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A Local Habitation and a Name: Essaying Early Modern Stages in a Postmodern World

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Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you will stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realizing you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the moment of truth in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost. (Harold Pinter, "Art, Truth & Politics")<sup>1</sup>

1

The Theseus of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most artfully composed *trompe-l'oeil*. As the champion of hard, cold rationality, the Duke of Athens, in response to the fantastic story told by the four lovers of their night in the woods, insists, "I never may believe / These antique fables, nor these fairy toys" (5.1.2-3).<sup>2</sup> He is himself, of course, straight from an antique fable and the present inhabitant of a fairy toy; moreover, his intransigence, his unwillingness to concede that what appears to be fictional might still be truthful, is set against *our* willingness to believe in *him*. In this essay, I look at the epistemological issues underlying the enterprises of "original practice" (OP) stagings of early

modern drama and the “reconstruction” of early modern playhouses. These phenomena are informed by and seek to inform contemporary scholarship on early modern theater history and literary studies; the biennial Blackfriars Conference of the American Shakespeare Center, during which scholars stand on the stage of the Blackfriars playhouse in Staunton, Virginia and deliver papers that are an admixture of argument and performance, often “testing out” or “illustrating” early modern stage methods and practices, is an example of the convergence between *theoria* and *praxis* in these fields. Yet many question the value of such convergence. On lively panels at the 2007 American Society for Theater Research conference and the 2008 Shakespeare Association of America conference, detractors argued, in effect, that modern stagings of perceived early modern practices produced nothing more than antique fables and fairy toys. The discussion, under the aegis of “Shakespearean Intentionality,” has also been underway recently on the SHAKSPER listserv. Cary Mazer, a participant in the roundtable, sounds a note dismissive of “original practices”:

What it finally comes down to, then, is less a matter of what we mean by Shakespeare, but what theatrical practitioners mean when they claim that they identified something as ‘Shakespeare’s intentions.’ Rather than point out the fallacy of their claims and mocking them for it, let us instead politely thank them for showing us their cards, even as they blithely continue to play the game.<sup>3</sup>

It is perfectly sensible to reject, as Mazer does, the grandest of claims made by original practitioners—that they provide access to *an*, or even *the*, “authentic” Shakespeare (or Marlowe or Jonson or any other early modern dramatist). Yet, without endorsing the authenticity of their product, I would like to defend the authenticity of their enterprise. Moreover, I would like to do so in the service of defending historically—and textually—grounded scholarship, the seed-bed for these endeavors, from an encroaching epistemological pessimism. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes write,

[I]f it’s always and only the present that makes the past speak, it speaks always and only to—and about—ourselves... The irony which that situation generates constitutes a fruitful, necessary, and inescapable aspect of any text’s being. Perhaps it’s the basis of the only effective purchase on Shakespeare we are able to make.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to take issue with “always,” “only,” “necessary,” and “inescapable,” but I would like most to confront the “irony” that these critics claim as endemic to our relationship with dramatic literature and performance; in its place, I would like to offer an earnest look at earnestness.

## 2

For Theseus, reason and imagination are opposed, reality aligning with the former, illusion with the latter. Shakespeare, using the figure of Theseus against the argument of Theseus, collapses these categories. As the Duke indicts poets and their labors, his dismissal, voiced by a character upon a stage, turns back upon itself and eats its own tail:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,  
 And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name. (5.1.12-17)

Theseus is both an airy nothing and quite clearly *something* for those of us watching him in this local habitation. Shakespeare's trick is to conflate at this moment mimesis and diegesis, the classic move of the *trompe-l'oeil*. A mimetic experience creates the illusion of a *happening*; for the occasion to be trusted the medium must be transparent. Embedded in a dramatic situation, a dispute about the nature of belief with his soon-to-be wife, Hippolyta, Theseus' words are spoken in the *now* of lived experience. A diegetic experience, on the other hand, foregrounds the medium of narration, separating the present moment from the *then* of the tale; the act of diegesis is that of *telling* rather than showing. Thus Theseus, the product of the poet's pen, pulls back the curtain, reminding us about the fictive nature of characters in a play by removing us to the point of their (and his) creation. Rather than the neat antithesis between reason/reality and imagination/fiction that he proposes, we find a sort of chiasmus, reason emerging from fiction, imagination eliding with reality. The purpose of the *trompe-l'oeil* is not to fool, but to fool then reveal the deception, and then have the audience marvel at having been fooled—the *trompe-l'oeil* celebrates not reality, but art's triumph over reality. As Theseus argues one thing but embodies another, we are made aware of the artfulness of art; more importantly, we are made aware of how naturally, effortlessly and unselfconsciously we have allowed ourselves to suspend our disbelief.

What makes us susceptible to the seemingly fabulous? According to Theseus, it is desire. Theseus claims that when "strong imagination" overcomes "cool reason" the capacity to see things as they are truly is compromised; it is the desire for "some joy" that crafts the circumstances under which that joy might be realized. That crafting, Shakespeare understands, the invested participation in the imaginative process, does not diminish the experience but compounds it. Theseus, however, categorically rejects the verity of the imaginative process and maligns (like Plato) poets as peddlers of falsehood. Yet his word is not the last word. Hippolyta challenges his position:

But all the story of the night told over,  
 And all their minds transfigured so together,  
 More witnesseth than fancy's images,  
 And grows to something of great constancy;  
 But howsoever, strange and admirable. (5.1.23-27)

Hippolyta does not discount the strangeness that Theseus attaches to their tale; yet in finding it "admirable" as well, she suggests that it is not only the four lovers whose minds are "transfigur'd so together," but that she, the auditor of their story—and by extension any who believe their tale—have also been transfigured.

Transfiguration was a heavily-weighted concept for Shakespeare's contemporaries: in the original Greek gospels, what had been translated into English as "transfiguration" read *metemorphothe*, or metamorphosis, and the transfiguration that would come readily to mind would have been that celebrated by Rafael, the Transfiguration of Christ. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Christ metamorphosed on a mountaintop before Peter, James and John into a being of light, conversed with Moses and Elijah, and was finally proclaimed the Son of God. To question the possibility of transfiguration is more than cavalier, Hippolyta's language suggests—it undermines faith itself. Thus, the sharpest barb aimed at Theseus comes from a line from the Geneva translation of the New Testament that finds its way obliquely into *Midsummer*. The Apostle Peter, chided those who received the tale of the Transfiguration with skepticism: "For we followed not *deceivable fables*, when we opened unto you the power, and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but with our eyes we saw his majesty" (2 Peter: 16; italics added). Hints of Tyndale's language are elsewhere evident in *Midsummer*, so it does not seem unreasonable that Theseus, who dismisses the fantastic as "fables," is also rebuked. Despite Theseus' arguments to the contrary, the boundary between reason and the fantastic is permeable, allowing a different sort of truth to be generated, one of "great constancy."

At the root of Theseus' resistance to antique fables, is their antique nature, which, etymologically, is rooted in the "antic," defined by the *OED* as, "Grotesque, in composition or shape; grouped or figured with fantastic incongruity; bizarre." Theseus, the minotaur-slayer, cannot abide the irrational conjoining of parts, the disparate, the strange or the astonishing; yet in a play that has at the center of its joyful labyrinth an ass-headed man encountering the divine, it is precisely this pious paradigm of knowledge that is celebrated. In the world of neat contrast that the play establishes, between an Athens representing law, civilization, order, and reason and the woods as the demesne of nature, magic, mystery, and all things wild, it is clear not only where Theseus stands, but where he rules; he is complicit in upholding the Athenian codes and not disinterested in their maintenance. He is Apollonian, in Nietzsche's sense, in his desire for individuation and clarity; yet he lacks the poet-god's conviction that some dreams are truth-bearing and that it is the poet's work to distill this truth. His scorn of the "poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling" is a dismissal of the efficacy of Apollonian prophesying, of the ability of the artist to scry from fragments and shards a compelling sense of the whole. Yet we, the audience, in noting the incongruity between what Theseus *says* and what he *is* are meant to spot where he misses the mark, and to ask how and why he does.

The reason for Theseus' insistence on ratiocination as the sole determinant of truth, embodied in Athens' restrictive patriarchy and its misogynistic civic code, is an inchoate fear of that which cannot be controlled or contained; what the lunatic, lover and poet all share, according to Theseus, is the experience of being overwhelmed by something outside themselves and the transformative effect of such experience. His is a fear of Dionysiac surrender to the passions; beneath this fear lies the fear of surrender to chaos, of the surrender of self-control, and finally, of the surrender of the autonomous self. The taming of Hippolyta, wooed by the sword, is a skirmish in Theseus' struggle against the grotesque; she is, after all, as queen of the Amazons, a dispossessing admixture of features male and female, regal and savage, whom

Theseus attempts to normalize through marriage. Thesean rationality opposes the erratic, the metamorphic, and the capricious—but he cannot win the argument in a space that is itself Dionysian, the theater. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an antic work—a grotesque mixture of mythological figures, faeries, and simple laborers, and it presents in the four lovers observing the rite of May, in the midnight encounter between mortal and goddess, Dionysian revelry and ravishment. Moreover, it includes the audience as participants, who find within the riotous confusion of the parts, “So musical a discord, such sweet thunder” (4.1.117). Howsoever central a figure of authority Theseus might be in Athens, he is kept to the edges of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while at the play's own center we find a figure less august, but more compelling, a figure transfigured, who embodies the grotesque, and who, through surrender, finds himself elevated.

### 3

Just as Bottom is the spiritual heir of the metamorphic figures of Ovid and Apuleius, those in our own day who attempt, earnestly, to revivify early modern or “original” stage practices or who build simulacra of Renaissance playhouses, are the descendants of Shakespeare's Bottom. Discovering their comrade after his transfiguration, the Mechanicals exclaim, “Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated” (3.1.113-14). “Thou art translated,” might well be the charge leveled at modern actors who endeavor to adopt principles of playing that are four centuries old and understood only dimly. A translation is always a merging of disparate media, creating a new figure. With an ass-head grafted onto his human form, Bottom becomes, in modern parlance, a hybrid. And this is precisely what actors who adopt Elizabethan or Jacobean practices and what theaters built in accordance with a sense of Renaissance design become—hybrids.

“They that have the voice of lions and the act of hares, are they not monsters?” (*Troilus and Cressida*, 3.2.84-6)—a modern actor reconfigured as an Elizabethan player is a monster, a sort of patchwork agglomeration of contemporary sensibilities and exotic practices. Yet monsters need not horrify—in the earlier sense of the word, they are marvels and prodigies, sometimes even the objects of desire, as is that “poor monster,” Viola, to the otherwise sober-minded Olivia (*Twelfth Night*, 2.1.34). What is appealing to audiences about “original practice” performances of Shakespeare is not that they are in some sense more authentic than modern productions (although some might feel this way), but rather that they are prodigious. They provide a theatrical experience that is out of the ordinary and revel unapologetically in their unconventionality. The departure from contemporary expectations of performance is manifest sometimes in obvious ways: with universal lighting, in the case of the Blackfriars, or day-lit performances, in the case of the Globe, encouraging interaction between actors and spectators. Sometimes the difference is present in subtler fashion: a distinctive understanding of the text generated by a “Renaissance” approach to the rehearsal process (using cue scripts or eschewing directors), an insistence on rapid delivery and seamless scene transitions, or an attentiveness to gestures grounded in a rhetorical understanding of the text (utilizing Bulwer's *Chirologia* and *Chironomia*, for example).<sup>5</sup> By assembling fragments of early

modern theatrical practice for modern consumption, such productions do in fact present something “original,” if only in the sense of introducing something innovative, on the order of “hot ice and wondrous strange black snow” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 5.1.59).

“Original” playhouses, such as the London Globe and the Blackfriars in Staunton, are also hybrids, yet of a different order. *Locus* and *platea* collapse in these spaces—audiences are encouraged to accept the fiction that, in the same way that a wooden “O” might hold the vasty fields of France, the wooden “O” they are standing is *the* wooden “O.” They are asked to use their imaginary puissance not simply to be transported by what is represented on these stages, but also to be transported by the stage itself. The space of performance radiates beyond the apron of the stage to encompass the entire playhouse, as the immaterial form of the historical “Globe” or “Blackfriars” is given a local habitation and a name. The pleasure that is offered is not in its authenticity, but in the illusion of authenticity, the *trompe-l’oeil*. Moreover, a sense of double-transport ensues—the audience is not simply watching a Shakespearean play but also participating as a Shakespearean audience.<sup>6</sup> The proclivity of audiences at the newly-“re”-constructed Globe to play their perceived part—by heckling the actors, throwing food, etc.—has been well documented.<sup>7</sup> The desire to believe allows participation and transport—the authenticity of the experience is derived from the pleasing suspension of disbelief; the success of such performances ultimately depends on giving pleasure, and in the case of audiences attending productions set on “original” stages, that pleasure is compounded by a sense of complicity in the imaginative process.

It goes without saying that for some spectators, such transport is rarely, if ever, achieved; what undermines their participation is a Thesean dismissal of the entire spectacle, a rejection of the hybrid experience that conjoins, through the imagination, modern sensibilities with fragments of early modern experience. Theseus’ objection of such “fables” and “fairy toys” is echoed by Hobbes: “From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in times past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, Nymphs, and the like; and now adayes the opinion that rude people have of Fayries, Ghosts, and goblins; and of the power of Witches” (“Of Imagination”).<sup>8</sup> The surrender to the fantastical is only for the “rude,” for those like Shakespeare’s *Mechanicals*, who naively cannot separate strong fancy from vision and sense. When Bottom contends that they must expose the fictive nature of the lion that Snug will be presenting on stage in order not to fright the ladies—“Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion’s neck” (3.1.33-4)—he is conceding that the power of theatrical representation is so overwhelming that the only safe option for them to take is to pull back the veil of illusion. In order to dispel the monstrous, they must clarify that even though shape is that of a lion the voice is that of a man; they must disassemble the hybrid into its constituent parts; they must, that is, reveal exactly how the lion is given a local habitation and clarify its/his true name. The joke here, of course, is that a sophisticated audience would never believe that it was truly a lion on stage, and those laughing now at the *Mechanicals’* naïveté are thereby aligned with the urbane, courtly figures who will later mock Bottom and company. The deeper joke, however, is that this present audience believes in some capacity in

the very Bottom they are laughing at; that is, the actor playing Bottom does not indicate that he is not in fact Bottom, but rather Actor X, and the audience, not attending to their own complicity in the illusion, does not distinguish this Dream from “vision and sense.” Even as they celebrate their own perspicacity, a rude and willful ignorance, engendered by the pleasure that the present experience elicits, proves more compelling.

4

Apart from the pleasure (or frustration) that OP stagings might elicit from audiences, the question at hand for us is whether or not such pursuits have any scholarly value. From its earliest incarnations of the English stage, the movement towards originalism has had its detractors: Max Beerbohm took issue with the efforts of William Poel’s Elizabethan Stage Society: “[W]e, in the twentieth century, cannot project—or rather retroject—ourselves into the original audience’s ‘state of receptivity.’”<sup>9</sup> This criticism is perfectly sensible—it is radically untenable that we might switch out our own “state of receptivity,” like switching out a memory chip from our computer, and put in its place that of other audiences from another time. Yet that is not the point of OP, which, I would argue, does not attempt to replace our capacity for receptivity, but to *alter* that capacity. The language of “experimentation” that is often applied to OP fosters the skepticism of Beerbohm and others, by insinuating a sort of epistemological *telos* that is appropriate only for the sciences. Use of such language has caused many to misunderstand the point of original practices by implying that they are systematic and over-determined, that those who pursue OP seek to exercise too much control and that they are too confident in their outcomes. A more nuanced understanding of the sorts of knowledge that are generated by original practices is necessary if we are to recognize their utility.

A recent collection edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, *Shakespeare’s Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, attempts to reclaim the notion of “experiment” as an apt descriptor for research and practice conducted at the new Globe: “While the theatre has proven itself to be more than a ‘test-tube’ for academics [Andrew Gurr’s phrase], it has nevertheless been used for experiments where many discoveries about early modern playhouse practice have been and continue to be made.”<sup>10</sup> The rejection of the laboratory model followed immediately by the insistence upon rigorously-concluded “discoveries” exemplifies a confusing ambivalence about the notion of experimentation that attends upon OP. On the one hand, Carson and Karim-Cooper want to shift “experimental” back into the position of meaning something like what is meant by “experimental theater,” that is, theater which is unconventional, boundary-bending, even radical. On the other hand, much of the OP project is inherently conservative, attempting to recover with increasing precision elements of the culture, often the specifically material culture, of early modern theater. The truth is that for certain pursuits the laboratory model is entirely appropriate. Collecting textual data, as in Alan Dessen’s and Leslie Thomson’s *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (1999), investigating through archeological excavations the remains of the Rose, following Renaissance recipes in preparing the dyes for costumes, are the sorts of endeavors

that lend themselves to the hypothesis and conclusion model of the scientific method. Yet once these elements are put literally into play, an alternative model, alluded to by Karim-Cooper, that of the workshop, must take over. Trying to intuit what these fragments of knowledge mean for the stagecraft of the period, or for that even more slippery notion, what the experience of being in the audience was like in the Renaissance is often reduced to seeing what “works” when these plays are staged today. Yet the reasons something works are so mercurial, so immaterial, that we must ultimately confess our own positions and prejudices in the assessment—the *bête noir* of the scientific method. Putting into practice the lessons of OP, actors and directors are less like experimental scientists and more like workmen, like mechanicals, like Bottom and company, whose earnest efforts invariably distort the “original,” yet who, in missing the mark, often produce something that works on its own terms. Ultimately, OP stagings *are* revolutionary in the way that Carson and Karim-Cooper hope for, if we read into revolutionary its tensile original meaning, which is to turn back again to an original point, yet in doing so, to move forward, past the point at which one is presently fixed.

The issue of experiment takes us back to Shakespeare’s contemporary, Francis Bacon. It is telling that the father of the modern experimental method castigated the faulty laws of demonstrations as “Idols of the Theatre:”

Finally, there are Idols which have crept into human minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also from faulty laws of demonstration. These I call *Idols of the Theatre*, because I regard all the philosophies that have been received or invented as so many stage plays creating fictitious and imaginary worlds.<sup>11</sup>

Theater is represented not only as deceptive but as dangerous. A stage play recombines elements of the real world to present something new, a hybrid figure. Like Bottom, Bacon fears that such idols will be credited without scrutiny and that they will distract from the pursuit of verifiable knowledge. Bacon analogizes stage plays to idolatry to acknowledge that there is a seductive component to belief. The mind that allows itself to trust what is not demonstrably true, he argues, has been charmed into false belief, acting as an “enchanted glass,” and the effects are pernicious. George Puttenham likewise cautions in *The Art of English Poesy* against the dangers of enchantment: “fantasy be resembled to a glass,” which, if it is warped, will “breed chimeras and monsters in man’s imaginations, and not only in his imaginations, but also in all his ordinary actions and life which ensues.”<sup>12</sup> Bacon believes that enchantment is something that we are willingly subject to and therefore something that we can divest ourselves of. To achieve clarity, he seeks to institute a scientific method that is impersonal, dispassionate, and immune to desire. A scientist is compromised if he or she allows the longing for a particular outcome to dictate the course of an experiment; Bacon wants to banish the chimerical from the laboratory.

There are certain elements of human knowledge, however, that cannot fall under the purview of the scientific method, that, by their very nature, are subject to the vicissitudes of human experience, subjects that Bacon pursues in another format: revenge, love, cunning, friendship,

vainglory, and so forth. Bacon's *Essays* famously begin with jesting Pilate not staying for Truth. The truth that Pilate rejects, however, is a truth beyond what the scientific method can conclude, a metamorphic, transfiguring truth. The *Essays* represent Bacon's attempts at moving towards what Pilate turns away from. And what is earnest about the endeavor is the effort that persists in spite of the evasiveness of its subject. In fact, Bacon's essays, like those of his exemplar, Montaigne ("I speak my meaning," Montaigne claims, "in disjointed parts" ("Of Experience")), are themselves grotesque—provisional, stitched together, kaleidoscopic.<sup>13</sup> In the most elliptical of the *Essays*, "Of Fame," Bacon warns against rumor, against that sort of report that is unverifiable, that is, in fact, driven by the human desire to tell a story that one might profit from. He acknowledges the monstrous nature of rumor: "The poets make *Fame* a *Monster*. They describe her in Part, finely and elegantly; and, in part, gravely and sententiously. They say, look how many *Feathers* she hath, so many *Eyes* she hath underneath: So many *Tongues*; So Many *Voyces*; She pricks up so many *Ears*."<sup>14</sup> Yet this critique of the chimerical comes in a package that is itself chimerical. "Of Fame" is an unfinished essay, dropping off mid-sentence, as if to remind us of the unfinished, transitory, inconclusive nature of the *Essays* as a whole. The diverse subjects that Bacon explores in this work refuse to remain in place. Yet all the revisions and drafts of the *Essays* show how thoroughly Bacon is committed to staying with his subject—human experience, in all its diverse manifestations—even though he knows that any truth he gleans along the way will be glimpsed on the periphery of one's vision and that it will disappear as soon as it is noted, that his task is one without end. The material world may respond to test-tube and beaker, but that of human experience entails work of a different order.

5

When Bottom awakens from his night with the Fairy Queen, the contours of what he has seen linger, but the center begins to dissolve:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom.  
(4.1.202-13)

Trying to call to memory a rapidly receding experience produces in Bottom synaesthesia, an incongruous mixing of sensory impressions. Many have noted that this passage includes a scrambling of a verse from I Corinthians: "The eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him." And as Peter Holland indicates in the Oxford edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, some have conjectured that Shakespeare may have been most familiar with the 1557 Geneva Bible, which follows this verse with, "For the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the

bottom of God's secrets," adding resonance to the name given this weaver by Shakespeare, one that suggests that he has touched the divine. Yet it must also be noted that Bottom's synaesthesia is itself a manifestation of the grotesque, as eyes, ears, hands, tongues are all misaligned. While such irrational rearrangements might seem to indicate a breakdown in the order of signification, at least in its conventional capacity, the organs of reception and communication being transposed, there is something truthful represented here in a more immediate way—the very experience that Bottom would incarnate is that of irrational rearrangements: an ass's head fixed upon a man's body, a queen coupling with a commoner, a mortal mingling with the divine, the mundane feted by the magical. The collapsing of contradictory elements engenders both confusion and illumination. Bottom's revision of the verses of St. Paul (who is also a figure of transfiguration: Jew/Christian, Saul/Paul) is both nonsensical and eminently sensible. In the moments of awakening, one is on the threshold between what "is" and what "is not"; yet it is clear that the boundary is permeable, and the elements from each commingle. When Bottom declares that his ballad "shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom," we seem to press against the far boundaries of causation and effect, signification and sense—a dream without a bottom should not be called Bottom's Dream. And yet it should. What Bottom is really making is a declaration of an apophatic nature, announcing that there are some phenomena that we can only understand by understanding what they are not.

Apophatic knowledge straddles the "is/is not" boundary. Recognizing that there is no "bottom" to some secrets, Bacon subtly revises St. Paul's Corinthians in *The Advancement of Learning*—"The spirit of man is as the lamp of God, wherewith He searcheth the inwardness of all secrets"—to insinuate that the search itself is godly, not only the subject of the search. It is in our nature, he argues, to attempt to comprehend things that our beyond our capacity to know. In such cases we must employ the limited tools that are available to us to describe the limitless: we must employ the figure of *apophasis*, describing what something "is" by describing what it "is not." And this is the model that I would like to suggest is most appropriate for the work done under the rubric of original practices.

Bottom's Dream is a pitch-perfect metaphor for modern attempts to reconstruct early modern staging and early modern stages. These projects present matters that are on the far side the threshold dividing the present from the past. They represent dimly-remembered actions and figures that are further jumbled in the transmission. Yet as with Bottom's ballad, which is an attempt to give solid shape to shadows through the imposition of aesthetic form ("I will sing it at the latter end of a play") and pathos ("peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death"), they are vigorously and earnestly presented. When William Poel began staging Shakespeare in an "Elizabethan" manner, he missed the mark in innumerable ways. Yet his work had the effect of clearing important space by presenting an alternative to the overblown, baroque productions of the nineteenth century. Taking elements that appeared to him to be verifiably Elizabethan—such as the minimal use of stage properties and seamless scene transitions—Poel presented a radical re-envisioning of Shakespearean dramaturgy. He had been scandalized by "the extreme difficulty—it might almost be said the impossibility—

of discovering a single point of likeness between the modern idea of a representation and one of Shakespeare's plays, and the actual light in which it presented itself before the eyes of Elizabethan spectators."<sup>15</sup> He intended to correct misconceptions about Shakespearean stagecraft that had accrued over the intervening centuries. What Poel understood, moreover, was that audiences would have to experience something that they believed to be from the past if they were to dislodge the ideas they held in the present. In 1893, he constructed within the Royalty Theatre, "as near a resemblance of the old Fortune Playhouse as was possible in a roofed theatre."<sup>16</sup> Appropriately, the play that he chose to present centered on an all-seeing authority figure bent on reforming the public through stagey manipulations. Poel was pleased by the critical response:

The play acted was "Measure for Measure," and in commenting upon this revival the *Times* said: "The experiment proved at least that scenic accessories are by no means as indispensable to the enjoyment of a play as the manager supposes"; and a professor of literature at one of our London colleges wrote: "I don't think I was ever more interested—nay, fascinated—by a play upon the stage, and now I shall ever think the cutting up into scenes and acts a useless cruelty and an utter spoiling of the story."<sup>17</sup>

The stage manager and the scholar each took away a lesson—not an "Elizabethan" one, neither comments on the "authenticity" of the production, but an apophatic one. Each better understood how modern theatrical practices were *not* Shakespearean. By jarring free opinions that had settled in, Poel cleared the way for others to do their own sort of work. Both the impressionistic productions of Harley Granville-Barker and the scrupulous scholarship of E.K. Chambers were predicated upon the re-envisioning of Elizabethan stagecraft championed by Poel. For the long lines of practitioners and academics that are indebted to figures such as Granville-Barker and Chambers, Poel's turning back towards "authenticity" provided a way of moving forward.

In this way, translations of a Shakespearean stage experience may prove transformational. Frank Hildy sees present-day OP projects as a carrying on in the spirit of the Elizabethan Revival: "I have long argued that Shakespeare's Globe offers us an opportunity to learn how to 'translate' Shakespeare for a modern audience;" he is also committed to the work that makes such an endeavor viable: There is a language of performance that transcends the language of words. Is it impossible to translate this language in any meaningful way if one has never studied the original performance language and come to an understanding of its grammar and syntax?"<sup>18</sup> A translation both is and is not the original; it has no purpose without granting priority to that which it is attempting to translate, yet at every point in the process it is manifestly clear that the original is being transmuted into something other than what it is. This apophatic paradox is at the heart of every act of translation, and any successful translation functions as a *trompe-l'oeil*, concealing and showing its hand simultaneously. Hildy uses the metaphor of translation to clarify that any modern attempt at Elizabethan staging is a moderated one; it is like Bottom's ballad, which will attempt to pin down

quicksilver. Apprehension accompanies this practice. When Peter Quince cries out, “Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art translated!” he is horrified by the monstrous shape into which his friend had been transformed. There is something distressing about seeing such radical recombination, seeing, that is, the unseemly seams between disparate objects that have been forcefully conjoined. Such kaleidoscopic configurations, however, are often what discovery is predicated upon, as Quince unwittingly concedes by using a word, “translated,” that is itself prismatic. In addition to meaning “transformed,” to “translate” in the early modern period also meant, “To carry or convey to heaven without death” (the *OED* cites Coverdale’s Bible for this gloss). Bottom’s transfiguration enables him to achieve a sort of enlightenment through transport, even if he is unable to convey accurately or fully upon his return the impression of the original experience.

Early twenty-first-century productions of Shakespeare that claim to be “original” both are and are not. By attempting to revivify elements of original stagecraft, those engaged in the various OP projects press together some sort of collage in which early and post-modernity overlap, perhaps uncomfortably. Yet although they may appear to the sober-minded scholar to be the “patched fools” that Bottom warns against, original practitioners engage in work that is eminently useful to the broader projects of theater historians and critics. By challenging what we think we know, suggesting unforeseen possibilities and insisting upon new relationships, those working with the constraints of “original practices” compel a sort of revolutionary reworking of our some of our own scholarly notions and practices. Yolanda Vazquez, an actor and educator at Shakespeare’s Globe, describes her experience in working in “original practices” costumes:

As Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, at certain times when she was becoming a little bit more passionate, in the rehearsal room I would be able to breathe easily through a phrase, but when the corset arrived and the dress and the overcoat, I realized I could not quite breathe in the same way on lines. I had to rethink it and feel where the breath had to be taken and how many lines I could get through.<sup>19</sup>

This seemingly minor detail, when attended to by critics and scholars, may not be so minor. As a man of the theater, and as a playwright who tuned his scripts finely to take advantage of the acting conventions of his day, how conscious might have Shakespeare been when writing the part of Beatrice of the physical pressure that a costume would place on the vocal capacities of an actor? That is, was he writing into the script the very tension between what one wishes to say and the embodied limitations on speech? This train of inquiry, of course, opens into larger theoretical issues that are imperative to critics and scholars today—of the effects of material culture, of the unsteady relationship between text and performance, of feminist critiques of the constrained speech of women, and so forth.

The grandest of OP gestures have been the attempts to reconstruct early modern playhouses, most prominently Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London and the Blackfriars Playhouse in

Virginia. Actors, directors, designers, musicians, and choreographers have found working in these spaces both challenging and illuminating. Paul Chahidi describes his experience on the stage of Shakespeare's Globe:

The fundamental area in which this theatre reveals so much is in the symbiotic relationship between the words of the playwright, the actor, the audience and the architecture of the building, which are all intrinsically linked; you cannot separate one from the other. And where I had a sort of epiphany, when I started to get slightly bigger parts here and I started to talk to the audience, was with the soliloquies. It just became so obvious and so beautifully simple, and so clear what the relationship between the actor and the audience should be, and what you should be doing when you are speaking a soliloquy, which is holding a conversation with the audience. And that is something that has been lost with proscenium-arch theatres, speaking in the darkness, and a certain style of acting has come up from that architecture.<sup>20</sup>

Whether or not Chahidi is correct to assume that he has discovered what an actor *should* be doing, he is certainly right to remind us that the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries formed a single element in a network of actor, audience, script and stage, and that attending to these relationships can yield new perspectives on performance. For most OP productions, only two or three of these elements can be put into play. By providing the best approximation of early modern playhouses that we are yet capable of making, the Globe and Blackfriars allow all four elements to come together. Whether they are authentically Elizabethan or Jacobean is not the point (and weren't these categories as fluid in their own times as the notions of modernity and post-modernity are in our own?). What they open up are moments when those who allow themselves to pursue robustly the perpetually elusive qualities of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage are caught unawares and compelled to readjust their assumptions. Without taking seriously the attempt to reconstruct an early modern playhouse, we may not even know what questions we are *not* asking.

There are perils that attend on OP, most prominently the inclination to establish new orthodoxies. Many practitioners, with imaginations fired by the success of applying "Elizabethan" stage techniques to modern productions, have come to believe that they have uncovered, as the title to Patrick Tucker's book on Shakespearean performance announces, the "secrets" of acting Shakespeare. If what is meant by such claimants is simply that they have hit upon ways of staging Shakespeare, inspired by an openness to what has been gleaned from the study of early modern practices, that now produce lively and popular theater, then there is nothing to be objected to; the American Shakespeare Center's productions at the Blackfriars are a prime example of successful contemporary theater that implements effectively a selection of early modern practices, without staking any claims of authenticity. Yet many original practitioners, particularly those who, like Tucker and Neil Freeman, believe that the First Folio is some sort of master document recording the authentic intentions of Shakespeare

and/or his contemporaries, waiting to be decoded by modern actors, who may then put into practice long-submerged “Elizabethan” and “Jacobean” techniques, insist on the authenticity of their work.<sup>21</sup> Such First Folio advocates forget that it was Heminge and Condell’s admonition to those purchasing the Folio to “Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe;” the book that they were proffering was radically different from the cue scripts of players or the copies of prompters, both in structure and purpose, and if they were encouraging a hermeneutical approach to the plays, it was not simply pegged to performance but also subject to the vagaries and conventions of literary publication.<sup>22</sup>

The difference between the set of prescriptions made in the *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare* and ones such as Peter Hall makes in his *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*—“When two characters each have a half-line that makes up one line, the second character must come in precisely on cue and the tempo and the dynamic of the two halves must make one line”<sup>23</sup>—is that Hall understands the possibilities and limitations of original practices. He states bluntly, “Can we mount an authentic performance as Shakespeare would have seen it? No.”<sup>24</sup> What Hall advocates is a “creative compromise” by which actors attempt to understand the playwright’s “formal demands” while remaining affirmatively in the present. Hall is concerned primarily with the formal demands of Shakespeare’s dramatic language; yet the work of theater historians and literary scholars has extended the compass of “formal demands” to include ever broader aspects of early modern performance. “Creative compromise” is in fact an apt descriptor of original practices, positioning them as translations or hybrids; and such an approach allows one to navigate between extreme attitudes towards OP. On the one side, distressed by the sense of irretrievability that Ben Jonson felt for his early masque, *Hymenaei* (1606)—“that it lasted not still, or, now it is past, cannot by imagination, much less description, be recovered to a part of that spirit it had in the gliding by”<sup>25</sup>—are those who remain skeptical of the whole process of historical recuperation. On the other side, are those who refuse to acknowledge their own positioning in the recovery of the past. Recognizing that there are two models—one *experimental*, in the conventional scientific sense, the other *experiential*, grounded in the ardent pursuit of elusive truths—allows a flexible, evolving relationship to emerge between these two endeavors. What arises from this dialectic is something like Hegelian synthesis, where claims that are seemingly at odds produce a synthetic (or hybrid, if you will) form of knowledge. Considering original practice performances to be an argument for the way things *may* have been, rather than an authentic recreation of the past, positions the informed audience member as interlocutor, compelled through confrontation to sharpen one’s own arguments and query one’s assumptions about the early modern stage.

Modern stage productions that represent early modern stage productions are shadows, perhaps even the shadows of shadows. Yet the theater itself straddles the boundary between is/is not, making the suspension of disbelief that these productions are predicated upon tenable, if not sustainable. There are facets of early modern theater that study in archives and the writing of papers cannot engage, and even scholars of early modern drama, perhaps

particularly such scholars, have occasion to surrender to “Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends.” At the risk of invoking the figure to which original practitioners have the greatest aversion, consciously or unconsciously, the animating principle behind original practice productions is the Stanislavskian “if.” Original practice productions body forth what would otherwise remain immaterial. And howsoever we would like to characterize these phenomena—hybrids, translations, grotesques, monsters—as an embodied representation of an early modern play, each both “is” and “is not” whatever we might apprehend to be the “original.” To be radically analytical or to strike a pose of irony in the face of such productions is to constrain the horizon of possibilities too narrowly. Even though original practices are emphatically not authentic, they represent an earnest, and authentic, desire to locate within our own experience early modern plays as they were intended to be experienced.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Pinter, “Art, Truth & Politics,” The Nobel Lecture, delivered on December 7, 2005 at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm, Sweden, in *The Essential Pinter* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes from Shakespeare taken from Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds., *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Cary Mazer. “Re: Shakespearean Intentionality”. Online posting. *SHAKSPER: The Global Electronic Shakespeare Conference*.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes, eds. *Presentist Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2007), 5.

<sup>5</sup> For a summary of contemporary original practice approaches, see Don Weingust, “Early Modern Theatrical Practice in the Later Modern Playhouse: A Brief Overview,” in *Thunder at a Playhouse: Essaying Shakespeare and the Early Modern Stage*, eds. Peter Kanelos and Matt Kozusko (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), 249-258.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the phenomenon of “Globe performativity,” see W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79-116.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Prescott, “Inheriting the Globe: The Reception of Shakespearean Space and Audience in Contemporary Reviewing,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare in Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 359-75.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1987), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Prescott, “Inheriting the Globe,” 372.

<sup>10</sup> Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, eds. *Shakespeare’s Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Bacon. *Novum Organum*, trans. Peter Urbach and John Gibson (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), 55-56.

<sup>12</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, eds. Frank Wigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 110.

<sup>13</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 824.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985), 256.

<sup>15</sup> Poel, William. *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1913), 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>18</sup> Carson and Karim-Cooper, *Shakespeare’s Globe*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

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<sup>21</sup> See Neil Freeman, *Shakespeare's First Texts* (New York: Applause, 1999), and Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Of course the intentions of Heminge and Condell regarding the publication of the First Folio are highly debatable. For a critique of Freeman's approach to First Folio readings, see W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the authority of performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 120-25.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 2003), 34.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>25</sup> In *Ben Jonson: The Oxford Authors*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 229.

Habitation and Naming. Chapter 1. January 2013 with 1 Reads. How we measure 'reads'. A 'read' is counted each time someone views a publication summary (such as the title, abstract, and list of authors), clicks on a figure, or views or downloads the full-text. Learn more. He uses a single large corpus of poems and plays by these three writers and a number of their contemporaries, as well as some straightforwardly quantitative measures: a list of words peculiar to an author, a list of words never appearing in [Show full abstract] his or her work, a list of adjacent word pairs that appear regularly in an author's work, and a list of pairs appearing rarely in it. The methods are tested by treating a series of samples whose authorship is known as if they were anonymous. The situationists characterised modern capitalist society as an organisation of spectacles: a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world. They took the words, meanings, theories, and experiences of the spectacle, and placed them in an opposing context; a perspective from which the world was given a fluidity and motion with which the static mediocrity of the spectacle could be negated. Introducing a sense of historical continuity by showing that the spectacle, in spite of its seamless appearance, carries the seeds of an emancipated and pleasure-filled world, the situationists showed that what could become real is more meaningful and desirable than that which is in being. Postmodernism General Introductions The world at its present state of development has recorded many new ideas that far outweigh human memory. European and other nations of the early world civilizations like Greece, Rome and Egypt have at one time or the other articulated different philosophical ideas popularly classified as the isms. In literature, writers have reacted to these ideas through their creative outputs. Writers that have made names are those who really had something new to offer to the world. Like post structuralism it attends to the lack of fixity in the meaning of things, dwelling painfully, sometimes ironically on life in a consumer society, but generally celebrating the advent of this new kind of life.