Celebrity Shylock

EMILY HODGSON ANDERSON

LIKE THEIR NONFICTITIOUS CELEBRITY COUNTERPARTS, SHAKEspeare's characters have long attracted gossip, speculation, and awe. "It appears that the leading quality in Falstaff's character," states Maurice Morgann in his *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777),

> is a high degree of wit and humor, accompanied with great natural vigour and alacrity of mind. This quality, so accompanied, led him probably very early into life, and made him highly acceptable to society; so acceptable, as to make it seem unnecessary for him to acquire any other virtue. Hence, perhaps, his continued debaucheries and dissipations of every kind. (18–19)

Writing mainly for the "lover of literature" who prefers to read plays, not see them (iii), Morgann anticipates the psychological conjecture about character now associated with the work of Ernest Jones, the "character criticism" of A. C. Bradley, and the bardolatry of Harold Bloom. These intellectual investments bring with them constraints, and yet popular responses to Shakespeare continue to embrace the "psychoanalytic inferability" of his characters and to give them lives and stories outside his plays (Taylor 50). Much like our embodied celebrities, Shakespeare's characters encourage the audience to seek out their hidden motivations, their most private desires.

In this regard, character criticism offers a provocative, and problematic, analogy to celebrity studies. Current theorizations of celebrity point to an interplay of opposites offered up by the object of adulation, as audiences are drawn to a tension between public image and private self (Luckhurst and Moody, "Singularity" 6; Rojek 11). A celebrity figure becomes enmeshed in something Joseph Roach calls

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"public intimacy," in that the most public and physical moments of exposure intrigue us because they offer glimpses into an inaccessible private desire (Roach, *It* 3, 16, and "Public Intimacy" 15). For Chris Rojek, the celebrity's public self is part of "a staged activity," during which a significant portion of the private self is always kept in reserve (11). The desire to transcend this suppressed self is "often the chief motive behind the struggle to achieve celebrity status" (12); the desire to discover this suppressed self is often the chief motive that impels adoring fans. Yet when a fictive character is under scrutiny, such "discoveries" devolve into "irresponsible speculation[s] about [a character's] psychological mechanics" (Yachnin and Slights 2).[1] Precisely because characters are not real people, the objection goes, we cannot speculate about their private lives. How can characters ever offer not just an interiority scripted through soliloquy or narrator or projected on them by us, counterfactually and after the fact, but a tantalizing sense of psyche that remains pristine, "personal," and out of reach?

Despite this paradox, characters often seem to attain celebrity, even as current discourse on celebrities remains focused on those who have historical, physical presence. This essay proposes the celebrity of fictive bodies and seeks to understand how, and how far, certain fictional characters can stimulate an audience response analogous to that elicited by the flesh and blood. It also seeks to examine the complexities raised by such a comparison, especially when the character in question engenders this reaction from the stage. In thinking about how a dramatic character acquires celebrity and what that celebrity consists of, we need to consider how the models for celebrity studies and character criticism become not merely analogous but superimposed.

A particular aspect of celebrity culture—the fascination with, and search for, the private dimensions of public lives—thus forms the key facet of this essay's investigation. A particular moment in celebrity culture—the eighteenth century—frames it. Scholars have dubbed this period a "fertile" time in the evolution of celebrity (Roach, *It* 12; Braudy 7), and the quest for some hidden, private self seems to equate historical and more contemporary attitudes toward fame. In the eighteenth century, an emergent "uncertainty in personal identity," produced by everything from developments in religion to the onset of a newly minted industrial age, produced in turn a sense that one's true nature lurked behind some social surface (Braudy 7). This potential discrepancy fueled the ability to craft new public personae, on the one hand, and the desire to seek out what these personae were hiding, on the other. The eighteenth century saw "an intensified self-consciousness about the social character of what had once looked like miracles" (Roach, *It* 12). The period "became obsessed with individual uniqueness and the contradictory nature of modern fame . . . to an unprecedented degree" (McPherson 121).

In the eighteenth century, as today, the fascination with a public persona was demonstrated through the desire to get beyond or behind that persona. This obsession applied in obvious ways to eighteenth-century actors, as figures who advertised the production, and manipulation, of public roles. The same infatuation seems true of fictional characters as well. David Brewer's work, for instance, traces an eighteenth-century phenomenon he dubs "imaginative expansion," in which "the characters in broadly successful texts were treated as if they were both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all" (2). Brewer links this tendency back to a newly stable political regime that enabled readers to turn from politicized, allegorical interpretations of texts and to more flexible "aesthetic" ones (25–26). These aesthetically minded readers come to imagine the "off-page life" of characters (17); they endow characters with a "semi-independent existence that is capable of working . . . even for those who are not di-

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rectly familiar with the original texts in which [the characters] first made their appearance" (Bennett and Woollacott 13). Characters become treated as historical figures, and "abnormally interesting" ones at that (Roach, *It* 1).

Such psychological speculation, the search for some inaccessible private life, continues to connect discussions of character and celebrity. If past criticism treated characters like celebrities, more current criticism engages in the converse: Blakey Vermeule dubs contemporary figures such as Kobe Bryant "fictional characters," since most celebrities are "no more real to [us] than [fictional characters] are." She acknowledges that her definition perhaps "stretches things," to the extent that Bryant's story, unlike that of Sherlock Holmes or Tess of the D'Urbervilles, "was then ongoing, the narrative unfinished, the ending unknown. I could potentially meet him someday" (xi–xii). Vermeule here frames the major differences between historical celebrities and literary characters as ones of narrative and embodiment: the physical presence of Bryant as celebrity regulates the terms of her interiority quest. In the case of Kobe Bryant, the parameters for this narrative are suggested by the physical body, whereas in the case of a fictional character, the parameters are suggested by text.

This explains why embodied celebrities encourage psychological speculations through their appearances in public, while literary characters prompt them through their appearances in print. Indeed, any character, when treated as a celebrity, tends to become novelistic. The novel is the repository for literary interiority, the "deepest, truest knowledge of character" (Lynch 28), whereas the stage or screen offers a platform for the actor's talents, or a peephole into the actor's private desires. Even Shakespeare's characters are transformed into textual, read creations when their psychological merits are discussed. But how might these constructions of celebrity change when we study the character in performance? To illustrate this process, I turn to Shylock, and I place him on the eighteenth-century stage.

One of many "celebrity characters," Shylock is useful to this discussion for two reasons. First, he continues to be discussed in the terms of vexed identity. Like our tabloid stars, he presents a conjoined availability and inaccessibility that are labeled the secret to his enduring appeal: his ambiguous, unknowable state, "suspended between Christian and Jew, may in turn tell us something about [his] continuing fascination . . . his revelation and mystery" (K. Gross 115). Similarly, his abrupt exit from the stage and his striking absence from the final act perpetuate this charismatic mystique. Because "he is denied a part in the completed action, he hovers in a kind of limbo. . . . His absent presence . . . provokes questions, opens up troubling spaces of surmise." For all these reasons, "it is hard to keep Shylock from haunting one's consciousness" (108–09).

Yet the nature of this haunting has a historical dimension. Shylock is a useful case study, second, in regard to the development of his fame. The performance of Shylock on the eighteenth-century stage begins a new kind of fascination with this character. Seeking to explore and explain that fact, this essay outlines aspects of eighteenth-century theatrical practice that enabled audiences to consider character apart from actor and then, to showcase this shift, develops two valences of the eighteenth-century response to Shylock—the tendencies toward judgment and conversion. Shylock's celebrity becomes his autonomy from the flesh-and-blood people who enact him. The famous character, in this definition of celebrity, finally "ghosts" the actor more than any actor can "ghost" the role.[2]

Character Celebrity on the Eighteenth-Century Stage

Using Shylock to meditate on celebrity takes us from the cinema to the theater. It reminds us that, contrary to what film and television

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studies might suggest, "it was the theatre which provided the model of stardom subsequently appropriated by film" (Luckhurst and Moody, "Singularity" 3; see also Gledhill xiii). The two genres construct celebrity in different ways. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody distinguish between theatrical and cinematic approaches to celebrity on the basis that "theatre is a live event": "the power of theatrical performance has to do with the uniqueness of the occasion and the impossibility of its reproduction. Live performers are seen and experienced by audiences without the forms of mediation characteristic of film. Put simply, the celebrity of [theatrical] performers is about the experience of seeing an actor in the flesh" ("Singularity" 3). Theater asks us to think about celebrity in a more immediate, and even more physical, context than cinema studies would have us do. In theater, unlike film, we have access to the living, breathing focus of our adulation. Theater, like Shylock, demands flesh.

Yet invoking Shylock as a meditation on celebrity takes us from a discussion of the performer to a discussion of the character being performed. An alternative and underexamined aspect of celebrity culture is at play on the stage. This type of celebrity still involves a relation between the imagined and the corporeal: fans want beloved characters to come to life, a desire that leads to the dramatization of a novel or the constant reenactment of a play. At the same time, such enactment creates the issue of how spectators manage their adulation—to what extent they divide their fascination between the actor and the role.

In the eighteenth century, actors were certainly objects of adulation and, in turn, objects of an increasing number of portraits, pamphlets, and memoirs.[3] But if the eighteenth century was the "age of the actor" (Freeman 18; Kinservik 106), it was the age of the character, too. Indeed, by the nineteenth century a fascination with dramatic characters threatened to efface actors altogether. "Shakespeare's characters from Othello or Macbeth down to Dogberry are ideal," Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed. "They are not the things but the abstracts of the things which a great mind may take into itself and naturalize to its own heaven" (qtd. in Foakes 49).[4] Charles Lamb saw this idealism as an insurmountable boundary to performance, such that "the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. . . . [T]he play is beyond all art" (123). William Hazlitt, similarly, asserts that the reader of Shakespeare's plays "is almost always disappointed" in seeing them performed ("Mr. Kean's Richard II" 222). Plays are better read than seen, according to this rationale, since casting choices represent exercises in interpretation that threaten to foreclose future imaginings. For these critics, Shakespearean characters as staged are inevitably disappointing, because no one could suitably embody such complicated roles. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions of character criticism, a fascination with character becomes linked to a frustration with performance.

Interestingly, two of the greatest Shakespearean actors of the eighteenth century provided an impetus for this shift from the stage to page. By the end of their careers, the brother and sister team of John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons "had become so closely identified with their greatest Shakespearean parts that Lamb used their very preeminence as an argument against staging the Bard's plays at all" (Roach, "The Kembles"). "It is difficult for a frequent playgoer to disembarrass the idea of Hamlet from the person and voice of Mr. K.," Lamb complained, adding, "We speak of Lady Macbeth, while we are in reality thinking of Mrs. S." (112). For many late-eighteenth-century dramatists and critics, famous actors threatened to eclipse textual meaning or nuance (Heller 3). The celebrity of the actor detracts from one's appreciation of the character: the flesh-and-blood celebrity always takes center stage.

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Such responses have encouraged theater critics to focus on the actor, giving the actor a kind of primacy over any character being played. Eighteenth-century audiences came to a play not to see Hamlet but to see David Garrick *as* Hamlet; earlier audiences saw Elizabeth Barry's promiscuity in lieu of Cordelia's virtue and laughed her off the stage (Freeman 36, 38–39). But what if the influence were reversed? What if the character could seize control? Despite Lamb's complaint, the interplay between actor and role for most of the eighteenth century was typically more fluid, as audiences looked for connections and discrepancies between what they knew of an actor and the characters that he or she played. As Lisa Freeman has discussed, an actor's onstage and offstage behaviors were considered simultaneously, and together they constituted what Freeman calls "visible planes of 'character' that competed with and against one another for control over meaning" (36). Moral "character" and enacted "character" were regularly played off each other, so that during a performance the private lives of actors, as much as their renditions of a character, were on display.[5] Also on display was the way dramatic characters constructed these offstage identities. Eighteenth-century theatergoers gained access not merely to an actor's private life but to the process by which dramatic characters influenced ideas about it.

So, for instance, while such scrutiny motivated actors to cultivate reputations in line with the roles they wanted to play, the roles themselves often shaped these reputations. Siddons worked hard to publicize her reputation as a woman of virtue, and she worked especially hard to counter preemptively any sense that her professional role onstage conflicted with her more "private" roles of wife and mother. She performed numerous roles that showcased maternal affection (Buchanan 428–29; Pascoe 24; West, "Public and Private Roles" 6), and her public performances of what was assumed to be a private virtue allowed her to achieve the kind of liberty onstage that we associate more traditionally with acting today. Her earlier performances trained audiences to think of her as virtuous, so that she later could portray ruined or immoral women—such as her signature role, Lady Macbeth—without damaging her own reputation (Buchanan 429; West, "Public and Private Roles" 5, 10; McPherson). As a 1784 tribute to her dramatic performances asserts:

> But well may she assume sensations here
> [on the stage],
> Who dignifies her state in private sphere,
> The wife unblemish'd, and the mother dear.
> 'Tis Fiction which commands our stage
> applause,
> Practice in private life adorns her cause.
> (Young 15)

And yet, because Siddons participated so actively in "blurring the line between public and private," subsequent accounts of her life can "emphasize the disparity between the public actress and the private woman" (Pascoe 24, 23)—or between the private woman and the characters she played. Siddons's active conflation of character and actor ironically enabled her later characters to take on lives of their own.

For actors playing criminal parts, this possibility would have a special appeal. Despite the emergence of a certain "glamorized criminality" (Roach, *It* 13), actors cast as villains also ran a risk of having role and reputation align.[6] In the case of the Restoration-stage villain Samuel Sandford, physiognomy dictated both: he found himself forced into evil roles by his "low and crooked person, such bodily Defects . . . too strong to be admitted into great, or amiable Characters" (Cibber 77). But, as the dramatist and theater manager Colley Cibber states, "Sandford always appeared to me the honester Man, in proportion to the Spirit wherewith he expos'd the wicked, and immoral Characters he acted: For had his heart been unsound, or tainted with the least Guilt of them, his Conscience must, in spite of

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him, in any too near a Resemblance of himself, have been a Check upon the Vivacity of his Action" (80). According to Cibber, only an innocent man can convincingly play a rogue, and as an actor who himself performed a deformed villain (Richard III), Cibber would have good reason to advance such an argument. Here we see another attempt to decouple the character from the actor at exactly the moment the character takes on force. Cibber's defensive interpretation shows the potency not just of Sandford's physical appearance but also of the "wicked . . . and immoral Characters" Sandford sought to expose. The exposure, as Cibber well knows, could go the other direction. Indeed, just such a shift occurred in Charles Macklin's 1741 production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Judging Shylock

Charles Macklin was an Irish actor who had come to London in the 1720s. By the 1730s he had achieved a place at Drury Lane and shared, with Charles Fleetwood, the managerial duties there. Macklin supervised the spate of Shakespeare plays that held the stage during the 1740–41 season. When Drury Lane was switched to the control of David Garrick in 1747, the number of Shakespeare plays in the repertoire started to decline (Scouten 200). Macklin, then, can be credited with much of the mid–century Shakespeare revival, just as he is credited with choosing to stage *The Merchant of Venice* in 1741 not as the comic adaptation that had been popular since 1701 but as the original Shakespearean version of the play.

For forty years, audiences knew Shakespeare's drama as presented by George Granville in his adaptation *The Jew of Venice*. Granville's version had been wildly popular from its inception, and for Macklin to go back to Shakespeare's text represented a significant risk. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two versions was manifest in the character of Shylock. How Shylock had been played originally, probably by Richard Burbage, is a matter of speculation. Granville gave the role to Thomas Doggett, who played it as a comical, almost farcical part. As early as 1709 the playwright Nicholas Rowe expressed uncertainty about this interpretation: "though we have seen the *Merchant of Venice* received and acted as a Comedy, and Shylock acted by an excellent comedian, yet I cannot but think that the character was tragically designed by the author" (qtd. in Parry 57–58). Doggett made the role so popular as a comic part, however, that later productions would often give it to the troupe clown.

In many ways, this tradition probably worked to Macklin's advantage. His own acting repertoire until 1741 consisted mostly of comic parts. An eighteenth-century audience would have associated him with comedic roles, and since Shylock had been played in this manner, Fleetwood would have been quite willing to cast Macklin in the part. Apparently, Macklin kept his intentions to reimagine the role somewhat secret, underplaying it in rehearsal or "merely repeat[ing] his lines, and walk[ing] through his part without a single look or gesture, and without discovering the business which he had marked out for himself in his interpretation of the Jew" (Parry 63). When the rumor of his decision to play Shylock "seriously" started to circulate, no one seemed to think it was a good idea. Some of the cast seemed eager to see Macklin make a fool of himself, but some were more critical and told Fleetwood that Macklin would disgrace himself and the theater (Cook 92). Fleetwood was nervous enough to urge Macklin to give up the part.

Given eighteenth-century expectations for theatrical performance—an audience's long-standing association of certain actors with particular types of roles, not to mention the audience's long-standing relationship with a comic version of this Shakespearean play—Fleetwood's nerves were understandable. Even Macklin, in his memoirs, mentions that he had

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misgivings on opening night: "When I made my appearance in the green-room, dressed for the part, with my red hat on my head, my piqued beard, loose black gown, and with a confidence which I had never before assumed, the performers all stared at one another. . . . Well sir, hitherto all was right, till the last bell rung: then, I confess, my heart began to beat a little" (qtd. in Cook 92). Neither he nor Fleetwood needed to worry. According to Macklin, his initial appearance onstage was greeted with thunderous applause, and he apparently overheard whispered encomiums early in the performance. But it was in the third act that Macklin "threw out all [his] fire," and I give you in his own words the result:

> [A]s the contrasted passions of joy for the Merchant's losses, and grief for the elopement of Jessica, open a fine field for an actor's powers, I had the good fortune to please beyond my warmest expectations. The whole house was in an uproar of applause; and I was obliged to pause between the speeches to give it vent, so as to be heard. When I went behind the scenes after this act, the Manager met me, and complimented me very highly on the performance, and significantly added, "Macklin, you was right at last." . . . The *trial scene* wound up the fullness of my reputation: here I was well listened to, and here I made such a silent, yet forcible impression on my audience, that I retired from this great attempt most perfectly satisfied. On my return to the green-room . . . it was crowded with nobility and critics who all complimented me in the warmest and most unbounded manner. (qtd. in Cook 93–94)

Macklin was a hit, and his fame in this character held. But his initial reception shouldn't have been so surprising. In 1735 he had quarreled with a fellow actor, Thomas Hallam, who had apparently borrowed Macklin's favorite wig. Crying out "Goddamn you for a blackguard, scrub, rascal!" Macklin thrust his cane into Hallam's face, puncturing Hallam's left eye and penetrating his brain (Appleton 30). Hallam died the next day, and Macklin was charged with murder, though he was released eventually with just a fine. Such circumstances suggest why, despite his reputation as a comic actor, audiences were ready to accept him in his first role as a villain. Witnessing his performance soon after the play opened, George II was supposedly so troubled by Macklin's depiction that he spent a sleepless night. The next morning Robert Walpole waited on the king to express his fears that the Commons would oppose a certain measure then in contemplation. "I wish, your Majesty," said Walpole, "it was possible to find a recipe for frightening a House of Commons." "What do you think," replied the King, "of sending them to the theatre to see that Irishman play Shylock?" (qtd. in Parry 68).

As the king's response indicates, Shylock was no longer the comic, farcical character he had been at the beginning of the century. Macklin played off negative historical conceptions of Jewishness to depict Shylock as a terrifying villain—a performance that likely did much to encourage anti-Semitic attitudes among its audience. As Macklin's performances continued, these attitudes and anxieties would reach a peak owing to emerging controversy over the 1753 Jewish Naturalization Act (the so-called Jew Bill). In modifying the process by which foreign-born Jews could be naturalized or "made English," the Jew Bill conflated questions of nationality with questions of faith.[7] Simultaneously, it framed both categories as matters of acting rather than essence, so that any resulting xenophobia could be cast in theatrical terms. England in the mid–eighteenth century witnessed a "theatricalization of Jewish identity," and the theater responded with complicated doublings of its own: the playhouse in Macklin's time showcased characters that represented a "seamless performance of Jewish identity" and cross-dressing Gentile characters that accentuated "the way in which the performance of Jewish

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identity was staged" (Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation* 128, 129).[8]

Such a crisis in representation becomes what Michael Ragussis dubs an example of "metarepresentation, metatheater" in which not only cultural but also theatrical practices are exposed (*Theatrical Nation* 129). In this case, though, the metatheatrical moment trains audience attention on performances conducted by the character, not the actor himself. As the cross-dressing Gentile character takes over the actor's craft, the stage Jew becomes implicated in an act of performance, and the identity of the actor gets lost behind the ethnic identity of the character he portrays. After witnessing Macklin play Shylock in 1775, the German scientist George Lichtenberg responded that "the sight of this Jew is more than sufficient to arouse once again in the mature man all the prejudices of his childhood against this race" (40).

In other words, if Macklin's Shylock had a disturbing effect on eighteenth-century audiences, the role had an equally disturbing effect on audience perceptions of the man who played it. Whatever recognition Macklin might receive for his interpretation of this role becomes troubled by the audience response that sees the role apart from any actor. In 1753 the *London Evening Post* runs an account of a disconsolate farmer, pressed to sell his property when visited by a "strange-looking" man named Shylock; in 1768 Shylock emerges as author of a tract supporting Jewish naturalization (qtd. in Shapiro 220). The alternative response to character that I traced—the response that is more interested in Garrick as Hamlet than in Hamlet himself, or the response in which "the Siddons" can overshadow Lady Macbeth—is missing in these accounts. Even when considering the character onstage, Lichtenberg evaluates Shylock solely *as* Shylock. Macklin's Shylock seems larger than life, or large enough at least to eclipse the life behind it. The object of celebrity starts to shift.

And when Macklin was still visible to audiences, Shylock seems to dictate the terms. A rather terrifying personal ugliness made Macklin (like Sandford) allegedly suited to criminal parts: "If God writes a legible hand," his old enemy and fellow actor James Quin once remarked, "that fellow is a villain" (*Life* 99). Yet physical descriptions of Macklin increasingly channel ideas about Shylock. Lichtenberg describes Macklin as "a rather stout man with a coarse yellow face and a nose generously fashioned in all three dimensions, a long double chin, and a mouth so carved by Nature that the knife appears to have slit him right up to the ears, on one side at least" (40). The mouth may be carved "by Nature," but the knife is all Shylock's. In invoking the character's most infamous prop, the passage creates an eerie sense that the character has exerted physical violence on Macklin.

The longer Macklin played the part and the more the fame of the part increased, the more his perceived relation to the character changed. If public knowledge of Macklin's quarrels and ill temper had originally made him suited to the role, the role increasingly served as the sole source of ideas about his offstage behavior. His nineteenth-century biographer William Cook notes that "although Macklin got and merited the greatest applause in Shylock, this very applause in his public, often drew from the merit of his private character."[9] Since many of his later audiences "knew nothing of him but as he appeared on the stage, and there saw the passions of revenge and malice so forcibly and naturally displayed . . . they judged he must be something like the monster in private life which he was upon the stage" (95). The character, in short, could play the actor.

And as early as 14 February 1741, the night on which Macklin first brought his Shylock to the public, he seems attuned to the ways that Shylock was playing him, instead of the other way around. Building to the climactic and controversial trial scene, Macklin

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endows his characterization of the opening-night crowd with an inevitable double meaning: "The two front rows of the pit, as usual, were full of critics, who I eyed through the slit of the curtain, and was glad to see there; as I wished, in such a cause, to be tried by a *special jury*." An actor about to meet his fate, Macklin equates his status on the stage with the experience of the character he is about to play. His terminology is especially significant since he is engaged in his own bond with Fleetwood over his decision to reimagine this part. Caught somewhere between an Antonio and a Shylock, he chose, as his memoirs record, to "pledge his life on the success of the play" (qtd. in Cook 92).

In so doing, Macklin anticipates, and reactivates, the language of judgment that will haunt his character throughout the fourth act. Shylock's bond famously binds him to the impossible—that he take from Antonio one pound of flesh, no more no less, and not a drop of blood—and Portia's interpretation is familiar. Shylock's oft repeated phrase "A Daniel come to judgment!" "O wise young judge!" (4.1.221–22) thus turns on the Jew himself. Held to the letter of the law he staunchly supports, Shylock must forfeit his claims on Antonio, relinquish half his goods to the state, bequeath the other half to Lorenzo, and agree to become a Christian. By the nineteenth century, this trial would be viewed as a farce. William Hazlitt admires Shylock's conduct during the scene and notes that he "only fails through a legal flaw" (*Characters* 272).

So when, on opening night, Macklin recasts the theater as Shylock's courtroom, he also authenticates a trial scene potentially undermined by legal loopholes. The play itself sets up the trial as a prescripted stratagem, for Portia's covert scheming in act 3, scene 4, suggests that only one decision—that in favor of Antonio—can possibly be reached. But live theater, like legal trial, brings with it the possibility of surprise: both operate on the premise that conclusions are not foregone. Macklin's comparison reminds us that if one kind of judgment is predetermined by the script, another kind of judgment is not. Audience reaction will determine whether this Shylock will ever be seen again.

Converting Shylock

In this case, the popular verdict was very much in favor of Macklin's Shylock. His version of the character would hold the stage for the next fifty years, and in that half century the role would take on a life of its own.[10] Ten years into Macklin's reign, Shylock is cited as visiting British farms, authoring pamphlets in defense of Jewish naturalization, even acting in a play at Drury Lane titled *The Christian Imposter* (Shapiro 220–21). Macklin's performance had transformed Shylock "from . . . [a] stage character to one who steps out of the theater into the daily lives of English men and women" (Shapiro 220).

One such testament to Shylock's growing independence can be found in Maria Edgeworth's bizarre early-nineteenth-century novel *Harrington* (1817). The novel details Harrington's attempts to overcome the anti-Semitism inculcated in him by his childhood nurse, and as evidence of his achievement we are given Harrington's reactions to Jewish characters he encounters. As additional evidence, we are given his reactions to Macklin's performance in *The Merchant of Venice* and a conversation he has with Macklin himself. Yet throughout the novel Harrington seems to interact not with Macklin but with Shylock. At the playhouse, Harrington describes Macklin's Shylock as "an incomparable piece of acting," yet what he celebrates is not the early-eighteenth-century play between actor and role[11] but—much like Lichtenberg—the effacement of the actor himself. Harrington claims while watching the play, "I forgot it was Macklin; I thought only of Shylock" (136).

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This strange forgetting, the complete primacy of the character over the actor, is foreshadowed several pages earlier. When Harrington is unable to track down a Jewish man he has befriended, another friend consoles him by taking him to meet "the most celebrated Jew . . . in England." After winding through side streets, Harrington finds himself in the theater district, being introduced to "the real, original Jew of Venice . . . 'this is the Jew / that Shakespeare drew!'" (114). The Jew turns out to be no Jew at all: the man Harrington meets is Macklin. And yet Macklin's identity is obscured by Harrington's friend and the poetic couplet. The quoted rhyme has been apocryphally attributed to Alexander Pope, who was, by some accounts, so transported with admiration on his first viewing of Macklin's performance that he started up and pronounced those lines (J. Gross 121–22).

Both novelistic and popular accounts of the production thus show audiences all too eager to be captivated by Shylock himself. Yet unlike the emerging trends in character criticism, these audiences remain fascinated by Shylock as staged. In Edgeworth's novel especially, the theatrical experience of character is potent and explicitly religious. When Harrington hears that a comedy he intended to see has been replaced at the last minute by *The Merchant of Venice*, he reacts with vigor: "*The Merchant of Venice,* and Macklin the Jew!" (136). Charles Macklin, born Cathal MacLoughlin, was raised Catholic, though he converted to the Anglican church (Parry 22). In Harrington's response, Macklin is converted once more, and he is not alone.[12] During the performance, Harrington becomes increasingly pained—not terrified—by the intensity Macklin brings to Shylock, so that "at every fresh development of the Jew's villainy I shrunk as though I had myself been a Jew" (137).

Shylock transcends Macklin's performance here in two ways. Harrington's "conversion" is meant to underline his gradual ability to sympathize with "the Jewish side of the question" (138), and though his inverted sympathy is inspired by an overly vicious Shylock, his reaction anticipates the more typical nineteenth-century interpretation of this character. While Edgeworth's novel is set in the 1770s and 1780s (and thus during Macklin's tenure as Shylock), it is written and published in 1817, after the character of Shylock has undergone another substantial reinterpretation. The actor Edmund Kean inherited the role in 1814 and was the first to present Shylock as a truly sympathetic character.[13] Thanks to his performances, Hazlitt could contend that "Shylock has ceased to be a popular bugbear" and has instead become "a half-favourite with the philosophical part of the audience" (*Characters* 269). By the mid–nineteenth century most audience members did share Harrington's ability to sympathize with "the Jewish side of the question," though they were pained by what they saw as the cruelty done to Shylock and not, as Harrington claims to be, by the aggressively inappropriate depiction of Shylock as a representative of the Jewish race.[14]

At stake in these responses are the same tensions between public and private identity that fuel celebrity appeal. What is interesting, though, is that in both interpretations of the role the scripted lines of religious influence that mark Shylock's final exit from the stage are reversed. On paper Shakespeare's play ends with the suggestion of a vexed conversion that, as Janet Adelman and others have pointed out, would leave Shylock caught somewhere between the Jew and the Christian, even more of an alien figure than he had been at the play's start. Racially, he must remain a Jew; ritually, he will probably always be one.[15] By the eighteenth century the forced conversion would trigger anxieties over Jewish identity reactivated by the 1753 Jewish Naturalization Act and would make it next to impossible for audiences to read the conversion as definitive. And even before the

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eighteenth century the mystery of Shylock's private life prevents him from having any real conversion: no matter what their official religious status was, Shakespeare's converts, like their proximal relations the conversos, would be constantly suspected of "carrying out Jewish rituals in the privacy of their own houses" (Adelman 6; see also Shapiro 131–65). One's religious identity here seems dependent on the most private criteria; anti-Semitism in this formulation is motivated by the fear that we cannot ever know, literally or figuratively, what goes on behind closed doors.

At the same time, the trial scene as theater, the theater as a space of trial, urges us to rethink the common opposition between public performance and some hidden, private life. In contrast to Rojek's equation of staged activities with public selves (11), live performance offers a version of private life that becomes available only when staged. Macklin's theatrical characterization of the trial reminds us that enactment, in each of these venues, may set in motion the cogitative processes that constitute individual judgment, or private belief. Just so, while the scripted Shylock is trapped in a religious limbo, the performed Shylock is endowed with a more definitive effect. Condemned by the text to the fate of a converso, Shylock in performance co-opts Antonio's role: he too becomes a figure capable of dictating, or at least swaying, the religious identity of others. From Harrington to Hazlitt, audience members find themselves identifying with Shylock and, for a time at least, experiencing vicariously the life of the Jew. So while the cynical reading of Shylock's conversion dismisses it as merely public role-playing—at best Shylock will be a Jew playing a Christian, much as Macklin is a Christian playing a Jew—audience responses to this play present role-playing in a more sympathetic light. Reactions such as Harrington's ("I forgot it was Macklin. I thought only of Shylock") or Pope's ("This is the Jew / that Shakespeare drew!") show a growing primacy of character over actor that registers in terms of religion. Shylock's Judaism is perpetuated through Macklin's enactment of him; the actor who plays the Jew saves Shylock from the convert's fate.

And Shylock, by playing Macklin, avoids another kind of conversion as well. When Harrington attempts to defend Shakespeare's "severity," in the light of "the time when he wrote and the prejudices which then prevailed" (144), he is met with a surprising response. His Jewish friend Mr. Montenero answers:

> True . . . and as a dramatic poet, it was his business, I acknowledge, to take advantage of the popular prejudice as a *power*—as a means of dramatic pathos and effect. Yet you will acknowledge that we Jews must feel it peculiarly hard that the truth of the story on which the poet founded his plot should have been completely sacrificed to fiction, so that the characters were not only misrepresented, but reversed. . . . In the *true story* from which Shakespeare took the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*, it was a Christian who acted the part of the Jew, and the Jew that of the Christian; it was a Christian who insisted upon having the pound of flesh from next the Jew's heart. (144)

The source text to which Mr. Montenero refers appears in the second edition of Gregorio Leti's *The Life of Pope Sixtus the Fifth* (1669; 2nd ed., 1693) as the tale of a Christian merchant, Paul Secchi, and his wager with a Jewish insurer, Samson Cenada. To resolve a dispute about a commercial matter, Cenada is persuaded to set a pound of his flesh against Secchi's one thousand crowns. Ellis Farneworth, who first translated Leti's account into English in 1754, states that the "scene betwixt Shylock and Antonio in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* seems to be borrowed from this story, though the poet has inverted the persons" (402n19).[16] Archival exactitude is less an issue here than documenting the desire for such exactitude: by footnoting sources that include this reference,[17] Edgeworth lends

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authority to Mr. Montenero's account and reveals, in the process, a cultural desire to credit this version of the tale.

In one nineteenth-century reading, then, the play represents the ultimate injustice. Mr. Montenero suggests that the inversion is worse than the conversion—that casting the Jew as the villain is crueler than forcing him to ascribe to Christian beliefs. Simultaneously, Mr. Montenero's phrasing of the corrected events duplicates the precise scenario that will play out on the stage: in the production that Harrington has witnessed, a Christian does "ac[t] the part of the Jew." Theatrical performance offers a second inversion that corrects the infelicities of Shakespeare's script.

More important, this potential is accentuated by Edgeworth's novel and Shylock himself. While *The Merchant of Venice* is not the most overtly metatheatrical of Shakespeare's plays,[18] the climactic trial scene, replete with disguises, becomes a moment that reflects on the theater as a space of trial. Macklin makes this connection in his memoirs, as Shylock on trial, for him, reflects more generally on the workings of the stage. In a similar manner, the forced conversion that concludes the trial scene would remind contemporary audiences that, for the first part of his performance history at least, Shylock is being played by a Christian man.[19] Since Jewish actors were isolated figures until the later part of the nineteenth century, the forced conversion would activate for earlier audiences a metatheatrical effect. For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century viewers familiar with the Secchi-Cenada anecdote, theatrical performance shows the character making the Christian reenact actions initially perpetrated by one of his religion and race. The character, by playing the actor, reascribes actions to their correct source.

This historical context can, I believe, help explain Shylock's appeal. According to John Gross, "the extent of [Shylock's] fame" is evinced by the fact that "he is a familiar figure to millions who have never read *The Merchant of Venice*, or even seen it acted" (209). Like other famous characters, he has come to circulate linguistically even more than corporeally, so that "the very word 'shylock' has detached itself from its original bearer and, to a degree unique among Shakespeare's creations, gone on to live a life of its own" (Halpern 184).[20] Shylock is thus a celebrity who transcends embodiment—a celebrity who does not depend on the physical body in the traditional sense. He is also a character who encourages embodiment and for whom the act of embodiment constantly varies. "He has served as an inspiration for hundreds of writers, and a point of reference for innumerable publicists" (J. Gross 209); the act of remaking or restaging becomes, in Gross's definition, the mark of a character's fame.

The question of character celebrity then becomes an inquiry into what makes a character so conducive to appropriation. Subsequent to Macklin and Kean, Shylock as a character has undergone "countless mutations" (J. Gross 9). Yet, while Shylock may at times solicit sympathy, he is not a character to spark envy or aspiration. The kind of hero worship that produces proliferating Harry Potters—the desire to be or befriend a beloved character—has no place in Shylock's world. Instead, Shylock's celebrity inheres in his ability to inspire numerous reenactments, while his variability serves as a litmus test for our own shifting beliefs.

Such gestures confirm that, in contrast to flesh-and-blood celebrities, theatrical characters offer up private life only in performance. As certain characters are subjected to the same types of psychological speculation as their nonfictitious counterparts, theories of celebrity can nonetheless help us understand how and why these characters invite embodiment even as they transcend the body of any actor they play. Simultaneously, a focus on character is useful to our discussions of celebrity, since it asks us to reconsider the de-

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pendence of celebrity on the flesh and blood. My contention is that, owing to a combination of theatrical, political, and literary contexts, Shylock in the eighteenth century gains a particular kind of metatheatrical traction: he calls attention to his status as a character and thus to the fact that his "private" identity is necessarily performed. Yet in the context of the Secchi-Cenada anecdote, it is also as a character that he models the ability of performance to expose a truth supposedly hidden by public, social facades. This is why he projects onto audiences the desire to re-create him; this is why it is in the eighteenth century that he is first able to step beyond the stage.

Notes

1. For an overview of the backlash to character criticism, see Yachnin and Slights 2–4. Also see Taylor.

2. For more on ghosting in theater, see Carlson.

3. See West, *Image*; Nussbaum; McPherson 122; Freeman 38–39.

4. The quotation is from John Payne Collier's notes on the lecture Coleridge delivered on 16 Dec. 1811. See Foakes 48–50.

5. While this interest is not unique to the eighteenth century, the public materials (and accessibility of materials) devoted to actors around this time indicate audiences who were particularly invested in the relationship between actor and role. For detailed studies of this relationship, see, among others, Freeman; McPherson; West, "The Public and Private Roles."

6. See Luckhurst and Moody on notoriety, that "borderland territory between fame and disgrace," and its riskiness for actors before the twentieth century ("Singularity" 6).

7. See Shapiro 195–224 on the Jew Bill.

8. The Irishman Macklin himself encouraged this controversy by adding, in 1759, an afterpiece to his performances of Shakespeare's Jew. In this piece, titled *Love à la Mode*, Macklin scripted another, very different Jewish character: one Beau Mordecai, a fawning, insidious interloper. While Macklin usually gave this role to someone else, the back-to-back performances still reflected the renewed disputes over Jewish identity sparked by Jew Bill debates. For Ragussis this ethnic destabilization stands in for the more general "crisis in assimilation and national identity" experienced by other ethnic minorities in eighteenth-century England—such as the Irish ("Jews" 794).

9. Cook's initial phrasing is potentially ambiguous, but the complete quotation suggests that "drew from" here has the sense of "detracted from."

10. Eighteenth-century casting practices meant that once an actor was assigned a part, it was considered his or her property, for life. Though parts could be lent out on request, they were generally only given up on retirement, departure from the company, or death (Freeman 31; Brewer 67). Of course, other actors could play these parts simultaneously at rival theaters, and John Gross claims that "at least a dozen other Shylocks appeared on the stage during [Macklin's] time" (119). Yet none of these Shylocks could compete with Macklin's, and during his lifetime none tried. Until Kean "the actors who followed Macklin in playing Shylock remained faithful to his general conception of the character" (J. Gross 121; see also Brewer 68).

11. For more on this mode of eighteenth-century theatrical spectatorship, see Freeman 34.

12. In Harrington's response, Macklin as Shylock does not channel his own Protestant conversion—a reading closer to Michael Ragussis's claim that in playing Shylock, Macklin links the status of the Jews in eighteenth-century England to that of the persecuted Irish ("Jews" 794)—so much as Shylock as Macklin subsumes it.

13. Critics have proposed that Kean's ability to identify with Shylock stemmed from his illegitimate birth and low social class; both factors made him, like Shylock, something of an exile (Page 117). Curiously, one biographer claims that Kean may himself have been Jewish and that the Keans had changed their name from Cohen (Hillebrand 6; see also Page 116). There is no definitive evidence of this, though the *Dictionary of National Biography* does list the names of Kean's uncle as Moses and his father as Aaron (Knight).

14. And most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century spectators would have seen Shylock in racial terms: "he seems the depositary of the vengeance of his race" (Hazlitt, *Characters* 269).

15. Adelman argues that Jewish identity underwent a "process of racialization as a response to the prospect of Jewish conversion" (78). See also Shapiro 170–73.

16. Nowadays, this account has faded from scholarship because the chronology of the anecdote makes it a debatable Shakespearean source. Leti's tale did not circulate in print until 1693, and it is impossible to know if a version of the tale antedated *The Merchant of Venice* or if Leti's account emerged out of a tradition itself influenced by Shakespeare's play; whether or not this version is in fact the "true story" remains uncertain (Shapiro 124). But Edgeworth, at least, thought it was. She glosses Mr. Montenero's assertion with a reference to "Steevens's Life of Sixtus V, and Malone's Shakespeare" (144n1), noting the two important Shakespearean editors and critics who include Leti's account (as borrowed from Farneworth) in their eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare's plays.

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For one of the few discussions of this source text, see Shapiro 122–25.

17. Steevens includes the Leti account (taken from Farneworth) in his 1778 edition of Shakespeare's plays, the same edition that Malone later supplemented (with the Leti anecdote preserved [*Johnson-Steevens Edition*]). See also the editor's gloss on Edgeworth's footnote (144n1).

18. Yet Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern's work on the use of repeated and "premature" cues in *The Merchant of Venice* shows that the part of Shylock becomes incredibly, and consciously, metatheatrical in performance (192–213, 462–63).

19. Interestingly, the earliest instance of a Jewish actor performing Shylock in London coincides with the year of *Harrington*'s publication. While Kean was the major Shylock of the early nineteenth century (and while Kean may have had Jewish ancestors—see n13), a Mr. Sherenbeck took the role at Covent Garden in 1817 (J. Gross 134). This fact emphasizes that the acting tradition on which Edgeworth reflects is one in which all the Shylocks have been played by Christian men.

20. Perhaps the most common usage of *a shylock* is as "an abusive term for a money-lender" ("Shylock").

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