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The Duke of Gloucester's Sword: Prosthetic Props in the Repertory of Edmund Kean

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ABSTRACT

Edmund Kean played the role of Richard III for almost twenty years, in which time the most enduring images of his performance included his sword. Theatrical legend has it that this sword was passed down through generations of Shakespearean actors and found its resting place in Laurence Olivier's tomb. The significance of the sword as a theatrical relic can be located in the archival traces of Kean's performance style, particularly in James H. Hackett's 1826 annotated copy of *Richard III*. The sword's role in the performance takes on even more significance as Kean aged and became more physically debilitated. A performer known for his dynamic physicality, Kean was also recorded as struggling with physical impairments as a child. Moving from a mythical 'overcoming' of bodily challenges to simulating disability onstage as Richard to actual physical debility later in life, Kean continued to use his sword to 'prop' him up, literally and figuratively, on the stage. The sword becomes a prosthetic object, an addition to the body that shapes its movement and becomes an extension of the body itself. I argue that Kean's sword throughout his career showed off his prodigious physical skill and then became enmeshed in his bodily decline.

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That Edmund Kean wielded a sword (or two or more) has become the stuff of theatrical legend. Richard Mangan speculates that the sword Kean used in *Richard III* might be the single most 'talismanic object in the long history […] of English acting'.[1] George Cruikshank's cartoon 'The Theatrical Atlas' features Kean as Richard III, leaning on his sword, a simple silver blade with a gold hilt, as he carries the whole of Drury Lane Theatre on his hunchback.[2] After the actor's death, as the story goes, his son Charles, also an actor, bestowed the sword on nineteenth-century Shakespeare star Henry Irving when he performed the role of Richard. This bequest was only the start of the sword's

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[1]Richard Mangan, 'The Sword(s) of Edmund Kean', *Theatre Notebook* 64, no. 3 (2010): 174. See also Barbara Hodgdon, 'Shopping in the Archives: Material Memories', in *Shakespeare, Memory, and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135–67.

[2]'The Theatrical Atlas', engraved by George Cruickshank, published by H. Humphrey, 1814.

purported journey, as it became a symbol of Shakespearean celebrity passed down from Irving to John Gielgud and finally to another famous Richard, Laurence Olivier, in 1944. Gielgud's hope that Olivier would 'hand [it] on to another young hopeful' was not realised, however.[3] Olivier, when asked on whom he might bestow the sword, reportedly replied: 'No one. It's mine'. He was buried with it in 1989.

Conflicting stories of the sword's fascinating afterlife emphasise its power as a relic of Kean's celebrity, with little reference to how he used it on the stage. This stage property, like other relics, is not unique: it is just one of several Kean swords passed on to others like Noël Coward and the actor Richard Mansfield.[4] Work on Kean's celebrity has shown his 'symbolic significance and iconic status' in theatre history as representative of the wild, individual Romantic spirit, as well as one in a line of eighteenth and nineteenth century white male celebrity actors remembered for their association with Shakespeare.[5] The importance of 'material artifacts', as Tom Mole calls them, in shaping perceptions of the Romantic period by the Victorians and later generations should not be underestimated.[6] Elizabeth Williamson classifies theatrical props as relics, noting that their value is based on 'their ability to provide a link to an absent body, in this case the body of the performer'.[7] While Williamson argues that the 'affective and economic' value of these theatrical objects increases 'only when they have left the theater', I would emphasise that their value is enmeshed with memories of how the actor put the prop in motion.[8] By returning the sword to its theatrical context, I examine how Kean's sword (or swords) in *Richard III* acted as a prosthetic device that enabled physical skill and materialised the bodily difference of the character, and later the actor, over the course of his theatrical life. Conceptualising the sword as a dynamic and active participant in Kean's life on and off the stage, not just a cold remnant of his career, shows how integral the materiality of the theatre is to the bodies of actors, their physical abilities and/or impairments, and how their performances are remembered. References to this prop in the script of Kean's *Richard*, annotated by James H. Hackett in 1826, as well as other contemporary reviews show how Kean used this property as an extension of his celebrity body in his dynamic repertory of roles.

[3]Mangan, 'The Sword(s)', 174.
[4]New York theatrical producer Frank L. Perley donated Mansfield's sword (purportedly used by Kean) to the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1941.
[5]Celestine Woo, *Romantic Actors and Bardolatry: Performing Shakespeare from Garrick to Kean* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 133. For more on Kean's celebrity, see Jacky Bratton, 'The Celebrity of Edmund Kean: An Institutional Story', in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000*, eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 90–106.
[6]Tom Mole, *What the Victorians Made of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2017), 3. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this reference.
[7]Elizabeth Williamson, '"Useful and Fancy Articles": Relics of the Nineteenth-Century Stage', *Shakespeare International Yearbook* 7 (2007): 237.
[8]Williamson, 'Useful and fancy articles', 245.

Kean's repertory of parts relied on material prostheses that supplemented and enabled both racialized and disabled representations. While the word 'prosthesis' in disability studies also refers to something that makes a body 'fit in' or 'de-emphasizes difference', performance scholars have used 'prosthetic' to refer to a material thing that is added to a performer's body to shape the physicality of the (usually male, white, and able-bodied) actor.[9] Ian Smith has used the term 'prosthetic device' in reference to the black makeup and textiles used on the early modern stage to represent racialized characters.[10] Shylock's wig and gaberdine, Richard's hump, and Othello's brown makeup all served as markers of Kean's most famous roles and signs of his virtuosic skill of transformation.[11] He became submerged under these theatrical prosthetics starting with his 1814 London debut in *The Merchant of Venice*: 'the little, submissive, meek, and frightened man that had rehearsed Shylock was wholly lost when he assumed the gaberdine and beard'.[12] There are multiple accounts of him leaving the theatre still in costume and makeup. His blurring of onstage and offstage personas demonstrates what Leigh Woods called Kean's self-conscious 'myth-making', using his own 'transformational skill as an actor to bear on himself as a subject'.[13] While the sword in *Richard III* might not adhere to his body in the same way as the cosmetics in *Othello* did, the reactions to Kean's deployment of the sword – leaning on it, fighting with it, and brandishing it above his head – show how integral it was to the success of his iconic Richard III and his overall public image as a fierce and physically adept performer.

Kean performed the role of Richard as part of his Shakespearean repertory over the course of almost twenty years. In that time, his physical capabilities deteriorated, and the spectre of his former self haunted his later performances (when he was able to perform at all). The sword then became a kind of literal and figurative crutch for him to grasp onto his former power, and a tool to recapture the force of his energetic stage presence. Its enmeshment with the actor's body gives it a prosthetic quality, as both a supplement to his movement

[9]David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 3.

[10]Ian Smith, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage', *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 34.

[11]Ayanna Thompson references white celebrity actors like Kean as examples of how 'the skill and power that are central […] to performing other genders and races' are seen as 'the provenance of white actors' abilities': *Blackface* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 50. Paul Menzer makes a similar point about actors in *Richard III* – 'the physical difficulty of disabling an able body […] allows virtuosic displays by able-bodied actors': *Anecdotal Shakespeare: A New Performance History* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 150.

[12]Attributed to Leman Rede, 'Recollections of Kean', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 2 (1834): 53.

[13]Leigh Woods, 'Actors' Biography and Mythmaking: The Example of Edmund Kean', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 232. Other recent studies of Kean's celebrity include Jeffrey Kahan, *The Cult of Kean* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006) and Jonathan Mulrooney, *Romanticism and Theatrical Experience: Kean, Hazlitt and Keats in the Age of Theatrical News* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Kathryn Pratt also discusses Kean's relationship with the Huron tribe and his portrait as an 'Indian chief' in '"Dark Catastrophe of Passion": The "Indian" as Human Commodity in Nineteenth-Century British Theatrical Culture', *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002): 605–26.

and a tool to display his physical skill. My use of terms like 'prosthesis' as they relate to disability and performance studies builds on the work of scholars like Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, who write that 'performance provides a valuable conceptual model for the consideration of disability because it, too, is fundamentally about the deployment of bodies in space'.[14] The archive of Kean's career is rife with attention to his body, its form, movement, and ability on and off the stage. While Essaka Joshua has argued that the Romantic era 'comes before a theorized understanding of "disability"', she offers the term 'pre-disability' to apply to 'a collection of bodily configurations some of which we now categorize under the heading of "disability"'.[15] I contend that while Kean might not have been identified as 'disabled' in his lifetime, he can be classified as a 'pre-disability' figure, one who allows us to consider how performing bodies in the nineteenth century did not conform to ideas of able-bodiedness associated with most celebrity actors today. The sword then is particularly useful in tracking the impressions that his body made in performance, thus justifying this theatrical property's lasting presence as an artifact of Kean's celebrity, even as it changed hands over time.

'Shaped for Sportive Tricks': Kean's Body in Performance

The narratives of Kean's career that emerged over the nineteenth century construct a persona defined by energy, excess, charismatic action, and social disgrace. They are also full of myths and apocryphal anecdotes. Three major biographies of Kean published in the nineteenth century all frame his legacy through stories marked by personal loss, professional success, and ultimate decline.[16] Unlike his predecessor David Garrick, who was always considered a 'gentleman' actor, Kean was perpetually labelled as a lower-class upstart who never attained respectability due to his drunken and licentious offstage behaviour.[17] (Ironically, the sword has always been a signifier in English culture of a gentleman, a label that Kean never sought from the College of Arms.) His bad reputation nevertheless drew audiences to the theatre to watch him work. His movement, both off and on the stage, was frenetic. The *Edinburgh Courant* described the effect of his performance style on the audience: 'the fire and rapidity of his action – the quickness of his transition from passion to passion – the whirling atmosphere of bustle and exertion in which he involved himself – made every spectator's heart beat and leap with

[14]Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, eds., *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 9.
[15]Essaka Joshua, *Physical Disability in British Romantic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1, 7.
[16]B. W. Procter [a.k.a. Barry Cornwall], *The Life of Edmund Kean, in two volumes* (London: Edward Moxon, 1835); F. W. Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean, from published and original sources* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869); J. Fitzgerald Molloy, *The Life and Adventures of Edmund Kean, Tragedian, 1787–1833* (London: Downey & Co. Limited, 1897).
[17]For a comparison of Garrick and Kean, see Woo, *Romantic Actors.*

his own'.[18] His bold interpretations of Shakespearean characters made him a celebrity, filling the place in the public eye that Garrick or John Patrick Kemble had once occupied as the latest 'figurehead for their bardolatry'.[19]

Kean's body garnered attention in these descriptions of his movement onstage. His early performances as a tumbler showed off his flexibility and exceptional physical skill. Early in his career, he would play Richard III and Harlequin in the same night.[20] These consecutive appearances as the physically hyper-capable Harlequin and the bodily impaired Richard reflect how Kean himself was alternately associated with physical ability and disability in accounts of his life. In the 1814 *Authentic Memoirs of Edmund Kean*, author Francis Phippen describes the child Kean as needing iron braces on his legs that 'were shaped as if in mockery of his features'.[21] One account blames his condition on 'a celebrated posture-maker' who, while training Kean, caused his limbs to be 'distorted'.[22] Perhaps his notoriously 'little' size (just under five foot, seven inches) was a result of this infirmity. Peter Thomson posits that 'incipient rickets is a likelier cause' of the 'myth' of Kean's wearing leg irons as a child, 'if he ever did' at all.[23] Another childhood tale features Kean as a cabin boy on a ship who avoided hard labour by feigning illness so convincingly that he was able to end his service prematurely.[24] The use of these 'disability myths', as Jay Timothy Dolmage has labelled them, shows these authors (who at times cite Kean himself as a source) indulging in common narratives of overcoming disability as well as disability as a feigned performance to incite pity.[25] Jeffrey Kahan writes that there are 'at least two versions of every Keanian event', particularly in the narrative of his childhood and upbringing.[26] While it is difficult to trust any of the accounts of what happened to Kean's body over the course of his childhood, anecdotes like this are significant, Paul Menzer argues, for 'what meanings [they] nurture, not what facts [they] convey'.[27]

Kean's actions continually shaped and imperilled his body both on and off the stage. In one account of his first enacting Richard III as a child, he was caught by Kemble, the former star Richard of Drury Lane, who 'pushed him aside so roughly that he fell through a trap-door, and was lamed for some time'.[28] He might have later 'fractured a leg so badly that it never fully

[18]Quoted in Hawkins, *Kean*, I: 384.
[19]Woo, *Romantic Actors*, 134.
[20]Cornwall, *Kean*, I: 121.
[21]Francis Phippen, *Authentic Memoirs of Edmund Kean* … (London: J. Roach, 1814), 14.
[22]Anonymous, *Memoir of the Life of Edmund Kean, Esq* … (Quebec: Neilson & Cowan, 1826), 3.
[23]Peter Thomson, 'Kean, Edmund (1787–1833), actor', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004.
[24]See Phippen, *Authentic Memoirs*, 17–18; Hawkins, *Kean*, I: 14–15; Molloy, *Kean*, 12–13.
[25]See 'An Archive and Anatomy of Disability Myths', in Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 31–61.
[26]Kahan, *Cult of Kean*, 4.
[27]Menzer, *Anecdotal*, 6.
[28]Molloy, *Kean*, 25.

mended' as a result of a tumbling trick.[29] Cornwall attributes this leg injury to 'riding in the ring' at Bartholomew Fair, where 'his legs (otherwise exceedingly well-shaped) never entirely recovered their original beauty'.[30] This contradiction, that his legs which Cornwall had called 'crooked' previously were in fact 'originally beautiful' is par for the course in Keanian biography. All reference to childhood incapacity or accidental injury falls away as Phippen describes Kean at the height of his powers as 'the most graceful and systematic fencer we ever beheld on any stage'.[31] Katherine Schaap Williams emphasises 'the contingent vulnerability of the actor in time' and notes that 'even an able body is only ever temporarily able'.[32] She defines disability 'not [as] a static attribute of a body but a dynamic interaction that happens in space and time'.[33] Kean's repeated 'interactions' with physical disability, both on and off the stage, make him a compellingly 'unfixable' (to use Williams's term) figure through which to view disability and performance in history. Kean's uncle Moses, a comic performer often credited with inspiring his nephew, had a wooden leg.[34] While the figure of the leading male actor in Shakespearean repertory today is implicitly able-bodied, we see Kean's body from the beginning to the end of his life continually entangled with narratives of physical impairment.

'Take Up the Sword': Kean's *Richard* in Performance

This association between Kean and disability myths may well have been amplified by his sensational portrayal of Richard III, the iconic disability figure of Shakespeare's canon. Kean himself called Richard III, a role he often played between 1814 and 1833, 'that character which has been the foundation of my fame and fortune'.[35] This identification with the role might well have stemmed from his own physical insecurities, for his smaller stature made him, as a detractor wrote, 'suited to the deformities with which the tyrant is said to have been distinguished from his brothers'.[36] His first London appearance as Richard featured 'a step so natural and so appropriate that the audience, accustomed to a fine, picturesque and heroic stride, were absolutely startled'.[37] The 'natural' quality of his gait likely refers to his simulation of Richard's deformity as well as the difference between him and the statuesque Kemble. John Finlay made a less complimentary reference when he

[29]Thomson, 'Kean'.
[30]Cornwall, *Kean*, I: 49.
[31]Phippen, *Authentic Memoirs*, 95.
[32]Katherine Schaap Williams, *Unfixable Forms: Disability, Performance, and the Early Modern English Theater* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 9.
[33]Williams, *Unfixable*, 3.
[34]'Moses Kean' in Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors … 1660–1800,* vol. 8 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 275.
[35]Quoted in Hawkins, *Kean*, II: 159.
[36]Quoted in Phippen, *Authentic Memoirs*, 43. Harold N. Hillebrand disputes the authenticity of this negative Guernsey report in *Edmund Kean* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), 84.
[37]Hawkins, *Kean*, I: 159.

compared Kean's walk as Richard to a duck's waddle, a 'vulgar mimicry of an imagined defect'.[38] Leigh Hunt also objected to the 'enormous and bolster-like pad' on his leg, wishing that Kean would don a 'little handsomer deformity'.[39] This combination of material prosthetic with altered bodily movement is still integral to the performance of Richard by able-bodied actors today; Antony Sher while rehearsing the role recounts being led into the costume collection at the Royal Shakespeare Company to survey the humps and boots used by Richards past.[40] But the most striking element of Kean's performance as Richard was not his hump. It was his sword.

The swords Kean used in performance were his own possessions, as was customary for nineteenth century actors to own the costumes and props they used across their repertory of roles. In the 1834 auction of Kean's effects, there were many weapons up for sale, and all associated with a particular role, like the 'Venetian sword, worn by Mr. Kean in the character of Othello, with silver handle and silver gilt scabbard'.[41] The listing that contains the least embellishment is the one from *Richard III*, simply labelled 'The Duke of Gloucester's sword'. With no other accompanying description (such as the one given to the Venetian sword), this entry stands apart from the others in its simplicity. It is so adhered to the role that the name of Kean does not even figure into the listing; it is a possession of Gloucester himself. But as Lord Byron observed: 'Richard is a man; and Kean is Richard'.[42] Actor and role, role and prop, all combine to create an iconic dramatic spectacle.

The most detailed record of how Kean used his sword in the role appears in the handwritten annotations of actor James Hackett's script from his observations of performances in New York in 1826. There he marked down Kean's stage business in vivid detail to assist with his own imitations of the performance.[43] In the first scene, when Richard murders King Henry VI (as is customary in the version by Colley Cibber that Kean performed), Hackett describes Kean performing the following actions: 'walks up to him reproachfully', 'draws suddenly', and 'stabs violently'.[44] Hackett marks with care when each stab occurs, even drawing an arrow from the printed stage direction '*stabs him*' to a few lines earlier when Kean presumably performed the motion. Richard's first major action in this adaptation, unlike in Shakespeare's version, is with his sword, and the sword is then carried continually throughout

[38]John Finlay, *Miscellanies* (Dublin: John Cumming, 1835), 212.
[39]Leigh Hunt, *Examiner*, 26 February 1815, quoted in Scott Colley, *Richard's Himself Again: A Stage History of* Richard III (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 66.
[40]Antony Sher, *Year of the King: An Actor's Diary and Sketchbook* (London: Methuen, 1985), 142.
[41]*Auction catalogue, books of Edmund Kean, 17 June 1834* (London: G. Robins, 1834), 12.
[42]Quoted in Jim Davis, ed., *Lives of Shakespearian Actors II, Volume 1: Edmund Kean* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 185.
[43]*Oxberry's 1822 Edition to Richard III with the Descriptive Notes Recording Edmund Kean's Performance Made by James H. Hackett,* ed. Alan S. Downer (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1959). The quotations hereafter are from Hackett's handwritten notations.
[44]Hackett, 20.

the production. In the scene with Lady Anne, Kean 'enters irritably … sword under arm'.[45] He 'despondingly draws his sword' and then 'seizes the sword with both hands and rises, stares as if waiting for the mere hint from her' to plunge it into his breast.[46] When she tells him to put it up, he 'sheaths his sword with violence'.[47] During the Duchess of York's cursing speech, he 'plays with his sword, [and] arranges his dress to appear heedless of her invectives'.[48] He uses the sword to express emotion and character intention, and Hackett records these key details so that he may copy the performance accurately.

The most famous instance of Kean's 'swordplay', curiously not in a moment of combat, was in the scene of the night before the final battle. Hackett notes that Kean 'pauses and marks out the Battle on the stage with his sword, stops abruptly and bids "good night"' to his men.[49] This spectacle – the silent king moving his sword upon the ground – received rapturous audience response as reported by William Hazlitt: 'His manner of bidding his friends good night, and his pausing with the point of his sword, drawn slowly backward and forward on the ground, before he retires to his tent, received shouts of applause'.[50] Apparently this moment so fixated Lord Byron that he paid homage to it in 'Ode to Napoleon' (1814): 'or trace with thine all idle hand, in loitering mood upon the sand'.[51] Byron collapses the sword into the word 'hand', showing its prosthetic quality, as a part of Kean's body. Jane Moody cites this moment as an example of Kean's mixture of acting styles, as he borrowed the gestures and 'expressive silence' of the pantomimes and melodramas of his earlier career.[52] Kean's expertise on and off the stage, and the way he chose to include the sword in moments that were not in the text, points to the embodied skill particularly enmeshed in the practice of swordplay. Evelyn Tribble writes that weaponry unites both skill and identity: 'people shape tools, but tools in turn shape them'.[53] The sword shaped Kean's performance onstage and the way that his body was perceived.

Critics often hailed the fight between Kean's Richard and Richmond as the highlight of the entire performance. It was a spectacle of movement and emotion that played exactly to Kean's physical strengths. He was known for his excellent fencing skills, reportedly even going to train at an army barracks to test his expertise against the officers there.[54] But the sword Kean uses in this

[45]Hackett, 26.
[46]Hackett, 32
[47]Hackett, 34
[48]Hackett, 76
[49]Hackett, 88
[50]William Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage* (London: Robert Stodart, 1818), 9.
[51]Lord Byron, 'Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte' (1814), quoted in Colley, *Richard's Himself*, 73.
[52]Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 233.
[53]Evelyn Tribble, *Early Modern Actors and Shakespeare's Theatre: Thinking with the Body* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), 70.
[54]Davis, *Lives*, 127.

fight is not actually the sword of theatrical legend that I have been discussing. The customary stage practice at this time was for the actor before a fight to change his sword to a foil, a lighter and less dangerous instrument.[55] Hackett had marked to 'change sword for foil' at the end of Richard's rallying speech to his troops, but the words are crossed out, and appear again a few pages later, after the iconic 'a horse, a horse' line. There he writes, in larger print than his other notes on the page, 'here change for foil', making the time that Richard holds his original sword longer, and only changing it right before the fight.[56] Here Kean's sword replicates itself again and challenges the idea of the singular iconic object. It circulates instead with other props in an actor's repertory.

'A Lingering Act': Kean's Decline

Kean played Richard III on and off for almost twenty years as part of his performance repertory. He used the role frequently as a season opener and on tour as a significant showpiece for his talents alongside his other notable roles. As his dissolute lifestyle of drinking and womanising contributed to his failing health, his performances of Richard betrayed his inability to 'bustle' about as he once did. The American tour that Hackett recorded occurred in the wake of a disastrous event for Kean: the trial for criminal conversation with Mrs. Charlotte Cox in 1825.[57] Hawkins describes a pathetic scene of Kean in *Richard* post trial 'deliberately and carefully remov[ing] pieces of orange peel, which had been thrown on the stage, out of the way with the point of his sword'.[58] While narratives of his life signal this moment as the start of Kean's decline in personal health and professional regard, James Winston's diaries from his management of Drury Lane show a Kean who is frequently incapacitated from 1820 on. In 1826, Kean was back in London where his doctor advised him to 'prepare, if he continued his course of life, to have his leg taken off as a means of saving his life'.[59] While we might then interpret Hackett's account as a record of an actor with serious mobility issues, Kean continues

[55]Hackett throughout his script notices certain costume changes like this that need to occur. He marks when Kean changed from 'boots' to 'shoes' and back (36, 39, 74). See Thornton S. Graves, 'The Stage Sword and Dagger', The South Atlantic Quarterly 20 (1921): 201–12. Graves actually mentions mishaps from Richard III more than any other play, calling them the 'casualties of Bosworth Field' (209).

[56]Hackett, 96–97.

[57]Mulrooney offers an in-depth analysis of Kean's trial and public response to it (see Chapter 3, 'Edmund Kean's Controversy', in *Romanticism and Theatrical Experience*). He includes an image by R. Cruikshank, *The Hostile Press; and the Consequences of Crim. Con or Shakespeare in Danger* (1825), that features Kean brandishing his sword at his detractors while holding a Shakespeare text aloft (129). This pro-Kean image features the sword, whereas the other mocking images of him in the courtroom do not. Perhaps the removal of the sword in these caricatures (on p. 126) speak to the diminishment of Kean's power and authority in the wake of the scandal.

[58]Hawkins, *Kean*, II: 243.

[59]*Drury Lane Journal: selections from James Winston's diaries, 1819-1827*, eds. Alfred L. Nelson and Gilbert B. Cross (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1974), 138.

to confound any linear narrative. His friend Thomas Colley Grattan reported, however dubiously, that Kean returned to London with 'his leg, which a thousand sinister reports and prophecies should long since have deprived him of, so far recovered as to enable him to "strut his hour" … with perfect ease'.[60] But audiences expecting to see the mighty Kean in his later years were often disappointed, as John Doran remembers: 'the sire was absolutely electrifying audiences at Covent Garden by old flashes of his might, or disappointing them by his incapacity, or his capricious absence'.[61] Just as the young Kean was constrained in leg irons one minute and performing tumbling tricks the next, tales of the prematurely aged Kean found him sometimes with an unusual strength in performance and at other times barred completely from the stage.

After an 1832 London performance, Doran notes that Kean's 'power seemed gone': 'though he looked well as long as he was still, he moved only with difficulty, using his sword as a stick'.[62] His description of the final fight also shows a drastic shift from the combative Kean who had challenged Richmond with such ferocity: 'when, after a short fight … as [Richmond] seemed to deal the blow, he grasped Kean by the hand, and let him gently down, lest he should be injured by a fall'.[63] When Hackett made notes on Kean's performance in 1826, he noted that in act five, Kean 'frequently rests the point of his sword on the ground and rests on it'.[64] Whether that was an artistic choice or one made out of necessity to prop up his fading strength at the end of a long play, Hackett's note shows that Kean used the sword much like Sher's Richard used his crutches as a dynamic prosthetic property that supplemented his strength and protected his body from further impairment. The records of Kean's performances as Richard weave together the simulation of physical disability with actual physical debility and decline in a decidedly non-linear fashion. He consistently depended throughout his career on his sword, to win him acclaim and 'prop' him up, literally and figuratively, on the stage. Genevieve Love describes the portrayal of 'disabled embodiment' as a kind of 'skill [that] builds on the exploration of the mutual incorporation of body and prosthetic, actor and role'.[65] The sword becomes the conduit through which Kean displayed his spectacular physical ability, using it as both a weapon and an expression of his action and intentions in performance. The prop contributes to the performance in indispensable ways, resulting in its prosthetic ability to shape Kean's Richard, a portrayal left indelibly printed on the memories of those who saw him.

[60]Thomas Colley Grattan, 'My Acquaintance with the Late Edmund Kean', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 2 (1833): 228.
[61]John Doran, *Their Majesties' Servants: Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean,* vol. 2 (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1864), 569.
[62]Doran, *Annals*, 571.
[63]Doran, *Annals*, 572.
[64]Hackett, 83.
[65]Genevieve Love, *Early Modern Theatre and the Figure of Disability* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 43.

The Duke of Gloucester's sword after Kean's death followed an uncommon trajectory of self-multiplication, with different swords ending up in different collections (and in the coffins of certain celebrities). It even wound up in a play, Arthur Pinero's 1899 comedy *Trelawny of the Wells*, where another sword would play the 'role' of Kean's sword. When the celebrity actor exits the world's stage, the prop left behind serves as both a reminder and a remainder of their theatrical life. Its prosthetic qualities, the way it shaped Kean's portrayal and physicality, make the sword a metonym for the role itself. Menzer refers to playing the role of Richard as 'taking up the sword'.[66] Kean's sword defined his stage action; he used it not only as a weapon but also as a toy, a stylus, and a crutch. The versatility of the sword in *Richard III* mirrors Kean's versatile repertory of performances both on and off the stage. Anecdotes concerning his at once highly capable and impaired body frame him as an important figure in the discourse of disability myths and historical performance. Looking at how the sword performed for and with Kean in his repertory helps to justify its lively presence in the theatrical archive as a prosthetic object.[67] Barbara Hodgdon writes that studying theatrical props uncovers 'visible and invisible theatrical labor … in order to trace the force of performance'.[68] The 'force' of the sword shaped Kean's performance in his most memorable onstage moments recorded by observers at that time. The memory of the sword's use still lingers, even when the sword's career is done. Robin Bernstein imagines the archive as 'a ghostly discotheque where things of the past leap up to ask scholars to dance'.[69] By 'dancing' with the sword in the archive, I locate the power of theatrical properties in their motion on the stage, and the prosthetic dynamism of skilled actor-prop relations.

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[66]Menzer, *Anecdotal*, 146.
[67]See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[68]Barbara Hodgdon, *Shakespeare, Performance and the Archive* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 5.
[69]Robin Bernstein, 'Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race', *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (2009): 90.