other actors on the stage will absorb some of his qualities. If he is enough admired to be copied, then his work becomes a part of tradition.

Traditions are handed down from generation to generation. These traditions become the foundations for standards of excellence, but they do not impose laws upon acting, which state that a certain play must always be performed in a

certain style. Styles of acting must change with the society in which the acting exists.

Tradition can only be handed down, a delightful but ephemeral mixture of legend, history and hearsay, but style evolves afresh through the finest talents of each succeeding generation, influencing, in its own particular era, the quality both of acting and of production.\textsuperscript{4}

More than once in the history of the theatre, people have tried to impose laws to make acting conform to a constant style. This has usually happened during times when actors have become indifferent to their society's changes. These actors continued to perform in styles which had suited a past era, but not their new and changing audience. Before the laws had become firmly entrenched, some actor would come along to violate the laws. His violations revoked the laws and became the current vogue, because the violations more closely reflected the thinking of the current society. John Gielgud wrote, "And genius may always be relied on to appear suddenly from nowhere, breaking all rules and confounding all theory by sheer magnetism and originality."\textsuperscript{5}

Two men of genius who came from nowhere to break the rules were David Garrick in 1741 and Sir Laurence Olivier in 1937. These two men will be the major subjects of this thesis. Both Garrick and Olivier introduced new styles of acting to the theatre in Shakespearean plays. David Garrick introduced


\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 107.
his new style in Richard III and Sir Laurence Olivier introduced his in Henry V. The styles they introduced became the beginning of the end of old styles because, as the public rallied to the new, the other actors of the day began to model their performances after Garrick and Olivier. The reason for the successes of the new styles was that they reflected current thinking. The following was written of Garrick's new style of acting:

In 1741 "a young gentleman who never appeared on any stage" played Richard III at a minor theatre to a few friends and a poor £30-worth of nonchalant timekillers. At the end of the performance the newcomer was greeted with "loud shouts of approbation." David Garrick had arrived. In the next seven months he was seen in eighteen different parts. Notwithstanding the distance of Goodman's Fields from the fashionable part of London, the long space ... is said to have been nightly blocked up by the carriages of the nobility and gentry.

James Quin, who had been the leading actor of the time, went to see Garrick in Richard III and said, "If the young fellow is right, I and the rest of the players have all been wrong." It was not long before Quin and Garrick performed together on the stage. Quin's prediction came true, for he was forced into retirement. Garrick's new style had officially become the fashion of the time.

7Ibid., p. 93.
It has been written of Olivier's acting,
He is an actor unusually responsive to climates of
history outside the theatre. Before the Second
World War his Henry V anticipated the response
aroused by Churchill's oratory. Olivier's post-
war Hamlet caught a European mood of imprisonment
and defeat. His Tidas predicted an avant-garde
vogue for cruelty. After Suez he became the new
Therites, Archie Rice. During the racial con-
vulsions of the nineteen-sixties Othello, I suppose,
was inevitable.8

Both Garrick and Olivier have been pictured as men of
sensitivity to the trends of their society, but that alone
was not enough to make them great actors. Garrick and Olivier
developed and introduced new styles of acting to the theatre.
Since they both devoted the bulk of their careers to working
in the classics, they may be called classical actors. What
other than appearing in classics with sensitivity to current
trends in society makes a classical actor? John Gielgud has
written the following:

What are the most important qualities for a clas-
sical actor? Imagination, sensibility and power.
Relaxation, repose and the art of listening. To
speak well and move gracefully, these are elementary
feats which can be mastered with hard work and
practice, though some great actors, Irving in
particular, seem occasionally to have succeeded
without them. The young actor, if he has a love
of tradition and a natural respect for experience,
may be inclined at first to prefer to try and
imitate the less subtle excellences of other
actors he has seen. His own taste may not be
good. But as he grows older, he will be in-
creasingly influenced by the pictures he sees, the
books he reads, the music he hears and the

8Laurence Kitchin, Drama in the Sixties: Form and
experiences of his own life, rather than by the acting of other players, trusting more confidently to his own instinct and personal discoveries about human character and emotions.  

Garrick and Olivier shared the attributes that Gielgud has listed as being necessary for a classical actor. Both of them have stressed imagination, and the importance of listening to other actors on the stage. Both of them have been widely imitated. It has been said that the most popular actors during Garrick's time were Garrick and those he taught. Kenneth Tynan wrote of Olivier, "Young actors trust and venerate Gielgud--but the man they most copy is Olivier."  

As Garrick and Olivier progressed in their theatrical careers, they continued to be more and more imitated by other actors. Their influence spread, as John Gielgud said it would, from acting to other aspects of the theatre. They were influential in rehearsal and staging, as well as interpretation reforms.  

What influenced Garrick and Olivier to introduce new styles of acting to the theatre? They did not just suddenly decide that all which had gone before them was evil, and that they would change everything. Just as they were to influence actors, actors influenced them. There were actors before

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9Gielgud, op. cit., p. 106.

them who had broken with tradition to introduce new styles of acting to the theatre.

To give Garrick credit for the whole reformation of acting is to do something less than justice to his friend, Macklin. Some eight months earlier Macklin had startled his colleagues at Drury Lane with a very new Shylock. The tradition at the time was to play the part as a low-comedy clown in a red wig and tattered clothes, as Doggett had done in an earlier very free adaptation that treated the action as farce. Macklin restored the Shakespeare text, dressed the part correctly and played Shylock as a villain in a naturalistic manner."11

Nor was Olivier the only person on the stage during his time who had broken with tradition, but he was given the credit.

For many who saw it, Olivier's Henry V at the Old Vic in 1937 marks the start of an approach to Shakespearean acting which persists today, usually without the vocal splendor needed to digest twentieth-century habits of thought and feeling into the bloodstream of heroic drama. The young king endured a lengthy recital of genealogies by his prelates as impatiently as any modern audience, drummed a tattoo with his foot and finally asked, "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" in the tone of one irked by tedious protocol. Whose idea was it? Last week Dr. Tyrone Guthrie, the director on the occasion, replied: "I haven't the slightest recollection. Probably Sir Laurence's. He was always a great comedian."12

Garrick and Olivier have been credited for the new styles of acting, but in both cases there were men who preceded Garrick and Olivier with new styles. These predecessors

11Glunes, op. cit., p. 95.
12Laurence Kitchin, Mid-Century Drama, p. 196.
may have been great actors, but Garrick and Olivier got the credit because they were more dominant in their presentations.

Three years before Olivier's 1937 Henry V, Godfrey Tearle played the same part without the ham that was so prevalent at the time. Ralph Richardson and Harcourt Williams were also working in Shakespearean roles without being hams. They did not receive credit for introducing anything new. Nor did Macklin in his time. David Garrick and Laurence Olivier did. So it can be seen that other acting had influenced the way in which Garrick and Olivier were to portray characters upon the stage. They also were influenced by the acting of their time, which they thought was bad. The cycle goes round so that one actor influences another to influence a later one.

Garrick and Olivier introduced new styles of acting Shakespearean plays, which won for them acclaims of greatness, but theirs were not the only changes ever proposed. At various times people have thought something new had to be done about Shakespeare.

The end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth was a period when other authors, notably Dryden and Colley Cibber made attempts to improve Shakespeare, to tidy up his straggling plots, to prune his rambling genius, to sophisticate his woodnotes wild.¹³

What these authors did not realize was that the plays were fine as they were. It was the acting of them that needed changing.

David Garrick, the great actor, in the middle of the eighteenth century was responsible for the restoration of his texts to a form nearer, though not fully, that of the author's intentions. After Garrick there followed important Shakespearean revivals by Edmund Kean, William Charles MacCready, Julius William Booth—all showing marked respect for the poet's meaning.\(^4\)

All these important revivals were the work of important actors, and they followed the example of a great actor. Laurence Olivier seemed to realize the same thing in the twentieth century. The words of Shakespeare did not need changing to appeal to his audience. Rather, the acting of those words needed to change to fit the modern society.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Sir Henry Irving had introduced a style of acting which was fine for his time. "... the public of that day absolutely demanded realism in an elaborate, opulent style."\(^{15}\) The style had lost its appeal by the time Olivier came along, but the majority of the actors of the day had failed to recognize the need for a change. It took an actor of great understanding to recognize the need for change. That actor was Laurence Olivier.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 61.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 62.
Shakespeare left almost no remarks about the way his plays should be acted, but he did write a speech for Hamlet to present to the traveling acting company which was to perform before his step-father's court. Ever so often an actor seems to recognize the impact of this speech in relation to his own time. This actor of insight realizes that Hamlet's advice is being violated according to current tradition. This actor then introduces a new style which becomes the new tradition for his period of history.

It seems, then the right moment to recall some achievements of the established classical stars, first as a reminder of the insights to be gained from the actor and nobody else, secondly as a pointer to the ways in which tradition is vitally redirected. . . .

It appears that great actors do have a vital influence upon the theatre of their times. It is often the actors whom the public comes to see. The play is often only his vehicle, but the actor gains his popularity and reputation because of what he does with these vehicles.

Man has always sought the theatrical experience, and that theatrical experience has always needed to reflect the society of the time. To understand that theatre and society, it becomes advantageous to understand some of the great actors who have helped to shape that theatre.

Most actors follow the examples of those who have been called great. Even those greats have been influenced by the

acting of someone who preceded them. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the hypothesis that the acting of great actors does influence and help shape the theatre of a particular time. The acting of David Garrick and Sir Laurence Olivier, who have both been called the greatest actors of the English-speaking world during their times, will be used as examples to show how far-reaching the impact of the actor is upon the theatre of a particular time.
CHAPTER II

THE ACTING OF DAVID GARRICK

Peter Garrick was a member of a French Huguenot family, which had been forced to leave France during the Revocation. He had gone to Rotterdam with his sister and brother, and then to England. After his sister married, and his older brother went to Portugal, Peter Garrick joined the army and became an officer. While stationed in Lichfield, Peter Garrick married Arabella Claugh, the daughter of the choir master in the local cathedral. Their first son, Peter, was born there, but then the family was transferred to Hereford. On February 19, 1717, in Hereford, England, while his parents were on temporary duty, David Garrick drew his first breath. Very shortly thereafter the Garrick family moved back to Lichfield, where young Garrick was to spend most of his early life. Early in his life he proved himself to be a good student with a leaning toward things literary.

Quick and forward Garrick, as a boy, certainly was—his lively, mobile letters prove it—and his memory, that in a few years' time could master twenty leading parts in eight months, must have been exceptional, even when less congenially occupied. At all ages he had strong literary proclivities, and a handy acquaintance with Latin classics.¹

¹Mrs. Clement Parsans, Garrick and His Circle (London, 1906), p. 11.
During his early school years he spent considerable amounts of his time endeavoring to overcome the speech dialect of Lichfield. It was a part of the curriculum of his school to be proficient in good recitation of the leading Greek, Latin, and English authors.

When Garrick was eleven, a troupe of traveling players gave a performance in Lichfield. Garrick was so impressed by the stage and these actors that he got up a play to be presented in the home of one of Lichfield's richest residents. The play he chose for this occasion was *The Recruiting Officer*, in which he played Sergeant Kite. This amateur showing for a few relatives and friends was the first recorded performance of the man who was to become the light of the English stage.

Shortly after this first performance, David Garrick was sent to Lisbon to learn the wine business from his uncle and namesake. During this stay abroad, he distinguished himself most for the witty letters he sent back to England and for the good way he told stories to the wine merchants who were his uncle's friends. Because of financial problems at home, David Garrick returned to Lichfield.

It was Garrick's father's wish that his son should be enrolled in the university, but financial problems did not allow this to happen, so when Mr. Walmesley, in whose home David Garrick had made his first stage appearance, offered to send the young man to London to study with an old friend
of his, the family was delighted. Whether the young man knew
it or not, he would eventually become famous for his acting.
It was probably only accidental that the man in whose home
he first performed was responsible for his journey to London.

David Garrick first arrived in London from his home in
Lichfield in 1737. The purpose of his trip to the big city
was to study law. For about a year he pursued this study
with not too great an interest. In 1738 Garrick came of age
and inherited a thousand pounds from his uncle. With this
amount of money at his disposal, he was able to drop all
pretense of studying for the bar, which had never really
interested him.

With his brother, Peter, David Garrick went into the
wine business, for which he had had some training in Lisbon.
Peter was to remain in Lichfield while David was set up in
London as the company’s representative. The occupation was
quite agreeable to the young Garrick, for he was quite
sociable, and much of the time of a wine merchant was by
necessity spent in coffee houses. He concentrated his bus-
ness calls in the neighborhood of Convent Gardens. This
area was famous for its coffee houses and was the area in
which most of the actors and actresses of London lived.

Garrick had long since been stagestruck, but could not
consider giving vent to his secret desire to go upon the
stage because he was too loyal to his mother to upset and
disgrace her thus. This area of London, filled as it was with actors, had quite an attraction for a young man who liked the theatre as much as Garrick did. One of his favorite spots was the Bedford Coffee-house because most of the people who frequented it were theatre people who came there to discuss their profession and the people in it.

In these congenial surroundings the young wine merchant appeared to advantage. Although he seldom said anything worth repeating, his conversation sounded amusing at the time; probably because he acted, half-unconsciously, all the while he was talking, changing the expression of his face and varying the tone of his voice, turning before the eyes of his listener into the person he was describing. He seemed eager to please everyone, and as his humour had none of the ill nature that gave point to most of the other men's anecdotes, he offended no one.²

As a result of this ability to tell a story and his desire to please everyone, he was soon accepted into the social circle of the theatre people and was welcome both in the coffee houses and behind the scenes in the theatres. Among the actors whom Garrick befriended was a young man named Charles Macklin. Other than their interest in the theatre, the two men had little in common, but they soon became fast friends.

Unlike the easy-going Garrick, Charles Macklin was a man of quick and violent temper. He had rather revolutionary views on acting, which he spouted everywhere, claiming that if managers would only give him a chance, he would reform the

²Margaret Barton, Garrick (New York, 1949), p. 17.
entire tragic stage of the time. Because of his heavy features, Macklin was perfect to play villains, but managers disapproved of his method of acting tragedy and would cast him only in comedy roles.

Macklin had much to say about the acting of his older contemporaries: he complained of the absence of stage discipline, the egotism of the actors in trying to attract attention to themselves by tricks out of keeping with their parts, and at moments when they should have been listening with the audience to some other character in the play; and over and above everything else he detested the worn-out formalism of the tragic stage. The tragedians at that time invested their acting with a solemnity more usually associated with religious worship than the theatre, intended to uplift the audience into a state of aesthetic ecstasy rather than to excite emotion by a realistic portrayal of human suffering.3

The comic scenes in Shakespeare's tragedies were cut so that the audience would not laugh and break the spell the tragic actors had imposed upon the audience. The heroine in all tragedies wore a heavy black hooped dress. No attention was paid to the climate, situation or period of the play. The hero always wore a tall plume of feathers on a powdered periwig. They delivered all their speeches in a monotonous chant with the minimum of stylized gestures.

This style of acting had been introduced into England after the Restoration in imitation of the French contemporary acting. This formalized chanting was fine for the plays of Frenchmen like Racine, and for many of the English plays that

3Ibid., p. 18.
were copies of French writing, but for the plays of Shakespeare it was ridiculous, and much of the contemporary drama was patterned directly after Shakespeare and other Elizabethans. The style, though fine for its time, had lasted too long.

"In 1731 Aaron Hill was already complaining of the actors' 'stage voice, their eternal affectation of forced tone with which they cover and efface the passions they are indeavoring to heighten.'"4

At the time when David Garrick came to London and met Charles Macklin, the opportunities for acting in that city were confined almost entirely to two theatres, Covent Gardens and Drury Lane. Once an actor had proved himself in one role, the other theatre usually would not offer the play because they depended upon the same population for their audience. If one theatre had put forth the best Richard III, the other house did not want to offer a second-best for fear of losing business. The two leading actors of the time were Lacy Ryan, who specialized in tragic lovers and fops at Covent Gardens, and James Quin, who played noble Romans and happy drunkards at Drury Lane. Of these two, almost everyone agreed that James Quin was the better.

No one denied that these men were good in what they were doing. "... during the sixty years or so that the convention lasted many actors had arisen whose genius cannot be

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4 Ibid., p. 20.
doubted; actors whose underlying sincerity gave point to the most mechanical actions and whose voices swayed their audiences. "5 But some people were beginning to say that what the actors were doing, though they were good at it, was not the proper way to act. Aaron Hill wrote in The Prompter, "

The most universal complaint among good judges of the stage is that players are shockingly unnatural. This is laying the axe to the root of the tree, for, if we miss nature, we miss pleasure, our whole expectation from the theatre being that deception which arises from appearance mistaken for reality without which our attention would fly off from the scene, as our eyes from an ill-expressed picture. 6

Hill began his criticism of acting in the 1730's. He wanted more natural, or at least more passionate, acting upon the stage. He blamed much of the fault of acting on the time on vanity. He claimed that the actors were so vain they did not bother to rehearse, nor try to understand the characters they were to portray. They were not even embarrassed by mistakes they made while on the stage. They never used silent acting and never listened or reacted to the other actors on stage with them. He described James Quin as "... puffed, round Mouth, and empty, vagrant Eye, a solemn Stillness of Strut, a swing-swang Slowness in the Motion of the Arm, and

5Ibid., p. 20.
a dry, drawling voice that carries Opium in its detestable Monotony. For his comments he was called a bore, an idiot, and a genius.

Macklin agreed with Hill that the stage needed more *naturalism* and more playing between characters. He was not always able to practice what he preached because of his hatred for James Quin.

Macklin hated Quin with all the intolerance that the innovator in an art habitually displays towards the leading exponent of the orthodox technique. Whenever they were on stage together, Macklin deliberately clowned during Quin's speeches with the result that Quin could not make himself heard through the audience's laughter—an instance of the inartistic behavior that Macklin disapproved of in others.

Because of the friendship that had sprung up between them and because of Macklin's strong personality, David Garrick was quick to accept Macklin's views on acting. Though Garrick was still engaged in the wine business, he spent most of his time going from theatre to theatre, studying and exploring every aspect of the business for which he really longed. One night at Goodman's Fields an actor was suddenly taken ill, and Garrick, who had observed the performance so carefully, went on in his place as Harlequin. No one knew the difference since he wore a mask to cover his face.

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8Barton, op. cit., p. 22.
About this same time Macklin was getting his chance to present his ideas of naturalism upon the stage. He persuaded a friend of his, who was the manager of the Fleetwood Theatre, to revive *The Merchant of Venice*, with Macklin as Shylock. It was the custom of the time to play the character as a creature of low comedy in the funny clothes of a buffoon. Macklin determined secretly to play Shylock seriously and in the historically proper dress, and so he did on February 14, 1741. The audience and the management loved the performance. It was Charles Macklin's triumph, and he lived on it for the rest of his life. He was so impressive that even his enemy, James Quin, said he was a natural-born villain, and King George II could not sleep for the whole night after he saw Macklin's Shylock.

Macklin had made theatrical history. In a single evening he had revived a flagging interest in Shakespeare; he had prepared the audience for Garrick's greater genius in the new naturalistic style, and finally he had given the stage an interpretation of Shylock that held it for over a century—one in which pity played no part.9

In May the theatres of London closed for the summer. Many of the players went into what they called "sharing companies" and toured the provinces. Garrick joined one of these companies under the assumed name of Lyddal. By the end of that summer he had served his apprenticeship and was ready to try his fortune on the London stage. His mother

had since died, and he no longer needed to worry about dis-gracing her by going into the acting profession, of which she had disapproved.

On October 20, 1741, David Garrick wrote to his brother and partner in the wine business, Peter:

I have made an Exact Estimate of my Stock of wine, and what money I have out at Interest, and find that since I have been a wine Merchant I have run out near four hundred pounds. And trade not increasing I was very sensible some way must be thought of to redeem it. My mind (as you must know) has been always inclin'd to the Stage, say strongly that all my illness and lowness of Spirits was owing to my want of resolution to tell you by thoughts when here. Finding at last both my Inclination and Interest requir'd some new way of Life I have chosen the most agreeable to myself and, tho I know you will be much displeas'd at me, yet I hope when you find that I have the genius of an actor without the vices you will think less severely of me and not be ashamed to own me as a Brother.

I am willing to agree to anything you propose about the wine. I will take a thorough survey of the vaults and, making what you have at Lichfield part of the stock, will either send you your share or any other way you propose. Last night I play'd Richard the Third to the surprise of Everybody and as I shall make very near £300 per annum by it, and as it is really what I doat upon, I am Resolved to pursue it.10

On October 19, 1741, just eight months after Macklin's success as Shylock, David Garrick had made his debut in Cibber's version of Shakespeare's Richard III. He was an immediate success.

His forcible style in speaking and acting, at first threw the critics into some hesitation

10Ibid., p. 32.
concerning the novelty as well as the propriety of his manner. They had been long accustomed to an elevation of the voice, with a sudden mechanical depression of its tones, calculated to excite admiration, and to intrap applause. But after Garrick had gone through a variety of scenes, in which he gave evident proofs of consummate art, and perfect knowledge of character, their doubts were turned to surprise and astonishment. Garrick's triumph at the age of twenty-four was immediate, the most extraordinary and great that was ever known. All London went 'horn-mad after him.'

Because of Garrick's success and popularity, the two patented theatres, Covent Gardens and Drury Lane, began to lose money since everyone in London was traveling to Goodman's Fields to see the new, more natural style of acting with which Garrick seemed to be revolutionizing the theatre. The fact that he took nature as his model was from the beginning the most distinguishing feature of his style. Early in 1742, a writer for The Champion observed that feature of Garrick's acting and gave a good contrast between Garrick's acting and that of his rivals.

His Voice is clear and piercing, perfectly sweet and harmonious, without Monotony, Drawling, or Affec
tation; it is capable of all the various Passions, which the Heart of Man is agitated with, and the Genius of Shakespeare can describe; it is neither whining, bellowing, or grumpling, but in whatever Character he assimulates perfectly easy in its Transitions, natural in its Cadence, and beautiful in its Elocution. He is not less happy in his Mien and gait, in which he is neither strutting or mincing, neither stiff nor slouching. When three or four are on the stage with him, he is attentive to whatever is spoke, and never drops his character when he has finish'd a Speech, by

11Duer, op. cit., p. 225.
either looking contemptuously on an inferior Performer, unnecessary spitting, or suffering his eyes to wander thro' the whole Circle of Spectators. His action corresponds with the voice, and both with the character he is to play; it is never superfluous, awkward, or too frequently repeated, but graceful, decent, and various... The best and only Model is Nature of which Mr. Garrick is as fine a copy as he is of the players he imitates.¹²

Garrick's name became synonymous with the new, natural style of acting, but just as he was to influence many actors of his own time and the future, there were people who had influenced him to revolt against the currently dominant style of acting. There was more to the development of his new style than just the fact that a young wine merchant decided to become an actor and revolutionize the stage.

Aaron Hill had been criticizing acting for about ten years. Macklin had begun trying to introduce nature to acting since 1725, when he had played somewhat unsuccessfully at Lincoln's Inn Fields. "The character he first appeared in was that of Alexander in Oedipus, in which he spoke with so little of the then tragic cadence that the manager was not satisfied, and a separation in consequence soon took place."¹³

Macklin was undaunted, and, before Garrick made his debut, Macklin had risen to a position of some esteem as both


¹³Ibid., p. 34.
actor and coach. Giffard, who was manager of the company with which Garrick toured during the summer of 1741, and was also Manager of Goodman's Fields, also advocated more of nature on the stage.

With these kindred spirits he frequently lamented the condition to which the stage was reduced, where nature was wholly ignored, and false principles of art supplied its place... Macklin would call to mind his dismissal for speaking a part too familiarly, and his recent success in playing Shylock with realism; and Giffard was of the opinion that the town submitted to the present school of acting merely for want of knowing better.  

So, there had been men before Garrick who were also in favor of reform in current trends in acting. Thus, ideas were passed to Garrick and through no selfish motives of his own did he receive more than his share of the credit. His talent overwhelmed theirs, and, therefore, the credit seemed naturally to go to the biggest man.

So, by precept, protest, and example Macklin fought vigorously for Nature, against the prevalent stilted artificiality which Aaron Hill had also denounced much earlier. Both of these men deserve to be better known and more highly appreciated. In advance of their time they strove to reform and to have Nature recognized as the basis of acting; they advocated the establishment of an academy of acting and a school of the theatre; but they were not accorded credit generally for their innovations and influence because when the effects of their teaching and practice were realized a more spectacular star, David Garrick, obscured everything but his own conspicuous success.  

14 Ibid., p. 35.  
15 Ibid., p. 36.
He made his debut at a perfect time because the trumpet of discord had been often enough sounded to have made an impression upon the public. They were ready to accept his new style of acting, and his showmanship made him the proper person to give it to them. While Macklin had been able to achieve glory only in his performance of Shylock, before Garrick's first London season was finished, he had introduced successfully nineteen roles in which Nature was his model.

After Garrick's first successful season in London, he went to Dublin for a season. Quin soon followed to play at an opposing theatre. He wanted to prove that his style of acting was still the best and favorite of people everywhere. He lost the battle, for Garrick became the idol of Dublin. Soon he returned to London, where he was signed to play at Covent Garden in the same company with Quin. Now the real battle between the two styles was to take place.

They played opposite each other in a play called The Fair Penitent, Garrick playing Lathario and Quin Horatio. Quin knew it was a duel for the championship with no holds barred. He was very nervous. Garrick noticed this and commented, "I believe Quin is as much frightened as I am." The play began and the two contrasted actors played against each other—the old style versus the new. It was the audience who chose the victor. The verdict came in a scene where Garrick had to hurl a challenge at Quin. He did so, in his quick incisive style. Quin summoned his forces and went into one of his long, impressive pauses. So long was he that a voice from the gallery was heard calling, "Aren't you going to answer the gentleman?" Quin knew he had lost. He made his reply—in his best manner—"I...will...meet... thee...there..." But he knew he no longer led
the stage. David Garrick now wore his crown. The year was 1746.  

James Quin retired from the stage and went to live in Bath, but he soon grew tired of his idleness. He eventually returned to London to work at Drury Lane under the management of David Garrick. They became good friends and often ate together after productions in which they both performed. When Quin died, Garrick wrote the epitaph for his tomb.

Garrick's acting was marked by versatility, a thing uncommon to the stage during the period immediately preceding him. "The thing that strikes me above all others," a fan wrote him, "is that variety in your acting, and your being so totally a different man in Lear from what you are in Richard. There is a sameness in every other actor."  

Vitality or energy was also important to the success of his acting. He was always lively in his delivery of lines and was active and busy all the time he was on stage. He was sometimes criticized, especially by Macklin, for being too active.

Also important to his success at acting was his desire for truth. He wanted his roles to seem true to life, and to gain this he studied carefully the nature of man, which he endeavored to portray on the stage.

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17 Dieser, op. cit., p. 225.
In *Hamlet*, for example--first acted at Dublin in 1742 and at London in November, 1743--Garrick always seemed "to be engaged in a succession of affecting situations; not giving utterance to a speech, but to the instantaneous expression of his feelings, delivered in the most affecting tones of voice, and with gestures that belong only to nature. And in preparing the role of Lear he carefully studied the behavior of a man who'd lost his mind. "There it was," he said, "that I learned to imitate madness; I copied nature and to that owed my success..."  

By 1750 the supremacy of Garrick's style of acting was well-established. The audiences of London wanted nothing but natural acting on the stage. The sing-song declamation exemplified by Quin was completely out of favor. Garrick had made the point that actors should not produce theatrical oratory, but should turn to nature for the example for the interpretation of their roles. Though acting was called natural, it was not a slice of life. It was amplified nature.

Garrick didn't write or talk much about acting (actors can overdo that); he performed. He read more naturally than most of his predecessors--although with much heightening in tragedy and some in comedy where, according to many, he especially excelled. Declamation, Garrick said, "revolts my nature, does not please my judgement." He objected, for instance, to "the harmony of Racine's verses" because it "necessitates a sort of sing-song..."  

Garrick proved his point by demonstrating his powers of impersonation. He wanted his acting to be an impersonation of a character the public had come to see. He wanted the

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audience to forget he was David Garrick. Rather, he wanted
the audience to think they were watching Lear, Hamlet, Mac-
beth, or whoever the character may have been.

And "all the changes which take place in his features
come from the manner in which his deepest feelings
work." Sainte-Albine might have phrased that
tribute. Macklin, of course, diluted it by re-
marking that Garrick's "mind was busied" only "upon
external . . . partial imitation of individuals . . ."

Maybe so. Garrick didn't attempt to copy
ordinary human beings, to be simply realistic. He
didn't "imitate nature, but modeled himself on an
ideal personage who, in the particular situation,
would be affected in the highest degree by the
emotions of the movement." "If you act only
according to your own standard," he said, "or
indeed according to the most perfect natural model
that exists, you will never be more than mediocre."
Garrick, in other words, imagined terms of his
medium, in accordance with art.20

Throughout his career audiences and critics were impressed
with his ability to make rapid changes of emotion. Some
people have claimed that he did this only to impress the
audiences and to gain their approval. "His strength in pan-
tomime led him into the temptation not only when it was not
really necessary, but to contrive transitions--again not
strictly called for by the text--in which he could entrap
applause by the virtuosity of his swift change of stance and
attitude--his expression of tone and voice, changing at the
same time."21 For the most part, though, audiences and
critics thought his expressiveness and quick transitions

20 Ibid., p. 247.

made up a great part of Garrick's genius for which they loved him.

It was this expressive mobility of feature and piercing quality of eye which made possible the famous transitions, so much more affecting and rapid than those of Booth. In Lear, Gentleman wrote of Garrick, "We plainly perceive the elementary conflict re-imagined in his distracted looks, while the eyes are also feasted by a succession of expressive, striking attitudes." The secret of these justly famous transitions lay in his intense mimetic power, which made use of eyes, face and whole body to express accurately, picturesquely and clearly the change from one emotion to another.22

Garrick was the master of impersonation and mime, and he agreed with Aaron Hill that imagination was all-important to an actor. Hill wrote about it while Garrick practiced it.

Hill, too, emphasized that what mattered most was imagination, which has to be compelled to conceive the idea of the passion, and then be bound down to suppose that the actor is the character feeling the particular emotion in the particular circumstances. His theory was in agreement with the practice of Garrick. . . Garrick, like Booth, was a master of what Hill called "an association or adaption of his look to his voice." He outshone all others not only in the strength of his imaginative identification but in the superb technique by means of which he expressed what he was imagining.23

Though Garrick was not entirely responsible for the reformation in acting during his time, he certainly was responsible for making the new style popular. Aaron Hill and Charles Macklin had wanted reformation, but they were not strong enough to make it happen. Garrick was. He made the

22 Ibid., p. 109.
23 Ibid., p. 128.
audiences want nothing but his kind of acting. He was able
to do this because he was a great actor.

Few actors have earned such lengthy eulogies as
Garrick but alas, most are pure panegyric. One of
the most concise is perhaps the most revealing.
Kitty Clive was watching him from the wings, still
smarting from some rebuke that had exasperated her:
"Damn him, he could act a grid-iron." (A grid-iron
was the very solid wooden structure above the stage
from which scenery was suspended.) What distin-
guishes him most from his rivals in all ages is that
he was as supreme in comedy as in tragedy.24

Because of the popularity that Garrick's acting had
gained with the public and critics, he was able to institute
several new ideas to the theatre. Among the first of the
things David Garrick wanted to change was the old and accepted
habit of rewriting the plays of Shakespeare to fit the various
times or actor's talents. When in 1744 Garrick announced
that his first play of the season would be Macbeth as written
by Shakespeare, many people, including Charles Macklin, were
shocked that that to which they were accustomed was not the
work of Shakespeare.

"What does he mean?" asked Macklin. "Don't I play
Macbeth as written by Shakespeare?" And it came
as a surprise to many besides Quin that the Macbeth
to which they were accustomed was not Shakespeare's
but a Restoration version by Sir William Davenport.
He had rewritten many of the scenes, and, with
some lively singing by three comic witches and
dancing by the Furies, the play was almost as
diverting as an opera.25

p. 93.

25Barton, op. cit., p. 61.
Garrick did intend to do Macbeth exactly as Shakespeare had written it, but he did leave some of Davenport's alterations in the text, he cut a few scenes, and added a long death-speech for himself, since that was what audiences liked best to see him do. Garrick's version was, however, much closer to Shakespeare and more tasteful than Davenport's.

He attempted to restore other Shakespearean plays to their original text, but he seemed too influenced by the mode of the time and would cut, change and add in order to make the plays more actable for the taste of the time.

Garrick regarded himself as a supreme purist in the matter of restoring an uncorrupted Shakespeare text, claiming that he 'lost no drop of that immortal man'... Among his 'improvements' to the Shakespeare plays may be noticed the crowding out of Bottom and the rustics from The Dream to permit the addition of twenty-five songs to Shakespeare's modest three. His version of Hamlet 'rescued that noble play from all the rubbish of the fifth act.' Out went the grave diggers, the fencing match, the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the death of Ophelia, the poisoning of the Queen (led out, mad from remorse, instead). This left him a clear stage to die heroically and at a greater length than the parsimonious Shakespeare had envisioned.

Perhaps he made these changes out of a feeling that these changes would make the plays act well and be better received by the audiences of the time. It was said of Garrick's writing, "With an almost unerring sense of what would act well, he learnt how to mould his material into entertainment that moved swiftly and smoothly. . . ."27 He certainly

26 Clunes, op. cit., p. 92.  
understood that audiences appreciated the way he played a long, agonizing death scene and gave them one as often as possible. Whether he actually was successful or not at restoring Shakespeare's plays to their original form, he did sense that the translations being used were inferior and he made an attempt to return to the original. While he was working in this more nearly Shakespearean production of Macbeth, he was disappointed in the acting of the other players. He felt he was not getting enough response from the other players. This he was not able to do anything about until after he became manager of Drury Lane.

Garrick became manager of Drury Lane in 1747, and was full of ideas for reform in the theatre. It had been the practice in the past for managers to supervise rehearsals only in so much as to be sure the actors were letter-perfect in their lines. What they did when it was not their turn to speak on stage, he did not care. As a result, it was not uncommon for these ill-rehearsed plays to be a series of recitations, rather than real plays. Once one actor finished his speech, he might step back to the edge of the stage to chat with a friend in one of the boxes until time for him to speak again. This did not bother the stars at all because when they stepped forward, their recitals seemed all the grander. The casts were usually composed of one or two stars and quite inferior people in the supporting roles. In Garrick's
first season at Drury Lane, he assembled what might be called an all-star cast.

With Mrs. Cibber and Mrs. Pritchard for tragedy, and Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Woffington for comedy Garrick had secured the four outstanding actresses of the day. To alternate with himself in the lead, he chose Barry, the only rival he was ever to know in tragedy, and to support them he engaged Macklin, Havard, Yates, Delane, Sparks, and Shuter, all competent and experienced actors, many of whom were to be re-engaged every season. From this company—the strongest ever known in the history of the stage—only two stars were missing.28

The two missing stars were Woodward, who was already engaged for the season in Dublin but came the next season to join Garrick's company, and Quin, who had retired to Bath. He later came out of retirement to join Garrick at Drury Lane.

Garrick imposed new rehearsal rules and even penalized actors who forgot lines during a performance or tried to cover their mistakes by gagging. He began the habit of paying attention to casting, rather than handing out parts indiscriminately, as had been the custom before him. He tried to give parts to people who were best-suited for them, both in talent and appearance.

He discouraged intoning and taught his actors to speak accurately and as naturally as was compatible with the emphatic style of acting he had made his own. Before putting a new play into rehearsal, he would read it through to the assembled company, imparting so much interest to the minor roles that actors who would have scornfully refused them had they seen their few lines on paper were hoodwinked into accepting them. It cannot be said that Garrick

28 H. M. A., p. 86.
fulfilled all the functions of the modern producer, but in the plays he rehearsed he achieved greater unity of effect than had hitherto been seen on the stage.29

Through these more rigid rehearsals and more attention to casting, Garrick hoped to establish a sense of ensemble acting on the English stage. He had first really become upset with this during the performances of his "restored" Macbeth when he felt he was not getting the proper response from the other actors, particularly Lady Macbeth. He further helped solve this problem by stressing the importance of the minor roles in plays. Garrick wanted all the actors to feel their parts were vital to the production, and that when the leading actors were not speaking, they should engage in silent acting and listen and react in character. To gain what he wanted, Garrick had to work hard and work the others of the company even harder.

Not the least vexations of his leading ladies was Kitty Clive but her generous letter to him when he eventually retired gives a vivid picture of his reign. "In the height of the public admiration for you . . . when they were admiring everything you did . . . I was a living witness that they did not know, nor could they be sensible of half your perfections. I have seen you with your magic hammer in your hand, endeavoring to beat your ideas into the heads of creatures who had none of their own. I have seen you, with lamblike patience, endeavoring to make them comprehend you; and I have seen your lamb turned into a lion, by this your great labour and pains, the public was entertained; they thought they all acted very fine; they did not see you pull the wires."30

29 Ibid. 30 Glumes, op. cit., p. 99.
Here is another reason why Garrick was able to make his new style of acting popular in all kinds of parts, while Macklin could only succeed in one role. Garrick was not content, as was Macklin, to talk and argue about the theory of acting. Garrick put his theory into practice and then insisted that those around him not just listen to his preachings but also practice them regardless of the amount of work it took to achieve the desired effect.

Garrick's ideas for change in the theatre went beyond changing the style of acting. He wanted changes in costuming, lighting, scenery and audience-to-actor relations. All these innovations he attacked with a vigor equal to that he employed in his stage characterizations.

Garrick attempted to costume plays according to the period in which the action was supposed to have happened. He thought it important that the costume be, not only of the proper period, but appropriate to the character the actor was playing.

Garrick imported the scenic artist de Loutherbourg from the European continent to add realistic fires, volcanoes in eruption and dramatic cloud effects to make the pantomimes more lively. He introduced the use of built-up settings to replace the old formal clothes and wings that had been in vogue. He also introduced reforms in stage lighting.
Prior to Garrick's innovations there had been three main sources of light for the stage. There were rings of candles hanging from the roof over the apron. These were in no way shielded and must have caused quite bad eye strain for both actors and audiences. On either side of the proscenium there were sets of wall brackets, which probably gave no real help in lighting the stage. There were also footlights in a trough around the edge of the stage. After a trip to Europe in 1765, Garrick worked with Jean Monnet, the director of the Opera Comique, to bring better lighting to the English stage. Monnet wrote him,

I have carried out your two commissions, and with M. Boquet's designs I will send you a reflector and two different samples of the lamp you want for the footlights at your theatre. There are two kinds of reflectors: those that are placed in a niche in the wall and which have one wick; and those which are hung up like a chandelier, and have five. . . . As to the lamps for lighting your stage, they are of two kinds; some are of earthenware, and in biscuit form; they have six or eight wicks, and you put oil in them; the others are of tin, in the shape of a candle, with a spring, and you put candles in them.31

Besides introducing new lighting fixtures to the English stage, Garrick rearranged the placement of these lights. His new arrangement took the center of light from the apron to behind the proscenium arch, thus beginning a separation of actor and audience. "And above all, it meant that the basis was now provided for more elaborate, more easily controlled,

more pleasing, and more realistic effects. The path was being opened up which the theatre was to tread in the following century."32

Moving the action behind the proscenium helped to eliminate the importance of the apron to performing. Since the bulk of the light had been on the apron, naturally, much of the action took place there. By this move and the separation of actor and audience, Garrick was able to instigate another of his reforms. The audience had become a part of the group on stage. Tate Wilkinson wrote of what it was like.

Suppose an audience behind the curtain up to the clouds, with persons of a menial cast on the ground, beaux and no-beaux crowding the only entrance, what a play it must have been whenever Romeo was breaking open the supposed tomb, which was no more than a screen on those nights set up, and Mrs. Cibber prostrating herself on an old black couch, covered with black cloth, as the tomb of the Capulets, with at least (on a great benefit-night) two hundred persons behind her, which formed the background... a performer on a popular night could not step his foot with safety, lest he either should thereby hurt or offend, or be thrown down amongst scores of idle, tipsy apprentices.33

Actors had depended on these people on the stage to pay for their benefit nights, but Garrick was upset by their being on the stage. The extra people interfered too much with the action of the play. Garrick wanted the stage free for the play. So he banished the audience from the stage.

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32Ibid., p. 129.
33Glunes, op. cit., p. 99.
He was able to make the loss up to the actors by enlarging the size of the audience area. The people who had enjoyed sitting on the stage resented being moved from their usual perches and almost rioted. Garrick had to put an iron barrier across the front of the stage to keep the people from moving their seats back on the stage. He wrote many articles for newspapers and made several curtain speeches, saying this was necessary to present realism effectively, in order to convince the audience he was correct in removing them from the stage. Garrick also abolished the audience's right to sample the play and then demand their money back at the end of the first act. He tried to stop the habit of entering after the beginning of the third act for half price, but he gave up this reform when riots broke out in the theatre and street.

With all his reforms, Garrick was successful, except in his choice of new plays and in his writing of plays. "It would be pleasant to record that Garrick extended his reforms to choosing better new plays—but such was not the case. Though his own ephemeral writings, his odd verses, prologues and epilogues are not without distinction, his own plays and those he chose are little better than run-of-the-mill." 34

For this one shortcoming surely David Garrick can be forgiven because of the many things he did for the theatre of his time. All the reforms and innovations he brought to

34 Ibid., p. 100.
the theatre were made possible by the power and impact of his acting. The theatre and audiences were surely grateful and impressed by the changes he made, but they were most grateful and impressed because of the acting he gave to them. So impressive was David Garrick's acting that the following was written in *The Theatrical Review or Annals of the Drama* in 1763.

To these (i.e. the superior genius and understanding of Mr. Garrick) it is that we are indebted for the entertainment we receive from the variety of character he represents; a round, far more extensive, than is recorded in history of any other performer. In less judicious ages, actors have been extolled for the greatness of their merit, though their superiority consisted in nothing more than a single character. In more refined ones, he has been thought sufficiently great, who was excellent in five or six tragedy or comedy parts, (for they seldom extend to both) tolerable in a few others, and barely sufferable in the remainder. Alleyn was a great actor; but we have no absolute certainty of eminence but in comedy--Moohn and Hart were chiefly confined to the buskin--Nokes and Leigh to the sock--Betterton indeed rises much higher; he was eminent in almost every cast of tragedy, and highly excellent in comedy, but not at all in the low and outre of the vis comica--Booth shone superior to all in the majestic and dignified walks of Melpomene, but was by no means considerable in the humorous paths of Thalia.--Wiis in the airy and genteel, and Cibber in the insignificant and ludicrous, of the latter, were incomparable; but nothing but their names alone could tolerate their appearance in the former. We need not descend to later times; let the judicious reader compare these instances (drawn, we hope, with candour and impartiality) with the extensive powers of our modern Roscius, and then decree the palm where he shall think it most equitably due.35

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If the public or critics of his time found any fault with him it was forgiven because of his excellence. "Upon a review of the whole, we will venture to affirm, that impartial Justice must pronounce Mr. Garrick as the first of his Profession; and that the amazing Blaze of his Excellencies, greatly obscures, if not totally eclipses his Defects." 

Garrick retained his popularity until his retirement after a long career. When he died, he received very kind words from Dr. Johnson, who had been a life-long friend, but one of Garrick's severest critics.

Garrick retired in 1776 after a series of farewell performances of his greatest roles that moved the town to a hysteria of adulation. On his death he was buried in Westminster Abbey and earned from Dr. Johnson the enviable epitaph: "I am disappointed by that stroke of death which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure." 

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36 Ibid., p. 50.

37 Glunes, op. cit., p. 100.
On May 22, 1907, the third son of Agnes and Gerald Olivier was born in Darking, England. Gerald Olivier, whose family escaped France through Holland to gain religious freedom, was an Episcopal minister, and, therefore, his family moved often. Because of these frequent moves, Laurence, the third son, remembers few of his childhood homes.

By the time Laurence was five, he had grown accustomed to moving and had learned to entertain himself with one of the few things that moved with them, his father's religious ceremonies. He would use his bed covers as his vestments to perform the rituals in front of a toy altar in his bedroom. He often dragged in new neighbor children to serve as his congregation. When he was not playing priest, he occupied himself by conducting trains by lining up groups of chairs. He became part of the train by mimicking all the sounds the train should make.

When he was seven, young Olivier made his first stage by putting a large storage box in front of his bedroom window so that he could pull the window drapes around it. He later added a row of candles, hidden behind cocoa boxes around the edge of the stage to use as footlights. Sometimes he would
persuade his brother, Dickie, to act with him, but if Dickie were not available, Laurence was perfectly willing to play all the parts. It was of the same little importance to have an audience. If an audience of the family became available, that was fine. If not, he was content to perform for the sake of performing.

When he was nine years old, Laurence saw his first professional play, *Babes in the Wood*, at Drury Lane. He was overwhelmed by the aura of the stage. Back at his school that same year, he was cast as Brutus in the school's production of *Julius Caesar*. For some reason, Ellen Terry came to see the performance and liked it so much that she returned the second night. After the play, she went backstage to congratulate the performers.

She had a special embrace for the somewhat embarrassed Laurence whom she startled by asking: "Oh, don't you love it--don't you love the words?" ... The subsequent comments on Laurence's performance which she recorded in her diary were charged with prophecy. "The small boy who played Brutus," she wrote, "is already a great actor."\(^1\)

One reason for his success may have been that his teacher, Geoffrey Heald, was something of an amateur actor himself, and even in classroom recitations had always insisted on good diction and cadence of speech from his pupils. When Laurence left this school for St. Edward's, Oxford, he was extremely

unhappy. He had been so accustomed to moving that he had never really made friends, and he took no part in group activities at the school. The only time he seemed happy was when he was alone, or when he could slip away from school and go to London's theatres.

For the Christmas vacation Laurence went to the new house where his father, brother and sister were living. His mother had died suddenly during that year. During this holiday Dickie left to take a job on a plantation in India. Laurence was brokenhearted at the idea of being separated from his brother so long. He had always thought that his father wanted him to enter the ministry, but he had no heart for such a career and determined to follow his brother to India as soon as age would allow him.

When he told his father of his plans, Laurence could not have been more shocked by the answer from his father. "Don't you be a fool, Kim," said his father, using the nickname by which Laurence was known to his family. "You are going on the stage." Unknown to Laurence, his father had spent considerable time thinking about his son's career and had already decided he should go to study with Elsie Fogerty at her dramatic school in London. So, in 1924, Laurence Olivier left St. Edward's and went to London to begin his study for the stage.

\[2\text{Ibid., p. 31.}\]
Laurence Olivier was given a small scholarship during his stay at Miss Fogerty's dramatic school. Miss Fogerty's ideas about acting were somewhat out-of-date, but she was well-recognized because of her work in speech training for her students. When Olivier first auditioned for her, Miss Fogerty told him he had a problem area in the center of his face.

Olivier, given to frowning and eye-rolling, knew that she spoke the truth—that he was, in fact, badly self-conscious about that part of his face. His hair at that time came far forward; his eyebrows, thick and long, almost met; the whole effect was of a small, lowering brow. He soon shaved the eyebrows and time looked after the widow's peak, but he has never been quite sure whether his much-remarked addiction to false noses is not an attempt to conceal a weakness in the centre of his face of which he is subconsciously afraid.3

While Olivier was attending Miss Fogerty's dramatic school, he won the Dawson Millward Cup for being the school's best actor. After graduation, he found that this honor did little to get him parts, and for some time he nearly starved—playing walk-ons and acting as assistant stage manager for various touring companies. By working hard in these small jobs, he began to get promotions to slightly larger parts and began to get some recognition for his acting. "What he lacked in authority he made up for in his speaking of the verse. 'Sincerity,' the word used so much of his Malcolm, was widely applied to his Harold. It was a word destined to have a considerable influence on his career."4

3Ibid., p. 35. 4Ibid., p. 52.
While Olivier was appearing in a small part in a modern-dress version of *Taming of the Shrew*, he grew a moustache because he heard that the producer of *Beau Geste* was looking for a virile, moustached young man to play the lead in that upcoming play. The producer felt that manly young actors were rare in England and, therefore, found the part difficult to cast. Olivier determined that he was right for the part and that he should play it.

Before he was contacted about *Beau Geste*, Olivier went into the lead of *Bird in Hand*, which lasted for almost a year. While playing in this, he was asked by the Stage Society to appear in a special matinee of a war play, *Journey's End*. Olivier did not much like the play, and though he and the play got good reviews, he decided to leave it when it went into a regular run in London's West End. Basil Dean, the producer of *Beau Geste*, saw *Journey's End* and asked Olivier to do *Beau Geste*. Olivier accepted happily. The play failed, but Olivier became accepted as a good leading man. Still his bad choice of plays persisted, and he accepted another series of parts in ill-fated plays.

Just when all seemed to be going wrong, Noel Coward offered Olivier the second lead in his production of *Private Lives*. Olivier was skeptical about it but decided it would be wise to play in a success for a change. The play was successful, but short-lived because Coward wanted to close
it in London and take it to New York. Olivier went with it in order to see New York.

From the New York run, Olivier was asked to go to Hollywood. He did nad made several movies which he considered very bad. Nonetheless, he made a good deal of money. He decided to return to London, where Noel Coward offered him a part in Theatre Royal. Olivier took the role and played the swashbuckling hero to the hilt. He was so enthusiastic that in a grand leap one night he broke his ankle.

His next venture was a play he had bought the rights to, The Ringmaster. The leading character was a cripple confined to a wheelchair and so was Olivier. The play was not a success, but by the time it closed Olivier was firmly established as a leading actor and a personality of the London theatre.

He was able to get the rights to produce and star in Golden Arrow. He had often felt frustrated as an actor by rehearsal methods. This was his first chance to introduce his new ideas to the rehearsing of a play.

He considered that during early rehearsals many producers tended to devote too much time to getting inflections exactly right, and trying out different moves experimentally. As an actor, groping with a part in its early stages, he had always found such hold-ups and indecision infuriating. So, with Helen Hayes, Cecil Parker, Denys Blakelock and the rest of the cast, he began rehearsals at the Whitehall by "setting" the moves for each act, right or wrong, and sticking to them. On the first day there was a reading. On each of the next three days they went right through one act. On
the fifth day they ran through the whole play. By this method he gave his actors a more or less rigid pattern to follow as well as giving himself a chance to see the play as a whole. Much of this pattern was clumsy and obviously wrong, but he didn't worry about that. Having got the play set, and given the actors an opportunity to "find" their characters (unworried by interjections and changes on his part), he then had something to change from or to build upon, when, at later rehearsals, he came to overhaul moves, business, and the reading of the lines.\(^5\)

The play was not successful, but Olivier became convinced his was the best way to rehearse a play. He was to return to this method in every play he produced thereafter. Because the play was shortlived, Olivier once again found himself unemployed.

At this particular time, drama was in a bad way in England. During World War I writers had turned out an amazing amount of trivia to entertain soldiers. After the war the theatres continued to feature this sort of play. George Bernard Shaw became so upset with the state of the theatre that he published *Heartbreak House* without bothering to have it performed.

The classics were little in demand. The Old Vic was about the only place one could see them done well. The salaries were small, but the idea of appearing in the classics appealed to actors of merit. Also, there was the knowledge that they would be maintained for the entire season and get

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 88.
to act with good performers. It was here that John Gielgud
gained his reputation. He had refused to spend his time in
the trivia being turned out by most of the theatres. During
his time at the Old Vic he learned much about the position
of actor-manager from Harcourt Williams.

After this training, Gielgud decided to take up producing.
He chose Hamlet as his first venture for 1934. He played
the lead and surprised everyone by making the play popular.
It had the second longest run on record.

In the autumn of 1935, John Gielgud announced that he
was going to produce Romeo and Juliet, and that he was going
to alternate the parts of Romeo and Mercutio with Laurence
Olivier. John Gielgud was London's most popular actor at
the time, and Olivier was on the rise. People looked upon
this production as an attempt by Olivier to try to unseat
Gielgud from his throne of popularity. Actually, no such
competition was in the mind of either actor, although they
disagreed on the interpretation of Romeo.

Gielgud was a romantic actor brought up in a more tra-
ditional school than Olivier, and he believed the play was
first and foremost a poem. Gielgud wanted to do nothing to
take away from the beauty of the play's poetry. Olivier was
more concerned with characterization than poetry. Olivier
thought that too much attention to poetry made the play,
especially the balcony scene, seem like an operatic duet.
Gielgud was afraid of too much realism and was afraid that Olivier's interpretation was going to receive disastrous responses from critics and audiences. He was correct.

The reception was exactly what Gielgud had expected. Most of the critics and a large number of the public were bewildered by the unconventional Romeo, and disliked the interpretation. Strung together, the adverse opinions of the first night critics formed a damning halter. Temperamentally ill-at-ease... a ranting, roaring Romeo... his blank verse is the blankest I have ever heard... efficient rather than inspiring... matter-of-fact in his methods... one misses the height of rapture and distress... approaches the mighty lines gingerly... one wanted over and over again to stop the performance and tell the actor he couldn't, just couldn't rush this or that passage... lacks poetry and more important, authority... instead of being romantic he is prosaic... plays Romeo as though he were riding a motor-bike...6

This was the kind of criticism he received for his first major Shakespearian performance. He was naturally upset and despondent, but soon his spirits began to be lifted by letters from people whose opinion he respected.

The very next day a note came round from Margaret Webster: "Very dear Larry, never mind the critics—what do they know about it? I found your Romeo full of passion, sincerity and beauty." Most of the appreciation he received during the six weeks he was playing Romeo was from other actors and members of the profession who forgave the shortcomings because of their admiration for the ideas behind them. Tyrone Guthrie, whom he did not then know at all well, wrote to say: "This is Fan Mail! Have been deeply thrilled and moved by R. and J. and especially with your Romeo. I believe the critics are right who fault you for not getting full value out of the verse. I didn't feel this at the theatre but thinking it over as I go to bed now

6Ibid., p. 91.
I believe it's true. But it doesn't matter. Your performance had such terrific vitality--speed and intelligence and gusto and muscularity--and you got a lyric quality pictorially if not musically. It has been a very exciting evening."

Olivier was still perplexed over the reception of his Romeo when rehearsals for the switch to Mercutio came along. He wrote his friend, Ralph Richardson for advice about the role. Richardson was playing the same part in New York, and Olivier respected his acting very much. Richardson wrote Olivier, describing his performance of Mercutio, and Olivier liked some of what he read. He decided to make Mercutio all dash and swagger. Again Gielgud was worried about the interpretation and the effect the critical response might have on Olivier. He need not have worried, for the audiences loved Olivier's Mercutio.

From his first entrance Olivier took the house. It seemed to one member of the cast that the audience was, unpredictably, for him--just as six weeks before it had been antagonistic. The audience loved his pantomime and applauded his business with Edith Evans, as the nurse. He could do no wrong.

Olivier's ideas of performing in a Shakespearian play differed from Gielgud's, and they argued about them during rehearsals. Neither was able to persuade the other that he was correct. Each did the roles as he saw fit. The audience and critics were not willing to accept Olivier's Romeo, but

7Ibid., p. 92.
8Ibid., p. 94.
they were willing to accept his ideas of Mercutio. These performances made of him even more of a star and theatre personality of controversy, but it was not until 1937 that his greatness was really established.

Whether Olivier and Gielgud wanted it or not, their performances started a comparison of their acting. The idea was for years to decide which of them was England's greatest actor. James Agate wrote in a letter to Vivien Leigh in 1945 that he thought her husband was becoming a great actor, and in October of 1946, Agate wrote the following of Gielgud and Olivier.

The editor of a theatrical magazine having asked which I consider the better actor, Olivier or Gielgud, I sent him this letter:

Queen Alexandria Mansions
Grape Street, W. C. 2
October 9, 1946

Dear Sir,

Many years ago I asked my ancient caddie at St. Andrews which was the better golfer, young Tom Morris or Bobby Jones. He looked at me distastefully and said, "Baith o' them played pairfect gowf!"

Yours faithfully,

James Agate

If Agate was unwilling to say which he considered the better, he was willing to say there had been no great actors

in England since Sir Henry Irving. Other critics disagreed with him. Leslie Stokes wrote,

If we may believe the remembered early judgements of one of our more aged critics, there had been no great English actor since Irving. It is the early judgement which is in doubt, for we may check his current estimates of contemporary actors by a visit to the theatre, but we shall never know for certain whether some of the beauty of those performances witnessed so long ago did not lie in the young eyes of the beholder. The greatness of an actor cannot be measured exactly, like the speed of an athlete, but only by comparison with his rivals, as the skill of a boxer is measured against that of his opponent. We can, however, award the championship.

The present champion of the English theatre is Laurence Olivier, who wrestled the title from John Gielgud with his performance in Richard III, during the last Old Vic season.¹⁰

Even John Gielgud made a comparison of their performances in Romeo and Juliet.

"Larry had a great advantage over me in his commanding vitality, striking looks, brilliant humor and passionate directness. In addition he was a fine fencer, and his breathtaking fight with Tybalt was a superb prelude to his death scene as Mercutio. As Romeo, his love scenes were instantly real and tender, and his tragic gift profoundly touching... I had an advantage over him in my familiarity with the verse, and in the fact that the production was of my own devising, so that all the scenes were arranged just as I had imagined I could play them best."¹¹

It should be noticed that in all the comparisons and rivalry between Gielgud and Olivier, there has never been any battle to prove one right and one wrong as there was between


¹¹ Ibid.
the two competitors, Garrick and Quin. One was never concerned
with eliminating the other from the stage. Kenneth Tynan
discussed the two actors in an article for Life.

The best English actors often come in pairs. A
century and a half ago we had John Philip Kemble,
all dignity and word-music, and the galvanic new-
comer Edmund Kean, all earth and fire... In
modern terms John Gielgud is Kemble to Olivier's
Kean—the esthete, as opposed to the animal. 'John
is claret,' as a wine-loving English critic once
put it. 'And Larry is Burgundy.' But the dif-
fERENCE between them reminds me more of Edmund Burke's
definition, the Beautiful (i.e., Gielgud) is that
which is shapely, harmonious and pleasing; while
the Sublime (i.e., Olivier) is irregular and awe-
inspiring, like thunderstorms and mountain peaks.1

In the last paragraph of Tynan's article he names Olivier,
instead of Gielgud, as England's greatest actor:

"And practice which means discipline, devotion and the
relentless nourishing of one's natural gifts is what keeps
Olivier secure on his pedestal as the greatest actor on the
stages of the western world."12

If he is, then, the greatest actor on the stages of the
Western world, what makes him so? Laurence Kitchin believes
that it is due largely to the shock of recognition he gives
to a generation of people who demand that their attention be
retained. Olivier does not lose that attention.

From my experience I can understand Olivier's hold
on the mid-century adolescent. It is not only a
result of accessibility reached on the cinema,

12Roddy McDowell, "Great Sir Laurence," Life, LVI (May 1,
1964), 101.

13Ibid., p. 102.
with Henry V, Richard III, and Hamlet regularly revived in the West End and even the suburbs. More likely it is his faculty for producing the shock of recognition—things like Richard's fussiness, Hotspur's stammer and the Oedipus howl—which rivet a generation bombarded with calls on the attention. It is not something demanded by the text we are recognizing but a variation the text can tolerate, a guarantee that the actor has made up his own mind about it, raided headquarters instead of going through the usual channels . . . Speed, decisiveness, an absence of gullibility, together with violent blazes of self-assertion, are qualities admired in present urban society. They may admit rest periods of knowing calculation. Olivier, meditative at slow tempo, is usually up to mischief.  

Kitchin did not really care for Olivier's Romeo of 1935 or his Hamlet of 1937. He felt Olivier was as yet a bit too unpolished to attempt such fieriness, but Kitchin thinks he really reached greatness with Henry V in 1937.

The first shock came that year with Henry V at the Old Vic, in a way any schoolboy could have recognized. There sat the king as the prelates got down to expounding his claim to the throne of France, and there was I, ready to watch a matinee idol's growing-pains. Having seen Tearle and Richardson, I expected to learn nothing new about the part. Sooner or later the legalistic drone would end and Henry would ask, in the stately manner of Tearle, or as near as a classical novice could get to it: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" It would, of course, be essential that the claim be just. Any doubt, and Henry would call off the war at once; if the play was not staunchly and reputedly patriotic it was nothing. And then I noticed the king was getting restive. Olivier was showing the same cross impatience with the prelates as he had shown to the students about their make-up four years ago. Generations of persecuted schoolboys were being vindicated by a

Henry who had no more time for that dreary speech than they. This was the revolution, consolidated when Olivier spoke the inquiry very clear and fast on a rising, hectoring inflection. It was plain that he was going to war anyway. Right and conscience were being given the value they had in 1937 when speeches relative to the international situation were made.15

His ability to gauge his acting of age-old parts to the times in which he is performing is one thing responsible for the popularity of Olivier's acting. Along with tempering the part to the times, Olivier also shocked the audience into recognizing new things in the character he was playing. James Agate commented on this facet of Olivier's acting in his description of Olivier's performance of Lear. "I thought Olivier began extraordinarily well, with just the right amount of testiness. A magnificent head, and everything royal about him. The whole subsequent performance brilliantly imagined and achieved. Mind working all the time and making one see things one had not previously noticed."16

Besides making one recognize there are new things to old parts and that these parts can be related to modern times, Olivier has also received praise for the energy and variety he achieves in his roles. This has been seen as a part of the reason for Tynan and Kitchin's praise for his acting. Tyrone Guthrie joins them in praising him for this quality. Guthrie does not agree with some of Olivier's dissenters that

15Ibid., p. 51.
16Agate, op. cit., p. 492.
the lack of beauty in language is not made up by his other qualities. The first time Guthrie saw Olivier was in his much criticized performance of *Romeo and Juliet* with John Gielgud. Of the performance Guthrie wrote,

This was the first time I saw him act. He had been severely faulted by the drama critics for what they regarded as bad verse-speaking. I thought he spoke the verse with marvelous clarity, energy and variety. What more can you want? He had, it is true, a tendency to rant; to make rather exaggerated contrasts of pace, pitch and volume. But these were the excesses of ardent, youthful temperament. Time would cure them. And, anyway, how rare it is to hear someone who really can blow up a storm, whose voice explodes like a bomb, crashes like breaking glass, screams like a macaw. A lot of the noises he made, and still makes, were not 'beautiful'; and drama critics, then as now, like their Shakespeare to be sonorous. In the interests of sonority they seem prepared to sacrifice most other values. I will confess that to me the Voice Beautiful is all too often the Voice Dull.

Laurence Olivier is never dull.17

Olivier has attached great importance to this shock of recognition and the beginning of his characterization. He believes that the audience can and will accept almost anything if the initial scene is successful. He has said,

In Shakespeare I always try to reassure the audience initially that they are not going to see some grotesque, outsized dimension of something which they can't understand or sympathize with. If you have succeeded in the initial moments, either by a very strong stamp of characterization so they recognize you as a real guy, or by a quiet approach—then I

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think there's no end to where you can lead them in size of acting a little later in the evening.  

The reason Olivier gives for this being necessary is that he thinks Shakespeare must be big to be convincing. "God knows you have to be enormously big as Othello. It has to be big stuff." Olivier thinks that by giving the audience this initial shock of something different or new in the character, a relationship between character and audience is established which will allow the actor to let his acting wander to great heights as the evening goes on. He wants the character and lines to sound natural and humanlike, but he does not aim to give a slice of life because to him Shakespeare is bigger than life.

Out of a sense of duty, Olivier has occasionally tried to play what is insultingly known as "the common-man"--the seedy schoolteacher, for instance, in the film Term of Trial. He seldom succeeds. That outsized emotional candor cannot help breaking through. The actor bursts the seams of the role and the common man becomes exceptional. That is why Olivier has spent the greater part of his professional life with his trousers off--playing bare-legged or in tights the exceptional characters around whom the playwrights of the past built their tellest tragedies and highest comedies.

Though he plays big characters in a big way, Olivier wants them to have a ring of reality to them. One way he endeavors to achieve this ring of reality is to avoid the

18 McDowell, op. cit., p. 83.
19 Ibid.
sing-song that can develop from too much attention to the verse of lines. Olivier likes to modernize the flow of the speeches and break them down into a contemporary pattern for literal understanding, rather than yielding to the inherent flow of the verse.

Olivier demonstrated his approach to verse in his development of the role of Hotspur when he affected a stammer on the sound "w" throughout his speeches. He selected "w" because of an analysis of the play and the dying words of Hotspur: "No, Percy, thou art dust and food for w_____." Percy supplied the missing word, "worms." Olivier pictured the dying Hotspur stumbling on the word and unable to complete his last words. Olivier decided to portray Hotspur as a young man with a speech defect and, in doing that, it was necessary to change much of the phrasing of the verse to accommodate the stammer.21

Before Olivier is satisfied with any role, he studies it as he did Hotspur to find the key to the character's individuality. Then he adds to that observations of people with similar qualities. Then he enlarges on what he has seen. Not only is he possessed of great talent, but he adds to this much hard work. The results have been much success, respect and praise for being England's greatest actor. All these things have given him a place in the hearts of audiences.

Kenneth Tynan wrote,

You cannot make love by installments, and Olivier's relationship with his audience is that of a skilled but dominating lover. He is one of that select group of performers (the greatest athletes, bull-fighters, singers, politicians, ballerinas, and vaudeville comedians are some of the others) whose special gift is to be able to exercise fingertip control over the emotions of a large number of people gathered in one place to witness one unique event. He can do other things, of course, but this is what he can do peerlessly and irreplaceably. 22

Because of this excellent relation with his audiences and because of his excellent acting, Olivier has become, as Garrick had in his time, England's "greatest actor."

Recent years have also seen his prosperity and honors increase. He was knighted in 1948, the youngest actor ever to be so honored, was given the French Legion of Honor in 1953, and an honorary degree from Tufts College, Boston, in 1946 as 'the real interpreter of Shakespeare of our age.' 23

Like Garrick had done before him, Olivier came into the theatre at a time when the current style of acting was somewhat stilted. The way the lines were spoken was the main fault.

As actors, not speech therapists, were training beginners in diction, the raw material of revivals was an actor using an imperfect instrument in a bad declamatory convention. I take this to be the authentic ham tradition, nowadays more often found among street entertainers, orotund, condescending and false. 24


Like Garrick, Olivier did not care for that style. Olivier, like Garrick, preferred acting which was more natural. He wrote,

I was told I couldn't speak verse. That worried me terribly, because ever since I was a boy I felt I spoke Shakespeare like a native. But the lyrical verse-speaking of that time was against the nature of my central feeling about acting, which is reality. I spent a great deal of my early life fighting the lyrical tendencies of my colleagues. The music is only the top half of Shakespeare. There's a bottom half to be observed--animalism, earth, actualities and all that.25

John Gielgud has been quoted earlier as saying that young actors will often be influenced by and attempt to imitate older, more established performers in their development of style. So it was with Olivier. Most of the actors who were in vogue at the beginning of Olivier's career were exponents of lyrical verse-speaking. He opposed this style and turned to the few actors who were presenting more realistic performances.

In 1937, when he joined the Old Vic Companies, his first role was Hamlet "... based, in part, on his vivid recollections of Barrymore, in part, on long consultations about the role with Britain's leading psychoanalyst Ernest Jones. It was hailed as 'the first virile Shakespeare in a generation.'"26 Godfrey Tearle had introduced some reality to his playing of Shakespeare, but he had endeavored to keep his

presentations loyal to the way they had been done in Shakespeare's time. Olivier wanted reality to fit his time. Olivier learned from Tearle, but at the same time he broke with tradition. In discussing their respective performances of Henry V, Laurence Kitchin wrote,

There was never any suspicion that his (Olivier's) readings were modern because he only knew how to act in a modern idiom. The tradition had been expanded, not ignored or disrupted. It is as well, too, to remember the intention of the dramatist. Boring as it now seems, the prelates' exposition of Henry's claim has the important function of legitimizing what otherwise would be unprovoked aggression. Tearle's reading was therefore more in keeping with the original and not to be despised. We know that the Elizabethans, chronic litigators, liked a slice of legal argument.27

Since Olivier did not really want to break completely with tradition, but merely to expand on it and avoid being too lyrical, he also turned to Ralph Richardson as an example. Olivier considered the lyrical quality a bit effeminate and wanted Shakespeare to be more manly. Ralph Richardson was quite manly. Olivier wrote him to ask Richardson to tell him how to play Mercutio. When the letter came back, Olivier picked one particular piece of advice to base his characterization upon. Olivier sought examples from players of his time, but he never had a definite predecessor, as Garrick did in Macklin. Olivier watched several actors, and then molded parts of each of their styles into that for which he

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27 Kitchin, op. cit., p. 53.
became famous. His style of acting became the most popular, and his fame rose to such degree that his acting allowed him to have considerable influence upon the theatre of his time. The actors he chose to observe and imitate were great artists, but it took a larger person to really make a devastating effect on taste. Some of the people who preceded Olivier with breaks in tradition did excellent work. They did not quite have his shock of recognition or his flair, but they served as aids to the appreciation of Olivier.

In the thirties two important sections of the national repertoire were saved from neglect or distortion because Richardson and Ashcraft happened to be available and because Harcourt Williams allowed actors elbow-room to develop in. Although none of the three was a dealer in the shock of recognition, they embodied transmissible qualities of dependability, integrity and respect for their material. After seeing something of the old hams, it gave one a feeling of security to know that Richardson, Ashcraft and Harcourt Williams were at work. Another of the same type of reclaimer was Tearle. His territory adjoined Richardson's where it touched Henry V, a part he played only three years before Olivier's revolutionary performance in 1937. This makes Tearle of fourfold importance: As a Shakespearean actor aged fifty in 1934 who was not a ham, as an exemplary noble Roman from North's Plutarch, as a bluff, patriotic Tudor and as an aid to the appreciation of Olivier.

After he had developed his style, Olivier began to depend less and less upon others' examples. It was just after World War II that Olivier was really ready to come into his own. The British people were starved for drama. The theatres had

\[28\textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.\]
all but closed down during the war years. Music hall performances were the only things offered to the public. To make up for lack of theatre, Donald Wolfitt had given Shakespearean performances at lunchtime to theatre-hungry audiences. So at war's end people were ready for some good acting. The Old Vic reopened with an all-star group of players: Dame Sybil Thorndike, Margaret Leighton, Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier. They opened with Peer Gynt, which was a great success. Olivier was determined to be a success. He had been too long away from the stage. His first great success came with Richard III. Olivier made certain alterations in the script, which later became a habit with him. People were willing to accept these changes, and the changes in the way Olivier played characters they had come to think of in more traditional ways. Olivier was now ready to begin making his own contributions to the theatre.

One of Olivier's great contributions to the theatre was bringing Shakespeare to the movies and making it popular. When Olivier decided to do a film of Henry V, he was going to produce the enterprise himself. He had spent the bulk of his planning time mulling over the artistic aspects of the project. He had given little thought to the financial problems of such an undertaking. Finally he had to seek outside help. He went to the Rank Corporation to seek financial aid. They were doubtful about taking on such an expensive affair
that might not be a money-maker. Shakespeare was not the most popular fare with the movie-going public. It was the reputation of Laurence Olivier's acting that finally persuaded them to put up the money. To their surprise and pleasure the movie was extremely popular in England. Rank grew brave enough to send the film to the United States, where Shakespeare was even less popular. *Henry V* ran for eleven months in New York, the longest run for a British film to that date. Word-of-mouth publicity was spread from those who saw Olivier to others to keep it running that long. Olivier won an Academy Award for the performance.

During the filming of *Henry V*, Olivier introduced several innovations to movie-making. He was worried about whether or not the movie audience would accept the Shakespearean Chorus. He decided to make the Chorus into an Elizabethan actor. He decided to begin and end the movie with this Elizabethan actor at the Globe Theatre. This solved another of his problems involving his concern with the audience's reacting to the Shakespearean verse.

If in this Bankside prologue the performance had all the broad bombast of Elizabethan acting, then, by contrast, the verse and prose dialogue of the film proper, which would be spoken quietly and sincerely, would seem natural. The audience would experience considerable relief when, on Henry's line, "Now sits the wind fair,..." the scenes at the Globe blended into those of the film and they realized that the whole film was not to be in the highly artificial manner in which it had started.²⁹

Besides these things, Olivier did not like the way that, when an actor in the movies had anything resembling a long speech, there was an immediate closeup. He felt this necessitated the actor's whispering at the very time he should be exploding. He reversed the procedure and started with a closeup and then let the camera go away from the actor so he could give his soliloquies full force. Olivier varied this in *Hamlet* by not letting the actor actually speak the lines but having him think while the soundtrack played the soliloquy.

Many people connected with the film were skeptical about these changes and felt they should not be attempted. Olivier insisted that things be done his way, though. "Now that *Henry V* has been accepted as an imaginative piece of filmmaking these various departures from convention do not seem so revolutionary, but at the time they were new and carried the stamp of original minds . . . Olivier had asked for complete power with good reason."30

Laurence Kitchin does not like Shakespeare on the screen. He believes that Shakespeare belongs on the stage, and when it is put on the screen, directors lose sight of the text in a desire to create something new for their medium. So he thinks movie-makers should leave Shakespeare alone. But he wrote of Olivier's Shakespearean movies: "For a good

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compromise between the needs of Shakespeare and the needs of
the screen, the three Olivier films are in a class by them-
selves, because they respect both the text and the camera."31

The following about Olivier's film of Richard III appeared
in Newsweek magazine:

As director-producer, Olivier announced publicly
that he 'wanted the best-acted picture that has
ever been made . . .' The result of all of Olivier's
acting, directing and producing high jinks is a
picture remarkable, free of ham and filled with
enhancements of Shakespeare, original, unobtrusive
but inspired . . . 'Filming Shakespeare,' Olivier
says, 'you don't need tricky shots. You don't have
to shoot up a man's trouser leg or photograph through
keyholes . . . Hollywood developed those techniques
to make up for bad acting and weak scripts.'32

Now that Olivier was thoroughly established, he could
look back on his early career to see what problems bad scripts
could be. He spent a good part of his early career with
them. In 1937, when he joined the Old Vic, he pretty much
gave them up and spent the most of the rest of his career in
Shakespeare. He looked upon Shakespeare as the epitome of
writing and acting. "Shakespeare has been, I suppose, the
criterion for hundreds of years. It's been the reputation
of big acting. Shakespeare is hard to understand. It's
hard to do. The characters are usually supermen or kings,
great tragic queens."33

31 Laurence Kitchin, Drama in the Sixties: Form and
32 Ibid., p. 103.
33 McDowell, op. cit., p. 99.
In the 1840's the first plans for a British National Theatre were begun, but many problems kept them from becoming a reality. It was not until 1949 that the national treasury finally gave money for the theatre to begin operating. Critics had insisted that the country needed such a theatre to carry on the tradition of classical acting. The reputation of Laurence Olivier helped to get the theatre started. "And, of course, the appointment of Sir Laurence Olivier as director gave assurance of success."34

At the National Theatre, Olivier was able to bring about some reforms he had always wanted for the theatre. Before he went to the National Theatre, he spent a season directing at the Chichester Festival Theatre, where he helped design the stage. It was a thrust stage with audience on three sides. He believed this made for more flexible performing. When asked to describe how he would change the staging of performances, he said that he would rather not because that was the director's problem and should not concern the audience. He thought the audience came to see the finished performance and should not have to worry about how it was achieved. The stage of the National Theatre was modeled after the Chichester Theatre, with a thrust stage.

Olivier continued to rehearse plays in the format he had established in Golden Arrow. He thinks that if players

go over and over a scene, they will eventually find the right way of doing it. He doesn't care for talking about motivations. He has also continued to insist on quiet from people who are not on stage during rehearsals. Rehearsals are serious business to Olivier, as they had been to Garrick. He does not like playing while someone is working.

Another thing that Olivier has been able to do since he has been at the National Theatre is to make Shakespeare more readily available to a large number of people. He was responsible for the policy of touring with the company every year through the provinces. The plays at the National Theatre have been so popular that at one time one magazine made note of the fact that tickets for the London performance were sold out, but that tickets were available for one of the summer performances at Chichester.

Of the National Theatre Olivier said,

You are third rate because you want to be third rate, and that's the truth of it. So much of the entertainment, so many of the newspapers, so much of what you see on the idiot box—all prove this. It's deliberately cheap because the public gobbles it up, but I still have faith that the public will like better things if they're provided.

These are the reasons why I've made the British National Theatre my whole life—and why I certainly think there should be a United States national theatre.35

At the British National Theatre, Laurence Olivier can serve another function for the theatre. He can be easily

35McDowell, op. cit., p. 100.
seen by the young actors of the time and serve as an example.

Kitchin thinks this may be his most vital contribution.

Olivier's most valuable lesson for his mid-century successors is not his willful originality but the kind of skill he applied to his second Macbeth under the direction of Saint-Denis (New, 1937). It is a part which had brought out the worst in many actors, all rant, hemorrhage and melodrama if the intellect is lacking and a ghastly parody of Hamlet in kilts when the actor is sensitive without seeming military. One can imagine the old ham's approach to the speech where Macbeth convinces himself that he has been condemned to insomnia: it's about sleep, so take it gently. As it's about the withholding of sleep, a terrible prospect, Olivier brought the speech to a howling climax, accepting the invitation clearly given by the open vowels of 'sleep no more.' He was equally terrifying in the little night-piece before Banquo's murder, that small bomb of atmosphere which starts with a homing crow and lets loose the agents of night two lines afterwards. In another key the briefing of the murderers had already revealed a Machiavellian motif just as relevant as the northern gloom. Olivier went about the business of persuading these ruffians as if it was a dangerous move which could misfire. Watchful, insinuating, crafty, he made a Renaissance intrigue of a scene which before had not seemed able to bear such weight.36

David Garrick and Sir Laurence Olivier busied themselves with acting and so they had little time to write about it. Perhaps this is what let them rise to the heights they did. There is no book containing Olivier's advice to actors, but he did make a speech to a group of acting students who may look to him as an example of acting.

'The growth of your career should be like that of a tree, a simple, steady, all-round growth. You are now about, I hope, to sink your roots deep

36 Kitchin, op. cit., p. 52.
into the fertile ground of this institution, in order to assure yourselves of as strong a stem as possible, so that however gloriously your branches may flourish they shall not want for resourcefulness and poise. There is plenty of wind, torrents of rain, and no end of thunder about, so don't get too tall too quickly. There is no more invidious state in a career, than that in which one finds one's reputation outgrowing one's experience.

'All I ask, as an audience, is to believe what I see and hear. An actor, above all, must be the great understander, either by intuition, observation or both, and that puts him on the level with a doctor, a priest or a philosopher. If I can get more from him than just belief, then I feel both fortunate and overjoyed . . . there are many dimensions in the art of acting, but NONE of them . . . are good or interesting . . . unless they are invested with the appearance, or complete illusion of truth. The difference between the actual truth and the illusion of the truth is what you are about to learn. You will not finish learning it until you are dead.'

A COMPARISON OF THE CAREERS OF DAVID GARRICK AND
SIR LAURENCE OLIVIER

Some two hundred years apart, two men, David Garrick and Sir Laurence Olivier, rose to become known as the greatest English actors of their times. In their rise to fame the two men shared many characteristics. Both men came from families of middle-class backgrounds. It was not the custom for men from such backgrounds to go on the stage, but these men broke from that tradition to win great respect in their chosen profession.

Both Garrick and Olivier were acclaimed for their innovations. Each entered the acting profession at a time when acting had become stilted and superficial, and each man was credited in his time for introducing a more natural style of acting to the theatre. In past chapters, it has been said that Garrick and Olivier both disapproved of the styles that were prevalent when they began their careers. But naturalism was not actually the invention of either Garrick or Olivier. They really sensed the feelings of the audiences of their times and realized that the desire was for a return to nature. In both their returns to nature, they were never really reproducing nature. Both actors heightened nature on the stage.
In the beginnings of their careers, both men were criticized because of their verse-speaking. It was written of Garrick, "He, too, was attacked at first for detracting from 'the dignity of theatrical enunciation.'" Later it was written of Olivier, "... his blank verse is the blankest I have ever heard ... lacks poetry ..." Neither man gave up his ideas of the way verse should be read, however. After people adjusted to their ways of reading verse, the vogue changed and Garrick and Olivier became the pacesetters.

Both men rose to fame as great actors of tragedy, but critics suspected that underneath it all they were both comedians.

Though Mr. Garrick's merit in Tragedy is very apparent, we are nevertheless inclined to think that comedy is his more peculiar forte.--The manner of his playing his Bages he entirely struck out himself; and in our opinion it is a test of much judgement, infinite vivacity, ready invention, and every other quality which composes the genuine Vis Comica. In Benedict [sic] he has given us the highest specimen of the sprightly and the humourous—In Kitiely of the Jealous—In Chalkstone of the persevering Dabouchee—And in a variety of other parts almost every character within the compass of the comic muse.

Many years later James Agate wrote, "I have the conviction that Olivier is a comedian by instinct and a tragedian by art.""
Both Garrick and Olivier were known for their mobility on the stage. Both men believed that acting was much more than reciting lines. They thought that plays should be active, and Garrick and Olivier were given to action. Besides disliking the way most actors of their times spoke lines, these two men disliked the way plays did not move. James Quin had been content to step down to the audience and deliver his lines while remaining in one place. Garrick disapproved of this. He acted all over the stage. "Cumberland's account of Garrick bounding lithely onto the stage 'alive in every muscle and every feature,' emphasizes a characteristic of his acting which persisted through the whole of his career."\(^5\)

Years later John Gielgud referred to the "musical and athletic power" of the verse, which drives it along. He believes that if one speaks the verse correctly, excessive movement is unnecessary.\(^6\) Olivier disagreed and has always been quite active on the stage. In fact, he has been so active and athletic that he has had over fifty accidents during his career on the stage.

So mobile were Garrick and Olivier upon the stage that they have sometimes both been criticized for resorting to theatrical tricks.

\(^5\)Joseph, op. cit., p. 108.

But it is not to be understood that we think Mr. Garrick utterly exempt from faults; no—there are some few which we propose to enumerate. It gives us pain to see him sometimes exert a sort of theatrical parade in Tragedy to catch the eyes and applause of the multitude.  

In 1948, Robert Herring wrote of Olivier, "I could forgive him almost all of the tricks he has played if it were not for the death-leap at the final killing of the king." This was written about Olivier's Hamlet.

Early in the career of each of these actors there was criticism of their voices. People said there was no music to their voices. Later, various critics came to their defenses by saying that other actors' voices might be compared to violins, but that violins were not the only musical instruments. Garrick and Olivier did possess voices with musical quality, but they were brass, rather than stringed, instruments. Of Garrick it was written,

His voice was musical, and easily heard even when he was speaking softly. . . . His voice had that one great requisite—it was piercing. 'In tragedy, says John Hill, the voice 'should pierce; and there are voices suited to it. Of all others, Mr. Garrick's, which in its full perfection, and on a proper occasion, pierces and strikes the heart, as the sound of a trumpet.'

Tyrone Guthrie wrote of Olivier's voice,

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9 Joseph, op. cit., p. 118.
Laurence Olivier is never dull. The voice, however, has more the quality of brass than of strings. And even now, after many years of intense cultivation and ceaseless practice, it is the vigor and brilliance of his tone which impresses. Sweetness does not come so easily. I have never been able to understand those critics who are not aware of the intense musicality which infuses all his performances—a rare sensitivity to rhythm, colour, phrasing, pace and pitch. 10

The physical appearance was never really an advantage to either Garrick or Olivier. They both overcame their disadvantages through the power of their acting. Of Garrick, Aaron Hill wrote,

All disadvantage of size and figure was forgotten: he spoke with a terrible force and violence, and with a dignity, all of which were kingly; nor do we anywhere, throughout the play lose one thought from the represented character, or bestow one upon the disproportioned stature of the actor. 11

Of Olivier, Tyrone Guthrie wrote, "He has never been a particularly handsome man, but he has always been able, on the stage, to suggest extreme good looks. Partly this is due to skill in make-up, far more to the vitality and intelligence which inform every glance, and the athletic energy and grace of every movement." 12

Garrick and Olivier both said they tried to model their characters on nature, and so both actors grew to put a great value on observation of people who were related to their

12Guthrie, op. cit., p. 158.
characters. Garrick related a story of how he learned to portray Lear's insanity by observing a neighbor who went mad.

While he was preparing the part and considering how best to simulate madness, an acquaintance of his, who lived a few doors away from the theatre, obligingly gave him a demonstration of the genuine state. This man was leaning out of his dining-room window holding his two-year-old child in his arms, when she accidentally slipped from his grasp. The little girl's body was dashed to pieces on the flagged area below, and the unfortunate man went out of his senses with shock. He lived on in the same house with two keepers, and Garrick often dropped in to see him on his way to the theatre. He watched him as he dandled an imaginary child out the very same window, appeared to drop it and then burst into terrible shrieks of anguish. In after years Garrick often gave a realistic imitation of his friend's agony for the after-dinner entertainment of a room full of his admirers. 'This it was,' he would say as he brought the demonstration to an end, 'that I learned to imitate madness.'

Olivier used his observations of people of similar types to Othello when he was preparing that role. Of Iago and Othello, he said,

Though I played Iago many years ago, I didn't understand the part till I'd been in the service during the war. I think when somebody gets a half stripe more than you, your soul can get bitten right into with bitterness and envy. And I felt it myself... It's terribly hard to say what they were like, those boys from Morocco. The whole thing will be in the lips and the color. I've been looking at Negroes' lips every time I see them on a train or anywhere, and actually, their lips seem black or blue-berry-colored, really, rather than red.

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13 Margaret Barton, Garrick (New York, 1949), p. 44.
Actors preceding both Garrick and Olivier had been content, once their acting was accepted, to remain the same throughout their careers. This was not true of Garrick and Olivier. They tried to remain changing, flexible, and improving.

It may, therefore, be fairly maintained that the more knowledge a player has, the more will he excel in his profession; and so true is this, that superior judges of theatrical excellence can discern improvements in the performance of Mr. Garrick, upon seeing him again in characters where they had once imagined it impossible for him to be greater: for Mr. Garrick is by study and observation continually adding to his stock of science, and enriching his mind with new ideas, towards which his late travels through a good part of Europe have no doubt very much contributed, and the fertility of his own lively fancy is always producing fresh thoughts.\(^\text{15}\)

Laurence Olivier has also changed in his performances through the years. Critics who did not like him in a part in his earlier career have praised him for the same role in later years. Olivier explains why he thinks it is necessary to change interpretations of characters one repeats through the years. "You see, in an age such as this, in which nostalgia is about the least popular of one's prerogatives, you'd better not be old fashioned--because they don't come and see the old darling out of sentiment. I've made great efforts to keep changing, come up with a surprise every so often."\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\)Agate, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 53.

\(^{16}\)McDowall, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 89.
Added to these qualities was the versatility of Garrick and Olivier. The following was written of Garrick:

Yet even more striking than his many-sidedness as a man was his versatility as an actor. Side by side with the power which made Fielding say, 'I regard [Garrick] in tragedy to be the greatest genius the world has ever produced,' he had comic gifts of the highest order.  

Olivier also changed easily from comedy to tragedy and received praise for both types of roles.

To further compare these two men and their acting, it would help to consider roles which they both played. When Garrick decided to make his debut in Richard III, he had more in mind than the lines of Richard. When he discussed the part with Macklin, he pointed out to him that since he was short, he could easily make himself look like a hunchback. He felt it was important that he never play a part for which he was not physically suited. Garrick felt that if he tried to play a big hero, people would not accept him because it was the custom of the time for managers to cast by size. Besides, this play was extremely melodramatic and, therefore, well-suited to Garrick's new style of acting.

Indeed the vehemence with which he threw himself into his part exhausted him, and by the end of the second act he was inaudible from hoarseness. It was only by sucking an orange, runs the story, given him behind the scenes by a sympathetic printer, that he recovered his voice in time to begin the third act. At first the spectators hesitated.

puzzled by the startling departure from the accepted style of acting. He had gone through a number of scenes before they broke into loud and enthusiastic shouts of applause. Here was a Richard who set himself so high a standard that he actually went on acting between his speeches! 'His voice,' notes a slightly later critic, 'is neither whining, bellowing, nor grumbling, but perfectly easy in its transitions, natural in its cadence and beautiful in its elocution. He is not less happy in his mien and gait in which he is neither strutting nor mincing; neither stiff nor slouching. When three or four are on the stage with him, he is attentive to whatever is spoken, and never drops his character when he has finished a speech by either looking contemptuously on an inferior performer, unnecessary spitting, or suffering his eyes to wander through the whole circle of spectators.'

In this critic's appraisal of Garrick there is reference to the fact that Garrick never strutted or minced. In the appraisals of Olivier some two hundred years later, critics wrote that he did not mince. This seems to be a thing that was common on the stage at both times. The actors were too effete, and it seems to have given pleasure to the spectators to see a man acting with virility. There is also mention of Garrick's eyes and voice for which he became famous. Mention of the way he used his eyes and voice crops up in many accounts of his acting. He tried to relate them to each other.

As one passion changes to another in the speech, so he changed from one tone to another, each change of utterance being preceded by a change of expression in the eyes, the features and stance, with his whole physical personality working in

\footnote{Barton, op. cit., p. 40.}
harmony. And as the expression of face and body preceded that of the voice, there was a pause between one tone and the next. For instance, in the much-praised tent-scene in Richard III, as he started from his dream, he was 'a spectacle of horror' and called for his horse 'in a manly tone': then came a pause, and 'with a countenance of dismay,' he advanced and cried out 'in a tone of distress—Bind up my wounds.' And now he fell upon his knees and 'said in a most pitious accent—Have mercy heaven!'

Garrick often used the device of letting the eyes and face show an emotion before he spoke the emotion. He believed that in real life the physical features reacted before the voice, and so he imitated that part of nature upon the stage. This caused him to make what seemed to be strange pauses in the verse, but he maintained they made it the more natural.

Years later Olivier was to play the part of Richard, and comments similar to those made about Garrick were made about Olivier.

Olivier's performance is in the same grand tradition and probably the ultimate of his particular brand of Shakespeare. "Olivier is a complete realist," says Anthony Quayle, director of the Shakespearean theatre at Stratford, England. "He is like a riveter, data-tatating away with a hundred details until the character is pinned down." Details that help graft his Richard in the memory: The lizard-like blink and roll of the eye, and the guillotine drop of his lip chopping off a high-pitched precise speech; the flashes of reptilian charm when he takes the spectator into his confidence by looking him startling in the eye; the blood-curdling spurts of malevolence when he unleashes the smoldering sexuality which he manages to inject into his flesh-creeping wooing of the bereaved Lady Anne. "Putty nose or no putty

nose," one Cockney fan commented, "when he makes his eyes go smoky-like, I still come all over peculiar." 20

Olivier, like Garrick, used his eyes to great advantage. Although Garrick seemed strange for acting between speeches and for paying attention to others on the stage, he was not different from Olivier in that he did that. Olivier often depends upon the other actors on the stage. He also does strange things with the verse.

Olivier's Richard eats into the memory like acid into metal, but the total impression is one of lightness and deftness. The whole thing is taken at a speed baffling when one recalls how perfectly, even finically, it is articulated: it is Olivier's trick to treat each speech as a kind of plastic vocal mass, and not as a series of sentences whose import must be precisely communicated to the audience: the method is impressionist. He will seize on one or two phrases in each paragraph which, properly inserted, will unlock its whole meaning: the rest he discards, with excessive idleness. To do this successfully he needs other people on the stage with him: to be ignored, stared past, or pushed aside during the lower reaches, and gripped and buttonholed when the wave rises to its crested climax. 21

Both Garrick and Olivier were concerned that their small stature and limited good looks would keep them from playing heroes. Their fears were unfounded. Both of them were able to play heroes for they made up for their lack of physical attributes by the way they carried themselves. Both of them


were said to possess the elegance of kings and heroes, and they both undertook the role of Hamlet. Lichtenberg, the German critic, described Garrick's performance.

Suddenly, as Hamlet moves towards the back of the stage slightly to the left and turns his back on the audience, Horatio starts, and saying: 'Look, my lord, it comes,' points to the right, where the ghost has already appeared and stands motionless, before anyone is aware of him. At these words Garrick turns sharply and at the same moment staggers back two or three paces with his knees giving way under him; his hat falls to the ground, and both his arms, especially the left, are stretched out nearly to their full length, with the hands as high as his head, the right arm more bent and the hand lower, and the fingers apart; his mouth is open: thus he stands rooted to the spot, with legs apart, but no loss of dignity, supported by his friends, who are better acquainted with the apparition and fear lest he should collapse.22

This description may seem a little absurd, but Lichtenberg goes on to describe the effect the positions of Garrick had on the audience.

His whole demeanour is so expressive of terror that it made my flesh creep even before he began to speak. The almost terror-struck silence of the audience, which preceded this appearance and filled one with a sense of insecurity, probably did much to enhance this effect. At last he speaks, and not at the beginning, but at the end of a breath, with a trembling voice: 'Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!' words which supply anything this scene may lack and make it one of the greatest and most terrible that will ever be played on any stage . . . you can well imagine what loud applause accompanies this exit. It begins as soon as the ghost goes off the stage and lasts until Hamlet also disappears. What an amazing triumph it is.23


Laurence Olivier played Hamlet first in 1937, and his performance was hailed as "the first virile Shakespeare in a generation." James Agate wrote that before one could decide whether a person could act Hamlet, one had to decide whether the person could act at all. Agate asks of an actor that he have a feeling for poetry and a sense of tragedy. Since everything the actor does is conveyed through the actor's body, Mr. Agate wanted the actor to possess a good, mobile face, a good voice, a noble bearing and a princely walk.

Apply these things to Mr. Olivier. Mr. Olivier has a well-turned head, a pleasing, youthful face, a magnificent voice of bow-string tautness and vibrancy marred by a few commonplace intonations which could easily be eliminated, good carriage, a springy, pantherine gait, and the requisite inches. Mr. Olivier, then, can act, since in addition to the foregoing he possesses the mimetic talent.

Agate found some fault with Olivier's Hamlet because he felt strongly about verse speaking and considered Olivier's method a little vulgar and too much a part of the modern, popular stage. Even with this fault admitted, he wrote that Olivier's performance had two qualities which made his acting the best of its time. The things he cites would seem parallel to what made Garrick's Hamlet especially popular.

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26 Ibid., p. 270.
Mr. Olivier's Hamlet excels any Hamlet of recent years--its pulsating vitality and excitement."27

Of the film Hamlet there was often criticism because it seemed out of its time. Laurence Kitchin felt, when he first saw the film, that its attitude was arbitrary. He has since changed his opinion to favor the film.

The ruling idea--'Denmark's a prison'--and the exaggerated enclosure of the action in dark, vaulted corridors seemed arbitrary at the time, 1948. It seems less arbitrary, more typical of a prevailing climate with every year that passes. From the first there were obvious echoes of Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible in the measured, shadowy progresses through windowless rooms. Now one recognizes the affinity with a post-war movement of which one masterpiece, Huis-Clas by Satre, had appeared four years before. Hamlet itself gives a pointer to the attitude of mind.28

Once again Olivier is seen to be changing his style to fit the changing audience for which he performs.

While the two actors shared triumphs in some plays, the records show a somewhat different reception of the men in other plays. King Lear is an example of this. Garrick received his greatest laurels for the role of Lear, while Olivier received limited praise and considerable censure. Of Garrick's portrayal of Lear it has been written,

> It was in Lear's madness that Garrick's genius was remarkably distinguished. He had no sudden starts, no violent gesticulation; his movements were slow

27Ibid., p. 271.

and feeble, misery was depicted in his countenance; he moved his head in the most deliberate manner; his eyes were fixed, or, if they turned to any one near him, he made a pause, and fixed his look on the person after much delay; his features at the same time telling what he was going to say before he uttered a word. During the whole time he presented a sight of woe and misery, and a total alienation of mind from every idea, but that of his unkind daughters.29

Garrick always claimed he learned to play the mad king by observing the madman in his neighborhood, but Macklin thought him far too great to have depended upon this one example, for the role was played with much more feeling than one example could give. To that, Garrick's great talent and imagination were added. Macklin wrote, "The curse exceeded all imagination, and had such an effect that it seemed to electrify the audience with horror... whilst he exhibited such a sense of the pathetic on discovering Cordelia as drew tears of commiseration from the whole house."30

Garrick played Lear at various times throughout his career, and age never seemed to have daunted his performance or the audience's response. Just before he retired in 1776, he repeated Lear with the following critical response.

Mr. Garrick last night repeated his capital representation of Lear, and in consequence thereof drew together a most crowded audience, principally composed of the first people of distinction, who seem resolved to let no opportunity escape them of enjoying the remainder of his inimitable performances.

29Darlington, op. cit., p. 69.
30Ibid., p. 70.
However difficult it may be to prevail upon the absentees to admit it, yet it will be readily confessed by those who were fortunate enough to be present last night, that he never appeared so great in the character before.

The curse at the close of the first act,—his phrenetic appeal to heaven at the end of the second on Regan's ingratitude, were two such enthusiastic scenes of human exertion, that they caused a kind of momentary petrefaction thro' the house, which he soon dissolved as universally into tears.—Even the unfeeling Regan and Goneril, forgetful of their characteristic cruelty, played thro' the whole of their parts with aching bosoms and streaming eyes. —In a word, we never saw before so exquisite a theatrical performance, or one so loudly and universally applauded.31

In the same part, Olivier received some praise, but he is never credited with sustaining the feeling through the entire role. Sir Henry Irving believed that great acting was a series of great moments, but the critics of Olivier's time wanted him to be great throughout the performance. For them, he never was. He was sometimes brilliant, but not always. James Agate wrote,

You ask me about Olivier's Lear. The answer is: m'yes and m'no . . . I thought Olivier began extraordinarily well, with just the right amount of testiness. A magnificent head, and everything royal about him. The whole subsequent performance brilliantly imagined and achieved. Mind working all the time and making one see things one had not previously noticed. For example, in the "loop'd and window'd raggedness" speech, at the line "0, I have ta'en too little care of this!" one sensed an unclouding of the mind and a return to the responsibilities of kingship. Yes, any amount of subtlety and intellectual appeal. But was I moved? Not so much as I ought to have been . . . The actor chipped off every bit of the character—but took me

31Agate, English Drama Critic, p. 61.
out of my critical self not more than three times—in the "Terrors of the earth" speech, in the second half of the mad scene, and from the entrance with the body of Cordelia to the end. Here the handling of the limp bundle as though it were the dummy certain dancers tie themselves to for a partner, the attempts at artificial respiration, the quiet at the end so that death took place without one's knowing the exact moment of passing—all this was masterly. Do you want it in a nutshell? Wolfit's Lear is a ruined piece of nature. Olivier's is a picture of ruins most cunningly presented.32

Kenneth Tynan agreed with Agate when he wrote of a later performance of Olivier as Lear. He thought there were great moments, but the entire performance was not great to him.

Olivier is a player of unparalleled animal powers, miraculously crossed with a player of extreme technical cuteness. The guttural precision of his voice would be unmistakable at a Cup Final, and its hoarse rallying note is the most invigorating sound in our theatres. He has a smoky moodiness of visage, a smoulderingness which always suggests daugh and dynamism cachet. He is our model Richard III and his Hotspur is unique. But he has no intrinsic majesty; he always fights shy of pathos; and he cannot play old men without letting his jaw say and his eye wonder archly in magpie fashion—in short, without being funny. He gave a moderate Lear at the New, built up out of a few tremendous tantrums of impotence (notice the crazed emphases and tearing fullness of tone in his 'I will do such things, what they are, yet I know not; but they shall be the terrors of the earth!') and an infinite run of cadenzas on his four most overworked tricks: (1) the stabbing finger; (2) the jaw and eye movement; (3) the ceaseless fits of wrestling with his cloak, like a tortoise with claustrophobia, and (4) the nervous nodding head. All these he exploited with rare diligence of bravura; it is an absorbing display, but in no way a great Lear.33

33 Tynan, n. s., 24, p. 59.
Garrick rose to his greatest heights in Lear, while Olivier had less success with the role. It is interesting, nonetheless, to notice the scenes for which Garrick was most praised were the ones in which critics said that Olivier had his moments of glory as Lear.

Garrick won praise for his Lear, while Olivier received only moderate acclaim for that role. Garrick attempted Othello but was never successful in that role. Garrick said his lack of success was due to his size. The critics did not agree with him. It was the opinion of most of the critics that Garrick's acting was not suited to the role. They thought that his excessive gesturing and facial expressions did not lend themselves to the dignity needed for the part of Othello. On the other hand, Olivier received much acclaim for his portrayal of Othello.

Olivier decided that Othello should be interpreted as a Negro rather than a Moor, the usual interpretation of the character. His performance was praised for its dignity. He was praised for establishing that dignity with his first entrance. Robert Speaight thought that it was a performance to go down in history as one of the greatest performances of the twentieth century. He thought that no performance in his time had received more applause than Olivier's Othello.

Laurence Kitchin wrote of the performance,

Leaving tragedy, Machiavelli and Shakespeare's display of Othello's glamour out of the matter, why
has Olivier chosen to suppress the Moor's heroic, stoical facade, which he could assume, if he felt like it, second to none? Well the mood of the nineteen-sixties is anti-heroic, enough to enjoy the sight of Iago cutting the rhetorical warrior down to size. So Iago, with the authority of recent academic opinion, is weakened, and something other than rhetorical military appeal is needed for Othello. Hence the African impersonation, around which our feelings about racialism and our daily contact with immigrants can be relied on to crystallize, like Victorian sentiment round Irving's veteran of Waterloo. If the performance went no further than this inspired mimicry it would be no more than a tour-de-force, but we have to reckon with Olivier's unique combination of extravert energy and command of verse. Having vulgarized Othello, not only by mimicry and a homely chuckle, but by languid waving of a rose and one crudely florid gesture of respect to the Duke, how is the actor to keep a hold on the part for four more acts? He can't show the progressive collapse of a facade, the usual solution. He can, however, if he has Olivier's intelligence and stamina, directly express the causes of the collapse, the inner, disruptive forces. He can release the sequence of feelings in which ravings like 'Goats and monkeys' make perfect sense. This is a complete surrender to the text's many invitations to primitivism; its great achievement is to keep the beauties of language afloat on a tide of emotion, instead of swamping them. There is, for instance, no formal distancing of set-pieces like the address to the senate or the farewell to arms. Othello is too busy reliving the episodes to enjoy his own eloquence, yet the diction remains fluent and exact.3

Here is another example of the way Olivier adjusts his performances and interpretations to the times in which he is living. The stage production was so successful that it was filmed for distribution in England and the United States. The reviewer for Holiday, who saw both the stage version and the film wrote:

The Othello triumph was so complete that a decision was made to preserve it on film. What is now being shown around the country in two-day engagements is precisely that—a preservation. It is neither film version nor a recreation, but a record, filmed almost cold off the stage... The National Theatre production, as suggested by the film, had many distinctions. The cast is almost uniformly excellent. The poetry is never sacrificed for dramatics, so the drama is heightened, and every scene is worked tactfully for the yield of poignancy, suspense, horror, humor, and vigor.35

Another role that gave Olivier great success was Oedipus. Garrick never played the part. John Mason Brown wrote of Olivier's portrayal,

Mr. Olivier's Oedipus is one of those performances in which blood and electricity are somehow mixed. It pulls lightning down from the sky. It is awesome, dwarfing, and appalling as one of nature's angriest displays. Though thrilling, it never loses its majesty... At the outset he is the arrogance of a man who feels himself above judgment. He speaks slowly, with a frightening casualness at first, when addressing the suppliants. His decisions are as swift as his speech is deliberate. He dares to take pauses of uncommon length. Yet the passion of his nature makes itself felt at once; the passion and the violence.35

Though they did not share this role, the unusually long pauses that Garrick used can be noted in Olivier's Othello.

Both Garrick and Olivier received criticism for using tricks on the stage to gain attention and to reinforce their characters. The critics of Olivier's Lear seem more upset about them than did Garrick's. Garrick was called down for

35Nathan Kallet, "Olivier and the Moor," Holiday, XXIX (April, 1966), 143.

36Barker, op. cit., p. 287.
his trickery in *Macbeth*. He was accused of employing unnatural pauses to gain applause.

Such pausing justified itself in Garrick's day, because the theatres were small enough for every phase of his expression to be clearly seen as it changed: little objection was raised, therefore, except when it seemed as if he had contrived an opportunity to provoke applause, where the text did not really call for this effect. The ears of the 'judicious' took exception, however, to some of the pauses which he made when there was no transition: in such cases his 'action' facial expression and tone of voice continued unchanged.37

Garrick came to the defense of his pauses in *Macbeth*, but the critics remained adamant. He was not forgiven. If the critics did not forgive Olivier for his tricks in *King Lear*, they did forgive them in *Coriolanus*. Agate seems to praise Olivier for the same kind of thing he condemned in Lear.

Vocally Mr. Olivier's performance is magnificent; his voice is gaining depth and resonance, and his range of tone is now extraordinary. Physically the performance is admirable, containing one startling leap and a superb fall at the end... The famous speech, 'I banish you!' is delivered not in the Kean manner of 'ungovernable passion,' but in the Phelps' 'cold sublimity of disdain.'

The end is the grand organ of acting, with all the stops out. It brings the house to its feet cheering.38

Twenty-one years later Olivier played the same part, and Laurence Kitchin came to the defense of Olivier's tricks because he said they were controlled. 'The point of this digression from an account of performance is to dispose of the criticism which seeks to convey Olivier's art in terms of his


38 *James Agate, Brief Chronicles*, p. 168.
virility, humour and emotional power. Great as these are, they are controlled, as our observations on his Macbeth have indicated, by interpretative intelligence of a very high order.  

Garrick and Olivier did much to popularize Shakespeare in their times. When Garrick began his career, Shakespeare was one of the most acted playwrights, but theatre attendance was not very good. After Garrick took over management of the Drury Lane and trained his company to act in his style, theatre attendance began to improve. "London liked their acting. The average daily attendance rose from 1,410 in 1742 to 1,878 in 1748, and the weekly average attendance from 8,460 in 1742 to 11,268 in 1748. (The city's population in 1750 was an estimated 676,230.)  

Olivier was to have just as much success with bringing in the crowds to see Shakespeare. His films took Shakespeare to more people than had ever seen him act before. His Henry V, which was tremendously successful in England, was even more successful in the United States. Despite the fact that American film executives were doubtful that Americans would accept the film, it made a £275,000 profit in its first year in the United States.  

41 Becker, p. 172.
Olivier's *Hamlet* met with just as much success. At first there was some doubt about movie audiences wanting Shakespeare, but *Hamlet* proved again that they did want it.

After a premiere at the Odean, Leicester Square, in London in May, 1948, when the film was seen by the King and Queen, the two Princesses and the Duke of Edinburgh, it started on a run of twenty-six weeks which was to be followed by a triumphant progress through the provinces in America, and eventually all over the world.1

These two films, along with *Richard III*, are still revived regularly and are still popular with audiences everywhere. So popular was *Hamlet* that Time wrote,

A man who can do what Laurence Olivier is doing for Shakespeare—and for those who treasure or will yet learn to treasure Shakespeare—is certainly among the more valuable men of his time... Olivier's films set up an equilateral triangle between the screen, the stage and literature. And between the screen, the stage and literature they establish an interplay, a shimmering splendor of the disciplined vitality which is art.2

After the filming of *Othello*, a writer for *Holiday* wrote a tribute to all of Olivier's films.

I can remember going to see a revival of Olivier's *Henry V* at a New York theatre that had accidentally received a Spanish-language version of the film. Even with the poetry lost to one who knew no Spanish, it was Shakespeare, and Olivier's taste as a director was more than enough to satisfy me. And it would have been enough with his careful, brooding *Hamlet* and his tapestry-rich version of *Richard III*, because in all of these Olivier settled on some cinematic equivalent of Shakespeare's drama.3

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1Ibid., p. 310.

2"Cinema," *Time*, LII (June 28, 1948), 60.

3Kallet, op. cit., p. 144.
For his performances in films, Olivier has won two Academy Awards for best performance by an actor, and in 1956 he was awarded the Selznick Golden Laurel Trophy for contributions to international good will.

Besides the movies, Olivier has appeared on television in classics and semi-classics. He has made extensive television appearances in England, and in 1960 he won the Emmy for the best performance by an actor in a single performance for his role in *Moon and Sixpence* in America.

While Garrick and Olivier did much to popularize the works of Shakespeare, and apparently they were most successful in his tragedies, both men played his comedies—and the comedies of other authors—successfully. Both men received just as high praise for their comic roles as for their tragic ones.

One of Garrick's most famous comic roles was Abel Drugger in *The Alchemist*. Derrick Wilkes wrote, "Abel Drugger is certainly the standard of low comedy; and Mr. Garrick's playing it is the standard of acting in this species of comedy." Sir John Brute in *The Provoked Wife* was another role in which he excelled. Of Garrick's Bayes in *The Rehearsal*, a comparison was written which compared his portrayal to that of other players of the time.

The difference between Garrick and his immediate predecessors was very conspicuous. They, by their action, told the spectators that they felt all the

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ridicule of the part; he appeared quite ignorant of the joke that was made against him. They seemed to sneer at the folly of Bayes with the audience; the audience laughed loudly at him. By seeming to understand the satire, they caught all the approbation of the pit; he gained their loudest plaudits, without letting them know he deserved it. They were in jest; he was in earnest.\textsuperscript{46}

Olivier received praise for his comic roles, just as Garrick had. John Mason Brown wrote of his Justice Shallow,

His Justice Shallow, for example, was wizened to the point of transparency. He was a dried seedpod of a man; a cobweb walking; an ancient cricket chirping. The only heroic thing about him was that in him a Shakespearean low comic managed to remain comic even to modern audiences. In itself this is no picayune achievement.\textsuperscript{47}

Olivier also received great praise for his performance in Sheridan's \textit{The Critic}. "As for Puff in \textit{The Critic}, Mr. Olivier was to turn him,—a short fifteen minutes after having played Oedipus,—into a fellow all energy and unction, laughter and lightness, who scampered and skittered around the stage, blowing the dust off Sheridan's old parody."\textsuperscript{48}

Both Garrick and Olivier were versatile enough to switch easily from tragedy to comedy, and both men won praise in both areas. This versatility was another factor responsible for their imprint upon the theatre.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 320.


\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 205.
Both Garrick and Olivier introduced new things to the theatre. Sometimes they were praised, and sometimes they were condemned. Criticism was difficult for both of them to take. Garrick was so afraid of criticism that he would not make his debut in a recognized theatre, nor would he play under his real name until after he was established. Samuel Foote took a dislike for Garrick's success to heart, and learned of Garrick's weakness.

The real reason why Foote, from whom nobody was safe, made Garrick the special target of his spite was, I believe, not professional at all, but personal, and had its roots in the characters of the two men. Foote was by nature a bully, and in Garrick he found what every bully, consciously or subconsciously, is searching for—the perfect victim.

In Garrick's character, mainly admirable, there was one besetting weakness; a morbid dislike, indeed a craven fear, of ridicule. This went far beyond the normal shrinking from adverse criticism, for which actors can easily be forgiven. Garrick's horror of being laughed at had the irrationality of an obsession, and rather than risk being made to look foolish he would sometimes deliberately play the fool himself.*

Sometimes when he was planning to introduce something new to the theatre, Garrick would become frightened that it would meet with disfavor, and he would write pieces for local papers, criticizing himself under an assumed name. It was his hope that people would oppose the criticism and rally to his side of the argument.

*Darlington, op. cit., p. 55.
Olivier was also frightened by criticism, and after his performance in *Romeo and Juliet* with Gielgud, he fretted for long periods of time. Once, after he had returned from the service, he was appearing with Ralph Richardson in *Arms and the Man*. Richardson had received excellent reviews, while Olivier's were not so good. Again he let the notices prey on his nerves.

I was in my habitual relationship with the critics. I'd always hated them. And for the most part I'd felt antagonistic toward audiences; I felt I was a good actor and I was in a stupid, wretched state of frustration.

The day after we opened, I went down to the theatre with Ralph to collect letters. On the way back he bought a newspaper and I took a look over his shoulder and it said, "Mr. Ralph Richardson was brilliant as Bluntschli. Mr. Olivier, on the other hand—" And I thought, "I'm going back to the Navy. I just won't take this any more. I can't stick it."50

Despite their dislike of criticism, neither Garrick nor Olivier was ever able to take the easy way out of his problem. Both men could have given up their radical ideas. They could not follow the example of those they did not admire, but rather had to follow their own light, even if it brought them unwanted criticism. One thing that Garrick and Olivier were both criticized for was their editing of the plays of Shakespeare. Both men felt they were loyal to the original text, but both would change a script if it fit their desires. Garrick said he was going to present the original

Hamlet to the public, but he decided to cut all the "rubbish" from the fifth act because by so doing he had more time for a really big death scene.

Olivier also tampered with Hamlet. He eliminated the parts of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and changed Fortinbras to a character called Fairbanks. Olivier received much criticism for these changes, but he never stopped making them. He came to the defense of his changes by saying they were necessary to make a film of less than three hours, rather than one of over four hours in length. Regardless of the criticisms given their ideas, both men remained adamant in the belief that they were correct. Garrick was determined that his ideas were correct, and after he became manager of the Drury Lane, he trained all his actors to perform in the same manner that he did.\(^{51}\) Olivier did the same thing after he became manager of the National Theatre. Though his interpretation of Hamlet had been one of controversy, he maintained that it was right, and when he directed Peter O'Toole in the same part, the part was judged as a reflection of Olivier's earlier performance. Whatever the limitations of Olivier's, they were repeated in O'Toole's performance. Both Garrick and Olivier claimed to be exponents of ensemble acting, but both were criticized for scene stealing. Garrick was said to have rewritten the last act of Hamlet, not to

\(^{51}\text{Duer, p. cit., p. 227.}\)
improve the play, but to give himself a chance to gain more attention and to have a more dramatic death scene. The main criticism of Olivier's Othello was the miscasting of Frank Finlay as Iago. People felt that this casting was done primarily to make Olivier stand out more in his part. Whatever the critics thought, the audiences usually responded as Garrick and Olivier had predicted they would. Sometimes, when the critics were not kind, they could sustain themselves on notices they received from ordinary playgoers. One of Garrick's favorites came from a deaf man who saw him act.

Following is a record of a conversation between the critic Arthur Murphy and Mr. Shireff, the deaf man.

When the company were seated at table, this writer was told that, if he held up his finger and spelt his words in the air, he might carry on a conversation. He tried the experiment, and found that it answered. Being told that Mr. Shireff was acquainted with Garrick, and admired him as an actor, he put the following questions to him:

'Did you know Garrick?—'yes,' in a very inarticulate sound.—'Did you ever see him act?'—'Yes.'—'Did you admire him?'—'Yes.'—'How could that be, when you could not hear him, and of course, could not understand him?' The answer was unintelligible. Mr. and Mrs. Heriot were used to his manner; at their desire, the question was repeated, and the answer, when explained, astonished the whole company. Mr. Shireff's reply was, Garrick's face was a language. To prove that it was so, Mr. Shireff stood up after dinner, and, muttering uncouth sounds, went through the part of 'Richard III' by his deportment, his action, and most significant looks, distinguishing every scene and all the

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various situations of Richard from the beginning to his death in Bosworth field. Hence a judgement may be formed of the actor, who could play before the deaf and dumb and make them capable. His face was a language!54

When Olivier was in one of his low ebbs about Romeo and Juliet and worried that perhaps he should abandon all his ideas on acting, the following message arrived to cheer him somewhat.

"When the interval came I was almost in tears and could not control my voice to answer anything more than a monosyllable when my companion spoke to me," he wrote. "I do not think I ever wish to see this play again lest my memory of Olivier be dimmed. Here was the true youth untouched by love with all the shy hesitancies of inexperience when he first set eyes on Juliet at the feast. He flowered into such beauty of feeling and movement that my heart ached for him knowing what was to follow.55

Whatever effect criticism had upon the two men, they did continue to pursue and endeavor to master their chosen profession. Their rises to success were parallel in that both of them knew almost no personal failures. Garrick was almost instantly a star after his first Richard III. Olivier appeared in a series of poor plays, but he was usually successful, and the closing of a play did not force him out of work as it might have a lesser player. He was always able to move immediately into something new.

Both men chose the works of Shakespeare as the primary vehicles for their acting, and both men were well-established

54Darlington, op. cit., p. 63.
55Barker, op. cit., p. 92.
as Shakespearean actors of outstanding ability before they were thirty years old. They both achieved early in their careers and maintained always the qualities that James Boswell set down as necessary for an actor of merit.

I would however beg leave to differ from the philosophers of old, who, when treating of the duties of men in their several stations, and comparing them to players, say, that "there is no matter what part is assigned to a performer, whether that of a king or a peasant"—The question is—has he done his part well? For though there is no doubt that he who performs the part of a peasant well, is better than he who performs the part of a king ill, yet a player is entitled to a greater degree of praise in proportion as he represents a lesser or greater character, and also in proportion to the variety of characters which he represents. 56

Garrick and Olivier both played a variety of parts and played them well. That was what allowed them to rise to such heights as actors. In their rise, it was inevitable that there should be comparisons between their acting and that of other players of the day. Garrick sought comparison because he wanted to prove that his acting style was superior to that which was traditional at the time. He openly competed in the same play with his chief opponent, James Quin. Garrick won and forced Quin to retire from the stage, but they never became enemies as a result. Later, Quin returned to the stage as an actor in Garrick's company. They became close friends and Garrick even wrote the epitaph for Quin's tombstone.

56 Agate, English Drama Critics, p. 54.
There was just as much comparison between Olivier and John Gielgud, although neither of them sought it.

Comparisons may be odious, but they are quite inevitable; and even when actors as dissimilar in style as Gielgud and Olivier are the subjects under discussion, tongues debate hotly the possibility of one usurping the other's position as England's leading actor. As if England, with a dearth of players who amount to much more than well-dressed dummies with a modicum of charm, could not afford to be led by more than one actor of real stature.

But in 1935 comparisons were neither odious nor foolish, for that year the two actors appeared alternately as Romeo and Mercutio in the same production. 57

Nonetheless Laurence Olivier did eventually take the title from Gielgud and became, as Garrick had in his time, England's greatest actor. But, like Garrick and Quin, Olivier and Gielgud remained good friends. One of Olivier's most-prized possessions was a gift from Gielgud. The gift was a sword presented to Olivier after he opened in Richard III in 1944. It was engraved with the following words, "This sword given him by his mother Kate Terry Gielgud, 1938, is given to Laurence Olivier by his friend John Gielgud in appreciation of his performance of Richard III at the New Theatre, 1944." 58

Despite the criticism, comparisons and hard work necessary, David Garrick and Sir Laurence Olivier did become and remain the greatest English actors of their times. They made contributions and innovations in acting and theatre.

58 Barker, op. cit., p. 233.
practice, but authorities maintain that both men should be given the most credit for the same thing—their acting.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The play may be the thing, and both Garrick and Olivier believed in the importance of respecting the text of the works they were performing, but good plays have proved through the years to be insufficient to satisfy the taste of the theatre-going public. If good plays were sufficient in themselves, an academic approach to drama would be satisfactory to the public for they could just read the plays. James Agate has said that such an idea is folly. He believed that even though Shakespeare may well be the greatest playwright in English history, people are not happy with just well-written plays. The plays must be well-acted to please the audiences. "The masses, always with the exception of the Old Vic faithfuls, do not flock to Shakespeare. What they flock to is Gielgud in something, and Richardson and Olivier in something, and if it's Shakespeare it's just too bad."\(^1\)

The public flocked to see David Garrick in his portrayals of Shakespearean characters and in the other parts he played. He came into the theatre in a time when acting was false and pretentious. He disliked the affectation of

the players of the time and determined to give audiences something more real with which to associate. Quin compared him to a renegade and likened Garrick to the people who were revolting against the established rules of the church. Quin said of Garrick that when audiences tired of the novelty, they would forget him and come back to church. Garrick disagreed. He thought audiences were just as tired of the old school of acting as he was, and that he was quite justified in his changes in acting. He said of Quin's remarks, "When Doctrines meet with gen'r'al approbation, It is not Heresy, but Reformation." Garrick believed his acting reforms were necessary and desired by all the public. When he introduced The Merchant of Venice, his first production as manager of the Drury Lane, Garrick said in the prologue, "The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,/For we that live to please, must please to live."

Garrick did please because, as has been stated earlier, the London audiences grew to want nothing but natural acting. Because audiences accepted his acting style, Garrick was able to become manager of the Drury Lane Theatre and there to institute a number of stage reforms. Some of his reforms met with some opposition, but he was strong enough to make

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3Ibid., p. 6.
people accept them. Actors were as hesitant as audiences to give up the idea of people sitting on the stage. Even though he had to put up an iron barrier to keep people off the stage, he had his way.

Actors were not accustomed to working at rehearsals, but Garrick forced them to accept his discipline. He fined them if they did not conform to his rules. He was also able to introduce new lighting, scenic, and costume reforms to the theatre. All these things were made possible because Garrick's acting was accepted as the standard of the time. He had remolded tradition.

Two hundred years later, audiences flocked to see Laurence Olivier perform. He, like Garrick, rebelled against acting that was stilted and artificial. His method of acting in classics became the accepted and imitated method. Because of the respect for his acting, Olivier was able to initiate several important developments in the theatre. Olivier wanted and did make some changes in current rehearsal habits when he was directing plays, but his were not as drastic as Garrick's. Olivier was able, because of respect for his acting, to raise the money to make Shakespearean films. His films have done more than anything else in the twentieth century to make Shakespeare popular with the general public. His acting and that of other current Shakespearean actors made it possible, after over one hundred years of delay, to
establish the British National Theatre. Like Garrick, Olivier has remolded tradition.

In the careers of these two men there can be seen many parallels. They were both from middle-class families which had come from France via Holland to England. Garrick's mother was from a family that earned its living in the church, and Olivier's father was a minister. Both men attended grammar schools which stressed the value of clear and expressive speech in recitations.

Both men found examples of the style of acting they proposed in other men who preceded them on the stage. Garrick had Macklin to serve as an example. Olivier looked to Ralph Richardson. In a recent television interview, Olivier mentioned some other actors who influenced his career. He said, when asked if there were other actors who had influenced him,

Yes, lots of them. I've mentioned Fairbanks and Barrymore whose Hamlet I first saw when I was seventeen years old. Noel Coward in his way influenced me a great deal, he taught me a very stern professionalism. Alfred Lunt taught me an enormous amount, by watching him, in the field of really naturalistic acting; he had astonishing gifts, an astonishing virtuosity in overlap, marvelous. That was when I first saw him in 1929 in Caprice at the St. James Theatre.4

Both men spent an apprenticeship in the provinces before they made their debuts in London. In the summer of 1741, Garrick went to Ipswich with a sharing company, where he made

his debut as Aboan in Oroonoko. "It was a small part, but a strongly emotional one with plenty of action, which Garrick needed for the exercise of his particular gifts. It gave him an opportunity, moreover, to stab himself and die on the stage—a performance he always thoroughly enjoyed and at which he excelled." This training prepared him for his revolutionary debut in London.

Later, Olivier received training which he considered invaluable in the Birmingham Repertory Company. He relates who he was almost fired from that company and how important he thought the training was. "In my first job at Birmingham, two years later, which I would have given my ears to get, where I had dreamt of being, where I knew would be found the absolute foundation of any good that I could ever be in my profession—in my very first part I was nearly fired for giggling." Olivier feels this training in the provinces was of vital importance to his development as an actor.

Both men were established as leaders of their profession before they were thirty years old. Both of them gained fame through Shakespearean roles, and both men devoted the major part of their careers to the playing of Shakespearean and other classic roles. Garrick and Olivier played in roles they had selected from current authors, but both men failed

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5 Margaret Barton, Garrick (New York, 1949), p. 29.
to select good plays from this group. Their greatest successes came in their revivals.

Garrick and Olivier claimed to be absolutely loyal to the production of Shakespeare as he wrote the plays, but both men made frequent alterations in Shakespearean plays. They both made these changes out of the belief that they were making necessary changes to please the audiences of their times. Though the critics often criticized them for these changes, their performances did usually appeal to the audiences for whom they were playing.

Another thing they were both criticized for was their excessive movement on the stage. Both men had come into the theatre at times when there was not much mobility on the stage. Garrick and Olivier were both mobile to the point of being athletic on the stage. The criticism they received bothered them both tremendously, but they were so determined they were right that they could never change in the stands they took. Olivier summed up their feelings when he talked about the reaction of critics to his verse-speaking.

'I remember headlines like 'A beautiful Juliet, but . . .' and that sort of thing. But I don't know. I'm not such an ass as to say the critics were all wrong about me, the way they were all wrong about Ibsen or Wagner or anything like that, but it is possible that they were a little wrong. It is possible that I went too far in my attitude. But I don't know that I've ever consciously changed and I would, I suppose, sit here and say, 'well, they've come round to me now, therefore I was right,' but it wouldn't be quite honest or true. I'd been taught as a child to make Shakespeare
my own language and that's the way I believed it should be, and that's the way it still is with me. 7

Both men were criticized, but both men remained loyal to their beliefs and sooner or later the critics did come round to agree with Garrick and Olivier.

Both men insisted in the highest standards for themselves and for those around them. When they organized their acting companies, they both wanted to surround themselves with extremely good actors and actresses. Of Garrick it was written, "Garrick surrounded himself with the finest company available, and he allowed them ample opportunity to exercise their gifts." 8 Years later, when Olivier was asked what kind of actors he wanted in the National Theatre, he said, "Very good ones, very good ones. Versatile ones; people who had their heart in the right place; unlazy ones, deeply enthusiastic, courageous, gifted with all sorts of attributes." 9

Just as David Garrick was able to train and mold the actors in his company, so was Olivier able to do the same thing in the National Theatre some two hundred years later. Garrick became the standard for his time, as did Olivier later. Noel Coward said,

The fact that the head of the National Theatre is Laurence Olivier, an actor from the top of his head to the soles of his feet, keeps up the

7 Ibid., p. 18.
8 Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 19.
9 Burton, op. cit., p. 31.
standard. He has a very sharp eye, and he presents a marvelous example to the young ones, and he always gives them chances. Now Larry inspires these young people, he is the boss. He is treated with respect, as the big actor-managers were treated with respect, though in a slightly different way because the managers have changed a little; but he's respected all right, and what he says goes. And so, when I came to work under him as a director, he was, of course, enchanting to me and gave me everything I wanted. But above all, he gave me the best staff, the best stage management, and the best cast I've ever had, and that is more encouraging. I think the quality of acting that I got out of these young people is the most exhilarating and happy thing that's happened to me, in the theatre, for many, many, many years.  

Both actors were able to influence the players around them. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they never demanded anything from anyone that they were not willing to do themselves. Both of them worked very hard at their profession, and the work paid off for them in the end.

Whereas some of the actors around them seemed to be great in some kinds of parts, Olivier and Garrick were able to excel in all types. They never seemed to be the same on the stage. Olivier explains why this happened to him. He gives the credit to Clare Eames and a conversation they once had. "I used to talk about a straight part or a character part and she said, 'What's the difference? Don't tell me there's such a thing as a straight part. There isn't a part in the world that isn't a character part.' And it was she who gave me that attitude."  

Garrick certainly shared that attitude.

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10 Ibid., p. 177  
11 Ibid., p. 16.
Another idea that Garrick and Olivier shared was the importance and difficulty of all roles. Garrick used to build up the small parts in the minds of his actors so they would believe they were important to the play, and once when Ralph Richardson was concerned that Falstaff was too difficult for him, Olivier said to him, "Nonsense, all parts are difficult. Don't be so coy, don't be so silly. Just have a go at it." That seems to be the attitude of David Garrick and Sir Laurence Olivier throughout their careers. They were not afraid to be different, and they were not afraid to try almost any part. Occasionally they failed, but more often they succeeded. Because of their daring, they became known as telegraph poles which bore up the theatre in times of stress. They both received the title of the greatest English-speaking actor of their times, and through their careers, Garrick and Olivier both proved that the acting of great performers does have a vital impact upon the theatre.

12 Ibid., p. 69.
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