

Cooke 1804 William Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin, comedian* (London, 1804).

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Macklin was now, by his own account, seventy-three years of age, (but by very strong circumstances, which we have already stated, *eighty-three*,) at either of which periods men seldom arrive; and when they do, generally dedicate the few remaining years allotted them, to repose and retirement. But our veteran was not of this complexion. By nature strong, healthy, and vigorous, he looked to no common calculations of life; and as men who feel no approximations to illness or decay, look more forward, Macklin not only felt the ardour of profession as strong as ever, but adverted to new experiments; experiments not founded merely on greater acquisitions of science, and long observation in the parts he was in possession of -- but on the dignity, sublimity, and pathos of tragic character. In short, having long convinced the town of his abilities in a certain line of performance, he would now come forward in all the pomp of Imperial Tragedy;

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and nothing less than Richard, Macbeth, and Othello, were to be the heralds of his new honours.

When he first announced his design, the public had various opinions of the cause of it. Some, for a time, looked upon it as a mere report, to exhibit the vanity and dotage of the Actor -- others, that the Manager only made use of him as a mere novelty to draw a few houses -- and others, to an interested view in the Performer himself, to make a last effort on the credulity of the public. But to those who knew Macklin well, none of these causes could in justice be ascribed to him. He was ever, it is true, more or less the dupe of his own vanity; but as he was never the slave of money, so he would not knowingly be the slave of any Manager for this purpose. The fact was, it was no new idea then arising from existing circumstances -- it was an early and settled opinion of his own, that he was competent to those parts; and as a proof of this, he broke off as being one

of the joint Managers of Crow Street Theatre, so far back as the year 1757, because he was not permitted to play those characters in turn with Barry: he likewise actually performed them in all the strolling companies in which he could command a cast of parts; and to these three characters (and we have it from his own authority) he added that of Hamlet, which he repeatedly performed at Bristol near forty years before this period, and on the

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same nights generally figured away as Harlequin in the Pantomime.

So that this was no new idea, but a revival of past performances: and as he thought himself once favourably and justly received in those characters, and made no calculation for the lapse of years, he imagined, once a theatrical hero, and ever a theatrical hero. He therefore, in the early part of the season of 1772,<*> made his engagements with the Manager of Covent Garden Theatre, and the 23d of October in the same year was announced for his performance of Macbeth.

Of the petty wrangles, riots, and lawsuits, which accompanied this attempt, the public have been long since in possession; we shall therefore only observe, that whatever his merits as an Actor might have been, he was very ill treated by a party raised against him, and that he repaid that ill treatment by an act of generosity, when he had his enemies at his feet, which reflects great credit on his memory. The manner, however, in which he played this character deserves to be noticed; not only as some curiosity to the rising generation, but as it records an æra of improvement in the interior arrangement of the Stage.

Previous to this period, Macbeth used to be dressed in a suit of scarlet and gold, a tail wig, &c.

<* Macklin's production had its premiere on Saturday 23 Oct 1773 and was repeated on the next three Saturdays (Genest 1832 5:414--15). The riot mentioned in the next paragraph took place on Thursday 18 Nov (when the play due to be performed was *The merchant of Venice*): it ended with Macklin being fired.>

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in every respect like a modern military officer. Gar-

rick always played it in this manner; and the fine picture of him and Mrs. Pritchard, in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, after the murder, painted by Zoffani, exhibits him in this dress. Barry and Smith dressed it in a similar manner; and it long stood as the general *costume* of the stage. Macklin, however, whose eye and mind were ever intent on his profession, saw the absurdity of exhibiting a Scotch character, existing many years before the Norman Conquest, in this manner, and therefore very properly abandoned it for the old Caledonian habit. He shewed the same attention to the subordinate characters, as well as to the scenes, decorations, music,<*> and other incidental parts of the performance.

So far was useful reformation acknowledged as such, and has ever since become general, not only on the London boards, but in all the provincial and country Theatres. Of his performance, we cannot give the same eulogium. His figure (even from his boyish days) was never calculated to impress the character of a dignified warrior; and in his first scene, when the audience saw a clumsy old man, who looked more like a Scotch Piper than a General and Prince of the Blood, stumping down the Stage, at the head of a supposed conquering army, "commanding a halt upon the heath," they felt it under an impression

<* The piece of music played in Act I, scene 3, as Macbeth and Banquo made their entrance, was the Coldstream March (Taylor 1832 2:12) -- i.e. the march which belonged to the (originally Scottish) Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards.>

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of absurdity and ridicule. His address to the witches, and his reflections on their prophecies, however, were given with such a knowledge of the character as to redeem the first impression; and his subsequent interview with Lady Macbeth was very much in the spirit of the author; but when he came to the dagger scene, which requires both a marking eye, as well as grace of action, he failed, at least in representation.

In his clamour against the King's death, and his hypocrisy in concealing it, he very much arrested the attention of the audience, as he likewise did in his interview with the three murderers.

In the banquet scene he failed -- he wanted both the dignity of hospitality, and those quick and reiterated impressions of fear which Macbeth should have on seeing Banquo's ghost. In many passages of the fourth and fifth acts, he had alternate merits and defects. Of the former may be classed his reply to the messenger who tells him that he thought he saw Birnam Wood move towards him:

----- "If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive
'Till famine cling thee: if thy speech be true,
I care not if thou dost for me as much."

The first part of this speech was delivered in a tone and look of such terrible menace as almost petrified the audience; while in the last line he fell in-

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to such an air of despondency, as shewed the effect of contrast in a most masterly manner. In short, this little speech might be classed amongst the *chef d'œuvres* of general acting, and as such was applauded by the whole of the audience.

His performance, on the whole, though there were passages that shewed the force of observation, and a sound judgment, may be classed more under the head of a *lecture on the part*, than a *theatrical representation*. The scene demanded the *embodying* of the character; and he was constantly giving the Author, which, though he often did very judiciously, it still was not sufficiently dramatic.

To speak candidly of this performance, it was lucky (at least for the fame of Macklin) that it was frustrated in his first attempt. Had he been permitted to go quietly on, his vanity would have imputed the indulgence of the audience (or the love of novelty which might have aided that indulgence) to superior abilities, and he would have gone through the whole of his design, by which he would have lost in a great degree (at least with the rising generation) those laurels which, in other walks of his profession, he had so long and honourably earned.

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