Restoration London’s leading actor and theatre manager Thomas Betterton has not been the subject of a biography since 1891. He worked with all the best-known playwrights of his age and with the first generation of English actresses; he was intimately involved in the theatre’s responses to politics, and became a friend of leading literary men such as Pope and Steele. His innovations in scenery and company management, and his association with the dramatic inheritance of Shakespeare, helped to change the culture of English theatre. David Roberts’s entertaining study unearths new documents and draws fresh conclusions about this major but shadowy figure. It contextualises key performances and examines Betterton’s relationship to patrons, colleagues and family, as well as to significant historical moments and artefacts. The most substantial study available of any seventeenth-century actor, *Thomas Betterton* gives one of England’s greatest performing artists his due on the tercentenary of his death.

**David Roberts** is Professor and Head of English at Birmingham City University. His previous publications include *The Ladies: Female Patronage of Restoration Drama* (1989) and editions of Defoe’s *Colonel Jack, A Journal of the Plague Year* and Lord Chesterfield’s letters. His articles and reviews have appeared in leading journals including *Shakespeare Quarterly, The Review of English Studies, ELH, The Times Literary Supplement* and *New Theatre Quarterly*. 
Sr

I was unfortunate in timing ye respect I came to pay you so ill, that it deprived me of y e honor of kissing y e hands before you left of verse. I have at Reading, beside Shakespeare, a head of Chaucers, as big as y e life, and I think no ill one. I have S' John Suckling, and Fletcher, if my Lord please to have any of these Copy'd for him, and you (Sr) will do me y e honor to send me his Lord's commands, they shall be punctually obey'd by.

Sr

Yours most oblig'd, faithfull
humble Servant
Tho: Betterton
THOMAS BETTERTON

The Greatest Actor of the Restoration Stage

DAVID ROBERTS
To Fiona, Joe and Maddy
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Note on dates and texts

New-style dates are used throughout except where otherwise indicated. For performances of plays, including Betterton’s, the date of the premiere or first performance by Betterton is used; dates for printed texts are indicated separately where appropriate. The availability of *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* means that first editions are generally used for play citations. Where page references are missing in such early texts, the relevant EEBO or ECCO image number is given as (for example) ‘EEBO 12’.