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Introduction

The theme of this book is that Shakespeare's cultural pre-eminence, nationally and internationally, during the period 1832 to 1916 was based on the performance of his plays. Recent studies of Shakespeare's elevation to the status of national icon by Gary Taylor (*Reinventing Shakespeare* 1990), Michael Dobson (*The Making of a National Poet* 1992) and Jonathan Bate (*Shakespearean Constitutions* 1989, *The Genius of Shakespeare* 1997) have not concerned themselves greatly with the stage. Yet it is a truth universally acknowledged that Shakespeare was a consummate man of the theatre, immersed in its practicalities as well as its arts, sensitive to its socially diverse audience and alert to the verdict of the box office. His plays were the product of his unique genius and the theatrical conditions in which he worked. His genius inevitably assured his place in the nation's artistic pantheon, but his roots in popular theatre ensured his place on the stage until almost the end of the period under review.

Whilst not denying the instances of royal, aristocratic and civic patronage, it is nevertheless true to say that historically the basis upon which the British theatre operated was commercial. Britain's monarchs did not erect grandiose court theatres, its governments did not aggrandise themselves with imposing state theatres and its municipalities did not minister to their citizens through the medium of subsidised theatres. Not that the theatre lay outside the sphere of official regulations. The warrants issued to Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant on 21 August 1660 by King Charles II were perpetuated by the monopolies enjoyed by Covent Garden and Drury Lane, not the least important aspect of which was their exclusive right over the performance of Shakespeare's plays in the capital. Successive managers of the patent theatres fell under the obligation to perform the plays of the national dramatist, but without the state subventions enjoyed by their continental counterparts. In 1832 the spirit of reform reached the patent theatres with the recommendation of the parliamentary Select Committee that the monopoly be

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abolished, though it took until 1843 for this to happen. The abolition of the patent theatres' monopoly was consistent with other anti-restrictive reforms in trade, politics and so on, but voices (Edward Bulwer Lytton, W. J. Fox amongst them) were raised arguing that the state should assume responsibilities for the recreation of the people (particularly the poor) including the establishment of a National Theatre. This suggestion fell on deaf ears and instead of being privileged by enshrinement (or incarceration) in a national institution, Shakespeare had to take his chance in the knockabout world of commercial entertainment.

This outcome was not the result of formal debate or political policy making, but rather a reflection of the prevailing attitudes of the day. Theatre managers, like the electorate as a whole, were to be enfranchised, in their case with the freedom to perform Shakespeare's plays on an equal footing. In the event there was an explosion of Shakespeare from lowly suburban theatres such as Sadler's Wells and Shoreditch to the West End and the court itself; his plays were staged with the vigour, imagination and taste which characterised so much Victorian endeavour. Whether this would have happened if a discrete, specialist institution had been set up charged with the performance of the classics – Shakespeare in particular – can only be a matter of speculation, but it can certainly be asserted that one of the great strengths of the Victorian stage was that it did not segregate actors, audiences and theatres into the legitimate and the illegitimate, the highbrow and lowbrow.

The situation was characterised by the royal family. Queen Victoria's tastes were decidedly catholic, ranging from circuses to Charles Kean's Shakespeare revivals. Prince Albert was more earnest, quizzing Macready about his text for *As You Like It* and looking to the court theatres of Germany for examples of patronage, but he never overlooked the importance of the entertainment available to the population at large. The couple's eldest daughter Princess Victoria, the future Empress (albeit briefly) of Germany, was in her father's mould, whereas, in this respect if in little else, their eldest son, the future King Edward VII, was closer to his mother, devoting himself to the sheer enjoyment of the theatre in all its diversity throughout his adult life. After her husband's death in 1861 Queen Victoria completely renounced the stage for over twenty years, so it was the Prince of Wales who set the tone which, when it came to Shakespeare, ranged from diplomatic (visiting foreign companies) to personal (Mrs Langtry as Rosalind) connections. Kaiser Wilhelm II's theatre-going was in marked contrast to his English cousin's; he maintained an impressive, though rather moribund, court theatre and made it a principle never to attend public playhouses.

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Although the British theatre was not beholden to the state for funds, its members nevertheless sought out a quasi-official role. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign the stage had been held in low esteem and its leaders seized any opportunity to contribute to national events as a means of elevating their own status and that of their profession. Shakespeare was of course their ace card, which they were only too willing to play at a royal wedding or diplomatic occasion. By the end of the nineteenth century the theatre's fortunes had been transformed, with many leading actors drawn into at least the fringes of the Marlborough House set and Henry Irving's knighthood in 1895 spurring on the ambitions of his peers. For an actor with such ambitions, services to the national dramatist, especially as a diplomatic initiative or contribution to some national event such as a coronation, were particularly apt. Accordingly the performance of Shakespeare's plays featured in the marriage ceremony of Princess Victoria, the coronations of Edward VII and George V, visits by members of the German royal house and – less propitiously – conflicts such as the Boer War.

British actors had long ventured overseas in the search for new audiences, but this process was given added momentum by the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century and the improvement in land (trains) and sea (steam) transport. Although personal advancement (status and money) was their principal driving force, these actors were inevitably implicated in the spread of British hegemony. This could be both an advantage and a disadvantage depending on their destination and the time of their visit. Macready's arrival in the United States in 1848 coincided with a build-up of anti-British feeling, whereas on all of his eight North American tours Henry Irving seized the opportunity to strengthen bonds between the two nations. Throughout the English-speaking world Shakespeare was the playwright whose plays audiences wanted to see, no doubt in some cases because of patriotic and sentimental attachments, but above all because of their sheer entertainment value: the action-packed plots, the legendary yet recognisably human characters, the rich humour, the lofty tragedy, the sensational murders, spine-chilling apparitions and breathtaking battles as well of course as the incomparable language, which was becoming the official and everyday tongue of peoples of very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In India the students who flocked to Shakespeare may have been encouraged by the principles enshrined in Macaulay's 'Minute of 2 February 1835' on Indian Education, but English actors invariably testified to the enthusiasm and responsiveness of audiences in the sub-continent and indeed further east.

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British actors travelling these enormous distances to perform Shakespeare obviously incurred substantial costs during the long (weeks, months) journeys, but such was the demand at their destination(s) that their outlay was usually (handsomely) recompensed. Even if successive British governments had been minded to do so it is inconceivable that they could have organised the export of Shakespeare on this scale. When the Comédie-Française visited London in 1879, Matthew Arnold sent up the cry '*organise the theatre!*' but those countries which did subsidise the theatre made little impact on the world stage. Corneille, Racine, Goethe, even Molière, as products of a different tradition and system, shared little of Shakespeare's popular appeal.

Instead non-English speaking actors turned to Shakespeare. Naturally many came to London in search of the ultimate imprimatur on their work, as Americans such as Edwin Forrest, Charlotte Cushman, Edwin Booth, Mary Anderson and others did. Helena Modjeska from Poland, Madame Ristori, Salvini and Rossi from Italy, Sarah Bernhardt – having deserted the Comédie-Française – and the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's company all converged on London, but they also took Shakespeare to audiences across the globe. Modjeska, who did learn English, enjoyed enormous popularity performing Shakespeare in America, but so too did Salvini who always performed in Italian, though sometimes with an Italian-speaking company and sometimes with an English-speaking company. Actors of many different native tongues became adept at these bi-lingual performances of Shakespeare. That they could do so was testimony not only to their own skills, but also to Shakespeare's common currency in the profession across the world and the savvy of their audiences.

This global Shakespearian network was a powerful force for the exchange of technique in both acting and stage practice. Macready, who was influenced by Talma, was Charlotte Cushman's model. The French actor Charles Fechter helped to revolutionise English Shakespearian acting. Originating in Manchester, Charles Calvert's *Henry V* traversed America and the southern hemisphere. The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, who had been impressed by the productions of Charles Kean and Samuel Phelps, in turn made a strong impact on Henry Irving, Frank Benson and Beerbohm Tree. The ever-eclectic Beerbohm Tree travelled widely, absorbing ideas from Max Reinhardt in Germany and the combined talents of Edward Gordon Craig and Constantin Stanislavski in Moscow, as well as venturing to Hollywood to film *Macbeth* with D. W. Griffith.

For many, Shakespeare was nothing less than a passport to freedom. Ira Aldrich, though the most celebrated, was by no means the only black

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American actor to make a successful career performing Shakespeare in Europe, in his case being a particular favourite in Russia and Poland, where he died. Conversely Helena Modjeska had escaped the, for her, repressive situation in Poland and after decades as an international star died in California.

Although Shakespeare had written for a theatre from which they were notably absent the performance of his plays in the nineteenth century afforded extensive opportunities to women. Modjeska, Ristori and Bernhardt took absolute control of their own fortunes, as did Charlotte Cushman and (more briefly) Mary Anderson, in all of whom aspects of Henry James's international diva, Miriam Rooth in *The Tragic Muse*, can be detected. Ellen Kean, Ellen Terry, Adelaide Calvert and even Madge Kendal and Lillah McCarthy pursued their Shakespearian careers for the most part in consort with a male partner, but they were also active in a managerial capacity, as were Sarah Lane, Lillie Langtry, Annie Horniman, Lilian Baylis and Lena Ashwell.

Lena Ashwell pioneered the provision of entertainment, including Shakespeare's plays, at the front during the First World War. This was a profoundly alien outcome for Shakespeare who for so long had embodied the spirit of freedom and internationalism through the performance of his plays. And yet throughout the nineteenth century and more markedly during the early twentieth century the spectre of national rivalry had lurked alongside that between individual actors. So colossal was Shakespeare's achievement that it seemed to be too great for one nation alone. Britain was of course only too glad to share her most famous son proprietorially, but this did not always satisfy rival claimants. In America for instance Edwin Forrest voiced the view that he and his countrymen, many of whom after all were of the same stock as the English bard, could claim him as their own and from Germany the cry of 'unser Shakespeare' arose ever louder.

My attempt to pursue Shakespeare across the stages of the globe over almost a century is of course fraught with difficulties and pitfalls. I make no claim to have produced a comprehensive history of Shakespearian production worldwide during those years, though readers should gain a reasonably full picture of the main developments in Britain at least. I am acutely aware of the problem of contextualisation across such a broad canvas, but hope that my summaries will be of benefit to those unfamiliar with (that aspect of) the subject without irritating (too much) those who are.

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1

The hero as actor: William Charles Macready

THOMAS CARLYLE

On 12 May 1840 Thomas Carlyle delivered his lecture 'The Hero As Poet: Dante; Shakespeare', the third of six in his series 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History'. In his lecture Carlyle identified what he considered to be Shakespeare's prospects not only in the land of his birth, but also around a world which during the remainder of the century was to become increasingly dominated by the English language. In a key passage Carlyle identified Shakespeare's role at home and abroad:

> In spite of the sad state Hero-worship now lies in, consider what this Shakspeare has actually become among us. Which Englishman we ever made, in this land of ours, which million of Englishmen, would we not give-up rather than the Stratford Peasant? There is no regiment of highest Dignitaries that we would sell him for. He is the grandest thing we have yet done. For our honour among foreign nations, as an ornament to our English household, what item is there that we would not rather surrender than him? Consider now, if they asked us, Will you give-up your Indian Empire or your Shakspeare, you English . . . ? (1946, p. 148)

Carlyle's pride in Shakespeare as the greatest 'Englishman we ever made' is proprietorial in an almost timeless way. He identifies Shakespeare as the product of a particular period ('This Elizabethan Era') in the nation's history, but the credit is shared by all his countrymen in perpetuity. The scale of the importance with which Carlyle imbued such a hero is evident from his valuation of 'the Stratford Peasant' above a 'million of Englishmen' or a 'regiment of highest Dignitaries' or 'your Indian Empire'. During the next three-quarters of a century 'the sad state of Hero-worship' was to improve – beyond even Carlyle's aspiration – reaching such heights that a 'million of Englishmen' and more were indeed sacrificed not directly for Shakespeare, but for a patriotic ideal with which he had become indissolubly identified. This was certainly not Carlyle's intention. He perceived that in the case of Shakespeare hero-worship would be a force for peace:

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England, before long, this Island of ours, will hold but a small fraction of the English: in America, in New Holland, east and west to the very Antipodes, there will be a Saxondom covering great spaces of the Globe. And now, what is it that can keep all of these together virtually one Nation, so that they do not fall-out and fight, but live at peace, in brotherlike intercourse, helping one another . . . We can fancy him [Shakespeare] as radiant aloft over all the Nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence. (p. 149)

By the time he delivered his hero-worship lectures, Carlyle had developed strong personal links with the contemporary author whom he would not have been alone in considering to be a candidate for such status: Goethe. In 1824 Carlyle sent a copy of his translation of *Wilhelm Meister*, with its influential critique of *Hamlet*, to the German author, with an accompanying letter and a correspondence ensued over the rest of the decade. Carlyle paid fulsome tribute to Goethe for the help which he had gained from the German author's works in overcoming his own spiritual crisis, but the scope of the letters extended from the benefits which great literature could impart to individuals to those which it could exert between nations. Thus on 20 July 1827 Goethe wrote to Carlyle:

It is obvious that the efforts of the best poets and aesthetic writers of all nations have now for some time been directed towards what is universal in humanity . . . striving to diffuse everywhere some gentleness, we cannot indeed hope that universal peace is being ushered in thereby, but only that inevitable strife will be gradually more restrained, war will become less cruel, and victory less insolent. (Norton ed., 1887, p. 24)

Carlyle reciprocated these sentiments, drawing attention to the 'rapidly progressive . . . study and love of German Literature' in Britain, where 'within the last six years, I should say that the readers of your language have increased tenfold' (p. 85).

In practice the implicit notions of national superiority and cultural hegemony were all too liable to surface in the form of rivalry, sometimes personal but also national, in which the achievements of artists and writers became part of the chauvinist arsenal rather than the instruments of peace.

MONOPOLY

Amongst those present at Carlyle's lecture on Shakespeare was William Charles Macready, the 'Eminent Tragedian', seen to be manager of

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Drury Lane Theatre. Ever sensitive about the status of the profession which he had reluctantly joined, when the decline in the fortunes of his actor–manager father placed the law and the church beyond his reach, Macready expressed himself 'disappointed in his [Carlyle's] treatment of the subject', an opinion no doubt conditioned by what the actor took as Carlyle's view 'of managers of playhouses being the most insignificant of human beings' (Toynbee ed., 1912, vol. 2, p. 60). In fact Carlyle had expressed his admiration for Macready's attempts to elevate the contemporary stage in a letter of 12 January 1838, in which, though describing himself as 'an entirely *un*theatrical man', he had expressed his wonder 'at your Herculean task. Proceed in it, prosper in it' (Archer, 1890, pp. 117–18). Carlyle's sentiments were apt, for if Shakespeare was to become the ornament of the English stage, it was upon Macready that the responsibility principally rested.

The status of the two principal London theatres, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, had come under parliamentary scrutiny in 1832 when a Select Committee had been appointed 'to inquire into the LAWS affecting DRAMATIC LITERATURE' (*British Parliamentary Papers, Stage and Theatre I*, 1968). Though the committee's remit extended to authors' copyright and other issues, it was the monopoly of the performance of 'legitimate drama' – principally Shakespeare – enjoyed by Covent Garden and Drury Lane that was most fiercely debated. These two theatres based their claim on the warrants granted by King Charles II to Thomas Killigrew (the King's Company) and Sir William Davenant (the Duke's Company) on 21 August 1660. In due course these companies had taken up residence at Drury Lane and Covent Garden respectively, and, though these theatres had been successively rebuilt, being enlarged each time to accommodate the capital's expanding population, their nineteenth-century managers regarded themselves as the heirs to Killigrew and Davenant and the privileges accorded to them by Charles II.

Charles Kemble, the youngest brother of Sarah Siddons and John Philip Kemble, whose precarious management of Covent Garden had only been salvaged by his daughter Fanny's debut as Juliet in 1829, nevertheless staunchly defended the monopoly, claiming that: 'certain plays . . . cannot be adequately represented without space to do them in; for instance such plays as Coriolanus or Julius Caesar' (p. 45). When asked whether audiences would prefer to see the plays 'as near their own doors as possible', Kemble replied 'I do not believe that there is any demand for it.'

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In 1832 Macready had no experience of managing a patent theatre, but he was insistent upon the retention of their privileged status, though when asked how many times he had played Shakespeare during his current engagement of two years at Drury Lane, he was obliged to reply that he had played Macbeth six times, Richard III 'five times, and Hamlet once and the Winter's Tale once' (p. 135). When it was pointed out to him that 'by limiting the performance of Shakespeare to the two great theatres, you leave it to the caprice of the proprietors of those theatres', he replied 'Yes; but they pay for that caprice, and the losses have been very heavy indeed in consequence.' Both Kemble and Macready were invited to make comparison with the Théâtre-Français (Comédie-Française) in Paris, but of course that received a state subvention, something never enjoyed by the English patent companies/theatres. The supporters of the monopoly found themselves in the unenviable position of asserting a privilege without having the means of carrying it out effectively.

Not only were the economic and demographic odds stacked against the patents, but also the very monopoly they were defending had long been more honoured in the breach than the observance. For years minor theatres had resorted to various ruses in order to perform Shakespeare. The most common was some form of music, an extreme case being the performance of *Othello* as a burletta, 'which was accomplished by having a low pianoforte accompaniment, the musician striking a chord once in five minutes – but always so as to be totally inaudible. This was the extent of the musical element distinguishing *Othello* from the dialogue of the regular drama' (Nicholson, 1906, p. 330). Another subterfuge was to perform Shakespeare's plays with different titles: '*Othello* under the title *Is He Jealous?*; *Romeo and Juliet* under the guise of *How to Die for Love*; *Macbeth* as *Murder Will Out*; *The Merchant of Venice* billed as *Diamond cut Diamond*; and *Hamlet* as *Methinks I See My Father*' (Broadbent, 1901, p. 107). Absurd though these instances now seem, they do make the crucial point that Shakespeare was still a dramatist with huge appeal to a 'popular' audience. He could be 'box-office'; otherwise managers would not go to such lengths and risk falling foul of the law to stage his plays. Jane Moody has argued persuasively 'that this process of adaptation began primarily as a legal safeguard but also provided an opportunity to translate Shakespeare for popular consumption' (1994, p. 62 and 2000).

Although the Select Committee's second recommendation was that all London theatres 'should be allowed to exhibit, at their option, the

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Legitimate Drama', it was not until 1843 that the necessary legislation was passed. In the interim intrepid managers assumed the responsibility of the patent houses, accepting to varying degrees that the performance of Shakespeare's plays was part of their remit. Alfred Bunn, who did 'not think it compatible with the disposition of this country, that its places of public entertainment should be up held by any grant from Government' (1840, vol. 1, p. 34) nevertheless drew attention to the financial penalties of producing Shakespeare at Drury Lane in the 1835–6 season. The twenty-four Shakespearian appearances by Macready – with 'every possible advantage to back him' – in the lead brought in £4,542, 'a nightly average of £189' compared with Madame Malibran whose sixteen performances in the *Maid of Artois* 'yielded a nightly average of more than £355 . . . Difference per night! – £166' (vol. 2, p. 72). The uneasy partnership between Macready and Bunn was terminated on 29 April 1836, not by the inadequacy of the financial rewards attached to staging Shakespeare, but by the former physically assaulting the latter at the end of Act 3 of *Richard III*.

MACREADY AS MANAGER

Macready set up, in opposition to Bunn, as manager of the other patent house, Covent Garden, issuing on 23 September 1837 his prospectus, which Bunn dismissed as 'this pretty document' (p. 268). In it Macready proclaimed 'his strenuous endeavours *to advance the drama as a branch of national literature and art*' (p. 267), drawing from his rival Bunn his resolve 'to sustain the character [which] Drury Lane has long enjoyed of being the FIRST THEATRE OF THE EMPIRE' (p. 273). Combative as ever, Bunn referred to the acting companies as 'the respective forces' (p. 277) and, the air thick with claims to 'national' and 'empire', battle was duly joined.

One of the causes of the decline of the drama, which the 1832 Select Committee had identified, was 'the absence of Royal encouragement'. Clearly if either (or both) of the patent houses was to achieve the status of a national theatre, the 'encouragement' of the sovereign was very much to be desired. By an apparently propitious synchronism on 20 June 1837, just months before Macready inaugurated his Covent Garden regime, the eighteen-year-old Queen Victoria had succeeded William IV. Furthermore in her prime minister, Lord Melbourne, the young sovereign had a fellow devotee of the theatre with whom, as George Rowell has observed (1978, p. 21), she discussed Shakespeare's plays and contemporary performances of them. Macready did not permit his professed republicanism

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