



David Garrick: Director (Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques)

Professor Kalman A Burnim PhD

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The life of this actor, manager, playwright, and eighteenth-century gentleman is here refracted through the voluminous correspondence and analyses of roles, plays, and performances in this, no doubt final, biography of David Garrick.

As the direct result of modern scholarship accessible only since the 1960s, it is now possible to appraise fully the life of this remarkable person who was born in Lichfield 19 February 1717, a childhood friend of Samuel Johnson, who became the greatest English theatrical luminary who ever lived, and who when he died 20 January 1779 was mourned by the nation and eulogized by Dr. Johnson as one whose death “eclipsed the gaiety of nations.”

For twenty-nine years (1747–1776) Garrick managed Drury Lane theatre, caring passionately for its well-being. His own acting set the pace for the performances, his discipline carried it on, and his theatrical innovations attracted the audiences on which the lives, hopes, and families of some 140 actors, actresses, singers, dancers, and others depended. In addition, he wrote, adapted, or altered some 49 plays and wrote nearly 100 prologues.

What emerges from this big, new critical biography is a fully drawn portrait of an eighteenth-century gentleman, with a wide range of acquaintances, elegant socially, morally, and personally, and an engaging conversationalist with and respecter of women of mark and with his closest friends. He was also, as the evidence now shows, the solid link with his own age and the great dramatic artists of the past, from the Restoration playwrights to Massinger, Jonson, Shakespeare, and early English dramatists.

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